"Yes, but he won't get here till morning."

"Is there anybody in the yards right now?"

"There's the wiper in the roundhouse."

"Send *him* out to call the men."

"Yes, ma'am. Hold the line."

She leaned against the side of the phone box, to wait. Kellogg was smiling.

"And you propose to run a railroad—a transcontinental railroad—with *that*?" he asked.

She shrugged.

She could not keep her eyes off the beacon. It seemed so close, so easily within her reach. She felt as if the unconfessed thought were struggling furiously against her, splattering bits of the struggle all over her mind: A man able to harness an untapped source of energy, a man working on a motor to make all other motors useless . . . she could be talking to him, to his kind of brain, in a few hours . . . in just a few hours. . . . What if there was no need to hurry to him? It was what she wanted to do. It was all she wanted. . . . Her work? What was her work: to move on to the fullest, most exacting use of her mind—or to spend the rest of her life doing his thinking for a man unfit to be a night dispatcher? Why had she chosen to work? Was it in order to remain where she had started—night operator of Rockdale Station—no, lower than that—she had been better than that dispatcher, even at Rockdale—was this to be the final sum: an end lower than her beginning? . . . There was no reason to hurry? *She* was the reason . . . They needed the trains, but they did not need the motor? *She* needed the motor. . . . Her duty? To whom?

The dispatcher was gone for a long time; when he came back, his voice sounded sulky: "Well, the wiper says he can get the men all right, but it's no use, because how am I going to send them out to you? We have no engine."

"No engine?"

"No. The superintendent took one to run down to Laurel, and the other's in the shops, been there for weeks, and the switch engine jumped a rail this morning, they'll be working on her till tomorrow afternoon."

"What about the wrecker's engine that you were offering to send us?"

"Oh, she's up north. They had a wreck there yesterday. She hasn't come back yet."

"Have you a Diesel car?"

"Never had any such thing. Not around here."

"Have you a track motor car?"

"Yes. We have that."

"Send them out on the track motor car."

"Oh . . . Yes, ma'am."

"Tell your men to stop here, at track phone Number 83, to pick up Mr. Kellogg and myself." she was looking at the beacon.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Call the Taggart trainmaster at Laurel, report the Comet's delay and explain to him what happened." She put her hand into her pocket

and suddenly clutched her fingers: she felt the package of cigarettes. "Say—" she asked, "what's that beacon, about half a mile from here?"

"From where you are? Oh, that must be the emergency landing field of the Flagship Airlines."

"I see . . . Well, that's all. Get your men started at once. Tell them to pick up Mr. Kellogg by track phone Number 83."

"Yes, ma'am."

She hung up. Kellogg was grinning.

"An airfield, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes." She stood looking at the beacon, her hand still clutching the cigarettes in her pocket.

"So they're going to pick up *Mr. Kellogg*, are they?"

She whirled to him, realizing what decision her mind had been reaching without her conscious knowledge. "No," she said, "no, I didn't mean to abandon you here. It's only that I, too, have a crucial purpose out West, where I ought to hurry, so I was thinking of trying to catch a plane, but I can't do it and it's not necessary."

"Come on," he said, starting in the direction of the airfield.

"But I—"

"If there's anything you want to do more urgently than to nurse those morons—go right ahead."

"More urgently than anything in the world," she whispered.

"I'll undertake to remain in charge for you and to deliver the Comet to your man at Laurel."

"Thank you . . . But if you're hoping . . . I'm not deserting, you know."

"I know."

"Then why are you so eager to help me?"

"I just want you to see what it's like to do something *you* want, for once."

"There's not much chance that they'll have a plane at that field."

"There's a good chance that they will."

There were two planes on the edge of the airfield: one, the half-charred remnant of a wreck, not worth salvaging for scrap—the other, a Dwight Sanders monoplane, brand-new, the kind of ship that men were pleading for, in vain, all over the country.

There was one sleepy attendant at the airfield, young, pudgy, and, but for a faint smell of college about his vocabulary, a brain-brother of the night dispatcher of Bradshaw. He knew nothing about the two planes: they had been there when he first took this job a year ago. He had never inquired about them and neither had anybody else. In whatever silent crumbling had gone on at the distant headquarters, in the slow dissolution of a great airline company, the Sanders monoplane had been forgotten—as assets of this nature were being forgotten everywhere . . . as the model of the motor had been forgotten on a junk pile and, left in plain sight, had conveyed nothing to the inheritors and the takers-over. . . .

There were no rules to tell the young attendant whether he was expected to keep the Sanders plane or not. The decision was made for him by the brusque, confident manner of the two strangers—by the credentials of Miss Dagny Taggart, Vice-President of a railroad—

by brief hints about a secret, emergency mission, which sounded like Washington to him—by the mention of an agreement with the airline's top officials in New York, whose names he had never heard before—by a check for fifteen thousand dollars, written by Miss Taggart, as deposit against the return of the Sanders plane—and by another check, for two hundred bucks, for his own, personal courtesy.

He fueled the plane, he checked it as best he could, he found a map of the country's airports—and she saw that a landing field on the outskirts of Afton, Utah, was marked as still in existence. She had been too tensely, swiftly active to feel anything, but at the last moment, when the attendant switched on the floodlights, when she was about to climb aboard, she paused to glance at the emptiness of the sky, then at Owen Kellogg. He stood, alone in the white glare, his feet planted firmly apart, on an island of cement in a ring of blinding lights, with nothing beyond the ring but an irredeemable night—and she wondered which one of them was taking the greater chance and facing the more desolate emptiness.

"In case anything happens to me," she said, "will you tell Eddie Willers in my office to give Jeff Allen a job, as I promised?"

"I will . . . Is this all you wish to be done . . . in case anything happens?"

She considered it and smiled sadly, in astonishment at the realization. "Yes, I guess that's all . . . Except, tell Hank Rearden what happened and that I asked you to tell him."

"I will."

She lifted her head and said firmly, "I don't expect it to happen, however. When you reach Laurel, call Winston, Colorado, and tell them that I will be there tomorrow by noon."

"Yes, Miss Taggart."

She wanted to extend her hand in parting, but it seemed inadequate, and then she remembered what he had said about times of loneliness. She took out the package and silently offered him one of his own cigarettes. His smile was a full statement of understanding, and the small flame of his match lighting their two cigarettes was their most enduring handshake.

Then she climbed aboard—and the next span of her consciousness was not separate moments and movements, but the sweep of a single motion and a single unit of time, a progression forming one entity, like the notes of a piece of music: from the touch of her hand on the starter—to the blast of the motor's sound that broke off, like a mountain rockslide, all contact with the time behind her—to the circling fall of a blade that vanished in a fragile sparkle of whirling air that cut the space ahead—to the start for the runway—to the brief pause—then to the forward thrust—to the long, perilous run, the run not to be obstructed, the straight line run that gathers power by spending it on a harder and harder and ever-accelerating effort, the straight line to a purpose—to the moment, unnoticed, when the earth drops off and the line, unbroken, goes on into space in the simple natural act of rising.

She saw the telegraph wires of the trackside slipping past at the tip of her toes. The earth was falling downward, and she felt as if its