about to land or to crash; the two possibilities seemed equal to her mind.

She felt the jolt of the wheels against the ground as an oddly delayed sensation: as if some fraction of time had gone to make her believe it.

She felt the running streak of jerky motion, then the jar of the stop and of silence, then the touch of his hands on her hair, removing the blindfold.

She saw a glaring sunlight, a stretch of scorched weeds going off into the sky, with no mountains to stop it, a deserted highway and the hazy outline of a town about a mile away. She glanced at her watch: forty-seven minutes ago, she had still been in the valley.

"You'll find a Taggart station there," he said, pointing at the town, "and you'll be able to take a train."

She nodded, as if she understood.

He did not follow her as she descended to the ground. He leaned across the wheel toward the open door of the plane, and they looked at each other. She stood, her face raised to him, a faint wind stirring her hair, the straight line of her shoulders sculptured by the trim suit of a business executive amidst the flat immensity of an empty prairie.

The movement of his hand pointed east, toward some invisible cities. "Don't look for me out there," he said. "You will not find me—until you want me for what I am. And when you'll want me, I'll be the easiest man to find."

She heard the sound of the door falling closed upon him; it seemed louder than the blast of the propeller that followed. She watched the run of the plane's wheels and the trail of weeds left flattened behind them. Then she saw a strip of sky between wheels and weeds.

She looked around her. A reddish haze of heat hung over the shapes of the town in the distance, and the shapes seemed to sag under a rusty tinge; above their roofs, she saw the remnant of a crumbled smokestack. She saw a dry, yellow scrap rustling faintly in the weeds beside her; it was a piece of newspaper. She looked at these objects blankly, unable to make them real.

She raised her eyes to the plane. She watched the spread of its wings grow smaller in the sky, draining away in its wake the sound of its motor. It kept rising, wings first, like a long silver cross; then the curve of its motion went following the sky, dropping slowly closer to the earth; then it seemed not to move any longer, but only to shrink. She watched it like a star in the process of extinction, while it shrank from cross to dot to a burning spark which she was no longer certain of seeing. When she saw that the spread of the sky was strewn with such sparks all over, she knew that the plane was gone.

Chapter III ANTI-GREED

"What am I doing here?" asked Dr. Robert Stadler. "Why was I asked to come here? I demand an explanation. I'm not accustomed to being dragged halfway across a continent without rhyme, reason or notice."

Dr. Floyd Ferris smiled. "Which makes me appreciate it all the more that you *did* come, Dr. Stadler." It was impossible to tell whether his voice had a tone of gratitude—or of gloating.

The sun was beating down upon them and Dr. Stadler felt a streak of perspiration oozing along his temple. He could not hold an angrily, embarrassingly private discussion in the middle of a crowd streaming to fill the benches of the grandstand around them—the discussion which he had tried and failed to obtain for the last three days. It occurred to him that that was precisely the reason why his meeting with Dr. Ferris had been delayed to this moment; but he brushed the thought aside, just as he brushed some insect buzzing to reach his wet temple.

"Why was I unable to get in touch with you?" he asked. The fraudulent weapon of sarcasm now seemed to sound less effective than ever, but it was Dr. Stadler's only weapon: "Why did you find it necessary to send me messages on official stationery worded in a style proper, I'm sure, for Army"—orders, he was about to say, but didn't—"communications, but certainly not for scientific correspondence?"

"It is a *government* matter," said Dr. Ferris gently.

"Do you realize that I was much too busy and that this meant an interruption of my work?"

"Oh yes," said Dr. Ferris noncommittally.

"Do you realize that I could have refused to come?"

"But you didn't," said Dr. Ferris softly.

"Why was I given no explanation? Why didn't you come for me in person, instead of sending those incredible young hooligans with their mysterious gibberish that sounded half-science, half-pulp-magazine?"

"I was too busy," said Dr. Ferris blandly.

"Then would you mind telling me what you're doing in the middle of a plain in Iowa—and what I'm doing here, for that matter?" He waved contemptuously at the dusty horizon of an empty prairie and at the three wooden grandstands. The stands were newly erected, and the wood, too, seemed to perspire; he could see drops of resin sparkling in the sun.

"We are about to witness an historical event, Dr. Stadler. An occasion which will become a milestone on the road of science, civilization, social welfare and political adaptability." Dr. Ferris' voice had the tone of a public relations man's memorized handout. "The turning point of a new era."

"What event? What new era?"

"As you will observe, only the most distinguished citizens, the cream of our intellectual elite, have been chosen for the special privilege of witnessing this occasion. We could not omit your name, could we?—and we feel certain, of course, that we can count on your loyalty and cooperation."

He could not catch Dr. Ferris' eyes. The grandstands were rapidly filling with people, and Dr. Ferris kept interrupting himself constantly to wave to nondescript newcomers, whom Dr. Stadler had never seen before, but who were personages, as he could tell by the particular shade of gaily informal deference in Ferris' waving. They