and swerving in another, or by means of her certainty that her body had become an instrument for the direct perception of his, like a screen reflecting both movements and motives—she could not tell. She knew only that he who had never started or lost a battle against himself, now had no power to leave this room.

His manner seemed to show no sign of strain. He took off his coat, throwing it aside, remaining in shirt sleeves, and sat down, facing her, at the window across the room. But he sat down on the arm of a chair, as if he were neither leaving nor staying.

She felt the light-headed, the easy, the almost frivolous sensation of triumph in the knowledge that she was holding him as surely as by a physical touch; for the length of a moment, brief and dangerous to endure, it was a more satisfying form of contact.

Then she felt a sudden, blinding shock, which was half-blow, half-scream within her, and she groped, stunned, for its cause—only to realize that he had leaned a little to one side and it had been no more than the sight of an accidental posture, of the long line running from his shoulder to the angle of his waist, to his hips, down his legs. She looked away, not to let him see that she was trembling—and she dropped all thoughts of triumph and of whose was the power.

"I've seen you many times since," he said, quietly, steadily, but a little more slowly than usual, as if he could control everything except his need to speak.

"Where have you seen me?"

"Many places."

"But you made certain to remain unseen?" She knew that his was a face she could not have failed to notice.

"Yes."

"Why? Were you afraid?"

"Yes."

He said it simply, and it took her a moment to realize that he was admitting he knew what the sight of his person would have meant to her. "Did you know who I was, when you saw me for the first time?"

"Oh yes. My worst enemy but one."

"What?" She had not expected it; she added, more quietly, "Who's the worst one?"

"Dr. Robert Stadler."

"Did you have me classified with him?"

"No. He's my conscious enemy. He's the man who sold his soul. We don't intend to reclaim him. You—you were one of us. I knew it, long before I saw you. I knew also that you would be the last to join us and the hardest one to defeat."

"Who told you that?"

"Francisco."

She let a moment pass, then asked, "What did he say?"

"He said that of all the names on our list, you'd be the one most difficult to win. That was when I heard of you for the first time. It was Francisco who put your name on our list. He told me that you were the sole hope and future of Taggart Transcontinental, that you'd stand against us for a long time, that you'd fight a desperate

battle for your railroad—because you had too much endurance, courage and consecration to your work." He glanced at her. "He told me nothing else. He spoke of you as if he were merely discussing one of our future strikers. I knew that you and he had been childhood friends, that was all."

"When did you see me?"

"Two years later."

"How?"

"By chance. It was late at night . . . on a passenger platform of the Taggart Terminal." She knew that this was a form of surrender, he did not want to say it, yet he had to speak, she heard both the muted intensity and the pull of resistance in his voice—he had to speak, because he had to give himself and her this one form of contact. "You wore an evening gown. You had a cape half-slipping off your body—I saw, at first, only your bare shoulders, your back and your profile—it looked for a moment as if the cape would slip further and you would stand there naked. Then I saw that you wore a long gown, the color of ice, like the tunic of a Grecian goddess, but you had the short hair and the imperious profile of an American woman. You looked preposterously out of place on a railroad platform—and it was not on a railroad platform that I was seeing you, I was seeing a setting that had never haunted me before—but then, suddenly, I knew that you *did* belong among the rails, the soot and the girders, that that was the proper setting for a flowing gown and naked shoulders and a face as alive as yours—a railroad platform, not a curtained apartment—you looked like a symbol of luxury and you belonged in the place that was its source—you seemed to bring wealth, grace, extravagance and the enjoyment of life back to their rightful owners, to the men who created railroads and factories—you had a look of energy and of its reward, together, a look of competence and luxury combined—and I was the first man who had ever stated in what manner these two were inseparable—and I thought that if our age gave form to its proper gods and erected a statue to the meaning of an American railroad, yours would be that statue. . . . Then I saw what you were doing—and I knew who you were. You were giving orders to three Terminal officials. I could not hear your words, but your voice sounded swift, clear-cut and confident. I knew that you were Dagny Taggart. I came closer, close enough to hear two sentences. 'Who said so?' asked one of the men. 'I did,' you answered. That was all I heard. That was enough."

"And then?"

He raised his eyes slowly to hold hers across the room, and the submerged intensity that pulled his voice down, blurring its tone to softness, gave it a sound of self-mockery that was desperate and almost gentle: "Then I knew that abandoning my motor was not the hardest price I would have to pay for this strike."

She wondered which anonymous shadow—among the passengers who had hurried past her, as insubstantial as the steam of the engines and as ignored—which shadow and face had been his; she wondered how close she had come to him for the length of that unknown moment. "Oh, why didn't you speak to me, then or later?"

"Do you happen to remember what you were doing in the Terminal that night?"

"I remember vaguely a night when they called me from some party I was attending. My father was out of town and the new Terminal manager had made some sort of error that tied up all traffic in the tunnels. The old manager had quit unexpectedly the week before."

"It was I who made him quit."

"I see . . ."

Her voice trailed off, as if abandoning sound, as her eyelids dropped, abandoning sight. If he had not withstood it then—she thought—if he had come to claim her, then or later, what sort of tragedy would they have had to reach? . . . She remembered what she had felt when she had cried that she would shoot the destroyer on sight. . I would have—the thought was not in words, she knew it only as a trembling pressure in her stomach—I would have shot him, afterward, if I discovered his role . . . and I would have had to discover it . . . and yet—she shuddered, because she knew she still wished he had come to her, because the thought not to be admitted into her mind, but flowing as a dark warmth through her body, was: I would have shot him, but not before—

She raised her eyelids—and she knew that that thought was as naked to him in her eyes, as it was to her in his. She saw his veiled glance and the tautness of his mouth, she saw him reduced to agony, she felt herself drowned by the exultant wish to cause him pain, to see it, to watch it, to watch it beyond her own endurance and his, then to reduce him to the helplessness of pleasure.

He got up, he looked away, and she could not tell whether it was the slight lift of his head or the tension of his features that made his face look oddly calm and clear, as if it were stripped of emotion down to the naked purity of its structure.

"Every man that your railroad needed and lost in the past ten years," he said, "it was I who made you lose him." His voice had the singletoned flatness and the luminous simplicity of an accountant who reminds a reckless purchaser that cost is an absolute which cannot be escaped. "I have pulled every girder from under Taggart Transcontinental and, if you choose to go back, I will see it collapse upon your head."

He turned to leave the room. She stopped him. It was her voice, more than her words, that made him stop: her voice was low, it had no quality of emotion, only of a sinking weight, and its sole color was some dragging undertone, like an inner echo, resembling a threat; it was the voice of the plea of a person who still retains a concept of honor, but is long past caring for it:

"You want to hold me here, don't you?"

"More than anything else in the world."

"You could hold me."

"I know it."

His voice had said it with the same sound as hers. He waited, to regain his breath. When he spoke, his voice was low and clear, with some stressed quality of awareness, which was almost the quality of a smile of understanding: