

the harshly public glare of light. He stood still, as if demanding that she look at him, his face expectant and stern.

"Have you forgotten that you wanted to shoot me on sight?" he asked.

It was the unprotected stillness of his figure that made it real. The shudder that threw her upright was like a cry of terror and denial; but she held his glance and answered evenly, "That's true. I did."

"Then stand by it."

Her voice was low, its intensity was both a surrender and a scornful reproach: "You know better than that, don't you?"

He shook his head. "No, I want you to remember that that had been your wish. You were right, in the past. So long as you were part of the outer world, you had to seek to destroy me. And of the two courses now open to you, one will lead you to the day when you will find yourself forced to do it." She did not answer, she sat looking down, he saw the strands of her hair swing jerkily as she shook her head in desperate protest. "You are my only danger. You are the only person who could deliver me to my enemies. If you remain with them, you will. Choose that, if you wish, but choose it with full knowledge. Don't answer me now. But until you do"—the stress of severity in his voice was the sound of effort directed against him—"remember that I know the meaning of either answer."

"As fully as I do?" she whispered

"As fully"

He turned to go, when her eyes fell suddenly upon the inscriptions she had noticed, and forgotten, on the walls of the room.

They were cut into the polish of the wood, still showing the force of the pencil's pressure in the hands that had made them, each in his own violent writing: "You'll get over it--Ellis Wyatt" "It will be all right by morning--Ken Danagger" "It's worth it--Roger Marsh." There were others.

"What is that?" she asked

He smiled. "This is the room where they spent their first night in the valley. The first night is the hardest. It's the last pull of the break with one's memories, and the worst. I let them stay here, so they can call for me, if they want me. I speak to them, if they can't sleep. Most of them can't. But they're free of it by morning. . . . They've all gone through this room. Now they call it the torture chamber or the anteroom--because everyone has to enter the valley through my house."

He turned to go, he stopped on the threshold and added:

"This is the room I never intended you to occupy. Good night, Miss Taggart "

Chapter II THE UTOPIA OF GREED

"Good morning."

She looked at him across the living room from the threshold of her door. In the windows behind him, the mountains had that tinge of silver-pink which seems brighter than daylight, with the promise of a light to come. The sun had risen somewhere over the earth, but

it had not reached the top of the barrier, and the sky was glowing in its stead, announcing its motion. She had heard the joyous greeting to the sunrise, which was not the song of birds, but the ringing of the telephone a moment ago; she saw the start of day, not in the shining green of the branches outside, but in the glitter of chromium on the stove, the sparkle of a glass ashtray on a table, and the crisp whiteness of his shirt sleeves. Irresistibly, she heard the sound of a smile in her own voice, matching his, as she answered:

"Good morning."

He was gathering notes of penciled calculations from his desk and stuffing them into his pocket. "I have to go down to the powerhouse," he said. "They've just phoned me that they're having trouble with the ray screen. Your plane seems to have knocked it off key. I'll be back in half an hour and then I'll cook our breakfast."

It was the casual simplicity of his voice, the manner of taking her presence and their domestic routine for granted, as if it were of no significance to them, that gave her the sense of an underscored significance and the feeling that he knew it.

She answered as casually, "If you'll bring me the cane I left in the car, I'll have breakfast ready for you by the time you come back."

He glanced at her with a slight astonishment; his eyes moved from her bandaged ankle to the short sleeves of the blouse that left her arms bare to display the heavy bandage on her elbow. But the transparent blouse, the open collar, the hair falling down to the shoulders that seemed innocently naked under a thin film of cloth, made her look like a schoolgirl, not an invalid, and her posture made the bandages look irrelevant.

He smiled, not quite at her, but as if in amusement at some sudden memory of his own. "If you wish," he said.

It was strange to be left alone in his house. Part of it was an emotion she had never experienced before: an awed respect that made her hesitantly conscious of her hands, as if to touch any object around her would be too great an intimacy. The other part was a reckless sense of ease, a sense of being at home in this place, as if she owned its owner.

It was strange to feel so pure a joy in the simple task of preparing a breakfast. The work seemed an end in itself, as if the motions of filling a coffee pot, squeezing oranges, slicing bread were performed for their own sake, for the sort of pleasure one expects, but seldom finds, in the motions of dancing. It startled her to realize that she had not experienced this kind of pleasure in her work since her days at the operator's desk in Rockdale Station.

She was setting the table, when she saw the figure of a man hurrying up the path to the house, a swift, agile figure that leaped over boulders with the casual ease of a flight. He threw the door open, calling, "Hey, John!"—and stopped short as he saw her. He wore a dark blue sweater and slacks, he had gold hair and a face of such shocking perfection of beauty that she stood still, staring at him, not in admiration, at first, but in simple disbelief.

He looked at her as if he had not expected to find a woman in this house. Then she saw a look of recognition melting into a differ-

ent kind of astonishment, part amusement, part triumph melting into a chuckle. "Oh, have *you* joined us?" he asked.

"No," she answered dryly, "I haven't. I'm a scab."

He laughed, like an adult at a child who uses technological words beyond its understanding. "If you know what you're saying, you know that it's not possible," he said. "Not here."

"I crashed the gate. Literally."

He looked at her bandages, weighing the question, his glance almost insolent in its open curiosity. "When?"

"Yesterday."

"How?"

"In a plane."

"What were you doing in a plane in this part of the country?"

He had the direct, imperious manner of an aristocrat or a rough-neck; he looked like one and was dressed like the other. She considered him for a moment, deliberately letting him wait. "I was trying to land on a prehistorical mirage," she answered. "And I have."

"You *are* a scab," he said, and chuckled, as if grasping all the implications of the problem. "Where's John?"

"Mr. Galt is at the powerhouse. He should be back any moment."

He sat down in an armchair, asking no permission, as if he were at home. She turned silently to her work. He sat watching her movements with an open grin, as if the sight of her laying out cutlery on a kitchen table were the spectacle of some special paradox.

"What did Francisco say when he saw you here?" he asked.

She turned to him with a slight jolt, but answered evenly, "He is not here yet."

"Not yet?" He seemed startled. "Are you sure?"

"So I was told."

He lighted a cigarette. She wondered, watching him, what profession he had chosen, loved and abandoned in order to join this valley. She could make no guess; none seemed to fit: she caught herself in the preposterous feeling of wishing that he had no profession at all, because any work seemed too dangerous for his incredible kind of beauty. It was an impersonal feeling, she did not look at him as at a man, but as at an animated work of art--and it seemed to be a stressed indignity of the outer world that a perfection such as his should be subjected to the shocks, the strains, the scars reserved for any man who loved his work. But the feeling seemed the more preposterous, because the lines of his face had the sort of hardness for which no danger on earth was a match.

"No, Miss Taggart," he said suddenly, catching her glance "you've never seen me before."

She was shocked to realize that she had been studying him openly. "How do you happen to know who I am?" she asked.

"First, I've seen your pictures in the papers many times. Second, you're the only woman left in the outer world, to the best of our knowledge, who'd be allowed to enter Galt's Gulch. Third, you're the only woman who'd have the courage—and prodigality—still to remain a scab."

"What made you certain that I was a scab?"