

his desk, a young girl's hand with long, thin fingers, relaxed for a moment, defenseless.

"The Stockton Foundry in Colorado," she said, "is going to finish that order for me--the one that the Amalgamated Switch and Signal Company ran out on. They're going to get in touch with you about the Metal."

"They have already. What have you done about the construction crews?"

"Nealy's engineers are staying on, the best ones, those I need. And most of the foremen, too. It won't be too hard to keep them going. Nealy wasn't of much use, anyway."

"What about labor?"

"More applicants than I can hire. I don't think the union is going to interfere. Most of the applicants are giving phony names. They're union members. They need the work desperately. I'll have a few guards on the Line; but I don't expect any trouble."

"What about your brother Jim's Board of Directors?"

"They're all scrambling to get statements into the newspapers to the effect that they have no connection whatever with the John Galt Line, and how reprehensible an undertaking they think it is. They agreed to everything I asked."

The line of her shoulders looked taut, yet thrown back easily, as if poised for flight. Tension seemed natural to her, not a sign of anxiety, but a sign of enjoyment; the tension of her whole body, under the gray suit, half-visible in the darkness.

"Eddie Willers has taken over the office of Operating Vice-President," she said. "If you need anything, get in touch with him. I'm leaving for Colorado tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. We have to make up time. We've lost a week."

"Flying your own plane?"

"Yes. I'll be back in about ten days. I intend to be in New York once or twice a month."

"Where will you live out there?"

"On the site. In my own railway car--that is, Eddie's car, which I'm borrowing."

"Will you be safe?"

"Safe from what?" Then she laughed, startled. "Why, Hank, it's the first time you've ever thought that I wasn't a man. Of course I'll be safe."

He was not looking at her; he was looking at a sheet of figures on his desk. "I've had my engineers prepare a breakdown of the cost of the bridge," he said, "and an approximate schedule of the construction time required. That is what I wanted to discuss with you." He extended the papers. She settled back to read them.

A wedge of light fell across her face. He saw the firm, sensual mouth in sharp outline. Then she leaned back a little, and he saw only a suggestion of its shape and the dark lines of her lowered lashes.

Haven't I?—he thought. Haven't I thought of it since the first time I saw you? Haven't I thought of nothing else for two years? . . . He

sat motionless, looking at her. He heard the words he had never allowed himself to form, the words he had felt, known, yet had not faced, had hoped to destroy by never letting them be said within his own mind. Now it was as sudden and shocking as if he were saying it to her. . . . Since the first time I saw you . . . Nothing but your body, that mouth of yours, and the way your eyes would look at me, if . . . Through every sentence I ever said to you, through every conference you thought so safe, through the importance of all the issues we discussed . . . You trusted me, didn't you? To recognize your greatness? To think of you as you deserved—as if you were a man? . . . Don't you suppose I know how much I've betrayed? The only bright encounter of my life—the only person I respected—the best businessman I know—my ally—my partner in a desperate battle . . . The lowest of all desires—as my answer to the highest I've met . . . Do you know what I am? I thought of it, because it should have been unthinkable. For that degrading need, which should never touch you, I have never wanted anyone but you . . . I hadn't known what it was like, to want it, until I saw you for the first time. I had thought: Not I, I couldn't be broken by it . . . Since then . . . for two years . . . with not a moment's respite . . . Do you know what it's like, to want it? Would you wish to hear what I thought when I looked at you . . . when I lay awake at night . . . when I heard your voice over a telephone wire . . . when I worked, but could not drive it away? . . . To bring you down to things you can't conceive --and to know that it's I who have done it. To reduce you to a body, to teach you an animal's pleasure, to see you need it, to see you asking me for it, to see your wonderful spirit dependent upon the obscenity of your need. To watch you as you are, as you face the world with your clean, proud strength--then to see you, in my bed, submitting to any infamous whim I may devise, to any act which I'll perform for the sole purpose of watching your dishonor and to which you'll submit for the sake of an unspeakable sensation . . . I want you--and may I be damned for it! . . .

She was reading the papers, leaning back in the darkness—he saw the reflection of the fire touching her hair, moving to her shoulder, down her arm, to the naked skin of her wrist.

. . . Do you know what I'm thinking now, in this moment? . . . Your gray suit and your open collar . . . you look so young, so austere, so sure of yourself . . . What would you be like if I knocked your head back; if I threw you down in that formal suit of yours, if I raised your skirt---

She glanced up at him. He looked down at the papers on his desk. In a moment, he said, "The actual cost of the bridge is less than our original estimate. You will note that the strength of the bridge allows for the eventual addition of a second track, which, I think, that section of the country will justify in a very few years. If you spread the cost over a period of--"

He spoke, and she looked at his face in the lamplight, against the black emptiness of the office. The lamp was outside her field of vision, and she felt as if it were his face that illuminated the papers on the desk. His face, she thought, and the cold, radiant clarity of