She rose to go He leaned forward across the desk, reluctant to end the interview and to end it so decisively

"You realize, of course, that a lengthy procedure will be necessary to put this through," he said, the words sounded almost hopeful "It isn't as simple as that"

"Oh sure" she said 'I'll send you a detailed report, which Eddie will prepare and which you won't read Eddie will help you put it through the works I'm going to Philadelphia tonight to see Rearden He and I have a lot of work to do' She added It's as simple as that, Jim

She had turned to go when he spoke again and what he said seemed bewilderingly irrelevant That's all right for you because you're lucky Others can t do it

Do what?

'Other people are human They re sensitive They can t devote their whole life to metals and engines You re lucky you've never had any feelings You've never felt anything at all

As she looked at him her dark gray eyes went slowly from astonishment to stillness then to a strange expression that resembled a look of weariness except that it seemed to reflect much more than the endurance of this one moment

No Jim she said quietly I guess I've never felt anything at all'

Eddie Willers followed her to her office Whenever she returned he felt as if the world became clear simple easy to face and he forgot his moments of shapeless apprehension He was the only person who found it completely natural that she should be the Operating Vice president of a great railroad even though she was a woman She had told him when he was ten years old that she would run the railroad some day It did not astonish him now just as it had not astonished him that day in a clearing of the woods

When they entered her office when he saw her sit down at the desk and glance at the memos he had left for her he felt as he did in his car when the motor caught on and the wheels could move forward

He was about to leave her office when he remembered a matter he had not reported Owen Kellogg of the Terminal Division asked me for an appointment to see you he said

She looked up astonished That's funny I was going to send for him Have him come up I want to see him Eddie she added suddenly, before I start tell them to get me Ayers of the Ayers Music Publishing company on the phone

'The Music Publishing Company?' he repeated incredulously

'Yes There s something I want to ask him

When the voice of Mr Ayers courteously eager inquired of what service he could be to her she asked Can you tell me whether Richard Halley has written a new piano concerto the Fifth?'

"A *fifth* concerto, Miss Taggart? Why no of course he hasn t

'Are you sure?'

"Quite sure, Miss Taggart He has not written anything for eight years"

"Is he still alive?"

"Why, yes—that is, I can't say for certain, he has dropped out of public life entirely—but I'm sure we would have heard of it if he had died."

"If he wrote anything, would you know about it?"

"Of course. We would be the first to know. We publish all of his work. But he has stopped writing."

"I see. Thank you."

When Owen Kellogg entered her office, she looked at him with satisfaction. She was glad to see that she had been right in her vague recollection of his appearance—his face had the same quality as that of the young brakeman on the train, the face of the kind of man with whom she could deal.

"Sit down, Mr. Kellogg," she said, but he remained standing in front of her desk.

"You had asked me once to let you know if I ever decided to change my employment, Miss Taggart," he said. "So I came to tell you that I am quitting."

She had expected anything but that; it took her a moment before she asked quietly, "Why?"

"For a personal reason."

"Were you dissatisfied here?"

"No."

"Have you received a better offer?"

"No."

"What railroad are you going to?"

"I'm not going to any railroad, Miss Taggart."

"Then what job are you taking?"

"I have not decided that yet."

She studied him, feeling slightly uneasy. There was no hostility in his face; he looked straight at her, he answered simply, directly; he spoke like one who has nothing to hide, or to show; the face was polite and empty.

"Then why should you wish to quit?"

"It's a personal matter."

"Are you ill? Is it a question of your health?"

"No."

"Are you leaving the city?"

"No."

"Have you inherited money that permits you to retire?"

"No."

"Do you intend to continue working for a living?"

"Yes."

"But you do not wish to work for Taggart Transcontinental?"

"No."

"In that case, something must have happened here to cause your decision. What?"

"Nothing, Miss Taggart."

"I wish you'd tell me. I have a reason for wanting to know."

"Would you take my word for it, Miss Taggart?"

"Yes."

"No person, matter or event connected with my job here had any bearing upon my decision."

"You have no specific complaint against Taggart Transcontinental?"

"None."

"Then I think you might reconsider when you hear what I have to offer you."

"I'm sorry, Miss Taggart. I can't."

"May I tell you what I have in mind?"

"Yes, if you wish."

"Would you take my word for it that I decided to offer you the post I'm going to offer, before you asked to see me? I want you to know that."

"I will always take your word, Miss Taggart."

"It's the post of Superintendent of the Ohio Division. It's yours, if you want it."

His face showed no reaction, as if the words had no more significance for him than for a savage who had never heard of railroads.

"I don't want it, Miss Taggart," he answered.

After a moment, she said, her voice tight, "Write your own ticket, Kellogg. Name your price. I want you to stay. I can match anything any other railroad offers you."

"I am not going to work for any other railroad."

"I thought you loved your work."

This was the first sign of emotion in him, just a slight widening of his eyes and an oddly quiet emphasis in his voice when he answered, "I do."

"Then tell me what it is that I should say in order to hold you!"

It had been involuntary and so obviously frank that he looked at her as if it had reached him.

"Perhaps I am being unfair by coming here to tell you that I'm quitting, Miss Taggart. I know that you asked me to tell you because you wanted to have a chance to make me a counter-offer. So if I came, it looks as if I'm open to a deal. But I'm not. I came only because I . . . I wanted to keep my word to you."

That one break in his voice was like a sudden flash that told her how much her interest and her request had meant to him; and that his decision had not been an easy one to make.

"Kellogg, is there nothing I can offer you?" she asked.

"Nothing, Miss Taggart. Nothing on earth."

He turned to go. For the first time in her life, she felt helpless and beaten.

"Why?" she asked, not addressing him.

He stopped. He shrugged and smiled—he was alive for a moment and it was the strangest smile she had ever seen: it held secret amusement, and heartbreak, and an infinite bitterness. He answered:

"Who is John Galt?"