

happens to be the other way around—and now you're going to see the kind of tools your ideas have determined!"

But even to go back took an act of intelligence—she thought, feeling the paradox of her own position, as she looked at the lethargy of the faces around her.

"How will we work the switches, Miss Taggart?"

"By hand."

"And the signals?"

"By hand."

"How?"

"By placing a man with a lantern at every signal post."

"How? There's not enough clearance."

"We'll use alternate tracks."

"How will the men know which way to throw the switches?"

"By written orders."

"Uh?"

"By written orders—just as in the old days." She pointed to the tower director. "He's working out a schedule of how to move the trains and which tracks to use. He'll write out an order for every signal and switch, he'll pick some men as runners and they'll keep delivering the orders to every post—and it will take hours to do what used to take minutes, but we'll get those waiting trains into the Terminal and out on the road."

"We're to work it that way all night?"

"And all day tomorrow—until the engineer who's got the brains for it, shows you how to repair the interlocker."

"There's nothing in the union contracts about men standing with lanterns. There's going to be trouble. The union will object."

"Let them come to me."

"The Unification Board will object."

"I'll be responsible."

"Well, I wouldn't want to be held for giving the orders—"

"I'll give the orders."

She stepped out on the landing of the iron stairway that hung on the side of the tower; she was fighting for self-control. It seemed to her for a moment as if she, too, were a precision instrument of high technology, left without electric current, trying to run a transcontinental railroad by means of her two hands. She looked out at the great, silent darkness of the Taggart underground—and she felt a stab of burning humiliation that she should now see it brought down to the level where human lampposts would stand in its tunnels as its last memorial statues.

She could barely distinguish the faces of the men when they gathered at the foot of the tower. They came streaming silently through the darkness and stood without moving in the bluish murk, with blue bulbs on the walls behind them and patches of light falling on their shoulders from the tower's windows. She could see the greasy garments, the slack, muscular bodies, the limply hanging arms of men drained by the unrewarding exhaustion of a labor that required no thought. These were the dregs of the railroad, the younger men who could now seek no chance to rise and the older men who had never

wanted to seek it. They stood in silence, not with the apprehensive curiosity of workmen, but with the heavy indifference of convicts.

"The orders which you are about to receive have come from me," she said, standing above them on the iron stairs, speaking with resonant clarity. "The men who'll issue them are acting under my instructions. The interlocking control system has broken down. It will now be replaced by human labor. Train service will be resumed at once."

She noticed some faces in the crowd staring at her with a peculiar look: with a veiled resentment and the kind of insolent curiosity that made her suddenly conscious of being a woman. Then she remembered what she wore, and thought that it did look preposterous—and then, at the sudden stab of some violent impulse that felt like defiance and like loyalty to the full, real meaning of the moment, she threw her cape back and stood in the raw glare of light, under the sooted columns, like a figure at a formal reception, sternly erect, flaunting the luxury of naked arms, of glowing black satin, of a diamond flashing like a military cross.

"The tower director will assign switchmen to their posts. He will select men for the job of signaling trains by means of lanterns and for the task of transmitting his orders. Trains will—"

She was fighting to drown a bitter voice that seemed to be saying: That's all they're fit for, these men, if even that . . . there's not a single mind left anywhere on Taggart Transcontinental. . . .

"Trains will continue to be moved in and out of the Terminal. You will remain at your posts until—"

Then she stopped. It was his eyes and hair that she saw first—the ruthlessly perceptive eyes, the streaks of hair shaded from gold to copper that seemed to reflect the glow of sunlight in the murk of the underground—she saw John Galt among the chain gang of the mindless, John Galt in greasy overalls and rolled shirt sleeves, she saw his weightless way of standing, his face held lifted, his eyes looking at her as if he had seen this moment many moments ago.

"What's the matter, Miss Taggart?"

It was the soft voice of the tower director, who stood by her side, with some sort of paper in his hand—and she thought it was strange to emerge from a span of unconsciousness which had been the span of the sharpest awareness she had ever experienced, only she did not know how long it had lasted or where she was or why. She had been aware of Galt's face, she had been seeing, in the shape of his mouth, in the planes of his cheeks, the crackup of that implacable serenity which had always been his, but he still retained it in his look of acknowledging the breach, of admitting that this moment was too much even for him.

She knew that she went on speaking, because those around her looked as if they were listening, though she could not hear a sound, she went on speaking as if carrying out a hypnotic order given to herself some endless time ago, knowing only that the completion of that order was a form of defiance against him, neither knowing nor hearing her own words.

She felt as if she were standing in a radiant silence where sight was her only capacity and his face was its only object, and the sight