

"Anything you have to say on the subject, you will please say it to my brother, Mr. James Taggart."

"I'd think that at a time like this you wouldn't want to pass up a rare opportunity to plead your case before—"

"Have you preserved any records pertaining to the motor factory?" She sat straight, her hands clasped tight together.

"What records? I believe I told you that I lost everything I owned when the bank collapsed." His body had gone slack once more, his interest had vanished. "But I do not mind it. What I lost was mere material wealth. I am not the first man in history to suffer for an ideal. I was defeated by the selfish greed of those around me. I couldn't establish a system of brotherhood and love in just one small state, amidst a nation of profit-seekers and dollar-grubbers. It was not my fault. But I won't let them beat me. I am not to be stopped. I am fighting—on a wider scale—for the privilege of serving my fellow men. Records, Miss Taggart? The record I left, when I departed from Madison, is inscribed in the hearts of the poor, who had never had a chance before."

She did not want to utter a single unnecessary word; but she could not stop herself: she kept seeing the figure of the old charwoman scrubbing the steps. "Have you seen that section of the country since?" she asked.

"It's not my fault!" he yelled. "It's the fault of the rich who still had money, but wouldn't sacrifice it to save my bank and the people of Wisconsin! You can't blame me! I lost everything!"

"Mr. Lawson," she said with effort, "do you perhaps recall the name of the man who headed the corporation that owned the factory? The corporation to which you lent the money. It was called Amalgamated Service, wasn't it? Who was its president?"

"Oh, him? Yes, I remember him. His name was Lee Hunsacker. A very worthwhile young man, who's taken a terrible beating."

"Where is he now? Do you know his address?"

"Why—I believe he's somewhere in Oregon. Grangeville, Oregon. My secretary can give you his address. But I don't see of what interest . . . Miss Taggart, if what you have in mind is to try to see Mr. Wesley Mouch, let me tell you that Mr. Mouch attaches a great deal of weight to my opinion in matters affecting such issues as railroads and other—"

"I have no desire to see Mr. Mouch," she said, rising.

"But then, I can't understand . . . What, really, was your purpose in coming here?"

"I am trying to find a certain man who used to work for the Twentieth Century Motor Company."

"Why do you wish to find him?"

"I want him to work for my railroad."

He spread his arms wide, looking incredulous and slightly indignant. "At such a moment, when crucial issues hang in the balance, you choose to waste your time on looking for *one* employee? Believe me, the fate of your railroad depends on Mr. Mouch much more than on any employee you ever find."

"Good day," she said.

She had turned to go, when he said, his voice jerky and high, "You haven't any right to despise me."

She stopped to look at him. "I have expressed no opinion."

"I am perfectly innocent, since I lost my money, since I lost all of my own money for a good cause. My motives were pure. I wanted nothing for myself. I've never sought anything for myself. Miss Taggart, I can proudly say that in all of my life I have *never* made a profit!"

Her voice was quiet, steady and solemn:

"Mr. Lawson, I think I should let you know that of all the statements a man can make, *that* is the one I consider most despicable."

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"I never had a chance!" said Lee Hunsacker.

He sat in the middle of the kitchen; at a table cluttered with papers. He needed a shave; his shirt needed laundering. It was hard to judge his age: the swollen flesh of his face looked smooth and blank, untouched by experience; the graying hair and filmy eyes looked worn by exhaustion; he was forty-two.

"Nobody ever gave me a chance. I hope they're satisfied with what they've made of me. But don't think that I don't know it. I know I was cheated out of my birthright. Don't let them put on any airs about how kind they are. They're a stinking bunch of hypocrites."

"Who?" asked Dagny.

"Everybody," said Lee Hunsacker. "People are bastards at heart and it's no use pretending otherwise. Justice? Huh! Look at it!" His arm swept around her. "A man like me reduced to this!"

Beyond the window, the light of noon looked like grayish dusk among the bleak roofs and naked trees of a place that was not country and could never quite become a town. Dusk and dampness seemed soaked into the walls of the kitchen. A pile of breakfast dishes lay in the sink; a pot of stew simmered on the stove, emitting steam with the greasy odor of cheap meat, a dusty typewriter stood among the papers on the table.

"The Twentieth Century Motor Company," said Lee Hunsacker, "was one of the most illustrious names in the history of American industry. I was the president of that company. I owned that factory. But they wouldn't give me a chance."

"You were not the president of the Twentieth Century Motor Company, were you? I believe you headed a corporation called Amalgamated Service?"

"Yes, yes, but it's the same thing. We took over their factory. We were going to do just as well as they did, better. We were just as important. Who the hell was Jed Starnes anyway? Nothing but a backwoods garage mechanic—did you know that that's how he started?—without any background at all. My family once belonged to the New York Four Hundred. My grandfather was a member of the national legislature. It's not my fault that my father couldn't afford to give me a car of my own, when he sent me to school. All the other boys had cars. My family name was just as good as any of theirs. When I went to college—" He broke off abruptly. "What newspaper did you say you're from?"