

that Directive 10-289 had been issued. It was on the evening of May 1 that he had been informed that his brother had committed suicide.

The trainmaster had heard it said that the directive was necessary to save the country. He could not know whether this was true or not, he had no way of knowing what was necessary to save a country. But driven by some feeling which he could not express, he had walked into the office of the editor of the local newspaper and demanded that they publish the story of his brother's death. "People have to know it," had been all he could give as his reason. He had been unable to explain that the bruised connections of his mind had formed the wordless conclusion that if this was done by the will of the people, then the people had to know it; he could not believe that they would do it, if they knew. The editor had refused; he had stated that it would be bad for the country's morale.

The trainmaster knew nothing about political philosophy; but he knew that that had been the moment when he lost all concern for the life or death of any human being or of the country.

He thought, holding the telephone receiver, that maybe he should warn the men whom he was about to call. They trusted him; it would never occur to them that he could knowingly send them to their death. But he shook his head: this was only an old thought, last year's thought, a remnant of the time when he had trusted them, too. It did not matter now. His brain worked slowly, as if he were dragging his thoughts through a vacuum where no emotion responded to spur them on; he thought that there would be trouble if he warned anyone, there would be some sort of fight and it was he who had to make some great effort to start it. He had forgotten what it was that one started this sort of fight for. Truth? Justice? Brother-love? He did not want to make an effort. He was very tired. If he warned all the men on his list, he thought, there would be no one to run that engine, so he would save two lives and also three hundred lives aboard the Comet. But nothing responded to the figures in his mind: "lives" was just a word, it had no meaning.

He raised the telephone receiver to his ear, he called two numbers, he summoned an engineer and a fireman to report for duty at once.

Engine Number 306 had left for Winston, when Dave Mitchum came downstairs. "Get a track motor car ready for me," he ordered. "I'm going to run up to Fairmount." Fairmount was a small station, twenty miles east on the line. The men nodded, asking no questions. Bill Brent was not among them. Mitchum walked into Brent's office. Brent was there, sitting silently at his desk; he seemed to be waiting.

"I'm going to Fairmount," said Mitchum; his voice was aggressively too casual, as if implying that no answer was necessary. "They had a Diesel there couple of weeks ago . . . you know, emergency repairs or something. . . . I'm going down to see if we could use it."

He paused, but Brent said nothing.

"The way things stack up," said Mitchum, not looking at him, "we can't hold that train till morning. We've got to take a chance, one way or another. Now I think maybe this Diesel will do it, but that's the last one we can try for. So if you don't hear from me in half an

hour, sign the order and send the Comet through with Number 306 to pull her."

Whatever Brent had thought, he could not believe it when he heard it. He did not answer at once; then he said, very quietly, "No."

"What do you mean, no?"

"I won't do it."

"What do you mean, you won't? It's an order!"

"I won't do it." Brent's voice had the firmness of certainty unclouded by any emotion.

"Are you refusing to obey an order?"

"I am."

"But you have no right to refuse! And I'm not going to argue about it, either. It's what I've decided, it's my responsibility and I'm not asking for your opinion. Your job is to take my orders."

"Will you give me that order in writing?"

"Why, God damn you, are you hinting that you don't trust me? Are you . . . ?"

"Why do you have to go to Fairmount, Dave? Why can't you telephone them about the Diesel, if you think that they have one?"

"You're not going to tell me how to do my job! You're not going to sit there and question me! You're going to keep your trap shut and do as you're told or I'll give you a chance to talk—to the Unification Board!"

It was hard to decipher emotions on Brent's cowboy face, but Mitchum saw something that resembled a look of incredulous horror; only it was horror at some sight of his own, not at the words, and it had no quality of fear, not the kind of fear Mitchum had hoped for.

Brent knew that tomorrow morning the issue would be his word against Mitchum's; Mitchum would deny having given the order; Mitchum would show written proof that Engine Number 306 had been sent to Winston only "to stand by;" and would produce witnesses that he had gone to Fairmount in search of a Diesel; Mitchum would claim that the fatal order had been issued by and on the sole responsibility of Bill Brent, the chief dispatcher. It would not be much of a case, not a case that could bear close study, but it would be enough for the Unification Board, whose policy was consistent only in not permitting anything to be studied closely. Brent knew that he could play the same game and pass the frame—up on to another victim. he knew that he had the brains to work it out—except that he would rather be dead than do it.

It was not the sight of Mitchum that made him sit still in horror. It was the realization that there was no one whom he could call to expose this thing and stop it—no superior anywhere on the line, from Colorado to Omaha to New York. They were in on it, all of them, they were doing the same, they had given Mitchum the-lead and the method. It was Dave Mitchum who now belonged on this railroad and he, Bill Brent, who did not.

As Bill Brent had learned to see, by a single glance at a few numbers on a sheet of paper, the entire trackage of a division—so he was now able to see the whole of his own life and the full price of the decision he was making. He had not fallen in love until he