

of Francisco's farewell. The officials who had rushed to the tower, that night, had knocked the calendar's motor to a stop, while tearing the film out of the projector. They had found the small square of Francisco's message, pasted into the strip of numbered days, but who had pasted it there, who had entered the locked room and when and how, was never discovered by the three commissions still investigating the case. Pending the outcome of their efforts, the page hung blank and still above the city.

It was blank on the afternoon of September 14, when the telephone rang in her office. "A man from Minnesota," said the voice of her secretary.

She had told her secretary that she would accept all calls of this kind. They were the appeals for help and her only source of information. At a time when the voices of railroad officials uttered nothing but sounds designed to avoid communication, the voices of nameless men were her last link to the system, the last sparks of reason and tortured honesty flashing briefly through the miles of Taggart track.

"Miss Taggart, it is not my place to call you, but nobody else will," said the voice that came on the wire, this time; the voice sounded young and too calm. "In another day or two, a disaster's going to happen here the like of which they've never seen, and they won't be able to hide it any longer, only it will be too late by then, and maybe it's too late already."

"What is it? Who are you?"

"One of your employees of the Minnesota Division, Miss Taggart. In another day or two, the trains will stop running out of here--and you know what that means, at the height of the harvest. At the height of the biggest harvest we've ever had. They'll stop, because we have no cars. The harvest freight cars have not been sent to us this year."

"What did you say?" She felt as if minutes went by between the words of the unnatural voice that did not sound like her own.

"The cars have not been sent. Fifteen thousand should have been here by now. As far as I could learn, about eight thousand cars is all we got. I've been calling Division Headquarters for a week. They've been telling me not to worry. Last time, they told me to mind my own damn business. Every shed, silo, elevator, warehouse, garage and dance hall along the track is filled with wheat. At the Sherman elevators, there's a line of farmers' trucks and wagons two miles long, waiting on the road. At Lakewood Station, the square is packed solid and has been for three nights. They keep telling us it's only temporary, the cars are coming and we'll catch up. We won't. There aren't any cars coming. I've called everyone I could. I know, by the way they answer. They know, and not one of them wants to admit it. They're scared, scared to move or speak or ask or answer. All they're thinking of is who will be blamed when that harvest rots here around the stations--and not of who's going to move it. Maybe nobody can, now. Maybe there's nothing you can do about it, either. But I thought you're the only person left who'd want to know and that somebody had to tell you."

"I . . ." She made an effort to breathe. "I see . . . Who are you?"

"The name wouldn't matter. When I hang up, I will have become a deserter. I don't want to stay here to see it when it happens. I don't want any part of it any more. Good luck to you, Miss Taggart."

She heard the click. "Thank you," she said over a dead wire.

The next time she noticed the office around her and permitted herself to feel, it was noon of the following day. She stood in the middle of the office, running stiff, spread fingers through a strand of hair, brushing it back off her face—and for an instant, she wondered where she was and what was the unbelievable thing that had happened in the last twenty hours. What she felt was horror, and she knew that she had felt it from the first words of the man on the wire, only there had been no time to know it.

There was not much that remained in her mind of the last twenty hours, only disconnected bits, held together by the single constant that had made them possible—by the soft, loose faces of men, who fought to hide from themselves that they knew the answers to the questions she asked.

From the moment when she was told that the manager of the Car Service Department had been out of town for a week and had left no address where one could reach him—she knew that the report of the man from Minnesota was true. Then came the faces of the assistants in the Car Service Department, who would neither confirm the report nor deny it, but kept showing her papers, orders, forms, file cards that bore words in the English language, but no connection to intelligible facts. "Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?" "Form 357W is filled out in every particular, as required by the office of the Co-ordinator in conformance with the instructions of the comptroller and by Directive 11-493." "Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?" "The entries for the months of August and September have been processed by—" "Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?" "My files indicate the locations of freight cars by state, date, classification and—" "Do you know whether the cars were sent to Minnesota?" "As to the interstate motion of freight cars, I would have to refer you to the files of Mr. Benson and of—" "

There was nothing to learn from the files. There were careful entries, each conveying four possible meanings, with references which led to references which led to final reference which was missing from the files. It did not take her long to discover that the cars had not been sent to Minnesota and that the order had come from Cuffy Meigs—but who had carried it out, who had tangled the trail, what steps had been taken by what compliant men to preserve the appearance of a safely normal operation, without a single cry of protest to arouse some braver man's attention, who had falsified the reports, and where the cars had gone—seemed, at first, impossible to learn.

Through the hours of that night—while a small, desperate crew under the command of Eddie Willers kept calling every division point, every yard, depot, station, spur and siding of Taggart Transcontinental for every freight car in sight or reach, ordering them to unload, drop, dump, scuttle anything and proceed to Minnesota at once, while they kept calling the yards, stations and presidents of every railroad still half in existence anywhere across the map, beg-