mean that he, Mitchum, would have to assume responsibility, admit full knowledge of the danger, stand in the open and identify the exact nature of the situation—the one act which the policy of his superiors was based on evading, the one key to their game.

Dave Mitchum was not the man to rebel against his background or to question the moral code of those in charge. The choice he made was not to challenge, but to follow the policy of his superiors. Bill Brent could have beaten him in any contest of technology, but here was an endeavor at which he could beat Bill Brent without effort. There had once been a society where men needed the particular talents of Bill Brent, if they wished to survive; what they needed now was the talent of Dave Mitchum.

Dave Mitchum sat down at his secretary's typewriter and, by means of two fingers, carefully typed out an order to the trainmaster and another to the road foreman. The first instructed the trainmaster to summon a locomotive crew at once, for a purpose described only as "an emergency"; the second instructed the road foreman to "send the best engine available to Winston, to stand by for emergency assistance."

He put carbon copies of the orders into his own pocket, then opened the door, yelled for the night dispatcher to come up and handed him the two orders for the two men downstairs. The night dispatcher was a conscientious young boy who trusted his superiors and knew that discipline was the first rule of the railroad business. He was astonished that Mitchum should wish to send written orders down one flight of stairs, but he asked no questions.

Mitchum waited nervously. After a while, he saw the figure of the road foreman walking across the yards toward the roundhouse. He felt relieved: the two men had not come up to confront him in person; they had understood and they would play the game as he was playing it.

The road foreman walked across the yards, looking down at the ground. He was thinking of his wife, his two children and the house which he had spent a lifetime to own. He knew what his superiors were doing and he wondered whether he should refuse to obey them. He had never been afraid of losing his job; with the confidence of a competent man, he had known that if he quarreled with one employer, he would always be able to find another. Now, he was afraid; he had no right to quit or to seek a job; if he defied an employer, he would be delivered into the unanswerable power of a single Board, and if the Board ruled against him, it would mean being sentenced to the slow death of starvation: it would mean being barred from any employment. He knew that the Board would rule against him; he knew that the key to the dark, capricious mystery of the Board's contradictory decisions was the secret power of pull. What chance would he have against Mr. Chalmers? There had been a time when the self-interest of his employers had demanded that he exercise his utmost ability. Now, ability was not wanted any longer. There had been a time when he had been required to do his best and rewarded accordingly. Now, he could expect nothing but punishment, if he tried to follow his conscience. There had been a

time when he had been expected to think. Now, they did not want him to think, only to obey. They did not want him to have a conscience any longer. Then why should he raise his voice? For whose sake? He thought of the passengers—the three hundred passengers aboard the Comet. He thought of his children. He had a son in high school and a daughter, nineteen, of whom he was fiercely, painfully proud, because she was recognized as the most beautiful girl in town. He asked himself whether he could deliver his children to the fate of the children of the unemployed, as he had seen them in the blighted areas, in the settlements around closed factories and along the tracks of discontinued railroads. He saw, in astonished horror, that the choice which he now had to make was between the lives of his children and the lives of the passengers on the Comet. A conflict of this kind had never been possible before. It was by protecting the safety of the passengers that he had earned the security of his children; he had served one by serving the other; there had been no clash of interests, no call for victims. Now, if he wanted to save the passengers, he had to do it at the price of his children. He remembered dimly the sermons he had heard about the beauty of self-immolation, about the virtue of sacrificing to others that which was one's dearest. He knew nothing about the philosophy of ethics; but he knew suddenly—not in words, but in the form of a dark, angry, savage pain—that if this was virtue, then he wanted no part of it.

He walked into the roundhouse and ordered a large, ancient coal-burning locomotive to be made ready for the run to Winston.

The trainmaster reached for the telephone in the dispatcher's office, to summon an engine crew, as ordered. But his hand stopped, holding the receiver. It struck him suddenly that he was summoning men to their death, and that of the twenty lives listed on the sheet before him, two would be ended by his choice. He felt a physical sensation of cold, nothing more; he felt no concern, only a puzzled, indifferent astonishment. It had never been his job to call men out to die; his job had been to call them out to earn their living. It was strange, he thought; and it was strange that his hand had stopped; what made it stop was like something he would have felt twenty years ago—no, he thought, strange, only one month ago, not longer.

He was forty-eight years old. He had no family, no friends, no ties to any living being in the world. Whatever capacity for devotion he had possessed, the capacity which others scatter among many random concerns, he had given it whole to the person of his young brother—the brother, his junior by twenty-five years, whom he had brought up. He had sent him through a technological college, and he had known, as had all the teachers, that the boy had the mark of genius on the forehead of his grim, young face. With the same single-tracked devotion as his brother's, the boy had cared for nothing but his studies, not for sports or parties or girls, only for the vision of the things he was going to create as an inventor. He had graduated from college and had gone, on a salary unusual for his age, into the research laboratory of a great electrical concern in Massachusetts.

This was now May 28, thought the trainmaster. It was on May 1