such man, not among the lethargic, extinguished faces of the passengers they had seen "Come on," he ordered, turning to the fireman

They climbed together aboard the locomotive The gray-haired engineer was sitting in his chair, staring out at the cacti The engine's headlight had stayed on and it stretched out into the night, motionless and straight, reaching nothing but the dissolving blur of crossties

Let's try to find what's wrong" said Eddie, removing his coat, his voice half order half plea Let's try some more

Yes sir said the engineer without resentment or hope

The engineer had exhausted his meager store of knowledge, he had checked every source of trouble he could think of He went crawling over and under the machinery unscrewing its parts and screwing them back again taking out pieces and replacing them, dismembering the motors at random like a child taking a clock apart but without the child's conviction that knowledge is possible

The fireman kept leaning out of the cab's window, glancing at the black stillness and shivering as if from the night air that was growing colder

Don't worry said Eddie Willers assuming a tone of confidence We've got to do our best but if we fail they'll send us help sooner or later They don't abandon trains in the middle of nowhere'

They didn't used to said the fireman

Once in a while the engineer raised his grease smeared face to look at the grease smeared face and shirt of Eddie Willers What's the use Mr Willers' he asked

'We can't let it go' Eddie answered fiercely he knew dimly that what he meant was more than the Comet and more than the railroad

Moving from the cab through the three motor units and back to the cab again his hands bleeding his shirt sticking to his back Eddie Willers was struggling to remember everything he had ever known about engines anything he had learned in college and earlier anything he had picked up in those days when the station agents at Rockdale Station used to chase him off the rungs of their lumbering switch engines The pieces connected to nothing his brain seemed jammed and tight he knew that motors were not his profession he knew that he did not know and that it was now a matter of life or death for him to discover the knowledge He was looking at the cylinders the blades the wires the control panels still winking with lights He was struggling not to allow into his mind the thought that was pressing against its periphery What were the chances and how long would it take—according to the mathematical theory of probability—for primitive men working by rule of thumb to hit the right combination of parts and re create the motor of this engine?

'What's the use, Mr Willers?" moaned the engineer

'We can't let it go!" he cried

He did not know how many hours had passed when he heard the fireman shout suddenly 'Mr Willers! Look!'

The fireman was leaning out the window, pointing into the darkness behind them

Eddie Willers looked. An odd little light was swinging jerkily far in the distance; it seemed to be advancing at an imperceptible rate; it did not look like any sort of light he could identify.

After a while, it seemed to him that he distinguished some large black shapes advancing slowly; they were moving in a line parallel with the track; the spot of light hung low over the ground, swinging; he strained his ears, but heard nothing.

Then he caught a feeble, muffled beat that sounded like the hoofs of horses. The two men beside him were watching the black shapes with a look of growing terror, as if some supernatural apparition were advancing upon them out of the desert night. In the moment when they chuckled suddenly, joyously, recognizing the shapes, it was Eddie's face that froze into a look of terror at the sight of a ghost more frightening than any they could have expected: it was a train of covered wagons.

The swinging lantern jerked to a stop by the side the engine. "Hey, bud, can I give you a lift?" called a man who seemed to be the leader; he was chuckling. "Stuck, aren't you?"

The passengers of the Comet were peering out the windows; some were descending the steps and approaching. Women's faces peeked from the wagons, from among the piles of household goods; a baby wailed somewhere at the rear of the caravan.

"Are you crazy?" asked Eddie Willers.

"No, I mean it, brother. We got plenty of room. We'll give you folks a lift--for a price—if you want to get out of here." He was a lanky, nervous man, with loose gestures and an insolent voice, who looked like a side-show barker.

"This is the Taggart Comet," said Eddie Willers, choking.

"The Comet, eh? Looks more like a dead caterpillar to me. What's the matter, brother? You're not going anywhere—and you can't get there any more, even if you tried."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't think you're going to New York, do you?"

"We *are* going to New York."

"Then . . . then you haven't heard?"

"*What?*"

"Say, when was the last time you spoke to any of your stations?"

"I don't know! . . . Heard *what*?"

"That your Taggart Bridge is gone. Gone. Blasted to bits. Sound-ray explosion or something. Nobody knows exactly. Only there ain't any bridge any more to cross the Mississippi. There ain't any New York any more--leastways, not for folks like you and me to reach."

Eddie Willers did not know what happened next; he had fallen back against the side of the engineer's chair, staring at the open door of the motor unit; he did not know how long he stayed there, but when, at last, he turned his head, he saw that he was alone. The engineer and the fireman had left the cab. There was a scramble of voices outside, screams, sobs, shouted questions and the sound of the side-show barker's laughter.

Eddie pulled himself to the window of the cab: the Comet's passengers and crew were crowding around the leader of the caravan