"I still owe you thanks, Mr. Rearden . . . for something much greater than charity."

"No. Don't you see? I have just received a great deal of money . . . which I didn't want. I can't invest it. It's of no use to me whatever . . . So, in a way, it pleases me that I can turn that money against the same people in the same battle. They made it possible for me to give you an extension to help you fight them."

He saw Eddie wincing, as if he had hit a wound. "That's what's horrible about it!"

"What?"

"What they've done to you—and what you're doing in return. I mean—" He stopped. "Forgive me, Mr. Rearden. I know this is no way to talk business."

Rearden smiled. "Thanks, Eddie. I know what you mean. But forget it. To hell with them."

"Yes. Only . . . Mr. Rearden, may I say something to you? I know it's completely improper and I'm not speaking as a vice-president."

"Go ahead."

"I don't have to tell you what your offer means to Dagny, to me, to every decent person on Taggart Transcontinental. You know it. And you know you can count on us. But . . . but I think it's horrible that Jim Taggart should benefit, too—that you should be the one to save him and people like him, after they—"

Rearden laughed. "Eddie, what do we care about people like him? We're driving an express, and they're riding on the roof, making a lot of noise about being leaders. Why should we care? We have enough power to carry them along—haven't we?"

* *

"It won't stand."

The summer sun made blotches of fire on the windows of the city, and glittering sparks in the dust of the streets. Columns of heat shimmered through the air, rising from the roofs to the white page of the calendar. The calendar's motor ran on, marking off the last days of June:

"It won't stand," people said. "When they run the first train on the John Galt Line, the rail will split. They'll never get to the bridge. If they do, the bridge will collapse under the engine."

From the slopes of Colorado, freight trains rolled down the track of the Phoenix-Durango, north to Wyoming and the main line of Taggart Transcontinental, south to New Mexico and the main line of the Atlantic Southern. Strings of tank cars went radiating in all directions from the Wyatt oil fields to industries in distant states. No one spoke about them. To the knowledge of the public, the tank trains moved as silently as rays and, as rays, they were noticed only when they became the light of electric lamps, the heat of furnaces, the movement of motors; but as such, they were not noticed, they were taken for granted.

The Phoenix-Durango Railroad was to end operations on July 25. "Hank Rearden is a greedy monster," people said. "Look at the fortune he's made. Has he ever given anything in return? Has he ever known any sign of social conscience? Money, that's all he's

after. He'll do anything for money. What does he care if people lose their lives when his bridge collapses?"

"The Taggarts have been a band of vultures for generations," people said. "It's in their blood. Just remember that the founder of that family was Nat Taggart, the most notoriously anti-social scoundrel that ever lived, who bled the country white to squeeze a fortune for himself. You can be sure that a Taggart won't hesitate to risk people's lives in order to make a profit. They bought inferior rail, because it's cheaper than steel—what do they care about catastrophes and mangled human bodies, after they've collected the fares?"

People said it because other people said it. They did not know why it was being said and heard everywhere. They did not give or ask for reasons. "Reason," Dr. Pritchett had told them, "is the most naive of all superstitions."

"The source of public opinion?" said Claude Slagenhop in a radio speech. "There is no source of public opinion. It is spontaneously general. It is a reflex of the collective instinct of the collective mind."

Orren Boyle gave an interview to *Globe*, the news magazine with the largest circulation. The interview was devoted to the subject of the grave social responsibility of metallurgists, stressing the fact that metal performed so many crucial tasks where human lives depended on its quality. "One should not, it seems to me, use human beings as guinea pigs in the launching of a new product," he said. He mentioned no names.

"Why, no, I don't say that that bridge will collapse," said the chief metallurgist of Associated Steel, on a television program. "I don't say it at all. I just say that if I had any children, I wouldn't let them ride on the first train that's going to cross that bridge. But it's only a personal preference, nothing more, just because I'm overly fond of children."

"I don't claim that the Rearden-Taggart contraption will collapse," wrote Bertram Scudder in *The Future*. "Maybe it will and maybe it won't. That's not the important issue. The important issue is: what protection does society have against the arrogance, selfishness and greed of two unbridled individualists, whose records are conspicuously devoid of any public-spirited actions? These two, apparently, are willing to stake the lives of their fellow men on their own conceited notions about their powers of judgment, against the overwhelming majority opinion of recognized experts. Should society permit it? If that thing does collapse, won't it be too late to take precautionary measures? Won't it be like locking the barn after the horse has escaped? It has always been the belief of this column that certain kinds of horses should be kept bridled and locked, on general social principles."

A group that called itself "Committee of Disinterested Citizens" collected signatures on a petition demanding a year's study of the John Galt Line by government experts before the first train was allowed to run. The petition stated that its signers had no motive other than "a sense of civic duty." The first signatures were those of Balph Eubank and Mort Liddy. The petition was given a great deal of space and comment in all the newspapers. The consideration