

money on those goddamn diners, and when there's no food to get, when restaurants are closing because they can't grab hold of a pound of horse meat anywhere, how can railroads be expected to do it? Why in hell should we have to feed the passengers, anyway? They're lucky if we give them transportation, they'd travel in cattle cars if necessary, let 'em pack their own box lunches, what do we care?---they've got no other trains to take!"

The telephone on her desk had become, not a voice of business, but an alarm siren for the desperate appeals of disaster. "Miss Taggart, we have no copper wire!" "Nails, Miss Taggart, plain nails, could you tell somebody to send us a keg of nails?" "Can you find any paint, Miss Taggart, any sort of waterproof paint anywhere?"

But thirty million dollars of subsidy money from Washington had been plowed into Project Soybean—an enormous acreage in Louisiana, where a harvest of soybeans was ripening, as advocated and organized by Emma Chalmers, for the purpose of reconditioning the dietary habits of the nation. Emma Chalmers, better known as Kip's Ma, was an old sociologist who had hung about Washington for years, as other women of her age and type hang about barrooms. For some reason which nobody could define, the death of her son in the tunnel catastrophe had given her in Washington an aura of martyrdom, heightened by her recent conversion to Buddhism. "The soybean is a much more sturdy, nutritious and economical plant than all the extravagant foods which our wasteful, self-indulgent diet has conditioned us to expect." Kip's Ma had said over the radio; her voice always sounded as if it were falling in drops, not of water, but of mayonnaise. "Soybeans make an excellent substitute for bread, meat, cereals and coffee—and if all of us were compelled to adopt soybeans as our staple diet, it would solve the national food crisis and make it possible to feed more people. The greatest food for the greatest number—that's my slogan. At a time of desperate public need, it's our duty to sacrifice our luxurious tastes and eat our way back to prosperity by adapting ourselves to the simple, wholesome foodstuff on which the peoples of the Orient have so nobly subsisted for centuries. There's a great deal that we could learn from the peoples of the Orient."

"Copper tubing, Miss Taggart, could you get some copper tubing for us somewhere?" the voices were pleading over her telephone. "Rail spikes, Miss Taggart!" "Screwdrivers, Miss Taggart!" "Light bulbs, Miss Taggart, there's no electric light bulbs to be had anywhere within two hundred miles of us!"

But five million dollars was being spent by the office of Morale Conditioning on the People's Opera Company, which traveled through the country, giving free performances to people who, on one meal a day, could not afford the energy to walk to the opera house. Seven million dollars had been granted to a psychologist in charge of a project to solve the world crisis by research into the nature of brother-love. Ten million dollars had been granted to the manufacturer of a new electronic cigarette lighter—but there were no cigarettes in the shops of the country. There were flashlights on the market, but no batteries; there were radios, but no tubes; there were

cameras, but no film. The production of airplanes had been declared "temporarily suspended." Air travel for private purposes had been forbidden, and reserved exclusively for missions of "public need." An industrialist traveling to save his factory was not considered as publicly needed and could not get aboard a plane; an official traveling to collect taxes was and could.

"People are stealing nuts and bolts out of rail plates, Miss Taggart, stealing them at night, and our stock is running out, the division storehouse is bare, what are we to do, Miss Taggart?"

But a super-color-four-foot-screen television set was being erected for tourists in a People's Park in Washington--and a super-cyclotron for the study of cosmic rays was being erected at the State Science Institute, to be completed in ten years.

"The trouble with our modern world," Dr. Robert Stadler said over the radio, at the ceremonies launching the construction of the cyclotron, "is that too many people think too much. It is the cause of all our current fears and doubts. An enlightened citizenry should abandon the superstitious worship of logic and the outmoded reliance on reason. Just as laymen leave medicine to doctors and electronics to engineers, so people who are not qualified to think should leave all thinking to the experts and have faith in the experts' higher authority. Only experts are able to understand the discoveries of modern science, which have proved that thought is an illusion and that the mind is a myth."

"This age of misery is God's punishment to man for the sin of relying on his mind!" snarled the triumphant voices of mystics of every sect and sort, on street corners, in rain-soaked tents, in crumbling temples. "This world ordeal is the result of man's attempt to live by reason! *This* is where thinking, logic and science have brought you! And there's to be no salvation until men realize that their mortal mind is impotent to solve their problems and go back to faith, faith in God, faith in a higher authority!"

And confronting her daily there was the final product of it all, the heir and collector—Cuffy Meigs, the man impervious to thought. Cuffy Meigs strode through the offices of Taggart Transcontinental, wearing a semi-military tunic and slapping a shiny leather briefcase against his shiny leather leggings. He carried an automatic pistol in one pocket and a rabbit's foot in the other.

Cuffy Meigs tried to avoid her; his manner was part scorn, as if he considered her an impractical idealist, part superstitious awe, as if she possessed some incomprehensible power with which he preferred not to tangle. He acted as if her presence did not belong to his view of a railroad, yet as if hers were the one presence he dared not challenge. There was a touch of impatient resentment in his manner toward Jim, as if it were Jim's duty to deal with her and to protect him; just as he expected Jim to keep the railroad in running order and leave him free for activities of more practical a nature, so he expected Jim to keep her in line, as part of the equipment.

Beyond the window of her office, like a patch of adhesive plaster stuck over a wound on the sky, the page of the calendar hung blank in the distance. The calendar had never been repaired since the night