The waters of the Mississippi had been rising all through the month of January, swollen by the storms, driven by the wind into a restless grinding of current and against every obstruction in their way. On a night of lashing sleet, in the first week of February, the Mississippi bridge of the Atlantic Southern collapsed under a passenger train. The engine and the first five sleepers went down with the cracking girders into the twisting black spirals of water eighty feet below. The rest of the train remained on the first three spans of the bridge, which held.

"You can't have your cake and let your neighbor eat it, too," said Francisco d'Anconia. The fury of denunciations which the holders of public voices unleashed against him was greater than their concern over the horror at the river.

It was whispered that the chief engineer of the Atlantic Southern, in despair over the company's failure to obtain the steel he needed to reinforce the bridge, had resigned six months ago, telling the company that the bridge was unsafe. He had written a letter to the largest newspaper in New York, warning the public about it; the letter had not been printed. It was whispered that the first three spans of the bridge had held because they had been reinforced with structural shapes of Rearden Metal; but five hundred tons of the Metal was all that the railroad had been able to obtain under the Fair Share Law.

As the sole result of official investigations, two bridges across the Mississippi, belonging to smaller railroads, were condemned. One of the railroads went out of business; the other closed a branch line, tore up its rail and laid a track to the Mississippi bridge of Taggart Transcontinental; so did the Atlantic Southern.

The great Taggart Bridge at Bedford, Illinois, had been built by Nathaniel Taggart. He had fought the government for years, because the courts had ruled, on the complaint of river shippers, that railroads were a destructive competition to shipping and thus a threat to the public welfare, and that railroad bridges across the Mississippi were to be forbidden as a material obstruction; the courts had ordered Nathanial Taggart to tear down his bridge and to carry his passengers across the river by means of barges. He had won that battle by a majority of one voice on the Supreme Court. His bridge was now the only major link left to hold the continent together. His last descendant had made it her strictest rule that whatever else was neglected, the Taggart Bridge would always be maintained in flawless shape.

The steel shipped across the Atlantic by the Bureau of Global Relief had not reached the People's State of Germany. It had been seized by Ragnar Danneskjöld—but nobody heard of it outside the Bureau, because the newspapers had long since stopped mentioning the activities of Ragnar Danneskjöld.

It was not until the public began to notice the growing shortage, then the disappearance from the market of electric irons, toasters, washing machines and all electrical appliances, that people began to ask questions and to hear whispers. They heard that no ship loaded

with d'Anconia copper was able to reach a port of the United States; it could not get past Ragnar Danneskjöld.

In the foggy winter nights, on the waterfront, sailors whispered the story that Ragnar Danneskjöld always seized the cargoes of relief vessels, but never touched the copper: he sank the d'Anconia ships with their loads; he let the crews escape in lifeboats, but the copper went to the bottom of the ocean. They whispered it as a dark legend beyond men's power to explain; nobody could find a reason why Danneskjöld did not choose to take the copper.

In the second week of February, for the purpose of conserving copper wire and electric power, a directive forbade the running of elevators above the twenty-fifth floor. The upper floors of the buildings had to be vacated, and partitions of unpainted boards went up to cut off the stairways. By special permit, exceptions were granted—on the grounds of "essential need"—to a few of the larger business enterprises and the more fashionable hotels. The tops of the cities were cut down.

The inhabitants of New York had never had to be aware of the weather. Storms had been only a nuisance that slowed the traffic and made puddles in the doorways of brightly lighted shops. Stepping against the wind, dressed in raincoats, furs and evening slippers, people had felt that a storm was an intruder within the city. Now, facing the gusts of snow that came sweeping down the narrow streets, people felt in dim terror that they were the temporary intruders and that the wind had the right-of-way.

"It won't make any difference to us now, forget it, Hank, it doesn't matter," said Dagny when Rearden told her that he would not be able to deliver the rail; he had not been able to find a supplier of copper. "Forget it, Hank." He did not answer her. He could not forget the first failure of Rearden Steel.

On the evening of February 15, a plate cracked on a rail joint and sent an engine off the track, half a mile from Winston, Colorado, on a division which was to have been relaid with the new rail. The station agent of Winston sighed and sent for a crew with a crane; it was only one of the minor accidents that were happening in his section every other day or so, he was getting used to it.

Rearden, that evening, his coat collar raised, his hat slanted low over his eyes, the snow drifts rising to his knees, was tramping through an abandoned open-pit coal mine, in a forsaken corner of Pennsylvania, supervising the loading of pirated coal upon the trucks which he had provided. Nobody owned the mine, nobody could afford the cost of working it. But a young man with a brusque voice and dark, angry eyes, who came from a starving settlement, had organized a gang of the unemployed and made a deal with Rearden to deliver the coal. They mined it at night, they stored it in hidden culverts, they were paid in cash, with no questions asked or answered. Guilty of a fierce desire to remain alive, they and Rearden traded like savages, without rights, titles, contracts or protection, with nothing but mutual understanding and a ruthlessly absolute observance of one's given word. Rearden did not even know the name of the young leader. Watching him at the job of loading the trucks,