"How are things down there?"

"Pretty splendid it seems to me, pretty splendid Right at the moment however they're But then what they're aiming at is the future The People's State of Mexico has a great future They'll beat us all in a few years'

"Did you go down to the San Sebastián Mines?"

The four figures at the table sat up straighter and tighter all of them had invested heavily in the stock of the San Sebastián Mines

Boyle did not answer at once so that his voice seemed unexpected and unnaturally loud when it burst forth Oh sure certainly that's what I wanted to see most'

And'

And what'

'How are things going'

'Great Great They must certainly have the biggest deposits of copper on earth down inside that mountain!

'Did they seem to be busy'

Never saw such a busy place in my life

What were they busy doing'

Well you know with the kind of Spic superintendent they have down there I couldn't understand half of what he was talking about but they're certainly busy

Any trouble of any kind'

Trouble' Not at San Sebastian It's private property the last piece of it left in Mexico and that does seem to make a difference

Orren Taggart asked cautiously what about those rumors that they're planning to nationalize the San Sebastian Mines'

Slander said Boyle angrily plain vicious slander I know it for certain I had dinner with the Minister of Culture and lunches with all the rest of the boys

There ought to be a law against irresponsible gossip said Taggart sullenly Let's have another drink

He waved irritably at a waiter There was a small bar in a dark corner of the room where an old wizened bartender stood for long stretches of time without moving When called upon he moved with contemptuous slowness His job was that of servant to men's relaxation and pleasure but his manner was that of an embittered quack ministering to some guilty disease

The four men sat in silence until the waiter returned with their drinks The glasses he placed on the table were four spots of faint blue glitter in the semi darkness like four feeble jets of gas flame Taggart reached for his glass and smiled suddenly

Let's drink to the sacrifices to historical necessity he said looking at Larkin

There was a moment's pause in a lighted room it would have been the contest of two men holding each other's eyes here they were merely looking at each other's eye sockets Then Larkin picked up his glass

'It's my party boys' said Taggart as they drank

Nobody found anything else to say until Boyle spoke up with

indifferent curiosity: "Say, Jim, I meant to ask you, what in hell's the matter with your train-service down on the San Sebastián Line?"

"Why, what do you mean? What is the matter with it?"

"Well, I don't know, but running just one passenger train a day is—"

"*One* train?"

"—is pretty measly service, it seems to me, and what a train! You must have inherited those coaches from your great-grandfather, and he must have used them pretty hard. And where on earth did you get that wood-burning locomotive?"

"*Wood*-burning?"

"That's what I said, wood-burning. I never saw one before, except in photographs. What museum did you drag it out of? Now don't act as if you didn't know it, just tell me what's the gag?"

"Yes, of course I knew it," said Taggart hastily. "It was just . . . You just happened to choose the one week when we had a little trouble with our motive power– our new engines are on order, but there's been a slight delay—you know what a problem we're having with the manufacturers of locomotives—but it's only temporary."

"Of course," said Boyle. "Delays can't be helped. It's the strangest train I ever rode on, though. Nearly shook my guts out."

Within a few minutes, they noticed that Taggart had become silent. He seemed preoccupied with a problem of his own. When he rose abruptly, without apology, they rose, too, accepting it as a command.

Larkin muttered, smiling too strenuously, "It was a pleasure, Jim. A pleasure. That's how great projects are born—over a drink with friends."

"Social reforms are slow," said Taggart coldly. "It is advisable to be patient and cautious." For the first time, he turned to Wesley Mouch. "What I like about you, Mouch, is that you don't talk too much."

Wesley Mouch was Rearden's Washington man.

There was still a remnant of sunset light in the sky, when Taggart and Boyle emerged together into the street below. The transition was faintly shocking to them—the enclosed barroom led one to expect midnight darkness. A tall building stood outlined against the sky, sharp and straight like a raised sword. In the distance beyond it, there hung the calendar.

Taggart fumbled irritably with his coat collar, buttoning it against the chill of the streets. He had not intended to go back to the office tonight, but he had to go back. He had to see his sister.

". . . a difficult undertaking ahead of us, Jim," Boyle was saying, "a difficult undertaking, with so many dangers and complications and so much at stake . . ."

"It all depends," James Taggart answered slowly, "on knowing the people who make it possible. . . . That's what has to be known—who makes it possible."

* *

Dagny Taggart was nine years old when she decided that she would run the Taggart Transcontinental Railroad some day. She stated it to herself when she stood alone between the rails, looking

at the two straight lines of steel that went off into the distance and met in a single point What she felt was an arrogant pleasure at the way the track cut through the woods it did not belong in the midst of ancient trees, among green branches that hung down to meet green brush and the lonely spears of wild flowers—but there it was The two steel lines were brilliant in the sun, and the black ties were like the rungs of a ladder which she had to climb

It was not a sudden decision, but only the final seal of words upon something she had known long ago In unspoken understanding, as if bound by a vow it had never been necessary to take, she and Eddie Willers had given themselves to the railroad from the first conscious days of their childhood

She felt a bored indifference toward the immediate world around her, toward other children and adults alike She took it as a regrettable accident to be borne patiently for a while, that she happened to be imprisoned among people who were dull She had caught a glimpse of another world and she knew that it existed somewhere the world that had created trains bridges telegraph wires and signal lights winking in the night She had to wait she thought, and grow up to that world

She never tried to explain why she liked the railroad Whatever it was that others felt she knew that this was one emotion for which they had no equivalent and no response She felt the same emotion in school, in classes of mathematics the only lessons she liked She felt the excitement of solving problems the insolent delight of taking up a challenge and disposing of it without effort the eagerness to meet another, harder test She felt at the same time a growing respect for the adversary, for a science that was so clean, so strict so luminously rational Studying mathematics, she felt, quite simply and at once How great that men have done this" and "How wonderful that I'm so good at it ' It was the joy of admiration and of one's own ability growing together Her feeling for the railroad was the same worship of the skill that had gone to make it, of the ingenuity of someone's clean reasoning mind worship with a secret smile that said she would know how to make it better some day She hung around the tracks and the round-houses like a humble student but the humility had a touch of future pride a pride to be earned

"You're unbearably conceited " was one of the two sentences she heard throughout her childhood, even though she never spoke of her own ability The other sentence was "You're selfish " She asked what was meant, but never received an answer She looked at the adults, wondering how they could imagine that she would feel guilt from an undefined accusation

She was twelve years old when she told Eddie Willers that she would run the railroad when they grew up She was fifteen when it occurred to her for the first time that women did not run railroads and that people might object To hell with that, she thought—and never worried about it again

She went to work for Taggart Transcontinental at the age of sixteen Her father permitted it he was amused and a little curious