"The Army Freight Special, westbound. But it's not due for about four hours. It's running late."

"I'll be right down. . . . Wait, listen, get Bill, Sandy and Clarence down by the time I get there. There's going to be hell to pay!"

Dave Mitchum had always complained about injustice, because, he said, he had always had bad luck. He explained it by speaking darkly about the conspiracy of the big fellows, who would never give him a chance, though he did not explain just whom he meant by "the big fellows." Seniority of service was his favorite topic of complaint and sole standard of value; he had been in the railroad business longer than many men who had advanced beyond him; this, he said, was proof of the social system's injustice—though he never explained just what he meant by "the social system." He had worked for many railroads, but had not stayed long with any one of them. His employers had had no specific misdeeds to charge against him, but had simply eased him out, because he said, "Nobody told me to!" too often. He did not know that he owed his present job to a deal between James Taggart and Wesley Mouch: when Taggart traded to Mouch the secret of his sister's private life, in exchange for a raise in rates, Mouch made him throw in an extra favor, by their customary rules of bargaining, which consisted of squeezing all one could out of any given trade. The extra was a job for Dave Mitchum, who was the brother-in-law of Claude Slagenhop, who was the president of the Friends of Global Progress, who were regarded by Mouch as a valuable influence on public opinion. James Taggart pushed the responsibility of finding a job for Mitchum onto Clifton Locey. Locey pushed Mitchum into the first job that came up—superintendent of the Colorado Division—when the man holding it quit without notice. The man quit when the extra Diesel engine of Winston Station was given to Chick Morrison's Special.

"What are we going to do?" cried Dave Mitchum, rushing, half-dressed and groggy with sleep, into his office, where the chief dispatcher, the trainmaster and the road foreman of engines were waiting for him.

The three men did not answer. They were middle-aged men with years of railroad service behind them. A month ago, they would have volunteered their advice in any emergency; but they were beginning to learn that things had changed and that it was dangerous to speak.

"What in hell are we going to do?"

"One thing is certain," said Bill Brent, the chief dispatcher. "We can't send a train into the tunnel with a coal-burning engine."

Dave Mitchum's eyes grew sullen: he knew that this was the one thought on all their minds; he wished Brent had not named it.

"Well, where do we get a Diesel?" he asked angrily.

"We don't," said the road foreman.

"But we can't keep the Comet waiting on a siding all night!"

"Looks like we'll have to," said the trainmaster. "What's the use of talking about it, Dave? You know that there is no Diesel anywhere on the division."

"But Christ Almighty, how do they expect us to move trains without engines?"

"Miss Taggart didn't," said the road foreman. "Mr. Locey does."

"Bill," asked Mitchum, in the tone of pleading for a favor, "isn't there anything transcontinental that's due tonight, with any sort of a Diesel?"

"The first one to come," said Bill Brent implacably, "will be Number 236, the fast freight from San Francisco, which is due at Winston at seven-eighteen A.M." He added, "That's the Diesel closest to us at this moment. I've checked."

"What about the Army Special?"

"Better not think about it, Dave. That one has priority over everything on the line, including the Comet, by order of the Army. They're running late as it is—journal boxes caught fire twice. They're carrying munitions for the West Coast arsenals. Better pray that nothing stops them on your division. If you think we'll catch hell for holding the Comet, it's nothing to what we'll catch if we try to stop that Special."

They remained silent. The windows were open to the summer night and they could hear the ringing of the telephone in the dispatcher's office downstairs. The signal lights winked over the deserted yards that had once been a busy division point.

Mitchum looked toward the roundhouse; where the black silhouettes of a few steam engines stood outlined in a dim light.

"The tunnel—" he said and stopped.

"—is eight miles long," said the trainmaster, with a harsh emphasis.

"I was only thinking," snapped Mitchum.

"Better not think of it," said Brent softly.

"I haven't said anything!"

"What was that talk you had with Dick Horton before he quit?" the road foreman asked too innocently, as if the subject were irrelevant. "Wasn't it something about the ventilation system of the tunnel being on the bum? Didn't he say that the tunnel was hardly safe nowadays even for Diesel engines?"

"Why do you bring that up?" snapped Mitchum. "I haven't said anything!" Dick Horton, the division chief engineer, had quit three days after Mitchum's arrival.

"I thought I'd just mention it," the road foreman answered innocently.

"Look, Dave," said Bill Brent, knowing that Mitchum would stall for another hour rather than formulate a decision, "you know that there's only one thing to do: hold the Comet at Winston till morning, wait for Number 236, have her Diesel take the Comet through the tunnel, then let the Comet finish her run with the best coal-burner we can give her on the other side."

"But how late will that make her?"

Brent shrugged. "Twelve hours—eighteen hours—who knows?"

"Eighteen hours—for the Comet? Christ, that's never happened before!"

"None of what's been happening to us has ever happened before,"

said Brent, with an astonishing sound of weariness in his brisk, competent voice.

"But they'll blame us for it in New York! They'll put all the blame on us!"

Brent shrugged. A month ago, he would have considered such an injustice inconceivable; today, he knew better.

"I guess . . ." said Mitchum miserably, "I guess there's nothing else that we can do."

"There isn't, Dave."

"Oh God! Why did this have to happen to us?"

"Who is John Galt?"

It was half-past two when the Comet, pulled by an old switch engine, jerked to a stop on a siding of Winston Station. Kip Chalmers glanced out with incredulous anger at the few shanties on a desolate mountainside and at the ancient hovel of a station.

"Now what? What in hell are they stopping *here* for?" he cried, and rang for the conductor

With the return of motion and safety, his terror had turned into rage. He felt almost as if he had been cheated by having been made to experience an unnecessary fear. His companions were still clinging to the tables of the lounge; they felt too shaken to sleep.

"How long?" the conductor said impassively, in answer to his question. "Till morning, Mr. Chalmers."

Chalmers stared at him, stupefied. "We're going to stand here till morning?"

"Yes, Mr. Chalmers."

"*Here?*"

"Yes."

"But I have a rally in San Francisco in the evening!"

The conductor did not answer.

"Why? Why do we have to stand? Why in hell? What happened?"

Slowly, patiently, with contemptuous politeness, the conductor gave him an exact account of the situation. But years ago, in grammar school, in high school, in college, Kip Chalmers had been taught that man does not and need not live by reason.

"Damn your tunnel!" he screamed. "Do you think I'm going to let you hold me up because of some miserable tunnel? Do you want to wreck vital national plans on account of a tunnel? Tell your engineer that I must be in San Francisco by evening and that he's got to get me there!"

"How?"

"That's your job, not mine!"

"There is no way to do it."

"Then find a way, God damn you!"

The conductor did not answer.

"Do you think I'll let your miserable technological problems interfere with crucial social issues? Do you know who I am? Tell that engineer to start moving, if he values his job!"

"The engineer has his orders."

"Orders be damned! *I* give the orders these days! Tell him to start at once!"