ging for cars for Minnesota—she went through the task of tracing from face to coward's face the destination of the freight cars that had vanished.

She went from railroad executives to wealthy shippers to Washington officials and back to the railroad—by cab, by phone, by wire—pursuing a trail of half-uttered hints. The trail approached its end when she heard the pinch-lipped voice of a public relations woman in a Washington office, saying resentfully over the telephone wire, "Well, after all, it is a matter of opinion whether wheat is essential to a nation's welfare—there are those of more progressive views who feel that the soybean is, perhaps, of far greater value"—and then, by noon, she stood in the middle of her office, knowing that the freight cars intended for the wheat of Minnesota had been sent, instead, to carry the soybeans from the Louisiana swamps of Kip's Ma's project.

The first story of the Minnesota disaster appeared in the newspapers three days later. It reported that the farmers who had waited in the streets of Lakewood for six days, with no place to store their wheat and no trains to carry it, had demolished the local courthouse, the mayor's home and the railroad station. Then the stories vanished abruptly and the newspapers kept silent, then began to print admonitions urging people not to believe unpatriotic rumors.

While the flour mills and grain markets of the country were screaming over the phones and the telegraph wires, sending pleas to New York and delegations to Washington, while strings of freight cars from random corners of the continent were crawling like rusty caterpillars across the map in the direction of Minnesota—the wheat and hope of the country were waiting to perish along an empty track, under the unchanging green light of signals that called for motion to trains that were not there.

At the communication desks of Taggart Transcontinental, a small crew kept calling for freight cars, repeating, like the crew of a sinking ship, an S.O.S. that remained unheard. There were freight cars held loaded for months in the yards of the companies owned by the friends of pull-peddlers, who ignored the frantic demands to unload the cars and release them. "You can tell that railroad to—" followed by untransmissible words, was the message of the Smather Brothers of Arizona in answer to the S.O.S. of New York.

In Minnesota, they were seizing cars from every siding, from the Mesabi Range, from the ore mines of Paul Larkin where the cars had stood waiting for a dribble of iron. They were pouring wheat into ore cars, into coal cars, into boarded stock cars that went spilling thin gold trickles along the track as they clattered off. They were pouring wheat into passenger coaches, over seats, racks and fixtures, to send it off, to get it moving, even if it went moving into trackside ditches in the sudden crash of breaking springs, in the explosions set off by burning journal boxes.

They fought for movement, for movement with no thought of destination, for movement as such, like a paralytic under a stroke, struggling in wild, stiff, incredulous jerks against the realization that movement was suddenly impossible. There were no other railroads:

James Taggart had killed them; there were no boats on the Lakes: Paul Larkin had killed them. There was only the single line of rail and a net of neglected highways.

The trucks and wagons of waiting farmers started trickling blindly down the roads, with no maps, no gas, no feed for horses—moving south, south toward the vision of flour mills awaiting them somewhere, with no knowledge of the distances ahead, but with the knowledge of death behind them—moving, to collapse on the roads, in the gullies, in the breaks of rotted bridges. One farmer was found, half a mile south of the wreck of his truck, lying dead in a ditch, face down, still clutching a sack of wheat on his shoulders. Then rain clouds burst over the prairies of Minnesota; the rain went eating the wheat into rot at the waiting railroad stations; it went hammering the piles spilled along the roads, washing gold kernels into the soil.

The men in Washington were last to be reached by the panic. They watched, not the news from Minnesota, but the precarious balance of their friendships and commitments; they weighed, not the fate of the harvest, but the unknowable result of unpredictable emotions in unthinking men of unlimited power. They waited, they evaded all pleas, they declared, "Oh, ridiculous, there's nothing to worry about! Those Taggart people have always moved that wheat on schedule, they'll find some way to move it!"

Then, when the State Chief Executive of Minnesota sent a request to Washington for the assistance of the Army against the riots he was unable to control--three directives burst forth within two hours, stopping all trains in the country, commandeering all cars to speed to Minnesota. An order signed by Wesley Mouch demanded the immediate release of the freight cars held in the service of Kip's Ma. But by that time, it was too late. Ma's freight cars were in California, where the soybeans had been sent to a progressive concern made up of sociologists preaching the cult of Oriental austerity, and of businessmen formerly in the numbers racket

In Minnesota, farmers were setting fire to their own farms, they were demolishing grain elevators and the homes of county officials, they were fighting along the track of the railroad, some to tear it up, some to defend it with their lives—and, with no goal to reach save violence, they were dying in the streets of gutted towns and in the silent gullies of a roadless night.

Then there was only the acrid stench of grain rotting in half-smoldering piles—a few columns of smoke rising from the plains, standing still in the air over blackened ruins—and, in an office in Pennsylvania, Hank Rearden sitting at his desk, looking at a list of men who had gone bankrupt: they were the manufacturers of farm equipment, who could not be paid and would not be able to pay him.

The harvest of soybeans did not reach the markets of the country: it had been reaped prematurely, it was moldy and unfit for consumption.

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On the night of October 15, a copper wire broke in New York City, in an underground control tower of the Taggart Terminal, extinguishing the lights of the signals.