dishwasher—that he, James Taggart, might sit in a private barroom and pay for the alcohol pouring down Orren Boyle's throat, for the waiter who sponged Boyle's garments when he spilled his drink over his chest, for the carpet burned by the cigarettes of an ex-pimp from Chile who did not want to take the trouble of reaching for an ashtray across a distance of three feet.

It was not the knowledge of his indifference to money that now gave him a shudder of dread. It was the knowledge that he would be equally indifferent, were he reduced to the state of the beggar. There had been a time when he had felt some measure of guilt—in no clearer a form than a touch of irritation—at the thought that he shared the sin of greed, which he spent his time denouncing. Now he was hit by the chill realization that, in fact, he had never been a hypocrite: in full truth, he had never cared for money. This left another hole gaping open before him, leading into another blind alley which he could not risk seeing.

I just want to do something tonight!—he cried soundlessly to someone at large, in protest and in demanding anger—in protest against whatever it was that kept forcing these thoughts into his mind—in anger at a universe where some malevolent power would not permit him to find enjoyment without the need to know what he wanted or why.

What do you want?—some enemy voice kept asking, and he walked faster, trying to escape it. It seemed to him that his brain was a maze where a blind alley opened at every turn, leading into a fog that hid an abyss. It seemed to him that he was running, while the small island of safety was shrinking and nothing but those alleys would soon be left. It was like the remnant of clarity in the street around him, with the haze rolling in to fill all exits. Why did it have to shrink?—he thought in panic. This was the way he had lived all his life—keeping his eyes stubbornly, safely on the immediate pavement before him, craftily avoiding the sight of his road, of corners, of distances, of pinnacles. He had never intended going anywhere, he had wanted to be free of progression, free of the yoke of a straight line, he had never wanted his years to add up to any sum—what had summed them up?—why had he reached some unchosen destination where one could no longer stand still or retreat? "Look where you're going, brother!" snarled some voice, while an elbow pushed him back—and he realized that he had collided with some large, ill-smelling figure and that he had been running.

He slowed his steps and admitted into his mind a recognition of the streets he had chosen in his random escape. He had not wanted to know that he was going home to his wife. That, too, was a fog-bound alley, but there was no other left to him.

He knew—the moment he saw Cherryl's silent, poised figure as she rose at his entrance into her room—that this was more dangerous than he had allowed himself to know and that he would not find what he wanted. But danger, to him, was a signal to shut off his sight, suspend his judgment and pursue an unaltered course, on the unstated premise that the danger would remain unreal by the sover-

eign power of his wish not to see it—like a foghorn within him, blowing, not to sound a warning, but to summon the fog.

"Why, yes, I did have an important business banquet to attend, but I changed my mind, I felt like having dinner with *you* tonight," he said in the tone of a compliment—but a quiet "I see" was the only answer he obtained.

He felt irritation at her unastonished manner and her pale, unrevealing face. He felt irritation at the smooth efficiency with which she gave instructions to the servants, then at finding himself in the candlelight of the dining room, facing her across a perfectly appointed table, with two crystal cups of fruit in silver bowls of ice between them.

It was her poise that irritated him most; she was no longer an incongruous little freak, dwarfed by the luxury of the residence which a famous artist had designed, she matched it. She sat at the table as if she were the kind of hostess that room had the right to demand. She wore a tailored housecoat of russet-colored brocade that blended with the bronze of her hair, the severe simplicity of its lines serving as her only ornament. He would have preferred the jingling bracelets and rhinestone buckles of her past. Her eyes disturbed him, as they had for months, they were neither friendly nor hostile, but watchful and questioning.

"I closed a big deal today," he said, his tone part boastful, part pleading. "A deal involving this whole continent and half a dozen governments."

He realized that the awe, the admiration, the eager curiosity he had expected, belonged to the face of the little shopgirl who had ceased to exist. He saw none of it in the face of his wife; even anger or hatred would have been preferable to her level, attentive glance; the glance was worse than accusing, it was inquiring.

"What deal, Jim?"

"What do you mean, what deal? Why are you suspicious? Why do you have to start prying at once?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't know it was confidential. You don't have to answer me."

"It's not confidential." He waited, but she remained silent. "Well? Aren't you going to say anything?"

"Why, no." She said it simply, as if to please him.

"So you're not interested at all?"

"But I thought you didn't want to discuss it."

"Oh, don't be so tricky!" he snapped. "It's a big business deal. That's what you admire, isn't it, big business? Well, it's bigger than anything those boys ever dreamed of. They spend their lives grubbing for their fortunes penny by penny, while I can do it like that"—he snapped his fingers—"just like that. It's the biggest single stunt ever pulled."

"Stunt, Jim?"

"Deal!"

"And you did it? Yourself?"

"You bet I did! That fat fool, Orren Boyle, couldn't have swung it in a million years. This took knowledge and skill and timing"—he

saw a spark of interest in her eyes—"and psychology." The spark vanished, but he went rushing heedlessly on. "One had to know how to approach Wesley, and how to keep the wrong influences away from him, and how to get Mr. Thompson interested without letting him know too much, and how to cut Chick Morrison in on it, but keep Tinky Holloway out, and how to get the right people to give a few parties for Wesley at the right time, and . . . Say, Cherryl, is there any champagne in this house?"

"Champagne?"

"Can't we do something special tonight? Can't we have a sort of celebration together?"

"We can have champagne, yes, Jim, of course."

She rang the bell and gave the orders, in her odd, lifeless, uncritical manner, a manner of meticulous compliance with his wishes while volunteering none of her own.

"You don't seem to be very impressed," he said. "But what would you know about business, anyway? You wouldn't be able to understand anything on so large a scale. Wait till September second. Wait till *they* hear about it."

"They? Who?"

He glanced at her, as if he had let a dangerous word slip out involuntarily. "We've organized a setup where we--me, Orren and a few friends—are going to control every industrial property south of the border."

"Whose property?"

"Why . . . the people's. This is not an old-fashioned grab for private profit. It's a deal with a mission—a worthy, public-spirited mission—to manage the nationalized properties of the various People's States of South America, to teach their workers our modern techniques of production, to help the underprivileged who've never had a chance, to—" He broke off abruptly, though she had merely sat looking at him without shifting her glance. "You know," he said suddenly, with a cold little chuckle, "if you're so damn anxious to hide that you came from the slums, you ought to be less indifferent to the philosophy of social welfare. It's always the poor who lack humanitarian instincts. One has to be born to wealth in order to know the finer feelings of altruism."

"I've never tried to hide that I came from the slums," she said in the simple, impersonal tone of a factual correction. "And I haven't any sympathy for that welfare philosophy. I've seen enough of them to know what makes the kind of poor who want something for nothing." He did not answer, and she added suddenly, her voice astonished, but firm, as if in final confirmation of a long-standing doubt, "Jim, you don't care about it either. You don't care about any of that welfare hogwash."

"Well, if money is all that you're interested in," he snapped, "let me tell you that that deal will bring me a fortune. That's what you've always admired, isn't it, wealth?"

"It depends."

"I think I'll end up as one of the richest men in the world," he said; he did not ask what her admiration depended upon. "There's