Rearden turned to look through the farm field, there was no trace of him and no sign of movement anywhere in the darkness.

Rearden stood on the edge of an empty road in a spread of loneliness vaster than it had seemed before. Then he saw, lying at his feet, an object wrapped in burlap, with one corner exposed and glistening in the moonlight, the color of the pirate's hair. He bent, picked it up and walked on.

* *

Kip Chalmers swore as the train lurched and spilled his cocktail over the table top. He slumped forward, his elbow in the puddle, and said:

"God damn these railroads! What's the matter with their track? You'd think with all the money they've got they'd disgorge a little, so we wouldn't have to bump like farmers on a hay cart!"

His three companions did not take the trouble to answer. It was late, and they remained in the lounge merely because an effort was needed to retire to their compartments. The lights of the lounge looked like feeble portholes in a fog of cigarette smoke dank with the odor of alcohol. It was a private car, which Chalmers had demanded and obtained for his journey; it was attached to the end of the Comet and it swung like the tail of a nervous animal as the Comet coiled through the curves of the mountains.

"I'm going to campaign for the nationalization of the railroads," said Kip Chalmers, glaring defiantly at a small, gray man who looked at him without interest. "That's going to be my platform plank. I've got to have a platform plank. I don't like Jim Taggart. He looks like a soft-boiled clam. To hell with the railroads! It's time we took them over."

"Go to bed," said the man, "if you expect to look like anything human at the big rally tomorrow."

"Do you think we'll make it?"

"You've got to make it."

"I know I've got to. But I don't think we'll get there on time. This goddamn snail of a super-special is hours late."

"You've *got* to be there, Kip," said the man ominously, in that stubborn monotone of the unthinking which asserts an end without concern for the means.

"God damn you, don't you suppose I know it?"

Kip Chalmers had curly blond hair and a shapeless mouth. He came from a semi-wealthy, semi-distinguished family, but he sneered at wealth and distinction in a manner which implied that only a top-rank aristocrat could permit himself such a degree of cynical indifference. He had graduated from a college which specialized in breeding that kind of aristocracy. The college had taught him that the purpose of ideas is to fool those who are stupid enough to think. He had made his way in Washington with the grace of a cat-burglar, climbing from bureau to bureau as from ledge to ledge of a crumbling structure. He was ranked as semi-powerful, but his manner made laymen mistake him for nothing less than Wesley Mouch.

For reasons of his own particular strategy, Kip Chalmers had decided to enter popular politics and to run for election as Legislator

from California, though he knew nothing about that state except the movie industry and the beach clubs. His campaign manager had done the preliminary work, and Chalmers was now on his way to face his future constituents for the first time at an overpublicized rally in San Francisco tomorrow night. The manager had wanted him to start a day earlier, but Chalmers had stayed in Washington to attend a cocktail party and had taken the last train possible. He had shown no concern about the rally until this evening, when he noticed that the Comet was running six hours late.

His three companions did not mind his mood: they liked his liquor. Lester Tuck, his campaign manager, was a small, aging man with a face that looked as if it had once been punched in and had never rebounded. He was an attorney who, some generations earlier, would have represented shoplifters and people who stage accidents on the premises of rich corporations; now he found that he could do better by representing men like Kip Chalmers.

Laura Bradford was Chalmers' current mistress; he liked her because his predecessor had been Wesley Mouch. She was a movie actress who had forced her way from competent featured player to incompetent star, not by means of sleeping with studio executives, but by taking the long-distance short cut of sleeping with bureaucrats. She talked economics, instead of glamour, for press interviews, in the belligerently righteous style of a third-rate tabloid: her economics consisted of the assertion that "we've got to help the poor."

Gilbert Keith-Worthing was Chalmers' guest, for no reason that either of them could discover. He was a British novelist of world fame, who had been popular thirty years ago; since then, nobody bothered to read what he wrote, but everybody accepted him as a walking classic. He had been considered profound for uttering such things as: "Freedom? Do let's stop talking about freedom. Freedom is impossible. Man can never be free of hunger, of cold, of disease, of physical accidents. He can never be free of the tyranny of nature. So why should he object to the tyranny of a political dictatorship?" When all of Europe put into practice the ideas which he had preached, he came to live in America. Through the years, his style of writing and his body had grown flabby. At seventy, he was an obese old man with retouched hair and a manner of scornful cynicism retouched by quotations from the yogis about the futility of all human endeavor. Kip Chalmers had invited him, because it seemed to look distinguished. Gilbert Keith-Worthing had come along, because he had no particular place to go.

"God damn these railroad people!" said Kip Chalmers. "They're doing it on purpose. They want to ruin my campaign. I can't miss that rally! For Christ's sake, Lester, do something!"

"I've tried," said Lester Tuck. At the train's last stop, he had tried, by long-distance telephone, to find air transportation to complete their journey; but there were no commercial flights scheduled for the next two days.

"If they don't get me there on time, I'll have their scalps and their railroad! Can't we tell that damn conductor to hurry?"

"You've told him three times."