

It had been followed by a few cocktails at the home of Orren Boyle, with only one unobtrusive gentleman from Argentina sitting silently in a corner, while two executives from Washington and a few friends of unspecified positions had talked about national resources, metallurgy, mineralogy, neighborly duties and the welfare of the globe—and had mentioned that a loan of four billion dollars would be granted within three weeks to the People's State of Argentina and the People's State of Chile.

It had been followed by a small cocktail party in a private room of the bar built like a cellar on the roof of a skyscraper, an informal party given by him, James Taggart, for the directors of a recently formed company. The Interneighborly Amity and Development Corporation, of which Orren Boyle was president and a slender, graceful, overactive man from Chile was treasurer, a man whose name was Señor Mario Martinez, but whom Taggart was tempted, by some resemblance of spirit, to call Señor Cuffy Meigs. Here they had talked about golf, horse races, boat races, automobiles and women. It had not been necessary to mention, since they all knew it, that the Interneighborly Amity and Development Corporation had an exclusive contract to operate, on a twenty-year "managerial lease," all the industrial properties of the People's States of the Southern Hemisphere.

The last event of the day had been a large dinner reception at the home of Señor Rodrigo Gonzales, a diplomatic representative of Chile. No one had heard of Señor Gonzales a year ago, but he had become famous for the parties he had given in the past six months, ever since his arrival in New York. His guests described him as a progressive businessman. He had lost his property—it was said—when Chile, becoming a People's State, had nationalized all properties, except those belonging to citizens of backward, non-People's countries, such as Argentina; but he had adopted an enlightening attitude and had joined the new regime, placing himself in the service of his country. His home in New York occupied an entire floor of an exclusive residential hotel. He had a fat, blank face and the eyes of a killer. Watching him at tonight's reception, Taggart had concluded that the man was impervious to any sort of feeling, he looked as if a knife could slash, unnoticed, through his pendulous layers of flesh—except that there was a lewd, almost sexual relish in the way he rubbed his feet against the rich pile of his Persian rugs, or patted the polished arm of his chair, or folded his lips about a cigar. His wife, the Señora Gonzales, was a small, attractive woman, not as beautiful as she assumed, but enjoying the reputation of a beauty by means of a violent nervous energy and an odd manner of loose, warm, cynical self-assertiveness that seemed to promise anything and to absolve anyone. It was known that her particular brand of trading was her husband's chief asset, in an age when one traded, not goods, but favors—and, watching her among the guests, Taggart had found amusement in wondering what deals had been made, what directives issued, what industries destroyed in exchange for a few chance nights, which most of those men had had no reason to seek and, perhaps, could no longer remember. The party had bored him, there had been

only half a dozen persons for whose sake he had put in an appearance, and it had not been necessary to speak to that half-dozen, merely to be seen and to exchange a few glances. Dinner had been about to be served; when he had heard what he had come to hear: Señor Gonzales had mentioned—the smoke of his cigar weaving over the half-dozen men who had drifted toward his armchair—that by agreement with the future People's State of Argentina, the properties of d'Anconia Copper would be nationalized by the People's State of Chile, in less than a month, on September 2.

It had all gone as Taggart had expected; the unexpected had come when, on hearing those words, he had felt an irresistible urge to escape. He had felt incapable of enduring the boredom of the dinner, as if some other form of activity were needed to greet the achievement of this night. He had walked out into the summer twilight of the streets, feeling as if he were both pursuing and pursued: pursuing a pleasure which nothing could give him, in celebration of a feeling which he dared not name—pursued by the dread of discovering what motive had moved him through the planning of tonight's achievement and what aspect of it now gave him this feverish sense of gratification.

He reminded himself that he would sell his d'Anconia Copper stock, which had never rallied fully after its crash of last year, and he would purchase shares of the Interneighborly Amity and Development Corporation, as agreed with his friends, which would bring him a fortune. But the thought brought him nothing but boredom; this was not the thing he wanted to celebrate.

He tried to force himself to enjoy it: money, he thought, had been his motive, money, nothing worse. Wasn't that a normal motive? A valid one? Wasn't that what they all were after, the Wyatts, the Reardens, the d'Anconias? . . . He jerked his head to stop it: he felt as if his thoughts were slipping down a dangerous blind alley, the end of which he must never permit himself to see.

No—he thought bleakly, in reluctant admission—money meant nothing to him any longer. He had thrown dollars about by the hundreds—at that party he had given today—for unfinished drinks, for uneaten delicacies, for unprovoked tips and unexpected whims, for a long-distance phone call to Argentina because one of the guests had wanted to check the exact version of a smutty story he had started telling, for the spur of any moment, for the clammy stupor of knowing that it was easier to pay than to think.

"You've got nothing to worry about, under that Railroad Unification Plan," Orren Boyle had giggled to him drunkenly. Under the Railroad Unification Plan, a local railroad had gone bankrupt in North Dakota, abandoning the region to the fate of a blighted area, the local banker had committed suicide, first killing his wife and children—a freight train had been taken off the schedule in Tennessee, leaving a local factory without transportation at a day's notice, the factory owner's son had quit college and was now in jail, awaiting execution for a murder committed with a gang of raiders—a way station had been closed in Kansas, and the station agent, who had wanted to be a scientist, had given up his studies and become a