

it my honor to know. They thought they could trust my honor. One does not betray a trust of this kind, does one?"

"Then you did betray it intentionally?"

"That's for you to decide. It was you who spoke about their trust and my honor. I don't think in such terms any longer. . . ." He shrugged, adding, "I don't give a damn about your brother James and his friends. Their theory was not new, it has worked for centuries. But it wasn't foolproof. There is just one point that they overlooked. They thought it was safe to ride on my brain, because they assumed that the goal of my journey was wealth. All their calculations rested on the premise that I wanted to make money. What if I didn't?"

"If you didn't, what did you want?"

"They never asked me that. Not to inquire about my aims, motives or desires is an essential part of their theory."

"If you didn't want to make money, what possible motive could you have had?"

"Any number of them. For instance, to spend it."

"To spend money on a certain, total failure?"

"How was I to know that those mines were a certain, total failure?"

"How could you help knowing it?"

"Quite simply. By giving it no thought."

"You started that project without giving it any thought?"

"No, not exactly. But suppose I slipped up? I'm only human. I made a mistake. I failed. I made a bad job of it." He flicked his wrist; a crystal marble shot, sparkling, across the floor and cracked violently against a brown one at the other end of the room.

"I don't believe it," she said.

"No? But haven't I the right to be what is now accepted as human? Should I pay for everybody's mistakes and never be permitted one of my own?"

"That's not like you."

"No?" He stretched himself full-length on the carpet, lazily, relaxing. "Did you intend for me to notice that if you think I did it on purpose, then you still give me credit for having a purpose? You're still unable to accept me as a bum?"

She closed her eyes. She heard him laughing; it was the gayest sound in the world. She opened her eyes hastily; but there was no hint of cruelty in his face, only pure laughter.

"My motive, Dagny? You don't think that it's the simplest one of all—the spur of the moment?"

No, she thought, no, that's not true; not if he laughed like that, not if he looked as he did. The capacity for unclouded enjoyment, she thought, does not belong to irresponsible fools; an inviolate peace of spirit is not the achievement of a drifter; to be able to laugh like that is the end result of the most profound, most solemn thinking.

Almost dispassionately, looking at his figure stretched on the carpet at her feet, she observed what memory it brought back to her: the black pajamas stressed the long lines of his body, the open collar

showed a smooth, young, sunburned skin—and she thought of the figure in black slacks and shirt stretched beside her on the grass at sunrise. She had felt pride then, the pride of knowing that she owned his body; she still felt it. She remembered suddenly, specifically, the excessive acts of their intimacy; the memory should have been offensive to her now, but wasn't. It was still pride, without regret or hope, an emotion that had no power to reach her and that she had no power to destroy.

Unaccountably, by an association of feeling that astonished her, she remembered what had conveyed to her recently the same sense of consummate joy as his.

"Francisco," she heard herself saying softly, "we both loved the music of Richard Halley . . ."

"I still love it."

"Have you ever met him?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Do you happen to know whether he has written a Fifth Concerto?"

He remained perfectly still. She had thought him impervious to shock, he wasn't. But she could not attempt to guess why of all the things she had said, this should be the first to reach him. It was only an instant; then he asked evenly, "What makes you think he has?"

"Well, has he?"

"You know that there are only four Halley Concertos."

"Yes. But I wondered whether he had written another one."

"He has stopped writing."

"I know."

"Then what made you ask that?"

"Just an idle thought. What is he doing now? Where is he?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him for a long time. What made you think that there was a Fifth Concerto?"

"I didn't say there was. I merely wondered about it."

"Why did you think of Richard Halley just now?"

"Because"—she felt her control cracking a little—"because my mind can't make the leap from Richard Halley's music to . . . to Mrs. Gilbert Vail."

He laughed, relieved. "Oh, that? . . . Incidentally, if you've been following my publicity, have you noticed a funny little discrepancy in the story of Mrs. Gilbert Vail?"

"I don't read the stuff."

"You should. She gave such a beautiful description of last New Year's Eve, which we spent together in my villa in the Andes. The moonlight on the mountain peaks, and the blood-red flowers hanging on vines in the open windows. See anything wrong in the picture?"

She said quietly, "It's I who should ask you that, and I'm not going to."

"Oh. I see nothing wrong—except that last New Year's Eve I was in El Paso, Texas, presiding at the opening of the San Sebastián Line of Taggart Transcontinental, as you should remember, even if you didn't choose to be present on the occasion. I had my picture taken

with my arms around your brother James and the Señor Orren Boyle ”

She gasped, remembering that this was true, remembering also that she had seen Mrs. Vail's story in the newspapers

“Francisco, what what does that mean?”

He chuckled “Draw your own conclusions Dagny”—his face was serious—“why did you think of Halley writing a Fifth Concerto? Why not a new symphony or opera? Why specifically a concerto?”

“Why does that disturb you?”

“It doesn't ” He added softly, “I still love his music, Dagny ” Then he spoke lightly again “But it belonged to another age Our age provides a different kind of entertainment ”

He rolled over on his back and lay with his hands crossed under his head, looking up as if he were watching the scenes of a movie farce unrolling on the ceiling

Dagny didn't you enjoy the spectacle of the behavior of the People's State of Mexico in regard to the San Sebastian Mines? Did you read their government's speeches and the editorials in their newspapers? They are saying that I am an unscrupulous cheat who has defrauded them They expected to have a successful mining concern to seize I had no right to disappoint them like that Did you read about the scabby little bureaucrat who wanted them to sue me ”

He laughed, lying flat on his back his arms were thrown wide on the carpet forming a cross with his body, he seemed disarmed relaxed and young

‘It was worth whatever it's cost me I could afford the price of that show If I had staged it intentionally I would have beaten the record of the Emperor Nero What's burning a city—compared to tearing the lid off hell and letting men see it?’

He raised himself, picked up a few marbles and sat shaking them absently in his hand, they clicked with the soft, clear sound of good stone She realized suddenly that playing with those marbles was not a deliberate affectation on his part it was restlessness he could not remain inactive for long

‘The government of the People's State of Mexico has issued a proclamation’ he said ‘asking the people to be patient and put up with hardships just a little longer It seems that the copper fortune of the San Sebastián Mines was part of the plans of the central planning council It was to raise everybody's standard of living and provide a roast of pork every Sunday for every man, woman, child and abortion in the People's State of Mexico Now the planners are asking their people not to blame the government but to blame the depravity of the rich, because I turned out to be an irresponsible playboy, instead of the greedy capitalist I was expected to be How were they to know, they're asking, that I would let them down? Well, true enough How were they to know it?’

She noticed the way he fingered the marbles in his hand He was not conscious of it, he was looking off into some grim distance, but she felt certain that the action was a relief to him, perhaps as a contrast His fingers were moving slowly, feeling the texture of the