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Nostromo

Joseph Conrad · *1904 · Original English (1904; Author's Note 1917)*

In the seaboard town of Sulaco, in the fictional republic of Costaguana, the San Tomé silver mine has become the center of a hope for order. Charles Gould pins his faith to material interests. Nostromo, the capataz de cargadores, is valued as incorruptible. When revolt comes, he and Martin Decoud take the silver to sea. The treasure, and the secret of it, destroy them in different ways.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a man who lives by being trusted remain himself once he is left alone with a hidden treasure?

"I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist."

Charles Gould · On the mine and order

Gould hopes the mine will impose order. Nostromo's name is his fortune before any silver is hidden. The lighter, Decoud's solitude, and Nostromo's secret test both hopes. Decoud dies on the Great Isabel; Nostromo lives to steal slowly from the hoard he allowed to be thought lost, and a shot in the dark ends him before a full confession.

KEY CHARACTERS

Nostromo
The trusted capataz whose hidden treasure finally destroys him.

Charles Gould
Owner of the San Tomé mine, who pins his faith to material interests.

Emilia Gould
His wife, who sees further than he does the cost of the mine.

Martin Decoud
The journalist left alone with the silver on the Great Isabel.

Dr. Monygham
The scarred physician who understands more of Nostromo's case than many others.

Giorgio Viola
The old Garibaldino whose house on the island is part of the last days.

MATERIAL INTERESTS

> *"I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist."*
>
> **Charles Gould** · On the mine and order

> *"The silver is gone, and I am glad of it."*
>
> **Charles Gould** · After the lighter has gone out

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Sulaco and the mine

THE SEABOARD AND THE SAN TOMÉ

The novel opens on Sulaco, once a quiet port, and on the silver mine Charles Gould has restored. Order, capital, and the hope of a quieter republic gather around it.

- Sulaco is a seaboard town in Costaguana, long a modest coasting port.
- Charles Gould restores the San Tomé mine with English capital.
- He pins his faith to material interests as a basis for order.

> *"I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist."*
>
> **Charles Gould** · On the mine and order

02

The capataz

NOSTROMO'S PUBLIC NAME

Gian' Battista Fidanza, called Nostromo, is the capataz de cargadores, trusted by Captain Mitchell and by the town as a perfectly incorruptible man.

- Nostromo is an Italian sailor who has become foreman of the cargo-workers.
- His reputation is his fortune before the silver is hidden.
- Captain Mitchell values him as invaluable for the work, an incorruptible fellow.

> *"Captain Mitchell's right-hand man--"invaluable for our work--a perfectly incorruptible fellow""*
>
> A public estimate of Nostromo

03

The lighter

REVOLT AND THE SILVER AT SEA

When revolt threatens the Occidental Province, Nostromo and Martin Decoud take a load of silver out by night in a lighter, to keep it from seizure.

- Civil war reaches Sulaco; the mine's silver is in danger.
- Nostromo and Decoud go out by night with the treasure.
- Gould would rather the silver be lost than remain as a prize in the town.

> *"The silver is gone, and I am glad of it."*
>
> **Charles Gould** · After the lighter has taken the treasure away

04

The Great Isabel

DECOUD ALONE WITH THE TREASURE

The plan miscarries in part. Decoud is left on the Great Isabel with the silver and, worn down by solitude, takes his own life. Nostromo survives.

- Decoud is left on the island with the hoard.
- Solitude wears him down; he dies by his own hand.
- Nostromo returns, and the silver is thought lost.

05

The secret

THE HIDDEN HOARD AND THE END

Nostromo lets the treasure be thought lost, then begins slowly to draw on it. His reputation and his private life come apart. A shot in the dark on the island ends his life.

- The capataz keeps the secret of the silver.
- He is divided in love among the Viola household on the island.
- He is mortally shot before the truth of the hoard is fully told.

Material interests · A public name · The hidden silver · Solitude · A seaboard town

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The hosted text is Project Gutenberg #2021, the 1904 novel together with Conrad's Author's Note of October 1917.
2. Costaguana is a fictional republic; do not treat it as a key to one particular country.
3. Gould's sentence on material interests is his public faith, not the narrator's last word.
4. Decoud's death on the Great Isabel is a suicide and should be handled with care in class.
5. This is a long novel of a town, a mine, and a reputation, not a simple adventure of stolen silver.

Quotations are verbatim from the Original English (1904; Author's Note 1917), Joseph Conrad, 1904; Project Gutenberg #2021, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/nostromo/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.