

steps toward the control of a future kingdom. Among the leaders of industry, her father's friends, she heard it said that one had better watch the young d'Anconia heir; if that copper company had been great before, it would sweep the world now, under what his management promised to become. She smiled, without astonishment. There were moments when she felt a sudden, violent longing for him, but it was only impatience, not pain. She dismissed it, in the confident knowledge that they were both working toward a future that would bring them everything they wanted, including each other. Then his letters stopped.

She was twenty-four on that day of spring when the telephone rang on her desk, in an office of the Taggart Building. "Dagny," said a voice she recognized at once, "I'm at the Wayne-Falkland. Come to have dinner with me tonight. At seven." He said it without greeting, as if they had parted the day before. Because it took her a moment to regain the art of breathing, she realized for the first time how much that voice meant to her. "All right . . . Francisco," she answered. They needed to say nothing else. She thought, replacing the receiver, that his return was natural and as she had always expected it to happen, except that she had not expected her sudden need to pronounce his name or the stab of happiness she felt while pronouncing it.

When she entered his hotel room, that evening, she stopped short. He stood in the middle of the room, looking at her—and she saw a smile that came slowly, involuntarily, as if he had lost the ability to smile and was astonished that he should regain it. He looked at her incredulously, not quite believing what she was or what he felt. His glance was like a plea, like the cry for help of a man who could never cry. At her entrance, he had started their old salute, he had started to say, "Hi—" but he did not finish it. Instead, after a moment, he said, "You're beautiful, Dagny." He said it as if it hurt him.

"Francisco, I—"

He shook his head, not to let her pronounce the words they had never said to each other—even though they knew that both had said and heard them in that moment.

He approached, he took her in his arms, he kissed her mouth and held her for a long time. When she looked up at his face, he was smiling down at her confidently, derisively. It was a smile that told her he was in control of himself, of her, of everything, and ordered her to forget what she had seen in that first moment. "Hi, Slug," he said.

Feeling certain of nothing except that she must not ask questions, she smiled and said, "Hi, Frisco."

She could have understood any change, but not the things she saw. There was no sparkle of life in his face, no hint of amusement; the face had become implacable. The plea of his first smile had not been a plea of weakness; he had acquired an air of determination that seemed merciless. He acted like a man who stood straight, under the weight of an unendurable burden. She saw what she could not have believed possible: that there were lines of bitterness in his face and that he looked tortured.

"Dagny, don't be astonished by anything I do," he said, "or by anything I may ever do in the future."

That was the only explanation he granted her, then proceeded to act as if there were nothing to explain.

She could feel no more than a faint anxiety; it was impossible to feel fear for his fate or in his presence. When he laughed, she thought they were back in the woods by the Hudson: he had not changed and never would.

The dinner was served in his room. She found it amusing to face him across a table laid out with the icy formality pertaining to excessive cost, in a hotel room designed as a European palace.

The Wayne-Falkland was the most distinguished hotel left on any continent. Its style of indolent luxury, of velvet drapes, sculptured panels and candlelight, seemed a deliberate contrast to its function: no one could afford its hospitality except men who came to New York on business, to settle transactions involving the world. She noticed that the manner of the waiters who served their dinner suggested a special deference to this particular guest of the hotel, and that Francisco did not notice it. He was indifferently at home. He had long since become accustomed to the fact that he was Señor d'Anconia of d'Anconia Copper.

But she thought it strange that he did not speak about his work. She had expected it to be his only interest, the first thing he would share with her. He did not mention it. He led her to talk, instead, about her job, her progress, and what she felt for Taggart Transcontinental. She spoke of it as she had always spoken to him, in the knowledge that he was the only one who could understand her passionate devotion. He made no comment, but he listened intently.

A waiter had turned on the radio for dinner music: they had paid no attention to it. But suddenly, a crash of sound jarred the room, almost as if a subterranean blast had struck the walls and made them tremble. The shock came, not from the loudness, but from the quality of the sounds. It was Halley's new Concerto, recently written, the Fourth.

They sat in silence, listening to the statement of rebellion--the anthem of the triumph of the great victims who would refuse to accept pain. Francisco listened, looking out at the city.

Without transition or warning, he asked, his voice oddly unstressed, "Dagny, what would you say if I asked you to leave Taggart Transcontinental and let it go to hell, as it will when your brother takes over?"

"What would I say if you asked me to consider the idea of committing suicide?" she answered angrily.

He remained silent.

"Why did you say that?" she snapped. "I didn't think you'd joke about it. It's not like you."

There was no touch of humor in his face. He answered quietly, gravely, "No. Of course. I shouldn't."

She brought herself to question him about his work. He answered the questions; he volunteered nothing. She repeated to him the comments of the industrialists about the brilliant prospects of d'Anconia

Copper under his management. "That's true," he said, his voice lifeless.

In sudden anxiety, not knowing what prompted her, she asked, "Francisco, why did you come to New York?"

He answered slowly, "To see a friend who called for me."

"Business?"

Looking past her, as if answering a thought of his own, a faint smile of bitter amusement on his face, but his voice strangely soft and sad, he answered:

"Yes."

It was long past midnight when she awakened in bed by his side. No sounds came from the city below. The stillness of the room made life seem suspended for a while. Relaxed in happiness and in complete exhaustion, she turned lazily to glance at him. He lay on his back, half-propped by a pillow. She saw his profile against the foggy glow of the night sky in the window. He was awake, his eyes were open. He held his mouth closed like a man lying in resignation in unbearable pain; bearing it, making no attempt to hide it.

She was too frightened to move. He felt her glance and turned to her. He shuddered suddenly, he threw off the blanket, he looked at her naked body, then he fell forward and buried his face between her breasts. He held her shoulders, hanging onto her convulsively. She heard the words, muffled, his mouth pressed to her skin:

"I can't give it up! I can't!"

"What?" she whispered.

"You."

"Why should—"

"And everything."

"Why should you give it up?"

"Dagny! Help me to remain. To refuse. Even though he's right!"

She asked evenly, "To refuse what, Francisco?"

He did not answer, only pressed his face harder against her.

She lay very still, conscious of nothing but a supreme need of caution. His head on her breast, her hand caressing his hair gently, steadily, she lay looking up at the ceiling of the room, at the sculptured garlands faintly visible in the darkness, and she waited, numb with terror.

He moaned, "It's right, but it's so hard to do! Oh God, it's so hard!"

After a while, he raised his head. He sat up. He had stopped trembling.

"What is it, Francisco?"

"I can't tell you." His voice was simple, open, without attempt to disguise suffering, but it was a voice that obeyed him now. "You're not ready to hear it."

"I want to help you."

"You can't."

"You said, to help you refuse."

"I can't refuse."

"Then let me share it with you."

He shook his head.