He sat looking down at her, as if weighing a question. Then he shook his head again, in answer to himself.

"If I'm not sure I can stand it," he said, and the strange new note in his voice was tenderness, "how could you?"

She said slowly, with effort, trying to keep herself from screaming, "Francisco, I have to know."

"Will you forgive me? I know you're frightened, and it's cruel. But will you do this for me—will you let it go, just let it go, and don't ask me anything?"

"I—"

"That's all you can do for me. Will you?"

"Yes, Francisco."

"Don't be afraid for me. It was just this once. It won't happen to me again. It will become much easier . . . later."

"If I could—"

"No. Go to sleep, dearest."

It was the first time he had ever used that word.

In the morning, he faced her openly, not avoiding her anxious glance, but saying nothing about it. She saw both serenity and suffering in the calm of his face, an expression like a smile of pain, though he was not smiling. Strangely, it made him look younger. He did not look like a man bearing torture now, but like a man who sees that which makes the torture worth bearing.

She did not question him. Before leaving, she asked only, "When will I see you again?"

He answered, "I don't know. Don't wait for me, Dagny. Next time we meet, you will not want to see me. I will have a reason for the things I'll do. But I can't tell you the reason and you will be right to damn me. I am not committing the contemptible act of asking you to take me on faith. You have to live by your own knowledge and judgment. You will damn me. You will be hurt. Try not to let it hurt you too much. Remember that I told you this and that it was all I could tell you."

She heard nothing from him or about him for a year. When she began to hear gossip and to read newspaper stories, she did not believe, at first, that they referred to Francisco d'Anconia. After a while, she had to believe it.

She read the story of the party he gave on his yacht, in the harbor of Valparaiso; the guests wore bathing suits, and an artificial rain of champagne and flower petals kept falling upon the decks throughout the night.

She read the story of the party he gave at an Algerian desert resort; he built a pavilion of thin sheets of ice and presented every woman guest with an ermine wrap, as a gift to be worn for the occasion, on condition that they remove their wraps, then their evening gowns, then all the rest, in tempo with the melting of the walls.

She read the accounts of the business ventures he undertook at lengthy intervals; the ventures were spectacularly successful and ruined his competitors, but he indulged in them as in an occasional sport, staging a sudden raid, then vanishing from the industrial scene

for a year or two, leaving d'Anconia Copper to the management of his employees.

She read of the interview where he said, "Why should I wish to make money? I have enough to permit three generations of descendants to have as good a time as I'm having."

She saw him once, at a reception given by an ambassador in New York. He bowed to her courteously, he smiled, and he looked at her with a glance in which no past existed. She drew him aside. She said only, "Francisco, why?" "Why—what?" he asked. She turned away. "I warned you," he said. She did not try to see him again.

She survived it. She was able to survive it, because she did not believe in suffering. She faced with astonished indignation the ugly fact of feeling pain, and refused to let it matter. Suffering was a senseless accident, it was not part of life as she saw it. She would not allow pain to become important. She had no name for the kind of resistance she offered, for the emotion from which the resistance came; but the words that stood as its equivalent in her mind were: It does not count—it is not to be taken seriously. She knew these were the words, even in the moments when there was nothing left within her but screaming and she wished she could lose the faculty of consciousness so that it would not tell her that what could not be true was true. Not to be taken seriously—an immovable certainty within her kept repeating—pain and ugliness are never to be taken seriously.

She fought it. She recovered. Years helped her to reach the day when she could face her memories indifferently, then the day when she felt no necessity to face them. It was finished and of no concern to her any longer.

There had been no other men in her life. She did not know whether this had made her unhappy. She had had no time to know. She found the clean, brilliant sense of life as she wanted it—in her work. Once, Francisco had given her the same sense, a feeling that belonged with her work and in her world. The men she had met since were like the men she met at her first ball.

She had won the battle against her memories. But one form of torture remained, untouched by the years, the torture of the word "why?"

Whatever the tragedy he met, why had Francisco taken the ugliest way of escape, as ignoble as the way of some cheap alcoholic? The boy she had known could not have become a useless coward. An incomparable mind could not turn its ingenuity to the invention of melting ballrooms. Yet he had and did, and there was no explanation to make it conceivable and to let her forget him in peace. She could not doubt the fact of what he had been; she could not doubt the fact of what he had become; yet one made the other impossible. At times, she almost doubted her own rationality or the existence of any rationality anywhere; but this was a doubt which she did not permit to anyone. Yet there was no explanation, no reason, no clue to any conceivable reason—and in all the days of ten years she had found no hint of an answer.

No, she thought—as she walked through the gray twilight, past the windows of abandoned shops, to the Wayne-Falkland Hotel—