the midst of a group, and, without a word, stepped aside where they could not be heard.

"Is that Scudder of *The Future*?" he asked, pointing.

"Why, yes."

He looked at her silently, unable to begin to believe it, unable to find the lead of a thought with which to begin to understand. Her eyes were watching him.

"How could you invite him here?" he asked.

"Now, Henry, don't let's be ridiculous. You don't want to be narrow-minded, do you? You must learn to tolerate the opinions of others and respect their right of free speech."

"In my house?"

"Oh, don't be stuffy!"

He did not speak, because his consciousness was held, not by coherent statements, but by two pictures that seemed to glare at him insistently. He saw the article, "The Octopus," by Bertram Scudder, which was not an expression of ideas, but a bucket of slime emptied in public—an article that did not contain a single fact, not even an invented one, but poured a stream of sneers and adjectives in which nothing was clear except the filthy malice of denouncing without considering proof necessary. And he saw the lines of Lillian's profile, the proud purity which he had sought in marrying her.

When he noticed her again, he realized that the vision of her profile was in his own mind, because she was turned to him fullface, watching him. In the sudden instant of returning to reality, he thought that what he saw in her eyes was enjoyment. But in the next instant he reminded himself that he was sane and that this was not possible.

"It's the first time you've invited that . . ." he used an obscene word with unemotional precision, "to my house. It's the last."

"How dare you use such—"

"Don't argue, Lillian. If you do, I'll throw him out right now."

He gave her a moment to answer, to object, to scream at him if she wished. She remained silent, not looking at him, only her smooth cheeks seemed faintly drawn inward, as if deflated.

Moving blindly away through the coils of lights, voices and perfume, he felt a cold touch of dread. He knew that he should think of Lillian and find the answer to the riddle of her character, because this was a revelation which he could not ignore; but he did not think of her—and he felt the dread because he knew that the answer had ceased to matter to him long ago.

The flood of weariness was starting to rise again. He felt as if he could almost see it in thickening waves; it was not within him, but outside, spreading through the room. For an instant, he felt as if he were alone, lost in a gray desert, needing help and knowing that no help would come.

He stopped short. In the lighted doorway, the length of the room between them, he saw the tall, arrogant figure of a man who had paused for a moment before entering. He had never met the man, but of all the notorious faces that cluttered the pages of newspapers, this was the one he despised. It was Francisco d'Anconia.

Rearden had never given much thought to men like Bertram Scudder. But with every hour of his life, with the strain and the pride of every moment when his muscles or his mind had ached from effort, with every step he had taken to rise out of the mines of Minnesota and to turn his effort into gold, with all of his profound respect for money and for its meaning, he despised the squanderer who did not know how to deserve the great gift of inherited wealth. There, he thought, was the most contemptible representative of the species.

He saw Francisco d'Anconia enter, bow to Lillian, then walk into the crowd as if he owned the room which he had never entered before. Heads turned to watch him, as if he pulled them on strings in his wake.

Approaching Lillian once more, Rearden said without anger, the contempt becoming amusement in his voice, "I didn't know you knew that one."

"I've met him at a few parties."

"Is he one of your friends, too?"

"Certainly not!" The sharp resentment was genuine.

"Then why did you invite him?"

"Well, you can't give a party—not a party that counts—while he's in this country, without inviting him. It's a nuisance if he comes, and a social black mark if he doesn't."

Rearden laughed. She was off guard; she did not usually admit things of this kind. "Look," he said wearily, "I don't want to spoil your party. But keep that man away from me. Don't come around with introductions. I don't want to meet him. I don't know how you'll work that, but you're an expert hostess, so work it."

Dagny stood still when she saw Francisco approaching. He bowed to her as he passed by. He did not stop, but she knew that he had stopped the moment in his mind. She saw him smile faintly in deliberate emphasis of what he understood and did not choose to acknowledge. She turned away. She hoped to avoid him for the rest of the evening.

Balph Eubank had joined the group around Dr. Pritchett, and was saying, sullenly, ". . . no, you cannot expect people to understand the higher reaches of philosophy. Culture should be taken out of the hands of the dollar-chasers. We need a national subsidy for literature. It is disgraceful that artists are treated like peddlers and that art works have to be sold like soap."

"You mean, your complaint is that they *don't* sell like soap?" asked Francisco d'Anconia.

They had not noticed him approach; the conversation stopped, as if slashed off; most of them had never met him, but they all recognized him at once.

"I meant—" Balph Eubank started angrily and closed his mouth; he saw the eager interest on the faces of his audience, but it was not interest in philosophy any longer.

"Why, hello, Professor!" said Francisco, bowing to Dr. Pritchett.

There was no pleasure in Dr. Pritchett's face when he answered the greeting and performed a few introductions.