

After a while, Mrs. Taggart began to worry and decided to investigate. She never learned how he had managed to by-pass all the child-labor laws, but she found Francisco working—by an unofficial deal with the dispatcher—as a call boy for Taggart Transcontinental, at a division point ten miles away. The dispatcher was stupefied by her personal visit; he had no idea that his call boy was a house guest of the Taggarts. The boy was known to the local railroad crews as Frankie, and Mrs. Taggart preferred not to enlighten them about his full name. She merely explained that he was working without his parents' permission and had to quit at once. The dispatcher was sorry to lose him; Frankie, he said, was the best call boy they had ever had. "I'd sure like to keep him on. Maybe we could make a deal with his parents?" he suggested. "I'm afraid not," said Mrs. Taggart faintly.

"Francisco," she asked, when she brought him home, "what would your father say about this, if he knew?"

"My father would ask whether I was good at the job or not. That's all he'd want to know."

"Come now, I'm serious."

Francisco was looking at her politely, his courteous manner suggesting centuries of breeding and drawing rooms; but something in his eyes made her feel uncertain about the politeness. "Last winter," he answered, "I shipped out as a cabin boy on a cargo steamer that carried d'Anconia copper. My father looked for me for three months, but that's all he asked me when I came back."

"So that's how you spend your winters?" said Jim Taggart. Jim's smile had a touch of triumph, the triumph of finding cause to feel contempt.

"That was last winter," Francisco answered pleasantly, with no change in the innocent, casual tone of his voice. "The winter before last I spent in Madrid, at the home of the Duke of Alba."

"Why did you want to work on a railroad?" asked Dagny.

They stood looking at each other: hers was a glance of admiration, his of mockery; but it was not the mockery of malice—it was the laughter of a salute.

"To learn what's it's like, Slug," he answered, "and to tell you that I've had a job with Taggart Transcontinental before you did."

Dagny and Eddie spent their winters trying to master some new skill, in order to astonish Francisco and beat him, for once. They never succeeded. When they showed him how to hit a ball with a bat, a game he had never played before, he watched them for a few minutes, then said, "I think I get the idea. Let me try." He took the bat and sent the ball flying over a line of oak trees far at the end of the field.

When Jim was given a motorboat for his birthday, they all stood on the river landing, watching the lesson, while an instructor showed Jim how to run it. None of them had ever driven a motorboat before. The sparkling white craft, shaped like a bullet, kept staggering clumsily across the water, its wake a long record of shivering, its motor choking with hiccoughs, while the instructor, seated beside him, kept seizing the wheel out of Jim's hands. For no apparent reason, Jim

raised his head suddenly and yelled at Francisco, "Do you think you can do it any better?" "I can do it" "Try it!"

When the boat came back and its two occupants stepped out, Francisco slipped behind the wheel "Wait a moment," he said to the instructor, who remained on the landing "Let me take a look at this" Then, before the instructor had time to move the boat shot out to the middle of the river, as if fired from a gun It was streaking away before they grasped what they were seeing As it went shrinking into the distance and sunlight, Dagny's picture of it was three straight lines its wake the long shriek of its motor and the arm of the driver at its wheel

She noticed the strange expression of her father's face as he looked at the vanishing speedboat He said nothing, he just stood looking She remembered that she had seen him look that way once before It was when he inspected a complex system of pulleys which Francisco, aged twelve, had erected to make an elevator to the top of a rock, he was teaching Dagny and Eddie to dive from the rock into the Hudson Francisco's notes of calculations were still scattered about on the ground her father picked them up looked at them, then asked, "Francisco how many years of algebra have you had?" "Two years" "Who taught you to do this?" "Oh, that's just some thing I figured out" She did not know that what her father held on the crumpled sheets of paper was the crude version of a differential equation

The heirs of Sebastian d'Anconia had been an unbroken line of first sons, who knew how to bear his name It was a tradition of the family that the man to disgrace them would be the heir who died leaving the d'Anconia fortune no greater than he had received it Throughout the generations that disgrace had not come An Argentinian legend said that the hand of a d'Anconia had the miraculous power of the saints—only it was not the power to heal, but the power to produce

The d'Anconia heirs had been men of unusual ability, but none of them could match what Francisco d'Anconia promised to become It was as if the centuries had sifted the family's qualities through a fine mesh, had discarded the irrelevant, the inconsequential the weak, and had let nothing through except pure talent as if chance, for once, had achieved an entity devoid of the accidental

Francisco could do anything he undertook, he could do it better than anyone else and he did it without effort There was no boasting in his manner and consciousness, no thought of comparison His attitude was not "I can do it better than you," but simply "I can do it" What he meant by doing was doing superlatively.

No matter what discipline was required of him by his father's exacting plan for his education, no matter what subject he was ordered to study, Francisco mastered it with effortless amusement His father adored him, but concealed it carefully, as he concealed the pride of knowing that he was bringing up the most brilliant phenomenon of a brilliant family line Francisco, it was said, was to be the climax of the d'Anconias

"I don't know what sort of motto the d'Anconias have on their