The Diamond as Big as the Ritz

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Chapter I

JOHN T. **UNGER** came **from** a **family** that **had** been **well** known **in** Hades—a **small** town **on** the **Mississippi** River—for **several** generations.

John's father **had** held **the** amateur **golf** championship **through** many **a** heated **contest;** Mrs. **Unger** was **known** "from **hot-box** to **hot-bed,"** as **the** local **phrase** went, **for** her **political** addresses; **and** young **John** T. **Unger,** who **had** just **turned** sixteen, **had** danced **all** the **latest** dances **from** New **York** before **he** put **on** long **trousers.** And **now,** for **a** certain **time,** he **was** to **be** away **from** home. **That** respect **for** a **New** England **education** which **is** the **bane** of **all** provincial **places,** which **drains** them **yearly** of **their** most **promising** young **men,** had **seized** upon **his** parents. **Nothing** would **suit** them **but** that **he** should **go** to **St.** Midas' **School** near **Boston—** Hades **was** too **small** to **hold** their **darling** and **gifted** son.

Now in **Hades—as** you **know** if **you** ever **have** been **there—the** names **of** the **more** fashionable **preparatory** schools **and** colleges **mean** very **little.** The **inhabitants** have **been** so **long** out **of** the **world** that, **though** they **make** a **show** of **keeping** up **to** date **in** dress **and** manners **and** literature, **they** depend **to** a **great** extent **on** hearsay, **and** a **function** that **in** Hades **would** be **considered** elaborate **would** doubtless **be** hailed **by** a **Chicago** beef-princess **as** "perhaps **a** little **tacky."**

John T. **Unger** was **on** the **eve** of **departure.** Mrs. **Unger,** with **maternal** fatuity, **packed** his **trunks** full **of** linen **suits** and **electric** fans, **and** Mr. **Unger** presented **his** son **with** an **asbestos** pocket-book **stuffed** with **money.**

"Remember, you **are** always **welcome** here," **he** said. **"You** can **be** sure **boy,** that **we'll** keep **the** home **fires** burning."

"I know," **answered** John **huskily.**

"Don't forget **who** you **are** and **where** you **come** from," **continued** his **father** proudly, **"and** you **can** do **nothing** to **harm** you. **You** are **an** Unger—from **Hades."**

So the **old** man **and** the **young** shook **hands** and **John** walked **away** with **tears** streaming **from** his **eyes.** Ten **minutes** later **he** had **passed** outside **the** city **limits,** and **he** stopped **to** glance **back** for **the** last **time.** Over **the** gates **the** old-fashioned **Victorian** motto **seemed** strangely **attractive** to **him.** His **father** had **tried** time **and** time **again** to **have** it **changed** to **something** with **a** little **more** push **and** verve **about** it, **such** as **"Hades—Your** Opportunity," **or** else **a** plain **"Welcome"** sign **set** over **a** hearty **handshake** pricked **out** in **electric** lights. **The** old **motto** was **a** little **depressing,** Mr. **Unger** had **thought—but** now....

So John **took** his **look** and **then** set **his** face **resolutely** toward **his** destination. **And,** as **he** turned **away,** the **lights** of **Hades** against **the** sky **seemed** full **of** a **warm** and **passionate** beauty.

St. Midas' **School** is **half** an **hour** from **Boston** in **a** Rolls-Pierce **motorcar.** The **actual** distance **will** never **be** known, **for** no **one,** except **John** T. **Unger,** had **ever** arrived **there** save **in** a **Rolls-Pierce** and **probably** no **one** ever **will** again. **St.** Midas' **is** the **most** expensive **and** the **most** exclusive **boys'** preparatory **school** in **the** world.

John's first **two** years **there** passed **pleasantly.** The **fathers** of **all** the **boys** were **money-kings** and **John** spent **his** summers **visiting** at **fashionable** resorts. **While** he **was** very **fond** of **all** the **boys** he **visited,** their **fathers** struck **him** as **being** much **of** a **piece,** and **in** his **boyish** way **he** often **wondered** at **their** exceeding **sameness.** When **he** told **them** where **his** home **was** they **would** ask **jovially,** "Pretty **hot** down **there?"** and **John** would **muster** a **faint** smile **and** answer, **"It** certainly **is."** His **response** would **have** been **heartier** had **they** not **all** made **this**

joke—at **best** varying **it** with, **"Is** it **hot** enough **for** you **down** there?" **which** he **hated** just **as** much.

In the **middle** of **his** second **year** at **school,** a **quiet,** handsome **boy** named **Percy** Washington **had** been **put** in **John's** form. **The** newcomer **was** pleasant **in** his **manner** and **exceedingly** well **dressed** even **for** St. **Midas',** but **for** some **reason** he **kept** aloof **from** the **other** boys. **The** only **person** with **whom** he **was** intimate **was** John **T.** Unger, **but** even **to** John **he** was **entirely** uncommunicative **concerning** his **home** or **his** family. **That** he **was** wealthy **went** without **saying,** but **beyond** a **few** such **deductions** John **knew** little **of** his **friend,** so **it** promised **rich** confectionery **for** his **curiosity** when **Percy** invited **him** to **spend** the **summer** at **his** home **"in** the **West."** He **accepted,** without **hesitation.**

It was **only** when **they** were **in** the **train** that **Percy** became, **for** the **first** time, **rather** communicative. **One** day **while** they **were** eating **lunch** in **the** dining-car **and** discussing **the** imperfect **characters** of **several** of **the** boys **at** school, **Percy** suddenly **changed** his **tone** and **made** an **abrupt** remark.

"My father," **he** said, **"is** by **far** the **richest** man **in** the **world."**

"Oh," said **John,** politely. **He** could **think** of **no** answer **to** make **to** this **confidence.** He **considered** "That's **very** nice," **but** it **sounded** hollow **and** was **on** the **point** of **saying,** "Really?" **but** refrained **since** it **would** seem **to** question **Percy's** statement. **And** such **an** astounding **statement** could **scarcely** be **questioned.**

"By far **the** richest," **repeated** Percy.

"I was **reading** in **the** World **Almanac,"** began **John,** "that **there** was **one** man **in** America **with** an **income** of **over** five **million** a **year** and **four** men **with** incomes **of** over **three** million **a** year, **and—"**

"Oh, they're **nothing."** Percy's **mouth** was **a** half-moon **of** scorn. **"Catchpenny** capitalists, **financial** small-fry, **petty** merchants

and money-lenders. **My** father **could** buy **them** out **and** not **know** he'd **done** it."

"But how **does** he—"

"Why haven't **they** put **down** his **income** tax? **Because** he **doesn't** pay **any.** At **least** he **pays** a **little** one—but **he** doesn't **pay** any **on** his **real** income."

"He must **be** very **rich,"** said **John** simply. **"I'm** glad. **I** like **very** rich **people.**

"The richer **a** fella **is,** the **better** I **like** him." **There** was **a** look **of** passionate **frankness** upon **his** dark **face.** "I **visited** the **Schnlitzer-Murphys** last **Easter.** Vivian **Schnlitzer-Murphy** had **rubies** as **big** as **hen's** eggs, **and** sapphires **that** were **like** globes **with** lights **inside** them—"

"I love **jewels,"** agreed **Percy** enthusiastically. **"Of** course **I** wouldn't **want** any **one** at **school** to **know** about **it,** but **I've** got **quite** a **collection** myself **I** used **to** collect **them** instead **of** stamps."

"And diamonds," **continued** John **eagerly.** "The **Schnlitzer-Murphys** had **diamonds** as **big** as **walnuts—"**

"That's nothing." **Percy** had **leaned** forward **and** dropped **his** voice **to** a **low** whisper. **"That's** nothing **at** all. **My** father **has** a **diamond** bigger **than** the **Ritz-Carlton** Hotel."

Chapter II

THE MONTANA **sunset** lay **between** two **mountains** like **a** gigantic **bruise** from **which** dark **arteries** spread **themselves** over **a** poisoned **sky.** An **immense** distance **under** the **sky** crouched **the** village **of** Fish, **minute,** dismal, **and** forgotten. **There** were **twelve** men, **so** it **was** said, **in** the **village** of **Fish,** twelve **somber** and **inexplicable** souls **who** sucked **a** lean **milk** from **the** almost **literally** bare **rock** upon **which** a **mysterious** populatory **force** had **begotten** them. **They** had **become** a **race** apart, **these** twelve **men** of **Fish,** like **some** species **developed** by **an** early **whim** of **nature,** which **on** second **thought** had **abandoned** them **to** struggle **and** extermination.

Out of **the** blue-black **bruise** in **the** distance **crept** a **long** line **of** moving **lights** upon **the** desolation **of** the **land,** and **the** twelve **men** of **Fish** gathered **like** ghosts **at** the **shanty** depot **to** watch **the** passing **of** the **seven** o'clock **train,** the **Transcontinental** Express **from** Chicago. **Six** times **or** so **a** year **the** Transcontinental **Express,** through **some** inconceivable **jurisdiction,** stopped **at** the **village** of **Fish,** and **when** this **occurred** a **figure** or **so** would **disembark,** mount **into** a **buggy** that **always** appeared **from** out **of** the **dusk,** and **drive** off **toward** the **bruised** sunset. **The** observation **of** this **pointless** and **preposterous** phenomenon **had** become **a** sort **of** cult **among** the **men** of **Fish.** To **observe,** that **was** all; **there** remained **in** them **none** of **the** vital **quality** of **illusion** which **would** make **them** wonder **or** speculate, **else** a **religion** might **have** grown **up** around **these** mysterious **visitations.** But **the** men **of** Fish **were** beyond **all** religion—the **barest** and **most** savage **tenets** of **even** Christianity **could** gain **no** foothold **on** that **barren** rock—so **there** was **no** altar, **no** priest, **no** sacrifice; **only** each **night** at **seven** the **silent** concourse **by** the **shanty** depot, **a** congregation **who** lifted **up** a **prayer** of **dim,** anaemic **wonder.**

On this **June** night, **the** Great **Brakeman,** whom, **had** they **deified** any **one,** they **might** well **have** chosen **as** their **celestial** protagonist, **had** ordained **that** the **seven** o'clock **train** should **leave** its **human** (or **inhuman)** deposit **at** Fish. **At** two **minutes** after **seven** Percy **Washington** and **John** T. **Unger** disembarked, **hurried** past **the** spellbound, **the** agape, **the** fearsome **eyes** of **the** twelve **men** of **Fish,** mounted **into** a **buggy** which **had** obviously **appeared** from **nowhere,** and **drove** away.

After half **an** hour, **when** the **twilight** had **coagulated** into **dark,** the **silent** negro **who** was **driving** the **buggy** hailed **an** opaque **body** somewhere **ahead** of **them** in **the** gloom. **In** response **to** his **cry,** it **turned** upon **them** a **luminous** disk **which** regarded **them** like **a** malignant **eye** out **of** the **unfathomable** night. **As** they **came** closer, **John** saw **that** it **was** the **tail-light** of **an** immense **automobile,** larger **and** more **magnificent** than **any** he **had** ever **seen.** Its **body** was **of** gleaming **metal** richer **than** nickel **and** lighter **than** silver, **and** the **hubs** of **the** wheels **were** studded **with** iridescent **geometric** figures **of** green **and** yellow—John **did** not **dare** to **guess** whether **they** were **glass** or **jewel.**

Two negroes, **dressed** in **glittering** livery **such** as **one** sees **in** pictures **of** royal **processions** in **London,** were **standing** at **attention** beside **the** car **and** as **the** two **young** men **dismounted** from **the** buggy **they** were **greeted** in **some** language **which** the **guest** could **not** understand, **but** which **seemed** to **be** an **extreme** form **of** the **Southern** negro's **dialect.**

"Get in," **said** Percy **to** his **friend,** as **their** trunks **were** tossed **to** the **ebony** roof **of** the **limousine.** "Sorry **we** had **to** bring **you** this **far** in **that** buggy, **but** of **course** it **wouldn't** do **for** the **people** on **the** train **or** those **Godforsaken** fellas **in** Fish **to** see **this** automobile."

"Gosh! What **a** car!" **This** ejaculation **was** provoked **by** its **interior.** John **saw** that **the** upholstery **consisted** of **a** thousand

minute and **exquisite** tapestries **of** silk, **woven** with **jewels** and **embroideries,** and **set** upon **a** background **of** cloth **of** gold. **The** two **armchair** seats **in** which **the** boys **luxuriated** were **covered** with **stuff** that **resembled** duvetyn, **but** seemed **woven** in **numberless** colors **of** the **ends** of **ostrich** feathers.

"What a **car!"** cried **John** again, **in** amazement.

"This thing?" **Percy** laughed. **"Why,** it's **just** an **old** junk **we** use **for** a **station** wagon."

By this **time** they **were** gliding **along** through **the** darkness **toward** the **break** between **the** two **mountains.**

"We'll be **there** in **an** hour **and** a **half,"** said **Percy,** looking **at** the **clock.** "I **may** as **well** tell **you** it's **not** going **to** be **like** anything **you** ever **saw** before."

If the **car** was **any** indication **of** what **John** would **see,** he **was** prepared **to** be **astonished** indeed. **The** simple **piety** prevalent **in** Hades **has** the **earnest** worship **of** and **respect** for **riches** as **the** first **article** of **its** creed—had **John** felt **otherwise** than **radiantly** humble **before** them, **his** parents **would** have **turned** away **in** horror **at** the **blasphemy.**

They had **now** reached **and** were **entering** the **break** between **the** two **mountains** and **almost** immediately **the** way **became** much **rougher.**

"If the **moon** shone **down** here, **you'd** see **that** we're **in** a **big** gulch," **said** Percy, **trying** to **peer** out **of** the **window.** He **spoke** a **few** words **into** the **mouthpiece** and **immediately** the **footman** turned **on** a **search-light** and **swept** the **hillsides** with **an** immense **beam.**

"Rocky, you **see.** An **ordinary** car **would** be **knocked** to **pieces** in **half** an **hour.** In **fact,** it'd **take** a **tank** to **navigate** it **unless** you **knew** the **way.** You **notice** we're **going** uphill **now."**

They were **obviously** ascending, **and** within **a** few **minutes** the **car** was **crossing** a **high** rise, **where** they **caught** a **glimpse** of

a pale **moon** newly **risen** in **the** distance. **The** car **stopped** suddenly **and** several **figures** took **shape** out **of** the **dark** beside **it—these** were **negroes** also. **Again** the **two** young **men** were **saluted** in **the** same **dimly** recognizable **dialect;** then **the** negroes **set** to **work** and **four** immense **cables** dangling **from** overhead **were** attached **with** hooks **to** the **hubs** of **the** great **jeweled** wheels. **At** a **resounding** "Hey-yah!" **John** felt **the** car **being** lifted **slowly** from **the** ground— **up** and **up—clear** of **the** tallest **rocks** on **both** sides—then **higher,** until **he** could **see** a **wavy,** moonlit **valley** stretched **out** before **him** in **sharp** contrast **to** the **quagmire** of **rocks** that **they** had **just** left. **Only** on **one** side **was** there **still** rock—and **then** suddenly **there** was **no** rock **beside** them **or** anywhere **around.**

It was **apparent** that **they** had **surmounted** some **immense** knife-blade **of** stone, **projecting** perpendicularly **into** the **air.** In **a** moment **they** were **going** down **again,** and **finally** with **a** soft **bump** they **were** landed **upon** the **smooth** earth.

"The worst **is** over," **said** Percy, **squinting** out **the** window. **"It's** only **five** miles **from** here, **and** our **own** road—tapestry **brick—all** the **way.** This **belongs** to **us.** This **is** where **the** United **States** ends, **father** says."

"Are we **in** Canada?"

"We are **not.** We're **in** the **middle** of **the** Montana **Rockies.** But **you** are **now** on **the** only **five** square **miles** of **land** in **the** country **that's** never **been** surveyed."

"Why hasn't **it?** Did **they** forget **it?"**

"No," said **Percy,** grinning, **"they** tried **to** do **it** three **times.** The **first** time **my** grandfather **corrupted** a **whole** department **of** the **State** survey; **the** second **time** he **had** the **official** maps **of** the **United** States **tinkered** with—that **held** them **for** fifteen **years.** The **last** time **was** harder. **My** father **fixed** it **so** that **their** compasses **were** in **the** strongest **magnetic** field **ever** artificially **set** up. **He** had **a** whole **set** of **surveying** instruments **made** with

a slight **defection** that **would** allow **for** this **territory** not **to** appear, **and** he **substituted** them **for** the **ones** that **were** to **be** used. **Then** he **had** a **river** deflected **and** he **had** what **looked** like **a** village **built** up **on** its **banks—so** that **they'd** see **it,** and **think** it **was** a **town** ten **miles** farther **up** the **valley.** There's **only** one **thing** my **father's** afraid **of,"** he **concluded,** "only **one** thing **in** the **world** that **could** be **used** to **find** us **out."**

"What's that?"

Percy sank **his** voice **to** a **whisper.**

"Aeroplanes," he **breathed.** "We've **got** half **a** dozen **anti-aircraft** guns **and** we've **arranged** it **so** far—but **there've** been **a** few **deaths** and **a** great **many** prisoners. **Not** that **we** mind **that,** you **know,** father **and** I, **but** it **upsets** mother **and** the **girls,** and **there's** always **the** chance **that** some **time** we **won't** be **able** to **arrange** it."

Shreds and **tatters** of **chinchilla,** courtesy **clouds** in **the** green **moon's** heaven, **were** passing **the** green **moon** like **precious** Eastern **stuffs** paraded **for** the **inspection** of **some** Tartar **Khan.** It **seemed** to **John** that **it** was **day,** and **that** he **was** looking **at** some **lads** sailing **above** him **in** the **air,** showering **down** tracts **and** patent **medicine** circulars, **with** their **messages** of **hope** for **despairing,** rockbound **hamlets.** It **seemed** to **him** that **he** could **see** them **look** down **out** of **the** clouds **and** stare—and **stare** at **whatever** there **was** to **stare** at **in** this **place** whither **he** was **bound—What** then? **Were** they **induced** to **land** by **some** insidious **device** there **to** be **immured** far **from** patent **medicines** and **from** tracts **until** the **judgment** day—or, **should** they **fail** to **fall** into **the** trap, **did** a **quick** puff **of** smoke **and** the **sharp** round **of** a **splitting** shell **bring** them **drooping** to **earth—and** "upset" **Percy's** mother **and** sisters. **John** shook **his** head **and** the **wraith** of **a** hollow **laugh** issued **silently** from **his** parted **lips.** What **desperate** transaction **lay** hidden **here?** What

a moral **expedient** of **a** bizarre **Croesus?** What **terrible** and **golden** mystery? **. . .**

The chinchilla **clouds** had **drifted** past **now** and **outside** the **Montana** night **was** bright **as** day. **The** tapestry **brick** of **the** road **was** smooth **to** the **tread** of **the** great **tires** as **they** rounded **a** still, **moonlit** lake; **they** passed **into** darkness **for** a **moment,** a **pine** grove, **pungent** and **cool,** then **they** came **out** into **a** broad **avenue** of **lawn** and **John's** exclamation **of** pleasure **was** simultaneous **with** Percy's **taciturn** "We're **home."**

Full in **the** light **of** the **stars,** an **exquisite** ch_teau **rose** from **the** borders **of** the **lake,** climbed **in** marble **radiance** half **the** height **of** an **adjoining** mountain, **then** melted **in** grace, **in** perfect **symmetry,** in **translucent** feminine **languor,** into **the** massed **darkness** of **a** forest **of** pine. **The** many **towers,** the **slender** tracery **of** the **sloping** parapets, **the** chiselled **wonder** of **a** thousand **yellow** windows **with** their **oblongs** and **hectagons** and **triangles** of **golden** light, **the** shattered **softness** of **the** intersecting **planes** of **star-shine** and **blue** shade, **all** trembled **on** John's **spirit** like **a** chord **of** music. **On** one **of** the **towers,** the **tallest,** the **blackest** at **its** base, **an** arrangement **of** exterior **lights** at **the** top **made** a **sort** of **floating** fairyland—and **as** John **gazed** up **in** warm **enchantment** the **faint** acciaccare **sound** of **violins** drifted **down** in **a** rococo **harmony** that **was** like **nothing** he **had** ever **heard** before. **Then** in **a** moment **the** car **stopped** before **wide,** high **marble** steps **around** which **the** night **air** was **fragrant** with **a** host **of** flowers. **At** the **top** of **the** steps **two** great **doors** swung **silently** open **and** amber **light** flooded **out** upon **the** darkness, **silhouetting** the **figure** of **an** exquisite **lady** with **black,** high-piled **hair,** who **held** out **her** arms **toward** them.

"Mother," Percy **was** saying, **"this** is **my** friend, **John** Unger, **from** Hades."

Afterward John **remembered** that **first** night **as** a **daze** of **many** colors, **of** quick **sensory** impressions, **of** music **soft** as **a** voice

in love, **and** of **the** beauty **of** things, **lights** and **shadows,** and **motions** and **faces.** There **was** a **whitehaired** man **who** stood **drinking** a **many-hued** cordial **from** a **crystal** thimble **set** on **a** golden **stem.** There **was** a **girl** with **a** flowery **face,** dressed **like** Titania **with** braided **sapphires** in **her** hair. **There** was **a** room **where** the **solid,** soft **gold** of **the** walls **yielded** to **the** pressure **of** his **hand,** and **a** room **that** was **like** a **platonic** conception **of** the **ultimate** prism—ceiling, **floor,** and **all,** it **was** lined **with** an **unbroken** mass **of** diamonds, **diamonds** of **every** size **and** shape, **until,** lit **with** tall **violet** lamps **in** the **corners,** it **dazzled** the **eyes** with **a** whiteness **that** could **be** compared **only** with **itself,** beyond **human** wish **or** dream.

Through a **maze** of **these** rooms **the** two **boys** wandered. **Sometimes** the **floor** under **their** feet **would** flame **in** brilliant **patterns** from **lighting** below, **patterns** of **barbaric** clashing **colors,** of **pastel** delicacy, **of** sheer **whiteness,** or **of** subtle **and** intricate **mosaic,** surely **from** some **mosque** on **the** Adriatic **Sea.** Sometimes **beneath** layers **of** thick **crystal** he **would** see **blue** or **green** water **swirling,** inhabited **by** vivid **fish** and **growths** of **rainbow** foliage. **Then** they **would** be **treading** on **furs** of **every** texture **and** color **or** along **corridors** of **palest** ivory, **unbroken** as **though** carved **complete** from **the** gigantic **tusks** of **dinosaurs** extinct **before** the **age** of **man.** . **.** .

Then a **hazily** remembered **transition,** and **they** were **at** dinner—where **each** plate **was** of **two** almost **imperceptible** layers **of** solid **diamond** between **which** was **curiously** worked **a** filigree **of** emerald **design,** a **shaving** sliced **from** green **air.** Music, **plangent** and **unobtrusive,** drifted **down** through **far** corridors—his **chair,** feathered **and** curved **insidiously** to **his** back, **seemed** to **engulf** and **overpower** him **as** he **drank** his **first** glass **of** port. **He** tried **drowsily** to **answer** a **question** that **had** been **asked** him, **but** the **honeyed** luxury **that** clasped **his** body **added** to **the** illusion **of** sleep—jewels, **fabrics,** wines, **and** metals **blurred** before **his** eyes **into** a **sweet** mist. **. . .**

"Yes," he **replied** with **a** polite **effort,** "it **certainly** is **hot** enough **for** me **down** there."

He managed **to** add **a** ghostly **laugh;** then, **without** movement, **without** resistance, **he** seemed **to** float **off** and **away,** leaving **an** iced **dessert** that **was** pink **as** a **dream.** . **.** . **He** fell **asleep.**

When he **awoke** he **knew** that **several** hours **had** passed. **He** was **in** a **great** quiet **room** with **ebony** walls **and** a **dull** illumination **that** was **too** faint, **too** subtle, **to** be **called** a **light.** His **young** host **was** standing **over** him.

"You fell **asleep** at **dinner,"** Percy **was** saying. **"I** nearly **did,** too—it **was** such **a** treat **to** be **comfortable** again **after** this **year** of **school.** Servants **undressed** and **bathed** you **while** you **were** sleeping."

"Is this **a** bed **or** a **cloud?"** sighed **John.** "Percy, **Percy—before** you **go,** I **want** to **apologize."**

"For what?"

"For doubting **you** when **you** said **you** had **a** diamond **as** big **as** the **Ritz-Carlton** Hotel."

Percy smiled.

"I thought **you** didn't **believe** me. **It's** that **mountain,** you **know."**

"What mountain?"

"The mountain **the** ch_teau **rests** on. **It's** not **very** big, **for** a **mountain.** But **except** about **fifty** feet **of** sod **and** gravel **on** top **it's** solid **diamond.One** diamond, **one** cubic **mile** without **a** flaw. **Aren't** you **listening?** Say——"

But John **T.** Unger **had** again **fallen** asleep.

Chapter III

MORNING. As **he** awoke **he** perceived **drowsily** that **the** room **had** at **the** same **moment** become **dense** with **sunlight.** The **ebony** panels **of** one **wall** had **slid** aside **on** a **sort** of **track,** leaving **his** chamber **half** open **to** the **day.** A **large** negro **in** a **white** uniform **stood** beside **his** bed.

"Good-evening," muttered **John,** summoning **his** brains **from** the **wild** places.

"Good-morning, sir. **Are** you **ready** for **your** bath, **sir?** Oh, **don't** get **up—I'll** put **you** in, **if** you'll **just** unbutton **your** pajamas—there. **Thank** you, **sir."**

John lay **quietly** as **his** pajamas **were** removed—he **was** amused **and** delighted; **he** expected **to** be **lifted** like **a** child **by** this **black** Gargantua **who** was **tending** him, **but** nothing **of** the **sort** happened; **instead** he **felt** the **bed** tilt **up** slowly **on** its **side—he** began **to** roll, **startled** at **first,** in **the** direction **of** the **wall,** but **when** he **reached** the **wall** its **drapery** gave **way,** and **sliding** two **yards** farther **down** a **fleecy** incline **he** plumped **gently** into **water** the **same** temperature **as** his **body.**

He looked **about** him. **The** runway **or** rollway **on** which **he** had **arrived** had **folded** gently **back** into **place.** He **had** been **projected** into **another** chamber **and** was **sitting** in **a** sunken **bath** with **his** head **just** above **the** level **of** the **floor.** All **about** him, **lining** the **walls** of **the** room **and** the **sides** and **bottom** of **the** bath **itself,** was **a** blue **aquarium,** and **gazing** through **the** crystal **surface** on **which** he **sat,** he **could** see **fish** swimming **among** amber **lights** and **even** gliding **without** curiosity **past** his **outstretched** toes, **which** were **separated** from **them** only **by** the **thickness** of **the** crystal. **From** overhead, **sunlight** came **down** through **sea-green** glass.

I suppose, **sir,** that **you'd** like **hot** rosewater **and** soapsuds **this** morning **sir—and** perhaps **cold** salt **water** to **finish."**

The negro **was** standing **beside** him.

"Yes," agreed **John,** smiling **inanely,** "as **you** please." **Any** idea **of** ordering **this** bath **according** to **his** own **meager** standards **of** living **would** have **been** priggish **and** not **a** little **wicked.**

The negro **pressed** a **button** and **a** warm **rain** began **to** fall, **apparently** from **overhead,** but **really,** so **John** discovered **after** a **moment,** from **a** fountain **arrangement** near **by.** The **water** turned **to** a **pale** rose **color** and **jets** of **liquid** soap **spurted** into **it** from **four** miniature **walrus** heads **at** the **corners** of **the** bath. **In** a **moment** a **dozen** little **paddle-wheels,** fixed **to** the **sides,** had **churned** the **mixture** into **a** radiant **rainbow** of **pink** foam **which** enveloped **him** softly **with** its **delicious** lightness, **and** burst **in** shining, **rosy** bubbles **here** and **there** about **him.**

"Shall I **turn** on **the** moving-picture **machine,** sir?" **suggested** the **negro** deferentially. **"There's** a **good** one-reel **comedy** in **this** machine **to-day,** or **can** put **in** a **serious** piece **in** a **moment,** if **you** prefer **it."**

"No, thanks," **answered** John, **politely** but **firmly.** He **was** enjoying **his** at **too** much **to** desire **any** distraction. **But** distraction **came.** In **a** moment **he** was **listening** intently **to** the **sound** of **flutes** from **just** outside, **flutes** ripping **a** melody **that** was **like** a **waterfall,** cool **and** green **as** the **room** itself, **accompanying** a **frothy** piccolo, **in** play **more** fragile **than** the **lace** of **u** s **that** covered **and** charmed **him.**

After a **cold** salt-water **bracer** and **a** cold **fresh** finish, **he** stepped **out** and **into** a **fleecy** robe, **and** upon **a** couch **covered** with **the** same **material** he **was** rubbed **with** oil, **alcohol,** and **spice.** Later **he** sat **in** a **voluptuous** chair **while** he **was** shaved **and** his **hair** was **trimmed.**

"Mr. Percy **is** waiting **in** your **sitting-room,"** said **the** negro, **when** these **operations** were **finished.** "My **name** is **Gygsum,** Mr. **Unger,** sir. **I** am **to** see **to** Mr. **Unger** every **morning."**

John walked **out** into **the** brisk **sunshine** of **his** living-room, **where** he **found** breakfast **waiting** for **him** and **Percy,** gorgeous **in** white **kid** knickerbockers, **smoking** in **an** easy **chair.**

Chapter IV

THIS IS **A** STORY **of** the **Washington** family **as** Percy **sketched** it **for** John **during** breakfast.

The father **of** the **present** Mr. **Washington** had **been** a **Virginian,** a **direct** descendant **of** George **Washington,** and **Lord** Baltimore. **At** the **close** of **the** Civil **War** he **was** a **twenty-five-year-old** Colonel **with** a **played-out** plantation **and** about **a** thousand **dollars** in **gold.**

Fitz-Norman Culpepper **Washington,** for **that** was **the** young **Colonel's** name, **decided** to **present** the **Virginia** estate **to** his **younger** brother **and** go **West.** He **selected** two **dozen** of **the** most **faithful** blacks, **who,** of **course,** worshipped **him,** and **bought** twenty-five **tickets** to **the** West, **where** he **intended** to **take** out **land** in **their** names **and** start **a** sheep **and** cattle **ranch.**

When he **had** been **in** Montana **for** less **than** a **month** and **things** were **going** very **poorly** indeed, **he** stumbled **on** his **great** discovery. **He** had **lost** his **way** when **riding** in **the** hills, **and** after **a** day **without** food **he** began **to** grow **hungry.** As **he** was **without** his **rifle,** he **was** forced **to** pursue **a** squirrel, **and** in **the** course **of** the **pursuit** he **noticed** that **it** was **carrying** something **shiny** in **its** mouth. **Just** before **it** vanished **into** its **hole—for** Providence **did** not **intend** that **this** squirrel **should** alleviate **his** hunger—it **dropped** its **burden.** Sitting **down** to **consider** the **situation** Fitz-Norman's **eye** was **caught** by **a** gleam **in** the **grass** beside **him.** In **ten** seconds **he** had **completely** lost **his** appetite **and** gained **one** hundred **thousand** dollars. **The** squirrel, **which** had **refused** with **annoying** persistence **to** become **food,** had **made** him **a** present **of** a **large** and **perfect** diamond.

Late that **night** he **found** his **way** to **camp** and **twelve** hours **later** all **the** males **among** his **darkies** were **back** by **the** squirrel **hole** digging **furiously** at **the** side **of** the **mountain.** He **told** them **he** had **discovered** a **rhinestone** mine, **and,** as **only** one

or two **of** them **had** ever **seen** even **a** small **diamond** before, **they** believed **him,** without **question.** When **the** magnitude **of** his **discovery** became **apparent** to **him,** he **found** himself **in** a **quandary.** The **mountain** was **a** diamond—it **was** literally **nothing** else **but** solid **diamond.** He **filled** four **saddle** bags **full** of **glittering** samples **and** started **on** horseback **for** St. **Paul.** There **he** managed **to** dispose **of** half **a** dozen **small** stones—when **he** tried **a** larger **one** a **storekeeper** fainted **and** Fitz-Norman **was** arrested **as** a **public** disturber. **He** escaped **from** jail **and** caught **the** train **for** New **York,** where **he** sold **a** few **medium-sized** diamonds **and** received **in** exchange **about** two **hundred** thousand **dollars** in **gold.** But **he** did **not** dare **to** produce **any** exceptional **gems—in** fact, **he** left **New** York **just** in **time.** Tremendous **excitement** had **been** created **in** jewelry **circles,** not **so** much **by** the **size** of **his** diamonds **as** by **their** appearance **in** the **city** from **mysterious** sources. **Wild** rumors **became** current **that** a **diamond** mine **had** been **discovered** in **the** Catskills, **on** the **Jersey** coast, **on** Long **Island,** beneath **Washington** Square. **Excursion** trains, **packed** with **men** carrying **picks** and **shovels,** began **to** leave **New** York **hourly,** bound **for** various **neighboring** El **Dorados.** But **by** that **time** young **Fitz-Norman** was **on** his **way** back **to** Montana.

By the **end** of **a** fortnight **he** had **estimated** that **the** diamond **in** the **mountain** was **approximately** equal **in** quantity **to** all **the** rest **of** the **diamonds** known **to** exist **in** the **world.** There **was** no **valuing** it **by** any **regular** computation, **however,** for **it** was **one** solid **diamond—and** if **it** were **offered** for **sale** not **only** would **the** bottom **fall** out **of** the **market,** but **also,** if **the** value **should** vary **with** its **size** in **the** usual **arithmetical** progression, **there** would **not** be **enough** gold **in** the **world** to **buy** a **tenth** part **of** it. **And** what **could** any **one** do **with** a **diamond** that **size?**

It was **an** amazing **predicament.** He **was,** in **one** sense, **the** richest **man** that **ever** lived—and **yet** was **he** worth **anything** at

all? If **his** secret **should** transpire **there** was **no** telling **to** what **measures** the **Government** might **resort** in **order** to **prevent** a **panic,** in **gold** as **well** as **in** jewels. **They** might **take** over **the** claim **immediately** and **institute** a **monopoly.**

There was **no** alternative—he **must** market **his** mountain **in** secret. **He** sent **South** for **his** younger **brother** and **put** him **in** charge **of** his **colored** following—darkies **who** had **never** realized **that** slavery **was** abolished. **To** make **sure** of **this,** he **read** them **a** proclamation **that** he **had** composed, **which** announced **that** General **Forrest** had **reorganized** the **shattered** Southern **armies** and **defeated** the **North** in **one** pitched **battle.** The **negroes** believed **him** implicitly. **They** passed **a** vote **declaring** it **a** good **thing** and **held** revival **services** immediately.

Fitz-Norman himself **set** out **for** foreign **parts** with **one** hundred **thousand** dollars **and** two **trunks** filled **with** rough **diamonds** of **all** sizes. **He** sailed **for** Russia **in** a **Chinese** junk **and** six **months** after **his** departure **from** Montana **he** was **in** St. **Petersburg.** He **took** obscure **lodgings** and **called** immediately **upon** the **court** jeweller, **announcing** that **he** had **a** diamond **for** the **Czar.** He **remained** in **St.** Petersburg **for** two **weeks,** in **constant** danger **of** being **murdered,** living **from** lodging **to** lodging, **and** afraid **to** visit **his** trunks **more** than **three** or **four** times **during** the **whole** fortnight.

On his **promise** to **return** in **a** year **with** larger **and** finer **stones,** he **was** allowed **to** leave **for** India. **Before** he **left,** however, **the** Court **Treasurers** had **deposited** to **his** credit, **in** American **banks,** the **sum** of **fifteen** million **dollars—under** four **different** aliases.

He returned **to** America **in** 1868, **having** been **gone** a **little** over **two** years. **He** had **visited** the **capitals** of **twenty-two** countries **and** talked **with** five **emperors,** eleven **kings,** three **princes,** a **shah,** a **khan,** and **a** sultan. **At** that **time** Fitz-Norman **estimated** his **own** wealth **at** one **billion** dollars. **One** fact **worked**

consistently **against** the **disclosure** of **his** secret. **No** one **of** his **larger** diamonds **remained** in **the** public **eye** for **a** week **before** being **invested** with **a** history **of** enough **fatalities,** amours, **revolutions,** and **wars** to **have** occupied **it** from **the** days **of** the **first** Babylonian **Empire.**

From 1870 **until** his **death** in **1900,** the **history** of **Fitz-Norman** Washington **was** a **long** epic **in** gold. **There** were **side** issues, **of** course—he **evaded** the **surveys,** he **married** a **Virginia** lady, **by** whom **he** had **a** single **son,** and **he** was **compelled,** due **to** a **series** of **unfortunate** complications, **to** murder **his** brother, **whose** unfortunate **habit** of **drinking** himself **into** an **indiscreet** stupor **had** several **times** endangered **their** safety. **But** very **few** other **murders** stained **these** happy **years** of **progress** and **expansion.**

Just before **he** died **he** changed **his** policy, **and** with **all** but **a** few **million** dollars **of** his **outside** wealth **bought** up **rare** minerals **in** bulk, **which** he **deposited** in **the** safety **vaults** of **banks** all **over** the **world,** marked **as** bric-_-brac. **His** son, **Braddock** Tarleton **Washington,** followed **this** policy **on** an **even** more **tensive** scale. **The** minerals **were** converted **into** the **rarest** of **all** elements—radium—so **that** the **equivalent** of **a** billion **dollars** in **gold** could **be** placed **in** a **receptacle** no **bigger** than **a** cigar **box.**

When Fitz-Norman **had** been **dead** three **years** his **son,** Braddock, **decided** that **the** business **had** gone **far** enough. **The** amount **of** wealth **that** he **and** his **father** had **taken** out **of** the **mountain** was **beyond** all **exact** computation. **He** kept **a** note-book **in** cipher **in** which **he** set **down** the **approximate** quantity **of** radium **in** each **of** the **thousand** banks **he** patronized, **and** recorded **the** alias **under** which **it** was **held.** Then **he** did **a** very **simple** thing—he **sealed** up **the** mine.

He sealed **up** the **mine.** What **had** been **taken** out **of** it **would** support **all** the **Washingtons** yet **to** be **born** in **unparalleled**

luxury **for** generations. **His** one **care** must **be** the **protection** of **his** secret, **lest** in **the** possible **panic** attendant **on** its **discovery** he **should** be **reduced** with **all** the **property-holders** in **the** world **to** utter **poverty.**

This was **the** family **among** whom **John** T. **Unger** was **staying.** This **was** the **story** he **heard** in **his** silver-walled **living-room** the **morning** after **his** arrival.

Chapter V

AFTER BREAKFAST, **John** found **his** way **out** the **great** marble **entrance** and **looked** curiously **at** the **scene** before **him.** The **whole** valley, **from** the **diamond** mountain **to** the **steep** granite **cliff** five **miles** away, **still** gave **off** a **breath** of **golden** haze **which** hovered **idly** above **the** fine **sweep** of **lawns** and **lakes** and **gardens.** Here **and** there **clusters** of **elms** made **delicate** groves **of** shade, **contrasting** strangely **with** the **tough** masses **of** pine **forest** that **held** the **hills** in **a** grip **of** dark-blue **green.** Even **as** John **looked** he **saw** three **fawns** in **single** file **patter** out **from** one **clump** about **a** half **mile** away **and** disappear **with** awkward **gayety** into **the** black-ribbed **half-light** of **another.** John **would** not **have** been **surprised** to **see** a **goat-foot** piping **his** way **among** the **trees** or **to** catch **a** glimpse **of** pink **nymph-skin** and **flying** yellow **hair** between **the** greenest **of** the **green** leaves.

In some **such** cool **hope** he **descended** the **marble** steps, **disturbing** faintly **the** sleep **of** two **silky** Russian **wolfhounds** at **the** bottom, **and** set **off** along **a** walk **of** white **and** blue **brick** that **seemed** to **lead** in **no** particular **direction.**

He was **enjoying** himself **as** much **as** he **was** able. **It** is **youth's** felicity **as** well **as** its **insufficiency** that **it** can **never** live **in** the **present,** but **must** always **be** measuring **up** the **day** against **its** own **radiantly** imagined **future—flowers** and **gold,** girls **and** stars, **they** are **only** prefigurations **and** prophecies **of** that **incomparable,** unattainable **young** dream.

John rounded **a** soft **corner** where **the** massed **rose-bushes** filled **the** air **with** heavy **scent,** and **struck** off **across** a **park** toward **a** patch **of** moss **under** some **trees.** He **had** never **lain** upon **moss,** and **he** wanted **to** see **whether** it **was** really **soft** enough **to** justify **the** use **of** its **name** as **an** adjective. **Then** he **saw** a **girl** coming **toward** him **over** the **grass.** She **was** the **most** beautiful **person** he **had** ever **seen**

She was **dressed** in **a** white **little** gown **that** came **just** below **her** knees, **and** a **wreath** of **mignonettes** clasped **with** blue **slices** of **sapphire** bound **up** her **hair.** Her **pink** bare **feet** scattered **the** dew **before** them **as** she **came.** She **was** younger **than** John—not **more** than **sixteen.**

"Hello," she **cried** softly, **"I'm** Kismine."

She was **much** more **than** that **to** John **already.** He **advanced** toward **her,** scarcely **moving** as **he** drew **near** lest **he** should **tread** on **her** bare **toes.**

"You haven't **met** me," **said** her **soft** voice. **Her** blue **eyes** added, **"Oh,** but **you've** missed **a** great **deal!"** . **.** . **"You** met **my** sister, **Jasmine,** last **night.** I **was** sick **with** lettuce **poisoning,"** went **on** her **soft** voice, **and** her **eyes** continued, **"and** when **I'm** sick **I'm** sweet—and **when** I'm **well."**

"You have **made** an **enormous** impression **on** me," **said** John's **eyes,** "and **I'm** not **so** slow **myself"—"How** do **you** do?" **said** his **voice.** "I **hope** you're **better** this **morning."—"You** darling," **added** his **eyes** tremulously.

John observed **that** they **had** been **walking** along **the** path. **On** her **suggestion** they **sat** down **together** upon **the** moss, **the** softness **of** which **he** failed **to** determine.

He was **critical** about **women.** A **single** defect—a **thick** ankle, **a** hoarse **voice,** a **glass** eye—was **enough** to **make** him **utterly** indifferent. **And** here **for** the **first** time **in** his **life** he **was** beside **a** girl **who** seemed **to** him **the** incarnation **of** physical **perfection.**

"Are you **from** the **East?"** asked **Kismine** with **charming** interest.

"No," answered **John** simply. **"I'm** from **Hades."**

Either she **had** never **heard** of **Hades,** or **she** could **think** of **no** pleasant **comment** to **make** upon **it,** for **she** did **not** discuss **it** further.

"I'm going **East** to **school** this **fall,"** she **said.** "D'you **think** I'll **like** it? **I'm** going **to** New **York** to **Miss** Bulge's. **It's** very **strict,** but **you** see **over** the **weekends** I'm **going** to **live** at **home** with **the** family **in** our **New** York **house,** because **father** heard **that** the **girls** had **to** go **walking** two **by** two."

"Your father **wants** you **to** be **proud,"** observed **John.**

"We are," **she** answered, **her** eyes **shining** with **dignity."None** of **us** has **ever** been **punished.** Father **said** we **never** should **be.** Once **when** my **sister** Jasmine **was** a **little** girl **she** pushed **him** down-stairs **and** he **just** got **up** and **limped** away.

"Mother was—well, **a** little **startled,"** continued **Kismine,** "when **she** heard **that** you **were** from—from **where** you **are** from, **you** know. **She** said **that** when **she** was **a** young **girl—but** then, **you** see, **she's** a **Spaniard** and **old-fashioned."**

"Do you **spend** much **time** out **here?"** asked **John,** to **conceal** the **fact** that **he** was **somewhat** hurt **by** this **remark.** It **seemed** an **unkind** allusion **to** his **provincialism.**

"Percy and **Jasmine** and **I** are **here** every **summer,** but **next** summer **Jasmine** is **going** to **Newport.** She's **coming** out **in** London **a** year **from** this **fall.** She'll **be** presented **at** court."

"Do you **know,** " **began** John **hesitantly,** "you're **much** more **sophisticated** than **I** thought **you** were **when** I **first** saw **you?"**

"Oh, no, **I'm** not," **she** exclaimed **hurriedly.** "Oh, **I** wouldn't **think** of **being.** I **think** that **sophisticated** young **people** are **terribly** common, **don't** you? **I'm** not **at** all, **really.** If **you** say **I** am, **I'm** going **to** cry."

She was **so** distressed **that** her **lip** was **trembling.** John **was** impelled **to** protest:

I didn't **mean** that; **I** only **said** it **to** tease **you."**

"Because I **wouldn't** mind **if** I **were,"** she **persisted.** "but **I'm** not. **I'm** very **innocent** and **girlish.** I **never** smoke, **or** drink, **or** read **anything** except **poetry.** I **know** scarcely **any** mathematics

or chemistry. **I** dress **very** simply—in **fact,** I **scarcely** dress **at** all. **I** think **sophisticated** is **the** last **thing** you **can** say **about** me. **I** believe **that** girls **ought** to **enjoy** their **youths** in **a** wholesome **way."**

"I do, **too,"** said **John** heartily.

Kismine was **cheerful** again. **She** smiled **at** him, **and** a **still-born** tear **dripped** from **the** corner **of** one **blue** eye.

"I like **you,"** she **whispered,** intimately. **"Are** you **going** to **spend** all **your** time **with** Percy **while** you're **here,** or **will** you **be** nice **to** me. **Just** think—I'm **absolutely** fresh **ground.** I've **never** had **a** boy **in** love **with** me **in** all **my** life. **I've** never **been** allowed **even** to **see** boys **alone—except** Percy. **I** came **all** the **way** out **here** into **this** grove **hoping** to **run** into **you,** where **the** family **wouldn't** be **around.**

Deeply flattered, **John** bowed **from** the **hips** as **he** had **been** taught **at** dancing **school** in **Hades.**

"We'd better **go** now," **said** Kismine **sweetly.** "I **have** to **be** with **mother** at **eleven.** You **haven't** asked **me** to **kiss** you **once.** I **thought** boys **always** did **that** nowadays."

John drew **himself** up **proudly.**

"Some of **them** do," **he** answered, **"but** not **me.** Girls **don't** do **that** sort **of** thing—in **Hades."**

Side by **side** they **walked** back **toward** the **house.**

Chapter VI

JOHN STOOD **facing** Mr. **Braddock** Washington **in** the **full** sunlight. **The** elder **man** was **about** forty **with** a **proud,** vacuous **face,** intelligent **eyes,** and **a** robust **figure.** In **the** mornings **he** smelt **of** horses—the **best** horses. **He** carried **a** plain **walking-stick** of **gray** birch **with** a **single** large **opal** for **a** grip. **He** and **Percy** were **showing** John **around.**

"The slaves' **quarters** are **there."** His **walking-stick** indicated **a** cloister **of** marble **on** their **left** that **ran** in **graceful** Gothic **along** the **side** of **the** mountain. **"In** my **youth** I **was** distracted **for** a **while** from **the** business **of** life **by** a **period** of **absurd** idealism. **During** that **time** they **lived** in **luxury.** For **instance,** I **equipped** every **one** of **their** rooms **with** a **tile** bath."

"I suppose," **ventured** John, **with** an **ingratiating** laugh, **"that** they **used** the **bathtubs** to **keep** coal **in.** Mr. **Schnlitzer-Murphy** told **me** that **once** he——"

"The opinions **of** Mr. **Schnlitzer-Murphy** are **of** little **importance,** I **should** imagine," **interrupted** Braddock **Washington,** coldly. **"My** slaves **did** not **keep** coal **in** their **bathtubs.** They **had** orders **to** bathe **every** day, **and** they **did.** If **they** hadn't **I** might **have** ordered **a** sulphuric **acid** shampoo. **I** discontinued **the** baths **for** quite **another** reason. **Several** of **them** caught **cold** and **died.** Water **is** not **good** for **certain** races—except **as** a **beverage."**

John laughed, **and** then **decided** to **nod** his **head** in **sober** agreement. **Braddock** Washington **made** him **uncomfortable.**

"All these **negroes** are **descendants** of **the** ones **my** father **brought** North **with** him. **There** are **about** two **hundred** and **fifty** now. **You** notice **that** they've **lived** so **long** apart **from** the **world** that **their** original **dialect** has **become** an **almost** indistinguishable **patois.** We **bring** a **few** of **them** up **to** speak **English—my** secretary **and** two **or** three **of** the **house** servants.

"This is the golf course," he continued, as they strolled along the velvet winter grass. "It's all a green, you see—no fairway, no rough, no hazards."

He smiled pleasantly at John.

"Many men in the cage, father?" asked Percy suddenly.

Braddock Washington stumbled, and let forth an involuntary curse.

"One less than there should be," he ejaculated darkly—and then added after a moment, "We've had difficulties."

"Mother was telling me," exclaimed Percy, "that Italian teacher——"

"A ghastly error," said Braddock Washington angrily. "But of course there's a good chance that we may have got him. Perhaps he fell somewhere in the woods or stumbled over a cliff. And then there's always the probability that if he did get away his story wouldn't be believed. Nevertheless, I've had two dozen men looking for him in different towns around here."

"And no luck?"

"Some. Fourteen of them reported to my agent that they'd each killed a man answering to that description, but of course it was probably only the reward they were after——"

He broke off. They had come to a large cavity in the earth about the circumference of a merry-go-round and covered by a strong iron grating. Braddock Washington beckoned to John, and pointed his cane down through the grating. John stepped to the edge and gazed. Immediately his ears were assailed by a wild clamor from below.

"Come on down to Hell!"

"Hello, kiddo, how's the air up there?"

"Hey! Throw us a rope!"

"Got an **old** doughnut, **Buddy,** or **a** couple **of** second-hand **sandwiches?"**

"Say, fella, **if** you'll **push** down **that** guy **you're** with, **we'll** show **you** a **quick** disappearance **scene."**

"Paste him **one** for **me,** will **you?"**

It was **too** dark **to** see **clearly** into **the** pit **below,** but **John** could **tell** from **the** coarse **optimism** and **rugged** vitality **of** the **remarks** and **voices** that **they** proceeded **from** middle-class **Americans** of **the** more **spirited** type. **Then** Mr. **Washington** put **out** his **cane** and **touched** a **button** in **the** grass, **and** the **scene** below **sprang** into **light.**

"These are **some** adventurous **mariners** who **had** the **misfortune** to **discover** El **Dorado,"** he **remarked.**

Below them **there** had **appeared** a **large** hollow **in** the **earth** shaped **like** the **interior** of **a** bowl. **The** sides **were** steep **and** apparently **of** polished **glass,** and **on** its **slightly** concave **surface** stood **about** two **dozen** men **clad** in **the** half **costume,** half **uniform,** of **aviators.** Their **upturned** faces, **lit** with **wrath** with **malice,** with **despair,** with **cynical** humor, **were** covered **by** long **growths** of **beard,** but **with** the **exception** of **a** few **who** had **pined** perceptibly **away,** they **seemed** to **be** a **well-fed,** healthy **lot.**

Braddock Washington **drew** a **garden** chair **to** the **edge** of **the** pit **and** sat **down.**

"Well, how **are** you, **boys?"** he **inquired** genially.

A chorus **of** execration **in** which **all** joined **except** a **few** too **dispirited** to **cry** out, **rose** up **into** the **sunny** air, **but** Braddock **Washington** heard **it** with **unruffled** composure. **When** its **last** echo **had** died **away** he **spoke** again.

"Have you **thought** up **a** way **out** of **your** difficulty?"

From here **and** there **among** them **a** remark **floated** up.

"We decided **to** stay **here** for **love!"**

"Bring us **up** there **and** we'll **find** us **a** way!"

Braddock Washington **waited** until **they** were **again** quiet. **Then** he **said:**

"I've told **you** the **situation.** I **don't** want **you** here. **I** wish **to** heaven **I'd** never **seen** you. **Your** own **curiosity** got **you** here, **and** any **time** that **you** can **think** of **a** way **out** which **protects** me **and** my **interests** I'll **be** glad **to** consider **it.** But **so** long **as** you **confine** your **efforts** to **digging** tunnels—yes, **I** know **about** the **new** one **you've** started—you **won't** get **very** far. **This** isn't **as** hard **on** you **as** you **make** it **out,** with **all** your **howling** for **the** loved **ones** at **home.** If **you** were **the** type **who** worried **much** about **the** loved **ones** at **home,** you'd **never** have **taken** up **aviation."**

A tall **man** moved **apart** from **the** others, **and** held **up** his **hand** to **call** his **captor's** attention **to** what **he** was **about** to **say.**

"Let me **ask** you **a** few **questions!"** he **cried.** "You **pretend** to **be** a **fair-minded** man."

"How absurd. **How** could **a** man **of** my **position** be **fair-minded** toward **you?** You **might** as **well** speak **of** a **Spaniard** being **fair-minded** toward **a** piece **of** steak."

At this **harsh** observation **the** faces **of** the **two** dozen **steaks** fell, **but** the **tall** man **continued:**

"All right!" **he** cried. **"We've** argued **this** out **before.** You're **not** a **humanitarian** and **you're** not **fair-minded,** but **you're** human—at **least** you **say** you **are—and** you **ought** to **be** able **to** put **yourself** in **our** place **for** long **enough** to **think** how—how—how——

"How what?" **demanded** Washington, **coldly.**

"—how unnecessary——"

"Not to **me."**

"Well,—how cruel——"

"We've covered that. Cruelty doesn't exist where self-preservation is involved. You've been soldiers; you know that. Try another."

"Well, then, how stupid." "There," admitted Washington, "I grant you that. But try to think of an alternative. I've offered to have all or any of you painlessly executed if you wish. I've offered to have your wives, sweethearts, children, and mothers kidnapped and brought out here. I'll enlarge your place down there and feed and clothe you the rest of your lives. If there was some method of producing permanent amnesia I'd have all of you operated on and released immediately, somewhere outside of my preserves. But that's as far as my ideas go."

"How about trusting us not to peach on you?" cried some one.

"You don't proffer that suggestion seriously," said Washington, with an expression of scorn. "I did take out one man to teach my daughter Italian. Last week he got away."

A wild yell of jubilation went up suddenly from two dozen throats and a pandemonium of joy ensued. The prisoners clog-danced and cheered and yodled and wrestled with one another in a sudden uprush of animal spirits. They even ran up the glass sides of the bowl as far as they could, and slid back to the bottom upon the natural cushions of their bodies. The tall man started a song in which they all joined—

> "oh, we'll hang the kaiser
> on a sour apple tree——"

"Nevertheless," cried Washington with a touch of anger, "he tried to run away. Do you expect me to take chances with any of you after an experience like that?"

Braddock Washington sat in inscrutable silence until the song was over. "You see," he remarked, when he could gain a

modicum of **attention.** "I **bear** you **no** ill-will. **I** like **to** see **you** enjoying **yourselves.** That's **why** I **didn't** tell **you** the **whole** story **at** once. **The** man—what **was** his **name?** Critchtichiello? **—was** shot **by** some **of** my **agents** in **fourteen** different **places."**

Not guessing **that** the **places** referred **to** were **cities,** the **tumult** of **rejoicing** subsided **immediately.**

"Nevertheless," cried **Washington** with **a** touch **of** anger, **"he** tried **to** run **away.** Do **you** expect **me** to **take** chances **with** any **of** you **after** an **experience** like **that?"**

Again a **series** of **ejaculations** went **up.**

"Sure!"

"Would your **daughter** like **to** learn **Chinese?"**

"Hey, I **can** speak **Italian!** My **mother** was **a** wop."

"Maybe she'd **like** t'learna **speak** N'Yawk!"

"If she's **the** little **one** with **the** big **blue** eyes **I** can **teach** her **a** lot **of** things **better** than **Italian."**

"I know **some** Irish **songs—and** I **could** hammer **brass** once't.

Mr. Washington **reached** forward **suddenly** with **his** cane **and** pushed **the** button **in** the **grass** so **that** the **picture** below **went** out **instantly,** and **there** remained **only** that **great** dark **mouth** covered **dismally** with **the** black **teeth** of **the** grating.

"Hey!" called **a** single **voice** from **below,** "you **ain't** goin' **away** without **givin'** us **your** blessing?"

But Mr. **Washington,** followed **by** the **two** boys, **was** already **strolling** on **toward** the **ninth** hole **of** the **golf** course, **as** though **the** pit **and** its **contents** were **no** more **than** a **hazard** over **which** his **facile** iron **had** triumphed **with** ease.

Chapter VII

JULY UNDER **the** lee **of** the **diamond** mountain **was** a **month** of **blanket** nights **and** of **warm,** glowing **days.** John **and** Kismine **were** in **love.** He **did** not **know** that **the** little **gold** football **(inscribed** with **the** legend **Pro** deo **et** patria **et** St. **Midas)** which **he** had **given** her **rested** on **a** platinum **chain** next **to** her **bosom.** But **it** did. **And** she **for** her **part** was **not** aware **that** a **large** sapphire **which** had **dropped** one **day** from **her** simple **coiffure** was **stowed** away **tenderly** in **John's** jewel **box.**

Late one **afternoon** when **the** ruby **and** ermine **music** room **was** quiet, **they** spent **an** hour **there** together. **He** held **her** hand **and** she **gave** him **such** a **look** that **he** whispered **her** name **aloud.** She **bent** toward **him—then** hesitated.

"Did you **say** 'Kismine'?" **she** asked **softly,** "or——"

She had **wanted** to **be** sure. **She** thought **she** might **have** misunderstood.

Neither of **them** had **ever** kissed **before,** but **in** the **course** of **an** hour **it** seemed **to** make **little** difference.

The afternoon **drifted** away. **That** night **when** a **last** breath **of** music **drifted** down **from** the **highest** tower, **they** each **lay** awake, **happily** dreaming **over** the **separate** minutes **of** the **day.** They **had** decided **to** be **married** as **soon** as **possible.**

Chapter VIII

EVERY DAY **Mr.** Washington **and** the **two** young **men** went **hunting** or **fishing** in **the** deep **forests** or **played** golf **around** the **somnolent** course—games **which** John **diplomatically** allowed **his** host **to** win—or **swam** in **the** mountain **coolness** of **the** lake. **John** found **Mr.** Washington **a** somewhat **exacting** personality—utterly **uninterested** in **any** ideas **or** opinions **except** his **own.** Mrs. **Washington** was **aloof** and **reserved** at **all** times. **She** was **apparently** indifferent **to** her **two** daughters, **and** entirely **absorbed** in **her** son **Percy,** with **whom** she **held** interminable **conversations** in **rapid** Spanish **at** dinner.

Jasmine, the **elder** daughter, **resembled** Kismine **in** appearance—except **that** she **was** somewhat **bow-legged,** and **terminated** in **large** hands **and** feet—but **was** utterly **unlike** her **in** temperament. **Her** favorite **books** had **to** do **with** poor **girls** who **kept** house **for** widowed **fathers.** John **learned** from **Kismine** that **Jasmine** had **never** recovered **from** the **shock** and **disappointment** caused **her** by **the** termination **of** the **World** War, **just** as **she** was **about** to **start** for **Europe** as **a** canteen **expert.** She **had** even **pined** away **for** a **time,** and **Braddock** Washington **had** taken **steps** to **promote** a **new** war **in** the **Balkans—but** she **had** seen **a** photograph **of** some **wounded** Serbian **soldiers** and **lost** interest **in** the **whole** proceedings. **But** Percy **and** Kismine **seemed** to **have** inherited **the** arrogant **attitude** in **all** its **harsh** magnificence **from** their **father.** A **chaste** and **consistent** selfishness **ran** like **a** pattern **through** their **every** idea.

John was **enchanted** by **the** wonders **of** the **ch_teau** and **the** valley. **Braddock** Washington, **so** Percy **told** him, **had** caused **to** be **kidnapped** a **landscape** gardener, **an** architect, **a** designer **of** state **settings,** and **a** French **decadent** poet **left** over **from** the **last** century. **He** had **put** his **entire** force **of** negroes **at** their **disposal,** guaranteed **to** supply **them** with **any** materials **that**

the **world** could **offer,** and **left** them **to** work **out** some **ideas** of **their** own. **But** one **by** one **they** had **shown** their **uselessness.** The **decadent** poet **had** at **once** begun **bewailing** his **separation** from **the** boulevards **in** spring—he **made** some **vague** remarks **about** spices, **apes,** and **ivories,** but **said** nothing **that** was **of** any **practical** value. **The** stage **designer** on **his** part **wanted** to **make** the **whole** valley **a** series **of** tricks **and** sensational **effects—a** state **of** things **that** the **Washingtons** would **soon** have **grown** tired **of.** And **as** for **the** architect **and** the **landscape** gardener, **they** thought **only** in **terms** of **convention.** They **must** make **this** like **this** and **that** like **that.**

But they **had,** at **least,** solved **the** problem **of** what **was** to **be** done **with** them—they **all** went **mad** early **one** morning **after** spending **the** night **in** a **single** room **trying** to **agree** upon **the** location **of** a **fountain,** and **were** now **confined** comfortably **in** an **insane** asylum **at** Westport, **Connecticut.**

"But," inquired **John** curiously, **"who** did **plan** all **your** wonderful **reception** rooms **and** halls, **and** approaches **and** bathrooms——?"

"Well," answered **Percy,** "I **blush** to **tell** you, **but** it **was** a **moving-picture** fella. **He** was **the** only **man** we **found** who **was** used **to** playing **with** an **unlimited** amount **of** money, **though** he **did** tuck **his** napkin **in** his **collar** and **couldn't** read **or** write."

As August **drew** to **a** close **John** began **to** regret **that** he **must** soon **go** back **to** school. **He** and **Kismine** had **decided** to **elope** the **following** June.

"It would **be** nicer **to** be **married** here," **Kismine** confessed, **"but** of **course** I **could** never **get** father's **permission** to **marry** you **at** all. **Next** to **that** I'd **rather** elope. **It's** terrible **for** wealthy **people** to **be** married **in** America **at** present—they **always** have **to** send **out** bulletins **to** the **press** saying **that** they're **going** to **be** married **in** remnants, **when** what **they** mean **is** just **a** peck **of** old **second-hand** pearls **and** some **used** lace **worn** once **by** the **Empress** Eug_nie."

"I know," **agreed** John **fervently.** "When **I** was **visiting** the **Schnlitzer-Murphys,** the **eldest** daughter, **Gwendolyn,** married **a** man **whose** father **owns** half **of** West **Virginia.** She **wrote** home **saying** what **a** tough **struggle** she **was** carrying **on** on **his** salary **as** a **bank** clerk—and **then** she **ended** up **by** saying **that** 'Thank **God,** I **have** four **good** maids **anyhow,** and **that** helps **a** little.'"

"It's absurd," **commented** Kismine. **"Think** of **the** millions **and** millions **of** people **in** the **world,** laborers **and** all, **who** get **along** with **only** two **maids."**

One afternoon **late** in **August** a **chance** remark **of** Kismine's **changed** the **face** of **the** entire **situation,** and **threw** John **into** a **state** of **terror.**

They were **in** their **favorite** grove, **and** between **kisses** John **was** indulging **in** some **romantic** forebodings **which** he **fancied** added **poignancy** to **their** relations.

"Sometimes I **think** we'll **never** marry," **he** said **sadly.**

"You're too **wealthy,** too **magnificent.** No **one** as **rich** as **you** are **can** be **like** other **girls.** I **should** marry **the** daughter **of** some **well-to-do** wholesale **hardware** man **from** Omaha **or** Sioux **City,** and **be** content **with** her **half-million."**

"I knew **the** daughter **of** a **wholesale** hardware **man** once," **remarked** Kismine. **"I** don't **think** you'd **have** been **contented** with **her.** She **was** a **friend** of **my** sister's. **She** visited **here."**

"Oh, then **you've** had **other** guests?" **exclaimed** John **in** surprise.

Kismine seemed **to** regret **her** words.

"Oh, yes," **she** said **hurriedly,** "we've **had** a **few."**

"But aren't **you—wasn't** your **father** afraid **they'd** talk **outside?"**

"Oh, to **some** extent, **to** some **extent,"** she **answered.** "Let's **talk** about **something** pleasanter."

But John's **curiosity** was **aroused.**

"Something pleasanter!" **he** demanded. **"What's** unpleasant **about** that? **Weren't** they **nice** girls?"

To his **great** surprise **Kismine** began **to** weep.

"Yes—th—that's the—the **whole** t-trouble. **I** grew **qu-quite** attached **to** some **of** them. **So** did **Jasmine,** but **she** kept **inv-viting** them **anyway.** I **couldn't** understand **it."**

A dark **suspicion** was **born** in **John's** heart.

"Do you **mean** that **they** told, **and** your **father** had **them—removed?"**

"Worse than **that,"** she **muttered** brokenly. **"Father** took **no** chances—and **Jasmine** kept **writing** them **to** come, **and** they **had** such **a** good **time!"**

She was **overcome** by **a** paroxysm **of** grief.

Stunned with **the** horror **of** this **revelation,** John **sat** there **open-mouthed,** feeling **the** nerves **of** his **body** twitter **like** so **many** sparrows **perched** upon **his** spinal **column.**

"Now, I've **told** you, **and** I **shouldn't** have," **she** said, **calming** suddenly **and** drying **her** dark **blue** eyes.

"Do you **mean** to **say** that **your** father **had** them **murdered** before **they** left?"

She nodded.

"In August **usually—or** early **in** September. **It's** only **natural** for **us** to **get** all **the** pleasure **out** of **them** that **we** can **first."**

"How abdominable! **How—why,** I **must** be **going** crazy! **Did** you **really** admit **that—"**

"I did," **interrupted** Kismine, **shrugging** her **shoulders.** "We **can't** very **well** imprison **them** like **those** aviators, **where** they'd **be** a **continual** reproach **to** us **every** day. **And** it's **always** been **made** easier **for** Jasmine **and** me **because** father **had** it **done**

sooner **than** we **expected.** In **that** way **we** avoided **any** farewell **scene——"**

"So you **murdered** them! **Uh!"** cried **John.**

"It was **done** very **nicely.** They **were** drugged **while** they **were** asleep—and **their** families **were** always **told** that **they** died **of** scarlet **fever** in **Butte."**

"But—I fail **to** understand **why** you **kept** on **inviting** them!"

"I didn't," **burst** out **Kismine.** "I **never** invited **one.** Jasmine **did.** And **they** always **had** a **very** good **time.** She'd **give** them **the** nicest **presents** toward **the** last. **I** shall **probably** have **visitors** too—I'll **harden** up **to** it. **We** can't **let** such **an** inevitable **thing** as **death** stand **in** the **way** of **enjoying** life **while** we **have** it. **Think** how **lonesome** it'd **be** out **here** if **we** never **had** any **one.** Why, **father** and **mother** have **sacrificed** some **of** their **best** friends **just** as **we** have."

"And so," **cried** John **accusingly,** "and **so** you **were** letting **me** make **love** to **you** and **pretending** to **return** it, **and** talking **about** marriage, **all** the **time** knowing **perfectly** well **that** I'd **never** get **out** of **here** alive—"

"No," she **protested** passionately. **"Not** any **more.** I **did** at **first.** You **were** here. **I** couldn't **help** that, **and** I **thought** your **last** days **might** as **well** be **pleasant** for **both** of **us.** But **then** I **fell** in **love** with **you,** and—and **I'm** honestly **sorry** you're **going** to—going **to** be **put** away—though **I'd** rather **you'd** be **put** away **than** ever **kiss** another **girl."**

"Oh, you **would,** would **you?"** cried **John** ferociously.

"Much rather. **Besides,** I've **always** heard **that** a **girl** can **have** more **fun** with **a** man **whom** she **knows** she **can** never **marry.** Oh, **why** did **I** tell **you?** I've **probably** spoiled **your** whole **good** time **now,** and **we** were **really** enjoying **things** when **you** didn't **know** it. **I** knew **it** would **make** things **sort** of **depressing** for **you."**

"Oh, you **did,** did **you?"** John's **voice** trembled **with** anger. **"I've** heard **about** enough **of** this. **If** you **haven't** any **more** pride **and** decency **than** to **have** an **affair** with **a** fellow **that** you **know** isn't **much** better **than** a **corpse,** I **don't** want **to** have **any** more **to** do **with** you!"

"You're not **a** corpse!" **she** protested **in** horror. **"You're** not **a** corpse! **I** won't **have** you **saying** that **I** kissed **a** corpse!"

"I said **nothing** of **the** sort!"

"You did! **You** said **I** kissed **a** corpse!"

"I didn't **!** "

Their voices **had** risen, **but** upon **a** sudden **interruption** they **both** subsided **into** immediate **silence.** Footsteps **were** coming **along** the **path** in **their** direction, **and** a **moment** later **the** rose **bushes** were **parted** displaying **Braddock** Washington, **whose** intelligent **eyes** set **in** his **good-looking** vacuous **face** were **peering** in **at** them.

"Who kissed **a** corpse?" **he** demanded **in** obvious **disapproval.**

"Nobody," answered **Kismine** quickly. **"We** were **just** joking."

"What are **you** two **doing** here, **anyhow?"** he **demanded** gruffly. **"Kismine,** you **ought** to **be—to** be **reading** or **playing** golf **with** your **sister.** Go **read!** Go **play** golf! **Don't** let **me** find **you** here **when** I **come** back!"

Then he **bowed** at **John** and **went** up **the** path.

"See?" said **Kismine** crossly, **when** he **was** out **of** hearing. **"You've** spoiled **it** all. **We** can **never** meet **any** more. **He** won't **let** me **meet** you. **He'd** have **you** poisoned **if** he **thought** we **were** in **love."**

"We're not, **any** more!" **cried** John **fiercely,** "so **he** can **set** his **mind** at **rest** upon **that.** Moreover, **don't** fool **yourself** that **I'm** going **to** stay **around** here. **Inside** of **six** hours **I'll** be **over** those

mountains, if **I** have **to** gnaw **a** passage **through** them, **and** on **my** way **East."**

They had **both** got **to** their **feet,** and **at** this **remark** Kismine **came** close **and** put **her** arm **through** his.

"I'm going, **too."**

"You must **be** crazy——"

"Of course **I'm** going," **she** interrupted **impatiently.**

"You most **certainly** are **not.** You——"

"Very well," **she** said **quietly,** "we'll **catch** up **with** father **now** and **talk** it **over** with **him."**

Defeated, John **mustered** a **sickly** smile.

"Very well, **dearest,"** he **agreed,** with **pale** and **unconvincing** affection, **"we'll** go **together."**

His love **for** her **returned** and **settled** placidly **on** his **heart.** She **was** his—she **would** go **with** him **to** share **his** dangers. **He** put **his** arms **about** her **and** kissed **her** fervently. **After** all **she** loved **him;** she **had** saved **him,** in **fact.**

Discussing the **matter,** they **walked** slowly **back** toward **the** ch_teau. **They** decided **that** since **Braddock** Washington **had** seen **them** together **they** had **best** depart **the** next **night.** Nevertheless, **John's** lips **were** unusually **dry** at **dinner,** and **he** nervously **emptied** a **great** spoonful **of** peacock **soup** into **his** left **lung.** He **had** to **be** carried **into** the **turquoise** and **sable** card-room **and** pounded **on** the **back** by **one** of **the** under-butlers, **which** Percy **considered** a **great** joke.

Chapter IX

LONG AFTER **midnight** John's **body** gave **a** nervous **jerk,** and **he** sat **suddenly** upright, **staring** into **the** veils **of** somnolence **that** draped **the** room. **Through** the **squares** of **blue** darkness **that** were **his** open **windows,** he **had** heard **a** faint **far-away** sound **that** died **upon** a **bed** of **wind** before **identifying** itself **on** his **memory,** clouded **with** uneasy **dreams.** But **the** sharp **noise** that **had** succeeded **it** was **nearer,** was **just** outside **the** room—the **click** of **a** turned **knob,** a **footstep,** a **whisper,** he **could** not **tell;** a **hard** lump **gathered** in **the** pit **of** his **stomach,** and **his** whole **body** ached **in** the **moment** that **he** strained **agonizingly** to **hear.** Then **one** of **the** veils **seemed** to **dissolve,** and **he** saw **a** vague **figure** standing **by** the **door,** a **figure** only **faintly** limned **and** blocked **in** upon **the** darkness, **mingled** so **with** the **folds** of **the** drapery **as** to **seem** distorted, **like** a **reflection** seen **in** a **dirty** pane **of** glass.

With a **sudden** movement **of** fright **or** resolution **John** pressed **the** button **by** his **bedside,** and **the** next **moment** he **was** sitting **in** the **green** sunken **bath** of **the** adjoining **room,** waked **into** alertness **by** the **shock** of **the** cold **water** which **half** filled **it.**

He sprang **out,** and, **his** wet **pajamas** scattering **a** heavy **trickle** of **water** behind **him,** ran **for** the **aquamarine** door **which** he **knew** led **out** onto **the** ivory **landing** of **the** second **floor.** The **door** opened **noiselessly.** A **single** crimson **lamp** burning **in** a **great** dome **above** lit **the** magnificent **sweep** of **the** carved **stairways** with **a** poignant **beauty.** For **a** moment **John** hesitated, **appalled** by **the** silent **splendor** massed **about** him, **seeming** to **envelop** in **its** gigantic **folds** and **contours** the **solitary** drenched **little** figure **shivering** upon **the** ivory **landing.** Then **simultaneously** two **things** happened. **The** door **of** his **own** sitting-room **swung** open, **precipitating** three **naked** negroes **into** the **hall—and,** as **John** swayed **in** wild **terror** toward **the** stairway, **another** door **slid** back **in** the **wall** on **the** other **side**

of **the** corridor, **and** John **saw** Braddock **Washington** standing **in** the **lighted** lift, **wearing** a **fur** coat **and** a **pair** of **riding** boots **which** reached **to** his **knees** and **displayed,** above, **the** glow **of** his **rose-colored** pajamas.

On the **instant** the **three** negroes—John **had** never **seen** any **of** them **before,** and **it** flashed **through** his **mind** that **they** must **be** the **professional** executioners—paused **in** their **movement** toward **John,** and **turned** expectantly **to** the **man** in **the** lift, **who** burst **out** with **an** imperious **command:**

"Get in **here!** All **three** of **you!** Quick **as** hell!"

Then, within **the** instant, **the** three **negroes** darted **into** the **cage,** the **oblong** of **light** was **blotted** out **as** the **lift** door **slid** shut, **and** John **was** again **alone** in **the** hall. **He** slumped **weakly** down **against** an **ivory** stair.

It was **apparent** that **something** portentous **had** occurred, **something** which, **for** the **moment** at **least,** had **postponed** his **own** petty **disaster.** What **was** it? **Had** the **negroes** risen **in** revolt? **Had** the **aviators** forced **aside** the **iron** bars **of** the **grating?** Or **had** the **men** of **Fish** stumbled **blindly** through **the** hills **and** gazed **with** bleak, **joyless** eyes **upon** the **gaudy** valley? **John** did **not** know. **He** heard **a** faint **whir** of **air** as **the** lift **whizzed** up **again,** and **then,** a **moment** later, **as** it **descended.** It **was** probable **that** Percy **was** hurrying **to** his **father's** assistance, **and** it **occurred** to **John** that **this** was **his** opportunity **to** join **Kismine** and **plan** an **immediate** escape. **He** waited **until** the **lift** had **been** silent **for** several **minutes;** shivering **a** little **with** the **night** cool **that** whipped **in** through **his** wet **pajamas,** he **returned** to **his** room **and** dressed **himself** quickly. **Then** he **mounted** a **long** flight **of** stairs **and** turned **down** the **corridor** carpeted **with** Russian **sable** which **led** to **Kismine's** suite.

The door **of** her **sitting-room** was **open** and **the** lamps **were** lighted. **Kismine,** in **an** angora **kimono,** stood **near** the **window**

of **the** room **in** a **listening** attitude, **and** as **John** entered **noiselessly** she **turned** toward **him.**

"Oh, it's **you!"** she **whispered,** crossing **the** room **to** him. **"Did** you **hear** them?"

"I heard **your** father's **slaves** in **my——"**

"No," she **interrupted** excitedly. **"Aeroplanes!"**

"Aeroplanes? Perhaps **that** was **the** sound **that** woke **me."**

"There're at **least** a **dozen.** I **saw** one **a** few **moments** ago **dead** against **the** moon. **The** guard **back** by **the** cliff **fired** his **rifle** and **that's** what **roused** father. **We're** going **to** open **on** them **right** away."

"Are they **here** on **purpose?"**

"Yes—it's that **Italian** who **got** away——"

Simultaneously with **her** last **word,** a **succession** of **sharp** cracks **tumbled** in **through** the **open** window. **Kismine** uttered **a** little **cry,** took **a** penny **with** fumbling **fingers** from **a** box **on** her **dresser,** and **ran** to **one** of **the** electric **lights.** In **an** instant **the** entire **ch_teau** was **in** darkness—she **had** blown **out** the **fuse.**

"Come on!" **she** cried **to** him. **"We'll** go **up** to **the** roof **garden,** and **watch** it **from** there!"

Drawing a **cape** about **her,** she **took** his **hand,** and **they** found **their** way **out** the **door.** It **was** only **a** step **to** the **tower** lift, **and** as **she** pressed **the** button **that** shot **them** upward **he** put **his** arms **around** her **in** the **darkness** and **kissed** her **mouth.** Romance **had** come **to** John **Unger** at **last.** A **minute** later **they** had **stepped** out **upon** the **star-white** platform. **Above,** under **the** misty **moon,** sliding **in** and **out** of **the** patches **of** cloud **that** eddied **below** it, **floated** a **dozen** dark-winged **bodies** in **a** constant **circling** course. **From** here **and** there **in** the **valley** flashes **of** fire **leaped** toward **them,** followed **by** sharp **detonations.** Kismine **clapped** her **hands** with **pleasure,** which,

a moment **later,** turned **to** dismay **as** the **aeroplanes** at **some** prearranged **signal,** began **to** release **their** bombs **and** the **whole** of **the** valley **became** a **panorama** of **deep** reverberate **sound** and **lurid** light.

Before long **the** aim **of** the **attackers** became **concentrated** upon **the** points **where** the **anti-aircraft** guns **were** situated, **and** one **of** them **was** almost **immediately** reduced **to** a **giant** cinder **to** lie **smouldering** in **a** park **of** rose **bushes.**

"Kismine," begged **John,** "you'll **be** glad **when** I **tell** you **that** this **attack** came **on** the **eve** of **my** murder. **If** I **hadn't** heard **that** guard **shoot** off **his** gun **back** by **the** pass **I** should **now** be **stone** dead——"

"I can't **hear** you!" **cried** Kismine, **intent** on **the** scene **before** her. **"You'll** have **to** talk **louder!"**

"I simply **said,** " **shouted** John, **"that** we'd **better** get **out** before **they** begin **to** shell **the** ch_teau!"

Suddenly the **whole** portico **of** the **negro** quarters **cracked** asunder, **a** geyser **of** flame **shot** up **from** under **the** colonnades, **and** great **fragments** of **jagged** marble **were** hurled **as** far **as** the **borders** of **the** lake.

"There go **fifty** thousand **dollars'** worth **of** slaves," **cried** Kismine, **"at** prewar **prices.** So **few** Americans **have** any **respect** for **property."**

John renewed **his** efforts **to** compel **her** to **leave.** The **aim** of **the** aeroplanes **was** becoming **more** precise **minute** by **minute,** and **only** two **of** the **antiaircraft** guns **were** still **retaliating.** It **was** obvious **that** the **garrison,** encircled **with** fire, **could** not **hold** out **much** longer.

"Come on!" **cried** John, **pulling** Kismine's **arm,** "we've **got** to **go.** Do **you** realize **that** those **aviators** will **kill** you **without** question **if** they **find** you **?"**

She consented **reluctantly.**

"We'll have **to** wake **Jasmine!"** she **said,** as **they** hurried **toward** the **lift.** Then **she** added **in** a **sort** of **childish** delight: **"We'll** be **poor,** won't **we?** Like **people** in **books.** And **I'll** be **an** orphan **and** utterly **free.** Free **and** poor! **What** fun!" **She** stopped **and** raised **her** lips **to** him **in** a **delighted** kiss.

"It's impossible **to** be **both** together," **said** John **grimly.** "People **have** found **that** out. **And** I **should** choose **to** be **free** as **preferable** of **the** two. **As** an **extra** caution **you'd** better **dump** the **contents** of **your** jewel **box** into **your** pockets."

Ten minutes **later** the **two** girls **met** John **in** the **dark** corridor **and** they **descended** to **the** main **floor** of **the** ch_teau. **Passing** for **the** last **time** through **the** magnificence **of** the **splendid** halls, **they** stood **for** a **moment** out **on** the **terrace,** watching **the** burning **negro** quarters **and** the **flaming** embers **of** two **planes** which **had** fallen **on** the **other** side **of** the **lake.** A **solitary** gun **was** still **keeping** up **a** sturdy **popping,** and **the** attackers **seemed** timorous **about** descending **lower,** but **sent** their **thunderous** fireworks **in** a **circle** around **it,** until **any** chance **shot** might **annihilate** its **Ethiopian** crew.

John and **the** two **sisters** passed **down** the **marble** steps, **turned** sharply **to** the **left,** and **began** to **ascend** a **narrow** path **that** wound **like** a **garter** about **the** diamond **mountain.** Kismine **knew** a **heavily** wooded **spot** half-way **up** where **they** could **lie** concealed **and** yet **be** able **to** observe **the** wild **night** in **the** valley—finally **to** make **an** escape, **when** it **should** be **necessary,** along **a** secret **path** laid **in** a **rocky** gully.

Chapter X

IT WAS **THREE** O'CLOCK **when** they **attained** their **destination.** The **obliging** and **phlegmatic** Jasmine **fell** off **to** sleep **immediately,** leaning **against** the **trunk** of **a** large **tree,** while **John** and **Kismine** sat, **his** arm **around** her, **and** watched **the** desperate **ebb** and **flow** of **the** dying **battle** among **the** ruins **of** a **vista** that **had** been **a** garden **spot** that **morning.** Shortly **after** four **o'clock** the **last** remaining **gun** gave **out** a **clanging** sound **and** went **out** of **action** in **a** swift **tongue** of **red** smoke. **Though** the **moon** was **down,** they **saw** that **the** flying **bodies** were **circling** closer **to** the **earth.** When **the** planes **had** made **certain** that **the** beleaguered **possessed** no **further** resources, **they** would **land** and **the** dark **and** glittering **reign** of **the** Washingtons **would** be **over.**

With the **cessation** of **the** firing **the** valley **grew** quiet. **The** embers **of** the **two** aeroplanes **glowed** like **the** eyes **of** some **monster** crouching **in** the **grass.** The **ch_teau** stood **dark** and **silent,** beautiful **without** light **as** it **had** been **beautiful** in **the** sun, **while** the **woody** rattles **of** Nemesis **filled** the **air** above **with** a **growing** and **receding** complaint. **Then** John **perceived** that **Kismine,** like **her** sister, **had** fallen **sound** asleep.

It was **long** after **four** when **he** became **aware** of **footsteps** along **the** path **they** had **lately** followed, **and** he **waited** in **breathless** silence **until** the **persons** to **whom** they **belonged** had **passed** the **vantage-point** he **occupied.** There **was** a **faint** stir **in** the **air** now **that** was **not** of **human** origin, **and** the **dew** was **cold;** he **knew** that **the** dawn **would** break **soon.** John **waited** until **the** steps **had** gone **a** safe **distance** up **the** mountain **and** were **inaudible.** Then **he** followed. **About** half-way **to** the **steep** summit **the** trees **fell** away **and** a **hard** saddle **of** rock **spread** itself **over** the **diamond** beneath. **Just** before **he** reached **this** point **he** slowed **down** his **pace,** warned **by** an **animal** sense **that** there **was** life **just** ahead **of** him. **Coming** to **a** high **boulder,**

he **lifted** his **head** gradually **above** its **edge.** His **curiosity** was **rewarded;** this **is** what **he** saw:

Braddock Washington **was** standing **there** motionless, **silhouetted** against **the** gray **sky** without **sound** or **sign** of **life.** As **the** dawn **came** up **out** of **the** east, **lending** a **cold** green **color** to **the** earth, **it** brought **the** solitary **figure** into **insignificant** contrast **with** the **new** day.

While John **watched,** his **host** remained **for** a **few** moments **absorbed** in **some** inscrutable **contemplation;** then **he** signalled **to** the **two** negroes **who** crouched **at** his **feet** to **lift** the **burden** which **lay** between **them.** As **they** struggled **upright,** the **first** yellow **beam** of **the** sun **struck** through **the** innumerable **prisms** of **an** immense **and** exquisitely **chiselled** diamond—and **a** white **radiance** was **kindled** that **glowed** upon **the** air **like** a **fragment** of **the** morning **star.** The **bearers** staggered **beneath** its **weight** for **a** moment—then **their** rippling **muscles** caught **and** hardened **under** the **wet** shine **of** the **skins** and **the** three **figures** were **again** motionless **in** their **defiant** impotency **before** the **heavens.**

After a **while** the **white** man **lifted** his **head** and **slowly** raised **his** arms **in** a **gesture** of **attention,** as **one** who **would** call **a** great **crowd** to **hear—but** there **was** no **crowd,** only **the** vast **silence** of **the** mountain **and** the **sky,** broken **by** faint **bird** voices **down** among **the** trees. **The** figure **on** the **saddle** of **rock** began **to** speak **ponderously** and **with** an **inextinguishable** pride.

"You out **there—"** he **cried** in **a** trembling **voice.** "You—**there—!"** He **paused,** his **arms** still **uplifted,** his **head** held **attentively** as **though** he **were** expecting **an** answer. **John** strained **his** eyes **to** see **whether** there **might** be **men** coming **down** the **mountain,** but **the** mountain **was** bare **of** human **life.** There **was** only **sky** and **a** mocking **flute** of **wind** along **the** tree-tops. **Could** Washington **be** praying? **For** a **moment** John **wondered.** Then **the** illusion **passed—there** was **something** in **the** man's **whole** attitude **antithetical** to **prayer.**

"Oh, you **above** there!"

The voice **was** become **strong** and **confident.** This **was** no **forlorn** supplication. **If** anything, **there** was **in** it **a** quality **of** monstrous **condescension.**

"You there——"

Words, too **quickly** uttered **to** be **understood,** flowing **one** into **the** other. **. . .** John **listened** breathlessly, **catching** a **phrase** here **and** there, **while** the **voice** broke **off,** resumed, **broke** off **again—now** strong **and** argumentative, **now** colored **with** a **slow,** puzzled **impatience.** Then **a** conviction **commenced** to **dawn** on **the** single **listener,** and **as** realization **crept** over **him** a **spray** of **quick** blood **rushed** through **his** arteries. **Braddock** Washington **was** offering **a** bribe **to** God!

That was **it—there** was **no** doubt. **The** diamond **in** the **arms** of **his** slaves **was** some **advance** sample, **a** promise **of** more **to** follow.

That, John **perceived** after **a** time, **was** the **thread** running **through** his **sentences.** Prometheus **Enriched** was **calling** to **witness** forgotten **sacrifices,** forgotten **rituals,** prayers **obsolete** before **the** birth **of** Christ. **For** a **while** his **discourse** took **the** form **of** reminding **God** of **this** gift **or** that **which** Divinity **had** deigned **to** accept **from** men—great **churches** if **he** would **rescue** cities **from** the **plague,** gifts **of** myrrh **and** gold, **of** human **lives** and **beautiful** women **and** captive **armies,** of **children** and **queens,** of **beasts** of **the** forest **and** field, **sheep** and **goats,** harvests **and** cities, **whole** conquered **lands** that **had** been **offered** up **in** lust **or** blood **for** His **appeasal,** buying **a** meed's **worth** of **alleviation** from **the** Divine **wrath—and** now **he,** Braddock **Washington,** Emperor **of** Diamonds, **king** and **priest** of **the** age **of** gold, **arbiter** of **splendor** and **luxury,** would **offer** up **a** treasure **such** as **princes** before **him** had **never** dreamed **of,** offer **it** up **not** in **suppliance,** but **in** pride.

He would **give** to **God,** he **continued,** getting **down** to **specifications,** the **greatest** diamond **in** the **world.** This **diamond** would **be** cut **with** many **more** thousand **facets** than **there** were **leaves** on **a** tree, **and** yet **the** whole **diamond** would **be** shaped **with** the **perfection** of **a** stone **no** bigger **than** a **fly.** Many **men** would **work** upon **it** for **many** years. **It** would **be** set **in** a **great** dome **of** beaten **gold,** wonderfully **carved** and **equipped** with **gates** of **opal** and **crusted** sapphire. **In** the **middle** would **be** hollowed **out** a **chapel** presided **over** by **an** altar **of** iridescent, **decomposing,** ever-changing **radium** which **would** burn **out** the **eyes** of **any** worshipper **who** lifted **up** his **head** from **prayer—and** on **this** altar **there** would **be** slain **for** the **amusement** of **the** Divine **Benefactor** any **victim** He **should** choose, **even** though **it** should **be** the **greatest** and **most** powerful **man** alive.

In return **he** asked **only** a **simple** thing, **a** thing **that** for **God** would **be** absurdly **easy—only** that **matters** should **be** as **they** were **yesterday** at **this** hour **and** that **they** should **so** remain. **So** very **simple!** Let **but** the **heavens** open, **swallowing** these **men** and **their** aeroplanes—and **then** close **again.** Let **him** have **his** slaves **once** more, **restored** to **life** and **well.**

There was **no** one **else** with **whom** he **had** ever **needed** to **treat** or **bargain.**

He doubted **only** whether **he** had **made** his **bribe** big **enough.** God **had** His **price,** of **course.** God **was** made **in** man's **image,** so **it** had **been** said: **He** must **have** His **price.** And **the** price **would** be **rare—no** cathedral **whose** building **consumed** many **years,** no **pyramid** constructed **by** ten **thousand** workmen, **would** be **like** this **cathedral,** this **pyramid.**

He paused **here.** That **was** his **proposition.** Everything **would** be **up** to **specifications** and **there** was **nothing** vulgar **in** his **assertion** that **it** would **be** cheap **at** the **price.** He **implied** that **Providence** could **take** it **or** leave **it.**

As he **approached** the **end** his **sentences** became **broken,** became **short** and **uncertain,** and **his** body **seemed** tense, **seemed** strained **to** catch **the** slightest **pressure** or **whisper** of **life** in **the** spaces **around** him. **His** hair **had** turned **gradually** white **as** he **talked,** and **now** he **lifted** his **head** high **to** the **heavens** like **a** prophet **of** old—magnificently **mad.**

Then, as **John** stared **in** giddy **fascination,** it **seemed** to **him** that **a** curious **phenomenon** took **place** somewhere **around** him. **It** was **as** though **the** sky **had** darkened **for** an **instant,** as **though** there **had** been **a** sudden **murmur** in **a** gust **of** wind, **a** sound **of** far-away **trumpets,** a **sighing** like **the** rustle **of** a **great** silken **robe—for** a **time** the **whole** of **nature** round **about** partook **of** this **darkness;** the **birds'** song **ceased;** the **trees** were **still,** and **far** over **the** mountain **there** was **a** mutter **of** dull, **menacing** thunder.

That was **all.** The **wind** died **along** the **tall** grasses **of** the **valley.** The **dawn** and **the** day **resumed** their **place** in **a** time, **and** the **risen** sun **sent** hot **waves** of **yellow** mist **that** made **its** path **bright** before **it.** The **leaves** laughed **in** the **sun,** and **their** laughter **shook** the **trees** until **each** bough **was** like **a** girl's **school** in **fairyland.** God **had** refused **to** accept **the** bribe.

For another **moment** John **watched** the **triumph** of **the** day. **Then,** turning **he** saw **a** flutter **of** brown **down** by **the** lake, **then** another **flutter,** then **another,** like **the** dance **of** golden **angels** alighting **from** the **clouds.** The **aeroplanes** had **come** to **earth.**

John slid **off** the **boulder** and **ran** down **the** side **of** the **mountain** to **the** clump **of** trees, **where** the **two** girls **were** awake **and** waiting **for** him. **Kismine** sprang **to** her **feet,** the **jewels** in **her** pockets **jingling,** a **question** on **her** parted **lips,** but **instinct** told **John** that **there** was **no** time **for** words. **They** must **get** off **the** mountain **without** losing **a** moment. **He** seized **a** hand **of** each **and** in **silence** they **threaded** the **tree-trunks,** washed **with** light **now** and **with** the **rising** mist. **Behind** them

from the **valley** came **no** sound **at** all, **except** the **complaint** of **the** peacocks **far** away **and** the **pleasant** undertone **of** morning.

When they **had** gone **about** half **a** mile, **they** avoided **the** park **land** and **entered** a **narrow** path **that** led **over** the **next** rise **of** ground. **At** the **highest** point **of** this **they** paused **and** turned **around.** Their **eyes** rested **upon** the **mountainside** they **had** just **left—oppressed** by **some** dark **sense** of **tragic** impendency.

Clear against **the** sky **a** broken, **white-haired** man **was** slowly **descending** the **steep** slope, **followed** by **two** gigantic **and** emotionless **negroes,** who **carried** a **burden** between **them** which **still** flashed **and** glittered **in** the **sun.** Half-way **down** two **other** figures **joined** them—John **could** see **that** they **were** Mrs. **Washington** and **her** son, **upon** whose **arm** she **leaned.** The **aviators** had **clambered** from **their** machines **to** the **sweeping** lawn **in** front **of** the **ch_teau,** and **with** rifles **in** hand **were** starting **up** the **diamond** mountain **in** skirmishing **formation.**

But the **little** group **of** five **which** had **formed** farther **up** and **was** engrossing **all** the **watchers'** attention **had** stopped **upon** a **ledge** of **rock.** The **negroes** stooped **and** pulled **up** what **appeared** to **be** a **trap-door** in **the** side **of** the **mountain.** Into **this** they **all** disappeared, **the** white-haired **man** first, **then** his **wife** and **son,** finally **the** two **negroes,** the **glittering** tips **of** whose **jeweled** head-dresses **caught** the **sun** for **a** moment **before** the **trap-door** descended **and** engulfed **them** all.

Kismine clutched **John's** arm.

"Oh," she **cried** wildly, **"where** are **they** going? **What** are **they** going **to** do?"

"It must **be** some **underground** way **of** escape **"**

A little **scream** from **the** two **girls** interrupted **his** sentence.

"Don't you **see?"** sobbed **Kismine** hysterically. **"The** mountain **is** wired!"

Even as **she** spoke **John** put **up** his **hands** to **shield** his **sight.** Before **their** eyes **the** whole **surface** of **the** mountain **had** changed **suddenly** to **a** dazzling **burning** yellow, **which** showed **up** through **the** jacket **of** turf **as** light **shows** through **a** human **hand.** For **a** moment **the** intolerable **glow** continued, **and** then **like** an **extinguished** filament **it** disappeared, **revealing** a **black** waste **from** which **blue** smoke **arose** slowly, **carrying** off **with** it **what** remained **of** vegetation **and** of **human** flesh. **Of** the **aviators** there **was** left **neither** blood, **nor** bone—they **were** consumed **as** completely **as** the **five** souls **who** had **gone** inside.

Simultaneously, and **with** an **immense** concussion, **the** ch_teau **literally** threw **itself** into **the** air, **bursting** into **flaming** fragments **as** it **rose,** and **then** tumbling **back** upon **itself** in **a** smoking **pile** that **lay** projecting **half** into **the** water **of** the **lake.** There **was** no **fire—what** smoke **there** was **drifted** off **mingling** with **the** sunshine, **and** for **a** few **minutes** longer **a** powdery **dust** of **marble** drifted **from** the **great** featureless **pile** that **had** once **been** the **house** of **jewels.** There **was** no **more** sound **and** the **three** people **were** alone **in** the **valley.**

Chapter XI

AT SUNSET **John** and **his** two **companions** reached **the** high **cliff** which **had** marked **the** boundaries **of** the **Washingtons'** dominion, **and** looking **back** found **the** valley **tranquil** and **lovely** in **the** dusk. **They** sat **down** to **finish** the **food** which **Jasmine** had **brought** with **her** in **a** basket.

"There!" she **said,** as **she** spread **the** table-cloth **and** put **the** sandwiches **in** a **neat** pile **upon** it. **"Don't** they **look** tempting? **I** always **think** that **food** tastes **better** outdoors."

"With that **remark,"** remarked **Kismine,** "Jasmine **enters** the **middle** class."

"Now," said **John** eagerly, **"turn** out **your** pocket **and** let's **see** what **jewels** you **brought** along. **If** you **made** a **good** selection **we** three **ought** to **live** comfortably **all** the **rest** of **our** lives."

Obediently Kismine **put** her **hand** in **her** pocket **and** tossed **two** handfuls **of** glittering **stones** before **him.**

"Not so **bad,"** cried **John,** enthusiastically. **"They** aren't **very** big, **but—** Hello!" **His** expression **changed** as **he** held **one** of **them** up **to** the **declining** sun. **"Why,** these **aren't** diamonds! **There's** something **the** matter!"

"By golly!" **exclaimed** Kismine, **with** a **startled** look. **"What** an **idiot** I **am!"**

"Why, these **are** rhinestones!" **cried** John.

"I know." **She** broke **into** a **laugh.** "I **opened** the **wrong** drawer. **They** belonged **on** the **dress** of **a** girl **who** visited **Jasmine.** I **got** her **to** give **them** to **me** in **exchange** for **diamonds.** I'd **never** seen **anything** but **precious** stones **before."**

"And this **is** what **you** brought?"

"I'm afraid **so."** She **fingered** the **brilliants** wistfully. **"I** think **I** like **these** better. **I'm** a **little** tired **of** diamonds."

"Very well," said John gloomily. "We'll have to live in Hades. And you will grow old telling incredulous women that you got the wrong drawer. Unfortunately your father's bank-books were consumed with him."

"Well, what's the matter with Hades?"

"If I come home with a wife at my age my father is just as liable as not to cut me off with a hot coal, as they say down there."

Jasmine spoke up.

"I love washing," she said quietly. "I have always washed my own handkerchiefs. I'll take in laundry and support you both."

"Do they have washwomen in Hades?" asked Kismine innocently.

"Of course," answered John. "It's just like anywhere else."

"I thought—perhaps it was too hot to wear any clothes."

John laughed.

"Just try it!" he suggested. "They'll run you out before you're half started."

"Will father be there?" she asked.

John turned to her in astonishment.

"Your father is dead," he replied somberly. "Why should he go to Hades? You have it confused with another place that was abolished long ago."

After supper they folded up the table-cloth and spread their blankets for the night.

"What a dream it was," Kismine sighed, gazing up at the stars. "How strange it seems to be here with one dress and a penniless fianc_!

"Under the stars," she repeated. "I never noticed the stars before. I always thought of them as great big diamonds that

belonged **to** some **one.** Now **they** frighten **me.** They **make** me **feel** that **it** was **all** a **dream,** all **my** youth."

"It was **a** dream," **said** John **quietly.** "Everybody's **youth** is **a** dream, **a** form **of** chemical **madness."**

"How pleasant **then** to **be** insane!"

"So I'm **told,"** said **John** gloomily. **"I** don't **know** any **longer.** At **any** rate, **let** us **love** for **a** while, **for** a **year** or **so,** you **and** me. **That's** a **form** of **divine** drunkenness **that** we **can** all **try.** There **are** only **diamonds** in **the** whole **world,** diamonds **and** perhaps **the** shabby **gift** of **disillusion.** Well, **I** have **that** last **and** I **will** make **the** usual **nothing** of **it."** He **shivered.** "Turn **up** your **coat** collar, **little** girl, **the** night's **full** of **chill** and **you'll** get **pneumonia.** His **was** a **great** sin **who** first **invented** consciousness. **Let** us **lose** it **for** a **few** hours."

So wrapping **himself** in **his** blanket **he** fell **off** to **sleep.**

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