

CHAPTER ONE

John Meets Percy

John T. Unger came from a well-known family in Hades, a small town on the Mississippi River. He was sixteen and his parents wanted him to have a good New England education. They decided to send him to St Midas' School near Boston. Hades was too small for their clever son.

Mrs. Unger packed her son's trunks and Mr Unger gave him a lot of money.

"Remember, you're always welcome back here," he said.

"I know," said John.

"Don't forget who you are and where you come from," said his father proudly. I "You are an Unger from Hades."

John was crying as he walked away. As he was leaving the city he looked back at Hades for the last time.

St Midas' School is half an hour from Boston and it was the most expensive and most exclusive boys' preparatory school in the world.

John's first two years went well. The fathers of all the boys were very rich and John spent his summers visiting his classmates in their fashionable holiday homes.

In the middle of his second year at school, a quiet, handsome boy named Percy Washington joined John's class. The new student was pleasant and very well dressed: it was obvious that he came from a very rich family. Percy and John immediately became friends. In fact, John was Percy's only friend as Percy did not want to make friends with the other boys. But even with John, Percy was reserved and he did not talk about his home or family. So when John was invited to spend the summer at Percy's home "in the West", John was surprised but he accepted happily.

Percy started talking about his family when they were on the train.

"My father," said Percy, "is the richest man in the world."

"Oh," said John politely. He could think of no other answer.

"The richest," repeated Percy.

"I read that there was a man in America who earned five million dollars a year. And four other men who earned more than three million dollars a year."

"Oh, they're nothing," said Percy. "My father could buy everything they have."

"Goodness," said John, "he must be very rich. I'm glad. I like very rich people. I visited the Schnlitzer-Murphys last Easter. Vivian Schnlitzer-Murphy had jewels as big as chickens' eggs."

"I love jewels," said Percy enthusiastically. "Of course, I don't want anyone at school to know about it, but I have quite a big collection. I collect them instead of stamps."

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

"Oh, that's nothing," Percy moved closer to John and whispered, "That's nothing at all. My father has a diamond bigger than The Ritz-Carlton Hotel."

The sunset in Montana was beautiful as the train stopped in a small village called Fish. A horse-drawn carriage came and drove them away. After half an hour the sky became dark and a magnificent huge I car appeared on the road. John had never seen such a car.

"Get in," said Percy to his friend. "I'm sorry we had to bring you here in a carriage, but we can't let the people on the train and from the village see this car."

"What a car!" said John, who was amazed.

"This thing?" laughed Percy. "It's just an old car."

They drove in the darkness towards the opening between two mountains. Percy looked at the clock in the car and said, "We'll be there in an hour and a half. You've never seen anything like it before." John was prepared to be surprised.

"We're driving uphill now," said Percy. "An ordinary car could not drive up this road."

There was a pale moon in the distance. The car stopped suddenly and some men appeared out of the dark. They started working and four huge metal cables came down from above. They were tied to the wheels and the car was slowly lifted from the ground. It went higher and higher, and then suddenly they were on the ground again.

"The worst is over," said Percy looking out of the window. "Now it's only five miles from here and it's *our* road. It belongs to us. This is where the United States ends."

"Are we in Canada?"

"No, we're not. We're in Montana, in the middle of the Rocky Mountains. You are on the only five square miles of land in America that aren't on any map."

"Why? Did they forget?" asked John.

"No," said Percy, "they tried to put it on the map three times. The first time my grandfather corrupted an entire government department and the second time he changed the maps of the United States. The last time was more difficult. My father created a very strong magnetic field and the map-makers' compasses did not work. They thought our place was ten miles further up the valley. There's only one thing my father is afraid of," Percy said. "It's the only thing that could find us."

"What's that?" asked John.

"Airplanes," Percy whispered. "We have half a dozen anti-aircraft guns, so no one has found us yet. Some pilots have died and some have become prisoners. Father and I don't mind that, but my mother and sisters worry about it."

The stars in Montana were very bright that night as they drove on. Suddenly John saw a magnificent castle of shining marble near a big lake.

John was amazed by the towers and the thousand yellow windows with their golden light. It looked like a fairyland. Then he heard the sound of violins playing beautiful music — he had never heard anything like it before.

The car stopped in front of high marble steps. At the top of the steps two huge doors opened silently and a beautiful lady with black hair was there to meet them.

"Mother," said Percy, "this is my friend, John Unger from Hades."

CHAPTER TWO

An Amazing Discovery

Afterwards John remembered that first night as a beautiful dream — a dream of music, of beautiful things, of lights and faces. There was a man with white hair who drank from a gold cup. There was a girl with a face like a flower with precious blue jewels in her hair. There were rooms with walls of gold and there were diamonds of all shapes and sizes everywhere. In the corners of the splendid rooms there were crystal lamps, and on the floors there were fur rugs of different types and colors.

Then they went to dinner. The plates were made of diamonds and there was music everywhere. John was overcome by the beauty and wealth that surrounded him and he fell asleep.

He woke up several hours later. He was in a large room and Percy was standing over him.

"You fell asleep at dinner," Percy said. "I almost did too. It was so good to be comfortable again after a year at school. Some servants undressed you and washed you while you were sleeping."

"Is this a bed or a cloud? It's so comfortable." said John. "Percy, before you go I want to apologize," he added.

"Why?"

"Well, I didn't really believe 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 castle is on. It's not a very big mountain because, except for some earth on top, it's solid diamond. One big diamond. Aren't you listening?"

But John T. Unger was asleep.

The next morning he woke up and discovered that the room was filled with sunlight. A servant in a white uniform stood beside his bed.

"Good evening," said John, trying to remember where he was.

"Good morning, sir. Are you ready for your bath, sir? Don't get up — I'll put you in — there. Thank you, sir."

John's pajamas were taken off. He expected to be lifted like a child, but this did not happen. Instead he felt the bed move slowly on its side. Then he began to roll down gently into bath water which was the same temperature as his body.

He was surrounded by a blue aquarium and he could see fish swimming. Sunlight came from above through sea-green glass.

"Would you like hot perfumed water this morning, sir, and perhaps cold water to finish?"

"Yes," agreed John, "as you please."

"Shall I turn on the moving-picture machine, sir?" asked the servant.

"No, thanks," answered John politely. He was enjoying the bath so much that he didn't want any distraction. After a moment he heard music coming from outside.

When the bath was over he was rubbed with oil, alcohol and perfume. Then a servant shaved his face.

"Mr Percy is waiting in your sitting room," said the servant. "My name is Gygsun, Mr Unger, sir. I will serve you every morning."

John walked out into the sunshine of his sitting room, where he found breakfast waiting for him. Percy was also there, beautifully dressed, sitting in an armchair.

Percy told John the following story of the Washington family at breakfast.

At the end of the American Civil War, the father of the present Mr Washington, Fitz-Norman Washington, was a twenty-five year old colonel I with about a thousand dollars in gold. Fitz-Norman was a direct descendant of George Washington. One day he decided to go west, as many people were doing at that time, and took twenty-four of his best servants with him. After less than a month in Montana, things were not going well. And this is when he made a great discovery.

One day he got lost in the hills, and after a day without food he was very hungry. He saw a squirrel, but because he did not have a gun he had to run after it. He noticed that the squirrel had something shiny in its mouth. Just before it disappeared into a hole, the squirrel dropped a large, perfect diamond.

At last he managed to find his camp, and the next morning he took his servants with him to dig for more diamonds. Since none of his servants knew what a diamond was or how valuable it was, he did

not inform them. He was amazed to discover that the mountain was *a single huge diamond*.

He filled four bags full of diamonds and went back to town. There he sold six small stones. When he tried to sell a bigger stone the storekeeper fainted and Fitz-Norman was arrested for disturbing the peace. He escaped from prison and caught the train for New York, where he sold a few medium-sized diamonds. He got about two hundred thousand dollars in gold, but he did not want to sell anymore. In fact, he left New York just in time because people were talking about the discovery of a diamond mine, and everyone wanted to find diamonds. Young Fitz-Norman returned to Montana.

CHAPTER THREE

Kismine

In two weeks Fitz-Norman calculated that the diamond mountain was about equal in quantity to all the diamonds in the world. It was impossible to know its exact value. No one in the world had enough gold to buy it. And what could anyone do with such a huge diamond?

It was an amazing situation. In one sense, he was the richest man that ever lived; and yet, what was he worth? The discovery of such a diamond would create a disaster on the world market. The only thing he could do was to sell his discovery secretly.

Fitz-Norman started traveling to different parts of the world. With one hundred thousand dollars and two trunks filled with diamonds of all sizes he sailed to St Petersburg in Russia, where he stayed in a small hotel. He met with the court jeweler and announced that he had a diamond for the Czar. He remained in St Petersburg for two weeks, moving from one hotel to another because his life was in danger.

Fitz-Norman then moved on to leave for India. Before he left Russia he promised the Czar to return

the next year with bigger and better diamonds. He then visited the capitals of twenty-two countries and talked with five emperors, eleven kings, three princes and a sultan.¹ At that time he calculated his wealth to be one billion dollars.

From 1870 until his death in 1900, the history of Fitz-Norman Washington was a long story of immense wealth. He married a lady from Virginia, had a son, and murdered his brother because he often got drunk and nearly told people their secret. There were a few other murders during these happy years of progress.

Before his death, he converted his money into gold and deposited it in banks all over the world. His son, Braddock, transformed the gold into a very rare element, radium, so that a billion dollars in gold could fit in a little box.

Three years after Fitz-Norman's death, his son decided that the business had gone far enough. His wealth was beyond calculation and could support all the Washingtons for generations, so he closed the diamond mine. But he knew that he had to protect his secret.

This was the family John T. Unger was staying with. This was the story he heard in his silver-walled sitting room that morning.

After breakfast John walked out of the great marble entrance and looked at the beautiful valley with its lakes, gardens and trees. He went down the marble steps and walked along some blue and white stones that seemed to go nowhere. He turned a corner and saw a girl coming towards him. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

She was wearing a little white dress that came to just below her knees. Her pink feet were bare.

She was younger than John — not more than sixteen.

"Hello," she said softly. "I'm Kismine."

John could not believe his eyes.

"You didn't meet me last night because I wasn't feeling well. You met my sister, Jasmine."

"Nice to meet you," John said. "I hope you're feeling better."

She suggested that they sit down together.

John was critical about women. A single defect — a big ankle, a loud voice, a cold look — was enough to make him lose interest. For the first time in

his life he was sitting next to a girl who seemed to be perfect.

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

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

"I'm going to school in the East this fall," she said. "Do you think I'll like it? I'm going to New York to Miss Bulge's. It's very strict, but father said I must not worry." Your father wants you to be proud," observed John.

"We are proud," she answered, her eyes shining with pride. "None of us has ever been punished. Father said we never should be."

"Mother was — well, a little surprised," I continued Kismine, "when she heard that you were from — where you are from, you know. But then, she's Spanish and old-fashioned."

"Do you spend much time out here?" asked John, trying to hide the fact that he was a bit hurt by this comment.

"Percy and Jasmine and I are here every summer." She paused, and then said, "You know, I'm a very innocent girl. I never smoke or drink or read anything except poetry. I know hardly any mathematics or chemistry, and I dress very simply. I

believe that girls should enjoy their youth in a good, healthy way."

"I do, too," said John enthusiastically.

"I like you," she whispered. "Are you going to spend all your time with Percy while you're here, or will you be nice to me? No boy has ever been in love with me in all my life. I've never even been allowed to see boys alone — except Percy. I came out here hoping to meet you, where the family wouldn't be around."

John bowed as he was taught at dancing school in Hades.

"We should 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."

"Well," John answered proudly, "some of them do, but not me. Girls don't do that sort of thing — in Hades."

They walked back to the house side by side.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Hole

John stood looking at Mr Braddock Washington in the full sunlight. Braddock was about forty. He had a proud face, intelligent eyes and a strong body. He carried a walking stick with a single precious stone. He and Percy were showing John their property, live here," he said, pointing at some marble houses. "They are the descendants of the ones my father brought with him from Virginia. Now there are two hundred and fifty of them. They have lived away from the world for so long that they have developed another language."

"This is the golf course," he continued, as they walked over the beautiful green grass. He smiled pleasantly at John.

"Are there many men in the cage, father?" asked Percy suddenly.

"One less than there should be," Braddock Washington replied angrily. "We've had some difficulties."

"Mother told me," said Percy, "that Italian teacher..."

"A terrible mistake," said Braddock Washington. "But of course there's a good chance that we got him. Perhaps he fell over a cliff. But even if he is free now, who will believe his story? However, I have two dozen men looking for him in different towns around here."

"Any luck?" asked Percy.

"Some. Fourteen of them reported that they each killed a man who looked like him, but they were probably after the reward."

He stopped talking. They came to a large hole in the ground covered by strong iron bars. Braddock Washington pointed to the hole with his walking stick. John stopped at the edge and looked down. He immediately heard shouting from below.

"Come on down to Hell!"

"Hello, boy! How's the air up there?"

"Hey! Throw us a rope!"

"Do you have an old sandwich for us?"

It was too dark to see clearly into the hole below, but John could tell from their voices and comments that they were middle-class Americans. Then Mr Washington touched a button in the grass with his walking stick and suddenly there was light.

"These are some men who had the misfortune of discovering the mountain," Braddock Washington said.

Below them there appeared a large hole in the earth that looked like the inside of a bowl. The sides were steep and made of glass. At the bottom there were about twenty men in uniforms of airplane pilots. They all seemed to be healthy.

Braddock Washington went to the edge of the hole and asked in a friendly voice.

"Well, how are you, boys?"

Angry voices came from the huge hole.

A tall man held up his hand and said, "Let me ask you a few questions. You think you're a fair man."

"How could a man of my position be fair towards you?" Braddock Washington asked.

"All right!" the tall man cried. "We've talked about this before. You're not fair but you're human. Put yourself in our place for once. Why don't you trust us to keep your secret?"

"Are you serious? I trusted one man to teach my daughter Italian, and last week he escaped."

The prisoners suddenly cheered with happiness. Braddock Washington was silent.

"You see," he continued, "I have nothing against you. 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? — was shot by some of my men in fourteen different places." The pilots were suddenly silent.

Mr Washington took his walking stick and pushed the button in the grass. The light below went out and the hole was dark again.

Mr Washington, followed by the two boys, walked away on his green golf course.

July on the diamond mountain was a month of cool nights and warm, sunny days. John and Kismine were in love. Late one afternoon, when the music room was not in use, they spent an hour there together. He held her hand and she gave him such a

look that he whispered her name aloud. She moved towards him. "Did you say 'Kismine'"? she asked softly, "or..." She wanted to be sure. Neither one of them had ever kissed anyone before, but during the next hour it seemed to make little difference.

They decided to get married as soon as possible.

CHAPTER FIVE

What Happened to the Guests?

Every day Mr Washington and the two boys went hunting or fishing, played golf or swam in the cool mountain lake. John found that Mr Washington was completely uninterested in any ideas or opinions except his own. Mrs Washington was always reserved and shy. She was quite indifferent to her two daughters and was only interested in Percy, with whom she had long conversations in Spanish at dinner.

Jasmine, the older daughter, looked like Kismine but was not so pretty. Her favorite books were about girls from poor families. Percy and Kismine seemed to have the arrogant attitude of their father — they were both selfish.

John was fascinated by the castle, and one day he asked Percy, "Who built this wonderful castle?"

"Oh," he answered, "I'm embarrassed to tell you, but it was a man who worked in the film industry. He was the only person we found who could work with an unlimited amount of money — although he couldn't read or write."

Towards the end of August John was sorry that he had to return to school. He and Kismine decided to run away and get married the following June.

"It would be nicer to get married here," Kismine said, "but I could never get father's permission to marry you. The best thing is to run away. It's terrible for rich people to get married in America because they have to inform the newspapers."

"I know," said John.

One afternoon late in August one of Kismine's comments changed the entire situation and terrified John.

They were in their favorite place and between kisses John said sadly, "Sometimes I think we'll never marry. You're too wealthy, too magnificent. You're not like other girls because you're too rich. I should marry the daughter of a rich businessman and be happy with her half-million dollars."

"I knew the daughter of a rich businessman once," said Kismine. "She was a friend of my sister who visited us."

"Oh, then you've had other guests?" John asked.

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

"But wasn't your father afraid they would tell others about this place?"

"Well, yes," she answered. "Let's talk about something more pleasant."

But now John was curious.

"Something more pleasant!" he said. "What's unpleasant about this? Weren't they nice girls?"

John was very surprised when Kismine started to cry.

"Yes — that — that's the trouble. I liked some of them very much. And Jasmine did too. But she continued inviting them anyway. I couldn't understand it."

John suddenly went cold.

"Do you mean... What happened to them?" asked John.

"Father took no chances — and Jasmine kept inviting them, and they had such a good time."

John was horrified by what he heard and sat there open-mouthed.

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

"Do you mean that your father murdered them 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 first."

"How absolutely terrible. How? Why? I must be going mad. Did you really say that?"

"I did," Kismine said quietly. "We can't imprison them like the pilots because we would be able to see them everyday. That would make us feel very bad. To make it easier for Jasmine and me, father always did it sooner than we expected. That way we didn't have to say goodbye."

"So you murdered them?" cried John.

"It was done very nicely. They were drugged while they were sleeping — and their families were always told that they had died of a disease."

"But, I can't understand why you continued inviting them."

"I didn't!" cried Kismine. "I have never invited anyone. They were Jasmine's guests. And they always had a very good time. Jasmine gave them the nicest presents, especially towards the end. I will probably have visitors too — then I won't feel so bad about it. We can't let such a thing as death stand in the way I of enjoying our life. Think of how lonely it would be here if no one ever came to visit. Why, father and

mother have lost some of their best friends, just as we have."

"And so," cried John, "and so you let me love you and pretended to return my love. And you talked about marriage, knowing that I would never leave this place alive."

"No," she protested. "Not anymore. I did at first. You were here and I thought your last days should be pleasant for both of us. But then I fell in love with you, and — I'm honestly sorry you're going to be killed. But if you are killed, you can't ever kiss another girl."

Oh, really! Is that what you think?" cried John fiercely.

"Well, yes... I have always heard that a girl can have more fun with a man she knows she can never marry. Oh, why did I tell you? I've probably ruined your good time now, and we were really enjoying ourselves. I knew it would make things quite sad for you."

"Oh, you did?" said John very angrily. "I've heard enough of this. If you think it's fun to fall in love with a boy who isn't much better than a corpse, then stay away from me."

"You're not a corpse," she protested in horror.
"You're not a corpse. You can't say I kissed a corpse."

"I didn't say that."

"Yes, you did. You said I kissed a corpse."

"I didn't."

Their voices were loud, but when they heard footsteps they became silent. A moment later Braddock Washington was looking at them through the rose bushes.

"Who kissed a corpse?" he asked.

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

"What are you two doing here?" he asked.
"Kismine, you should read or play golf with your sister. Go read. Go play golf. I don't want to find you here when I return."

Then he bowed to John and left.

"See?" said Kismine angrily, when her father left, "See what you've done? We can never meet again. He won't let me meet you. He will poison you if he thinks we're in love."

"We're not in love anymore." cried John fiercely. "He doesn't have to worry about that. And don't think I'm going to stay here any longer. In six

hours I'll be over those mountains, no matter what I have to do."

They were both standing and Kismine came close and put her arm through his.

"I'm going too."

"You must be mad!"

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

His love for her suddenly returned. She was his — she would go with him and share the dangers. He put his arms around her and kissed her. After all, she saved him, she loved him.

They walked back slowly towards the castle and discussed how they would escape. They decided that since Braddock Washington had seen them together they should leave the next night.

CHAPTER SIX

The Bribe

Long after midnight John woke up suddenly because he heard a loud noise outside his room. Then he heard some footsteps and a whisper. He knew his life was in danger and he was afraid.

With a sudden movement he pressed the button near his bed and the next moment he was sitting in the bath in the next room.

He jumped out wet and cold, and ran for the door. He stood near the big staircase and everything was silent and beautiful. Then two things happened at once. The door of his own sitting room opened and three slaves entered the hall.

Then Braddock Washington appeared in the elevator, wearing a fur coat and riding boots. He realized at once that these men wanted to kill him. They looked at Braddock Washington, who shouted, "Get in here! All three of you! Quick!"

The three slaves ran into the elevator. Something very serious was happening, something much more serious than his murder. But what could it be? Were the pilots trying to escape? Or had the people of Fish discovered the valley? John did not know.

He heard the elevator go up and down again. Percy was probably going to help his father, he thought. This was his opportunity to join Kismine and plan their immediate escape. He waited until the elevator was silent for several minutes and then he returned to his room and dressed quickly.

The door of Kismine's sitting room was open and the lamps were on. Kismine was standing near the window, listening to something. As John entered she turned towards him.

"Oh, it's you," she whispered, walking towards him. "Did you hear them?"

"I heard your father's slaves in my..."

"No," she interrupted. "Did you hear the airplanes?"

"Airplanes? Perhaps that was the sound that woke me."

"There are at least a dozen. I saw one a few moments ago against the moon. One of the guards fired his gun and my father woke up. We're going to start shooting at them immediately."

"Are they here on purpose?"

"Yes — it's that Italian who escaped — but let's go up to the roof garden and watch from there."

She took his hand and they went up to the roof garden in the elevator, where John kissed her. From the roof garden they could see a dozen bombers flying in a circle and soon the anti-aircraft guns were attacking them. Kismine clapped her hands happily, but a moment later the bombers began dropping their bombs and the valley was in flames.

The airplanes began attacking the anti-aircraft guns, and soon one of them was destroyed. After a while only two guns were left. They could not protect the castle much longer.

"Come on," John cried, pulling Kismine's arm. "We have to go now. Don't you realize that those airplanes will attack you if they see you?"

Kismine left the roof garden unwillingly. "We'll have to wake Jasmine," she said as they hurried towards the elevator. Then she added with a sort of childish delight, "We'll be poor, won't we? Like people in books. I won't have any parents and I'll be completely free. Free and poor. What fun!"

She stopped and gave John a happy kiss.

"It's impossible to be both free and poor," said John seriously. "I would choose to be free and not poor. You should bring your jewelry with you."

Ten minutes later the two girls met John in the dark corridor. They went through the magnificent halls for the last time and stood for a moment out on the terrace and watched the battle.

Kismine led John and Jasmine along a path to a hiding place. From there they could watch the battle in the valley and escape when necessary.

It was three o'clock in the morning when they reached their hiding place. Jasmine sat against a large tree and fell asleep immediately. John and Kismine sat together and watched the battle. Shortly after four o'clock the last gun was destroyed in a cloud of red

smoke. The airplanes were flying closer to the ground. Soon they would land and that would be the end of the Washingtons.

As the shooting stopped the valley became quiet. The castle stood dark and silent. It was beautiful without light as it had been beautiful in the sun. John saw that Kismine, like her sister, was sleeping.

Some time later John heard footsteps along the path. He waited in silence for them to pass. Then he continued walking up the mountain. He felt that someone was there, ahead of him. He slowly lifted his head above the edge to see who it was.

Braddock Washington was standing on top of the mountain against the sky, which was gray just before dawn. John watched Braddock Washington, who was lost in his thoughts. He was as still as a statue. Then suddenly he told the two slaves who were at his feet to lift a huge object that was between them. The first rays of the morning sun hit the magnificent huge diamond as the slaves slowly lifted it. Then Braddock Washington lifted his head and began to speak with immense pride.

"You out there!" he cried. "You...there!" He paused for a moment, his hands were raised.

What was he doing? Was he praying? John thought.

"Oh, you up there!" The voice became strong and confident. He was not praying. "You there..."

John listened breathlessly but he could only hear a few words here and there. Then he suddenly realized that Braddock Washington was offering a bribe to God. The diamond in the hands of his slaves was a sample — a promise of more to follow.

Braddock Washington would give to God the greatest and most perfect diamond in the world. The diamond was so immense it could become an enormous building. It could be made into a great church. Many men would work on it for years and it would be decorated with gold and other precious metals. In the middle of the church there would be an altar of iridescent radium, which would burn out the eyes of anyone who looked at it while praying.

In return Braddock Washington asked for only a simple thing, a thing that would be very easy for God. He asked that things return to the way they were yesterday at this time, and that they remain so. It was very simple. Let the heavens open and take these men and airplanes. Let him and his slaves live as they did before.

Braddock Washington spoke to God. But was his bribe big enough for God, he thought. God had His price. It was said that God was made in man's image, so He must have His price. And the price would be rare. It would not be an ordinary stone cathedral or a great pyramid. His diamond cathedral would be superior. That was his offer. God could take it or leave it.

As he finished speaking, his sentences became broken, short and uncertain. His hair had gradually turned white as he talked and now he lifted his head high to the heavens, like an old prophet — magnificently mad.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Escape

As John stared in amazement, something very strange began happening around him. The sky seemed to become dark for an instant and the wind started blowing. There seemed to be trumpets playing far away. For a time there was darkness and the birds' songs stopped. There seemed to be the sound of thunder.

That was all. Then the dawn continued as before and the sun rose. The leaves laughed in the sun and their laughter moved the trees. God had refused to accept the bribe.

For another moment John watched the beauty of the day. Then he turned and saw the airplanes land near the castle.

John ran down the side of the mountain where the two girls were awake. They were waiting for him. Kismine jumped to her feet. John knew there was no time for words. They must get off the mountain immediately. He took the hand of each girl and they silently moved through the trees in the morning light.

When they had gone about half a mile At a certain point they turned around and saw the mountain they had just left. Against the clear sky they

saw a white-haired man slowly coming down the mountain. Two enormous slaves followed him. They were carrying the diamond between them, which shone in the sun.

Then two other figures joined them, Mrs Washington and her son, Percy. The pilots with their guns had gone from their airplanes to the front of the castle.

Braddock Washington and his group stopped by a rock. The slaves pulled up a trapdoor in the side of the mountain. They all disappeared into the trapdoor — the white-haired man first, then his wife and son, and finally the two slaves.

Kismine pulled John's arm.

"Where are they going? What are they going to do?" she cried wildly.

"It must be some way of escape."

A little scream from the two girls interrupted his sentence.

"Don't you see?" cried Kismine. "The mountain is going to explode. They are going to destroy it."

Before she finished speaking, the color of the mountain became a bright yellow. At the same time the castle exploded and there was a great fire, and then nothing but smoke. The pilots and the five

people who had gone inside the mountain were certainly dead. Everything was destroyed and there was silence everywhere. John and the two girls were alone in the valley.

At sunset they reached the high cliff which had marked the boundaries of the Washingtons' land. They looked back at the beautiful valley, which was now peaceful again. They sat down to finish the food Jasmine had brought with her in a basket.

"There," she said, as she put the tablecloth on the grass and then put the sandwiches on it. "I always think food tastes better outdoors."

"Now," John said, "empty your pockets and let's see what jewels you brought with you. With a good selection of jewels we will be able to live well all our lives."

Kismine put her hand in her pocket and took out a lot of shiny jewels.

"Not so bad," cried John enthusiastically. "They aren't very big, but — oh no!" His expression changed when he held one of them up to the sun. "Why, these aren't diamonds. Something is wrong."

"Oh," exclaimed Kismine. "What an idiot I am."

"Why, these are glass," cried John.

"I know!" She started laughing, "I opened the wrong drawer. They belonged to a girl who visited Jasmine. She gave them to me in exchange for diamonds. I had never seen anything but diamonds before."

"And this is what you brought?"

"Yes," she said. "But I think I like these better - I'm a bit tired of diamonds."

"Very well, " said John sadly. "We'll have to live in Hades. And you will grow old and tell women that you opened the wrong drawer, and they will never believe you. Unfortunately, your father's bank books disappeared with him."

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

"If I come home with a wife at my age, my father won't give me a penny."

Jasmine spoke up.

"I love washing," she said quietly. "I have always washed my own handkerchiefs. I'll wash clothes for people and support both of you."

"Do they have laundry ladies in Hades?" asked Kismine innocently.

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

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

John laughed.

"Just try it, he said. "They'll throw you out of town before you know what's happening."

"Will father be there?" she asked.

John looked at her in astonishment.

"Your father is dead," he answered sadly. "Why should he go to Hades? You've confused it with another place with the same name."

After dinner they put away the tablecloth and put out their blankets for the night.

"What a dream it was," Kismine said, looking up at the stars. "How strange it seems to be here under the stars with one dress and a poor fiancé."

"Under the stars," she repeated. "I never noticed the stars before. I always thought of them as great big diamonds that belonged to someone. Now they frighten me. They make me feel that my youth was all a dream."

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

"How pleasant then to be mad." cried Kismine.

"That's what I'm told," said John. "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. Turn up your coat collar, little girl, it's a cold night."

He covered himself with his blanket and fell asleep.