

2 THE CARPET FROM BAGDAD

points in George's soul. The difficulty might be set forth in this manner: On one side stood inherent common sense; on the other, a boundless, roseate imagination which was likewise inherent—a kind of quixote imagination of suitable modern pattern. This *alter ego* terrified him whenever it raised its strangely beautiful head and shouldered aside his guardian-angel (for that's what common sense is, argue to what end you will) and pleaded in that luminous rhetoric under the spell of which our old friend Sancho often fell asleep.

P. A., as they called him behind the counters, was but twenty-eight, and if he was vice-president in his late father's shoes he didn't wobble round in them to any great extent. In a crowd he was not noticeable; he didn't stand head and shoulders above his fellow-men, nor would he have been mistaken by near-sighted persons, the myopes, for the Vatican's Apollo in the flesh. He was of medium height, beardless, slender, but tough and wiry and enduring. You may see his prototype on the streets a dozen times the day, and you may also pass him without turning round for a second view. Young men like P. A. must be intimately known to be admired; you