

The Offshore Pirate

by Francis Scott Fitzgerald

(Adapted book. Pre-Intermediate Level)

Part 1

“You can’t get me off this boat,” she said, “and you can’t take it anywhere. My uncle will have telephone messages traveling all over this ocean by six thirty.”

This improbable story begins on an ocean that was a blue dream. It was below a sky as blue as the blue of children’s eyes. The sun danced across the tops of the waves and made a golden pool a mile out. It was the beginning of a beautiful evening.

Between the Florida coast and the golden pool lay a white boat called the Narcissus. It wasn’t moving, but was sitting silently on the waves. On the boat, a yellow-haired girl was lying on a sofa, reading a book.

She was about nineteen, with a wide mouth and quick, gray eyes. In her hand was half an orange. As she read, she brought the orange to her mouth. Then she touched it with her tongue. She was lost in her book and didn’t hear the sound of footsteps.

An older, gray-haired man stopped in front of the girl. He didn’t look pleased. His shadow fell across her, but she didn’t look up. She turned the page of her book and touched the orange to her mouth again.

“Ardita!” said the gray-haired man.

She didn’t reply.

“Ardita!” he said again. “Ardita!”

She continued to read, and lifted the orange again.

“Oh, shut up,” she said.

“Ardita, will you listen to me?”

“Put it in writing.”

“Please close that book for two minutes. And put that orange down while I’m speaking to you.”

“Oh, can’t you leave me alone?”

“Ardita, I’ve just received a telephone message from the shore ...”

“Telephone?” Ardita said, showing a little interest for the first time.

“Yes, it was ...”

“You mean you have a telephone on this boat, out here?” she asked.

“Yes, and ...”

“Well, isn’t science wonderful!”

“Will you listen to me for a minute?”

“Oh, OK,” said Ardita, smoothing the page of her book.

“My friend Mr. Moreland has called again. He wants me to bring you to shore for dinner tonight. His son Toby has come all the way from New York to meet you. He’s invited some other young people, too. For the last time, will you ... ?

“No,” said Ardita, “I won’t. I came along on this boat trip to go to Palm Beach. You knew that was my idea. I don’t want to meet your friend, or his son, or the other young people. So either take me to Palm Beach or shut up and go away.”

“Very well, young lady. But I know you’re planning to meet a man who ...”

“I know,” said Ardita. “I’ve heard it all before. You don’t like him. You want to protect me. So you go your way and I’ll go mine. I’d like nothing better.”

“But as your uncle ...”

“Oh, go away!” Ardita shouted. “Do you want me to throw this book at you?”

Smack! The book flew through the air. It missed Ardita’s uncle and landed at his feet. He turned away and called for a small boat. Then he walked back to the sofa. Ardita was sitting there, with the orange at her tongue again.

“I am going ashore,” he said, slowly. “I will return at nine o’clock tonight, and we will start back for New York. When we arrive, I shall hand you back to your aunt. And you will stay there.”

He stopped and looked at her. Suddenly, he was no longer angry. She was little more than a child, he thought.

“Ardita,” he said, kindly. “I’m not stupid. I know men. Men like this one don’t change until they’re very old. Maybe the man loves you - that’s possible. He’s loved many women and he’ll love many more. It’s less than one month since he was seen with that terrible red-haired woman, Mimi Merrill. He promised her the gold and silver ring that Catherine of Russia gave his mother. You know this - you read the newspapers.”

“Make a film,” said Ardita. “It’s a good story for a movie.”

“Will you tell me why you want to marry him?”

“Maybe because he’s different to the stupid young men that I usually meet. Maybe because he has imagination and he’s brave. And don’t worry about the famous Russian ring. He’s going to give it to me at Palm Beach.”

“And the red-haired woman?”

“He hasn’t seen her for six months,” she said, angrily. “Men do what I want them to do.

Don’t you know that by now?”

“Is it the Russian ring that interests you?”

“No it isn’t. And you know that I never change my mind. So please go away. I refuse to go ashore. Do you hear?”

“Very well,” he said. “You’re an impossible, selfish girl and ...”

Splash! The piece of orange hit him in the neck.

A voice came from below.

“The boat is ready to take you ashore, Mr. Farnam.”

Mr. Farnam was too angry to speak. He turned and climbed down the ladder.

* * *

The sun dropped slowly and silently toward the ocean. Suddenly, the sound of men singing came up from below. Ardita lifted her head and listened. It was a very strange song, one that she didn’t know.

“Potatoes and cheese,

Pigs on their knees,

Apples and socks,
Fish on the rocks,
Lazy weather!
Send us some wind,
Send us some wind,
Send us some wind.
Pull together!”

Ardita threw her book down and hurried to the side of the ship. Fifty feet away, she saw a small boat coming toward her. There were seven men in it. Six of them were black, and one white man was standing at the front of the boat.

All were singing. Ardita watched them curiously. Then the white man lifted one hand and the music stopped.

“Greetings, Narcissus.” he called.

“What’s all this noise?” asked Ardita.

By this time, the small boat was against the side of the Narcissus. One of the black men took hold of the ladder, and the white man climbed quickly up it. He stood in front of Ardita.

“The women and children are safe!” he cried. “The men are our prisoners!” Ardita looked at him, unable to speak with excitement. He was a young man, and handsome. His hair was short and very black. His clothes were smart. “This ship is now mine.” he said.

“Who are you?” she asked coldly. “Are you mad, or is this a joke?”

“We’re pirates, and we have now taken this ship,” he replied.

“Get off the boat,” Ardita said.

“What?” The young man seemed very surprised.

“Get off the boat! You heard me!”

He looked at her for a minute.

“No I won’t,” he said slowly. “You can get off, if you want to.”

He went to the side of the ship and called to the men below. Immediately, the six black men climbed up the ladder and stood in front of him. They were all wearing dirty old blue uniforms. Each man was carrying a white bag.

“Step forward, Babe,” the young man said, and the smallest man stepped in front of the others.

“Yes, sir!”

“Go down below. Tie up everyone you find. And put those bags over there.” “Yes, sir!”

Babe turned to the other pirates and then they all went downstairs.

“Now,” said the young man to Ardita, “promise to keep your pretty little mouth shut for forty-eight hours. Then you can take our boat and go ashore.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then you’re going to sail with us.”

The young man sat down on Ardita’s sofa and looked around. He noticed the book and the orange.

“Hm. Have you got a clear head?”

Ardita didn’t reply.

“Because in five minutes you have to decide. Go or stay.”

He picked up the book and looked at it curiously.

“This is written in French - are you French?”

“No.”

“What’s your name?”

“Farnam”

“Farnam what?”

“Ardita Farnam.”

“Well, Ardita, don’t stand there looking nervous. Come over here and sit down.”

Ardita’s hands were shaking a little. She walked across to the other sofa and sat opposite the young man.

“You can’t get me off this boat,” she said, “and you can’t take it anywhere. My uncle will have telephone messages traveling all over this ocean by six thirty.”

The young man looked back at her, but said nothing.

“I don’t mind,” she continued. “It isn’t my boat. I don’t mind sailing with you for an hour or two. You can borrow that book if you

like. Then you can read it when the revenue men catch you. There will be plenty of time to read in prison.”

He laughed. “This was planned a long time before I knew about this boat. One boat is as good as another.”

“Who are you?” asked Ardita suddenly. “And what are you?”

“You’ve decided not to go ashore?”

“I never even thought about it.”

“We’re called Curtis Carlyle and his Six Black Friends. We were musicians and singers until today. Now, we’re pirates and we’re running from the law.”

He waved a hand at the white bags.

“What’s in the bags?” Ardita asked curiously.

“Well, let’s call it sand - Florida sand.”

* * *

Ten minutes later, the *Narcissus* was sailing away from the coast. It went south through the warm evening, as the sun came down. Babe seemed to be Curtis Carlyle’s main assistant. He gave orders to the other pirates. One of them was busy with a can of paint. He painted over the name *Narcissus* on the front of the boat and wrote the new name, *Hula Hula*.

Carlyle sat with Ardita, waiting for dinner. He lay back on the sofa and closed his eyes. Ardita looked at him carefully.

“He’s a romantic person,” she thought, “but less sure of himself than he seems. He’s not really like me. There’s something different about him.”

But he was the same as her in some ways. Like Ardita, Curtis Carlyle was selfish. She liked selfish people - they were never boring - and they always fell at her feet in the end. But this man seemed softer, even defenseless. She was interested in him, more interested than in herself. And that was unusual for Ardita.

The night became darker and the stars came out. A pale moon smiled down onto the ocean and dark clouds came across the sky. The shore slowly disappeared. Sometimes, one of the pirates lit a cigarette.

The only other light came from the moon. There was no sound except for the waves. All around them was the smell of the salt water.

Carlyle broke the silence.

“Lucky girl,” he said. “I’ve always wanted to be rich—and to buy all this.”

“Better to be you,” said Ardita. “I’m not really interested in money. It can’t give you everything. And it can’t change the person you are. I’m not afraid of anything on earth. Money didn’t give me that. It’s how I am.”

“Hm. I’m afraid of some things.”

“Let’s talk about you. What have you done? And how did you do it?” she asked.

“Why do you want to know? Are you going to write a movie about me?”

“Tell me,” she said. “Lie to me by moonlight. Tell me a wonderful story.”

One of the men arrived and lit some lights. Then he prepared the table for dinner. They ate cold chicken, salad, and fruit. Carlyle began to talk, slowly at first. Then he saw her interest and continued more happily. Ardita ate very little as she watched his handsome young face. And it was a good story.

“I began life as a poor kid in a Tennessee town. We were so poor, we were the only white family on the street. My friends were all black kids. There was a black woman called Belle Pope Calhoun. She played the piano at parties for rich white children. I sat next to her piano for hours, listening to her. She taught me to play. By the time I was thirteen, I was playing music in little cafes around Nashville. Eight years later, I took six of my black friends with me and we became a band. These are the men that you see me with now. We had great success. We played in all the big theaters in New York, and suddenly we were rich.”

Carlyle stopped. He took a drink, then put his glass down.

“And then it all changed. I stopped enjoying that life. We were making money - lots of it. Sometimes we played for private parties at

three thousand dollars a night. But these were in houses where I wasn't welcome during the day.

I was only the paid musician. I thought about leaving the boys - becoming a pianist without them. But I was sick of the theater life. I wanted to have a lot of money, but I wanted time for reading and playing. I wanted to be part of the society that I played for. So I needed to get rich, quickly. I put all of my money into a business idea. But the business failed and I lost everything.

"Then the war came. I became a soldier, but one of the officers knew me as a musician. After that, I spent the war playing in a band, for the soldiers."

Carlyle lit a cigarette and lay back on the sofa.

"And then, after the war, it all started again. The band came together again. We played for private dances, and some of the best Florida hotels wanted us, too. It was only a question of time then."

Ardita looked at him and waited for him to continue. But he shook his head.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to tell you about it. It's the best part of my story. I'm enjoying my life too much now. I want to keep it for myself a little longer. If I tell you, I'll lose some of the excitement. I want to remember that wonderful feeling when they suddenly realized."

"Realized what?" asked Ardita.

"That I was more than a musician."

From below came the sound of singing. Ardita listened, smiling. Her eyes closed.

Carlyle was silent for a minute. He looked up at the stars in the warm night sky.

"This is what I'm looking for," he said softly. "I want something beautiful that comes suddenly, like a dream. Like the beautiful eyes of a girl."

He turned to Ardita, but she was silent.

"You understand, don't you, Anita - I mean, Ardita?"

But she didn't answer. She was asleep.

Next day, Ardita sat as usual in her favorite seat, reading. At around noon, she reached the last page of her book and put it down next to her. She looked up and saw an island in the ocean. It was green with trees, and all around it was a white, sandy beach. At one end, she could see a tall, gray cliff.

Carlyle was standing at the side of the ship, looking at the island. Ardita called across to him.

“Is this it? Is this where you’re going?”

But Carlyle didn’t know. He shouted to Babe.

“Oh, Babe, is this your island?”

“Yes, sir! This is it!”

Carlyle joined Ardita.

“It looks interesting, doesn’t it?” he said.

“Yes,” Ardita replied, “but it doesn’t look big enough for a hiding place.”

“Are you still thinking of your uncle’s telephones? Do you think he’ll find us out here? Maybe you’re hoping for that.”

“No. I’m with you now. I’d like to see you escape.”

Carlyle laughed.

“You’re our Lady Luck. We’ll have to keep you with us - for now.”

“Well, you can’t ask me to swim back,” she said. “If you do, I shall write down your long, long story. I’ll turn it into a book.”

“I’m very sorry I bored you last night,” he replied.

“Oh you didn’t - only at the end. You were very angry, weren’t you?”

“Only because you couldn’t dance with those ladies. You were no more than a musician to them.”

Carlyle was angry, but Ardita laughed.

“Men usually want to talk about me,” she said, “not themselves.”

“And does every man say, ‘I love you’?”

Ardita laughed. “All of life is moving toward, or away from, that one sentence - I love you.”

“That’s a very smart thing to say,” said Carlyle.

“Much too smart for this time in the morning. Morning’s the time for sleeping and swimming. And being careless.”

The island came closer, and the black musicians started to sing again.

“Oh, down, Oh down,
My Momma wants to show me the stars,
Oh down, Oh down,
Daddy says tomorrow!
But Momma says today,
Yes Momma says today!”

Ten minutes later, the ship reached the island. It went around in a wide circle to the northern point.

“There’s a trick somewhere,” Ardita thought. “He can’t mean to stop under this cliff.”

They were now heading straight toward the rock. The cliff was over a hundred feet tall. Then Ardita saw where they were going.

There was a break in the cliff, hidden from the ocean. It was a very narrow passage, just wide enough for the boat. They traveled slowly, on calm, clear water between high gray walls. Finally, the passage opened out into a wide lake. Around them were trees and flowers, and in front of them was a beach.

Ardita laughed. “It’s a wonderful place to hide!” she said.

“It’s the kind of place that you read about,” said Carlyle.

“What’s its name?” Ardita asked Babe.

“No name,” he replied, laughing. “Just ‘Island,’ that’s all.”

A small boat was lowered onto the lake, and they went ashore.

“Come with me,” said Carlyle as he jumped onto the sandy beach. “Let’s take a look around.”

Part 2

“Think of the newspaper stories! ‘The society girl and the pirate!

Ardita Tarnam runs away with a bank robber!’”

They walked south to another beautiful white beach. Ardita kicked off her shoes and walked into the warm water. Then they walked slowly back to the small boat. Babe already had lunch ready for them. He had a man on the cliff, looking out for other boats. But he was sure that nobody knew about the break in the cliffs - or the island.

“This island’s not on any maps,” he said, smiling. “It’s too small.”

In the afternoon, they sat with their backs against the rocks on the highest part of the cliff. Carlyle told Ardita about his plans.

“The revenue men will be after me by now,” he said. “So we’ll stay here for a few weeks. Then we’ll travel south and go to Callao in Peru.”

“How much money have you stolen?” asked Ardita.

“Just under a million dollars,” he said.

“And what will you do in Callao?”

“Take a ship for India. I plan to go into Afghanistan. I’ll buy a palace there. Then after about five years, I’ll go to England. I’ll sound strangely foreign and my past will be a mystery. But India first. They say that all the gold in the world goes back to India in the end. I find that very interesting. And I want to read. I want enough time to read every possible book.”

Ardita laughed.

“You can laugh. But I know exactly what I want. Do you?”

“Oh, yes.”

“What is it?”

“A man.”

“What do you mean? Which man? Are you engaged?”

“Not exactly. But I had a plan to meet him in Palm Beach. You changed all that when you arrived. He’s waiting there for me with a gold and silver ring. It belonged to Catherine of Russia. I liked him because he had imagination and strong opinions.”

“And your family weren’t happy about this man?” he asked.

“I only have a silly uncle and a sillier aunt. They were very unhappy. There was another woman in the story. But he gave her up immediately, for me.”

Ardita moved forward and looked over the cliff. The ocean was far below. "Let's go swimming tonight," she said, "by moonlight."

Carlyle said nothing, but he smiled to himself.

Night came, turning everything blue and silver. They took the small boat into the lake and pulled it up onto the beach. Then they sat in the bright moonlight and watched the water.

"Are you happy?" Carlyle asked.

"I'm always happy near the ocean," said Ardita. "You know, you and I are the same in some ways. We have a similar history. Two years ago, when I was eighteen and you were ..."

"Twenty-five."

"... well, we were both successful in ordinary ways. You were a successful musician. I was beautiful young woman joining society. But deep inside us, we wanted more than that. I didn't know what I wanted. I went from man to man and I became more and more unhappy. I wanted things now-now-now! I didn't want to wait."

Ardita stood up suddenly.

"Wait a minute. I'm going to try this wonderful-looking water."

She ran forward, and then he heard her in the water. Her voice came back to him.

"I read everything I could find. I began to hate society."

"Come back, Ardita," he called to her.

"I will, in a minute. Listen, first. I enjoyed being terrible - that was all. I went to parties in beautiful but impossible costumes. I went around with the most exciting men in New York. I was a very bad, wild girl."

Soon, Carlyle heard the sound of her feet on the sand and she sat down next to him.

"Go in," she said. "It's wonderful."

He swam a little, then they sat together again on the sand.

"My family was angry," she continued. "They tried to find me a husband. And then, suddenly, I found something. I discovered that I was brave. I started to believe in myself. And that helped me through life. Men still came to me - old men and young men. They all wanted to

marry this proud, brave woman, but I didn't want any of them. I decided to live exactly as I liked. I wanted to die in my own way, too."

"That's OK for you," said Carlyle. "You can be brave if you're rich. It's different for me."

"You have to believe in yourself. But I also have hope, and you can have that, too. My hope always is that things will get better."

She ran to the water again. Carlyle heard her laugh as she reached the warm lake. And then he knew he loved her.

* * *

For the next three days, Ardita got up early. She started every morning with a swim. The black musicians left their work and watched her over the side of the ship.

In the afternoons, she swam again or she sat with Carlyle on the cliff. There, they talked for hours. Sometimes, they went to the beach on the south of the island to watch the sun go down.

Ardita didn't want this to end. She stopped thinking of it as a crazy, romantic adventure in the middle of her boring life.

"How can I go back to my old life," she thought, "after this? How can I start making decisions again about my future?"

She began to hate the idea of Carlyle leaving the island.

"Take me with you," she said late one night.

She was sitting on the grass with Carlyle. Across the other side of the lake, the musicians were playing their music.

"I'd love to become a very rich Indian lady," she added.

Carlyle looked at her quickly.

"You can, you know."

She laughed.

"Are you asking me to marry you? Think of the newspaper stories! 'The society girl and the pirate! Ardita Farnam runs away with a bank robber!'"

"It wasn't a bank."

"What was it? Why don't you tell me?"

"I don't want to take away your good opinion."

"My good opinion of you?"

“No, of yourself.”

Ardita looked up in surprise.

“Myself? I don’t understand. We’re talking about your crimes,” she said. “Not about me.”

“Well, we’ll see about that. But it’s better if you don’t know, right now.”

She reached over and touched his hand.

“Dear Mr. Curtis Carlyle,” she said softly, “are you in love with me?”

“Does it matter?”

“Yes,” she said, “it does. Because I think I’m in love with you.”

“That must make your January total at least six,” he suggested. “Maybe I will ask you to come to India with me.”

“Will you?”

“We can get married in Callao.”

“But what will happen when the revenue men catch you? What will happen to me?”

“I thought you weren’t afraid.”

“I’m not. But I won’t throw my life away to prove it to one man.”

“I love you, Ardita,” he said quietly.

Her face became serious.

“I love to be with you,” she said, “more than with any man I’ve ever met.

And I like your looks and your dark hair. You’re brave, and I like that, too. I like all the things you do, Curtis Carlyle. But I’m not old enough, or bored enough, to go with you. I think I’ll go back. I’ll marry - that other man.”

Across the silver lake, the musicians continued to play.

“Let’s dance!” cried Ardita. “I can’t sit here with this music playing.”

Carlyle took her hand and they walked out onto a wide area of hard sand. The music came across the lake to them. Ardita felt that she was in a dream. They danced under the moonlight and the stars, with the summer smells of flowers all around them.

“This is perfect,” said Ardita, softly.

“It’s a private dance, only for the very rich and the very beautiful,” Carlyle said softly in her ear.

“I feel quite crazy, but wonderful!”

They both laughed, but then suddenly the music stopped. They saw one of the men running around the lake. He came closer. They saw it was Babe.

“There’s a ship out there,” he said, pointing. “It’s less than a mile away and it’s not moving.”

“A ship? What’s it like?” Carlyle asked, and Ardita saw his face change. He looked very worried.

“I don’t know, sir.”

“Are they sending a boat ashore?” Carlyle asked.

“No sir.”

“We’ll go up.”

They climbed the hill in silence, hand in hand. At the top, they looked carefully over the cliff. Carlyle gave a little cry.

“It’s a revenue boat,” he said.

There were six-inch guns at the front and back.

“They know,” he said. “They know we’re here. How did they find us?”

“Are you sure they know about the break in the cliff? Maybe they’ll just take a look at the island in the morning. They can’t be sure we’re here. They won’t see our ship from out there,” Ardita said.

“Maybe they will,” he said. He looked at his watch. “It’s almost two o’clock now. You’re right that they won’t do anything until morning. Maybe they’re waiting for another ship. It’s possible.”

The hours passed and Ardita and Carlyle lay there, side by side. They were both silent, their heads in their hands, like dreaming children. Behind them, the musicians also waited.

Just before five o’clock, Babe came to Carlyle.

“There are guns on the Narcissus, sir,” he said. We can fight. “We only need a plan.”

But Carlyle laughed and shook his head.

“That’s a revenue boat, Babe. Look at the guns that they have! We can’t fight them and win. You can hide those bags in the sand if you like. But the men will go all over the island. They’ll find them.”

Babe turned away silently.

“He’s the best friend I’ve ever had,” Carlyle said to Ardita.

“You’ve given up?” asked Ardita.

“I have to - they’ll catch me. Look!”

The color of the sky was growing lighter. On the revenue ship they could see a group of men looking toward the island. They were looking straight at the break in the cliff.

“I’m so sorry,” Ardita said, softly. There were tears in her eyes.

“We’ll go back to the boat,” said Carlyle. “It’s better that way.”

They went down to the lake, and the small boat took them all back to the Narcissus. Ardita and Carlyle sat on the sofas and waited.

Almost an hour later, the front of the revenue boat came into view. It was sailing slowly into the break in the cliff. Then it stopped, and the sailors put two small boats over the side. In one boat was an officer and six men in blue uniforms. In the other were four men in uniform. Two gray-haired men were sitting at the back of the boat.

Ardita and Carlyle stood up at the same time and he moved toward her. Then he put his hand into his pocket and gave Ardita a small package.

“What’s this?” she asked.

She opened the paper and took out a gold and silver ring.

“I can’t be completely sure. But look closely. I think that’s your promised Russian ring,” he said.

“But how ... where ... ?”

“It came out of one of those bags. Let me explain. Curtis Carlyle and his Six Black Friends were playing in the tea-room of an expensive hotel in Palm Beach. In the middle of a song, they suddenly pulled out guns and pointed them at the crowd. I took this ring from a pretty woman with red hair.”

Ardita smiled.

“So that’s what you did! I knew you were brave! And you do believe in yourself.”

And then the sun came up and the sky was golden. The shadows on the ship disappeared into the corners. Ardita and Carlyle moved closer together and kissed.

She smiled up at him.

“Are you happy?” he asked.

But it was clear from the look on her face. Ardita was happier than ever before. For another minute, life was wonderful. Then they heard the sound of a small boat at the side of the Narcissus.

The two gray-haired men came up the ladder first. An officer and two sailors followed behind them.

Mr. Farnam looked at Ardita.

“So,” he said, slowly.

Ardita took her arms away from Carlyle’s neck. She looked at her uncle.

“So,” he repeated angrily. “So this is your romantic idea of life. You decided to run away with a pirate.”

“What a stupid old man you are!” she said quietly.

“Is that your best defense?”

“No,” she said. “No, there’s another thing. I’ve used these words to end most of our conversations for the past few years - ‘Shut up!’”

She took one last look at the two old men, the officer, and the sailors. Then she turned and walked away.

As soon as she left, her uncle started to laugh. The second old man laughed, too, then he turned to Carlyle.

“Well, Toby,” he said, “you crazy romantic boy. What have you learned? Is she the person you wanted?”

Carlyle smiled.

“Yes, of course. I was sure when I first heard about her. You received Babe’s message last night?”

“We did,” said Mr. Moreland. “But we kept quite close to you all the time. We were a little worried about those strange black musicians. We don’t know much about them.”

Carlyle laughed.

“They’re good men,” he said. “They played their part perfectly. Ardita never guessed.”

“Your father and I sat up all night, waiting,” said Mr. Farnam. “You’re welcome to her, my boy. She’s driven me crazy. Did you give her the Russian ring that my detective got from that Mimi woman?”

“Yes,” said Carlyle. “Be quiet! She’s coming back!”

Ardita looked at the group of men.

“Why does everybody look so pleased?” she thought. “What has happened here without me?”

“Ardita,” said Carlyle.

He took a step toward her. She took a step toward him.

“Ardita,” he repeated. “I have to tell you now. My story wasn’t true. It came out of thin Florida air. My name isn’t Carlyle. It’s Moreland - Toby Moreland.” She looked at him, unbelieving at first, then surprised, and then angry.

The three men waited. Mr. Moreland moved toward her. Mr. Farnam waited, worried.

But Ardita suddenly smiled, then laughed. She went to young Moreland and looked up at him. Her gray eyes were not at all angry.

“Promise me,” she said, “that you thought of this.”

“I promise,” he said. “It was my idea completely.”

Ardita kissed him.

“You imagined all this! That’s wonderful!” she said softly. “I want you to lie to me as sweetly for the rest of my life.”

The singing of the black musicians started again. Then Ardita remembered something.

“What was in those bags?” she asked.

“Florida sand,” he answered. “That was one of two true things that I told you.”

“Maybe I can guess the other,” she said, and she kissed him again.

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

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