

# The Offshore Pirate

F. Scott Fitzgerald

## I

This unlikely story begins on a sea that was a blue dream, as colorful as blue-silk stockings, and beneath a sky as blue as the irises of children's eyes. From the western half of the sky the sun was shying little golden disks at the sea—if you gazed intently enough you could see them skip from wave tip to wave tip until they joined a broad collar of golden coin that was collecting half a mile out and would eventually be a dazzling sunset. About half-way between the Florida shore and the golden collar a white steam-yacht, very young and graceful, was riding at anchor and under a blue-and-white awning aft a yellow-haired girl reclined in a wicker settee reading *The Revolt of the Angels*, by Anatole France.

She was about nineteen, slender and supple, with a spoiled alluring mouth and quick gray eyes full of a radiant curiosity. Her feet, stockingless, and adorned rather than clad in blue-satin slippers which swung nonchalantly from her toes, were perched on the arm of a settee adjoining the one she occupied. And as she read she intermittently regaled herself by a faint application to her tongue of a half-lemon that she held in her hand. The other half, sucked dry, lay on the deck at her feet and rocked very gently to and fro at the almost imperceptible motion of the tide.

The second half-lemon was well-nigh pulpless and the golden collar had grown astonishing in width, when suddenly the drowsy silence which enveloped the yacht was broken by the sound of heavy footsteps and an elderly man topped with orderly gray hair and clad in a white-flannel suit appeared at the head of the companionway. There he paused for a moment until his eyes became accustomed to the sun, and then seeing the girl under the awning he uttered a long even grunt of disapproval.

If he had intended thereby to obtain a rise of any sort he was doomed to disappointment. The girl calmly turned over two pages, turned back one, raised the lemon mechanically to tasting distance, and then very faintly but quite unmistakably yawned.

“Ardita!” said the gray-haired man sternly.

Ardita uttered a small sound indicating nothing.

“Ardita!” he repeated. “Ardita!”

Ardita raised the lemon languidly, allowing three words to slip out before it reached her tongue.

“Oh, shut up.”

“Ardita!”

“What?”

“Will you listen to me—or will I have to get a servant to hold you while I talk to you?”

The lemon descended very slowly and scornfully.

“Put it in writing.”

“Will you have the decency to close that abominable book and discard that damn lemon for two minutes?”

“Oh, can’t you lemme alone for a second?”

“Ardita, I have just received a telephone message from the shore——”

“Telephone?” She showed for the first time a faint interest.

“Yes, it was——”

“Do you mean to say,” she interrupted wonderingly, “ ’at they let you run a wire out here?”

“Yes, and just now——”

“Won’t other boats bump into it?”

“No. It’s run along the bottom. Five min——”

“Well, I’ll be darned! Gosh! Science is golden or something— isn’t it?”

“Will you let me say what I started to?”

“Shoot!”

“Well it seems—well, I am up here—” He paused and swallowed several times distractedly.

“Oh, yes. Young woman, Colonel Moreland has called up again to ask me to be sure to bring you in to dinner. His son Toby has come all the way from New York to meet you and he’s invited several other young people. For the last time, will you——”

“No,” said Ardita shortly, “I won’t. I came along on this darn cruise with the one idea of going to Palm Beach, and you knew it, and I absolutely refuse to meet any darn old colonel or any darn young Toby or any darn old young people or to set foot in any other darn old town in this crazy state. So you either take me to Palm Beach or else shut up and go away.”

“Very well. This is the last straw. In your infatuation for this man.—a man who is notorious for his excesses—a man your father would not have allowed to so much as mention your name—you have rejected the demi-monde rather than the circles in which you have presumably grown up. From now on——”

“I know,” interrupted Ardita ironically, “from now on you go your way and I go mine. I’ve heard that story before. You know I’d like nothing better.”

“From now on,” he announced grandiloquently, “you are no niece of mine. I——”

“O-o-o-oh!” The cry was wrung from Ardita with the agony of a lost soul. “Will you stop boring me! Will you go ’way! Will you jump overboard and drown! Do you want me to throw this book at you!”

“If you dare do any——”

Smack! The Revolt of the Angels sailed through the air, missed its target by the length of a short nose, and bumped cheerfully down the companionway.

The gray-haired man made an instinctive step backward and then two cautious steps forward. Ardita jumped to her five feet four and stared at him defiantly, her gray eyes blazing.

“Keep off!”

“How dare you!” he cried.

“Because I darn please!”

“You’ve grown unbearable! Your disposition——”

“You’ve made me that way! No child ever has a bad disposition unless it’s her fancy’s fault! Whatever I am, you did it.”

Muttering something under his breath her uncle turned and, walking forward called in a loud voice for the launch. Then he returned to the awning, where Ardita had again seated

herself and resumed her attention to the lemon.

"I am going ashore," he said slowly. "I will be out again at nine o'clock to-night. When I return we start back to New York, wither I shall turn you over to your aunt for the rest of your natural, or rather unnatural, life." He paused and looked at her, and then all at once something in the utter childness of her beauty seemed to puncture his anger like an inflated tire, and render him helpless, uncertain, utterly fatuous.

"Ardita," he said not unkindly, "I'm no fool. I've been round. I know men. And, child, confirmed libertines don't reform until they're tired—and then they're not themselves—they're husks of themselves." He looked at her as if expecting agreement, but receiving no sight or sound of it he continued. "Perhaps the man loves you—that's possible. He's loved many women and he'll love many more. Less than a month ago, one month, Ardita, he was involved in a notorious affair with that red-haired woman, Mimi Merrill; promised to give her the diamond bracelet that the Czar of Russia gave his mother. You know—you read the papers."

"Thrilling scandals by an anxious uncle," yawned Ardita. "Have it filmed. Wicked clubman making eyes at virtuous flapper. Virtuous flapper conclusively vamped by his lurid past. Plans to meet him at Palm Beach. Foiled by anxious uncle."

"Will you tell me why the devil you want to marry him?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," said Audits shortly. "Maybe because he's the only man I know, good or bad, who has an imagination and the courage of his convictions. Maybe it's to get away from the young fools that spend their vacuous hours pursuing me around the country. But as for the famous Russian bracelet, you can set your mind at rest on that score. He's going to give it to me at Palm Beach—if you'll show a little intelligence."

"How about the—red-haired woman?"

"He hasn't seen her for six months," she said angrily. "Don't you suppose I have enough pride to see to that? Don't you know by this time that I can do any darn thing with any darn man I want to?"

She put her chin in the air like the statue of France Aroused, and then spoiled the pose somewhat by raising the lemon for action.

"Is it the Russian bracelet that fascinates you?"

"No, I'm merely trying to give you the sort of argument that would appeal to your intelligence. And I wish you'd go 'way," she said, her temper rising again. "You know I never

change my mind. You've been boring me for three days until I'm about to go crazy. I won't go ashore! Won't! Do you hear? Won't!"

"Very well," he said, "and you won't go to Palm Beach either. Of all the selfish, spoiled, uncontrolled disagreeable, impossible girl I have——"

Splash! The half-lemon caught him in the neck. Simultaneously came a hail from over the side.

"The launch is ready, Mr. Farnam."

Too full of words and rage to speak, Mr. Farnam cast one utterly condemning glance at his niece and, turning, ran swiftly down the ladder.

## II

Five o'clock robed down from the sun and plumped soundlessly into the sea. The golden collar widened into a glittering island; and a faint breeze that had been playing with the edges of the awning and swaying one of the dangling blue slippers became suddenly freighted with song. It was a chorus of men in close harmony and in perfect rhythm to an accompanying sound of oars dealing the blue waters. Ardita lifted her head and listened.

"Carrots and Peas,

Beans on their knees,

Pigs in the seas,

Lucky fellows!

Blow us a breeze,

Blow us a breeze,

Blow us a breeze,

With your bellows."

Ardita's brow wrinkled in astonishment. Sitting very still she listened eagerly as the chorus took up a second verse.

“Onions and beans,  
Marshalls and Deans,  
Goldbergs and Greens  
And Costellos.  
Blow us a breeze,  
Blow us a breeze,  
Blow us a breeze,  
With your bellows.”

With an exclamation she tossed her book to the desk, where it sprawled at a straddle, and hurried to the rail. Fifty feet away a large rowboat was approaching containing seven men, six of them rowing and one standing up in the stern keeping time to their song with an orchestra leader's baton.

“Oysters and Rocks,  
Sawdust and socks,  
Who could make clocks  
Out of cellos?—”

The leader's eyes suddenly rested on Ardita, who was leaning over the rail spellbound with curiosity. He made a quick movement with his baton and the singing instantly ceased. She saw that he was the only white man in the boat—the six rowers were negroes.

“Narcissus ahoy!” he called politely.

“What's the idea of all the discord?” demanded Ardita cheerfully. “Is this the varsity crew from the county nut farm?”

By this time the boat was scraping the side of the yacht and a great bulking negro in the bow turned round and grasped the ladder. Thereupon the leader left his position in the stern and before Ardita had realized his intention he ran up the ladder and stood breathless before her on the deck.

“The women and children will be spared!” he said briskly. “All crying babies will be immediately drowned and all males put in double irons!” Digging her hands excitedly down into the pockets of her dress Ardita stared at him, speechless with astonishment. He was a young man with a scornful mouth and the bright blue eyes of a healthy baby set in a dark sensitive face. His hair was pitch black, damp and curly—the hair of a Grecian statue gone brunette. He was trimly built, trimly dressed, and graceful as an agile quarter-back.

“Well, I'll be a son of a gun!” she said dazedly.

They eyed each other coolly.

“Do you surrender the ship?”

“Is this an outburst of wit?” demanded Ardita. “Are you an idiot—or just being initiated to some fraternity?”

“I asked you if you surrendered the ship.”

“I thought the country was dry,” said Ardita disdainfully. “Have you been drinking finger-nail enamel? You better get off this yacht!”

“What?” the young man's voice expressed incredulity.

“Get off the yacht! You heard me!”

He looked at her for a moment as if considering what she had said.

“No,” said his scornful mouth slowly; “No, I won't get off the yacht. You can get off if you

wish.”

Going to the rail he gave a curt command and immediately the crew of the rowboat scrambled up the ladder and ranged themselves in line before him, a coal-black and burly darky at one end and a miniature mulatto of four feet nine at the other. They seemed to be uniformly dressed in some sort of blue costume ornamented with dust, mud, and tatters; over the shoulder of each was slung a small, heavy-looking white sack, and under their arms they carried large black cases apparently containing musical instruments.

“Ten-*shun*!” commanded the young man, snapping his own heels together crisply. “Right *driss*! Front! Step out here, Babe!”

The smallest Negro took a quick step forward and saluted.

“Take command, go down below, catch the crew and tie ’em up—all except the engineer. Bring him up to me. Oh, and pile those bags by the rail there.”

“Yas-suh!”

Babe saluted again and wheeling about motioned for the five others to gather about him. Then after a short whispered consultation they all filed noiselessly down the companionway.

“Now,” said the young man cheerfully to Ardita, who had witnessed this last scene in withering silence, “if you will swear on your honor as a flapper—which probably isn’t worth much—that you’ll keep that spoiled little mouth of yours tight shut for forty-eight hours, you can row yourself ashore in our rowboat.”

“Otherwise what?”

“Otherwise you’re going to sea in a ship.”

With a little sigh as for a crisis well passed, the young man sank into the settee Ardita had lately vacated and stretched his arms lazily. The corners of his mouth relaxed appreciatively as he looked round at the rich striped awning, the polished brass, and the luxurious fittings of the deck. His eye fell on the book, and then on the exhausted lemon.

“Hm,” he said, “Stonewall Jackson claimed that lemon-juice cleared his head. Your head feel pretty clear?”

Ardita disdained to answer.



“Because inside of five minutes you’ll have to make a clear decision whether it’s go or stay.”

He picked up the book and opened it curiously.

“The Revolt of the Angels. Sounds pretty good. French, eh?” He stared at her with new interest “You French?”

“No.”

“What’s your name?”

“Farnam.”

“Farnam what?”

“Ardita Farnam.”

“Well Ardita, no use standing up there and chewing out the insides of your mouth. You ought to break those nervous habits while you’re young. Come over here and sit down.”

Ardita took a carved jade case from her pocket, extracted a cigarette and lit it with a conscious coolness, though she knew her hand was trembling a little; then she crossed over with her supple, swinging walk, and sitting down in the other settee blew a mouthful of smoke at the awning.

“You can’t get me off this yacht,” she said steadily; “and you haven’t got very much sense if you think you’ll get far with it. My uncle’ll have wirelesses zigzagging all over this ocean by half past six.”

“Hm.”

She looked quickly at his face, caught anxiety stamped there plainly in the faintest depression of the mouth’s corners.

“It’s all the same to me,” she said, shrugging her shoulders. “ ’Tisn’t my yacht. I don’t mind going for a coupla hours’ cruise. I’ll even lend you that book so you’ll have something to read on the revenue boat that takes you up to Sing-Sing.”

He laughed scornfully.

“If that’s advice you needn’t bother. This is part of a plan arranged before I ever knew this

yacht existed. If it hadn't been this one it'd have been the next one we passed anchored along the coast."

"Who are you?" demanded Ardita suddenly. "And what are you?"

"You've decided not to go ashore?"

"I never even faintly considered it."

"We're generally known," he said "all seven of us, as Curtis Carlyle and his Six Black Buddies late of the Winter Garden and the Midnight Frolic."

"You're singers?"

"We were until to-day. At present, due to those white bags you see there we're fugitives from justice and if the reward offered for our capture hasn't by this time reached twenty thousand dollars I miss my guess."

"What's in the bags?" asked Ardita curiously.

"Well," he said "for the present we'll call it—mud—Florida mud."

### III

Within ten minutes after Curtis Carlyle's interview with a very frightened engineer the yacht *Narcissus* was under way, steaming south through a balmy tropical twilight. The little mulatto, Babe, who seems to have Carlyle's implicit confidence, took full command of the situation. Mr. Farnam's valet and the chef, the only members of the crew on board except the engineer, having shown fight, were now reconsidering, strapped securely to their bunks below. Trombone Mose, the biggest negro, was set busy with a can of paint obliterating the name *Narcissus* from the bow, and substituting the name *Hula Hula*, and the others congregated aft and became intently involved in a game of craps.

Having given order for a meal to be prepared and served on deck at seven-thirty, Carlyle rejoined Ardita, and, sinking back into his settee, half closed his eyes and fell into a state of profound abstraction.

Ardita scrutinized him carefully—and classed him immediately as a romantic figure. He gave the effect of towering self-confidence erected on a slight foundation—just under the surface of each of his decisions she discerned a hesitancy that was in decided contrast to the

arrogant curl of his lips.

“He’s not like me,” she thought “There’s a difference somewhere.” Being a supreme egotist Ardita frequently thought about herself; never having had her egotism disputed she did it entirely naturally and with no detraction from her unquestioned charm. Though she was nineteen she gave the effect of a high-spirited precocious child, and in the present glow of her youth and beauty all the men and women she had known were but driftwood on the ripples of her temperament. She had met other egotists—in fact she found that selfish people bored her rather less than unselfish people—but as yet there had not been one she had not eventually defeated and brought to her feet.

But though she recognized an egotist in the settee, she felt none of that usual shutting of doors in her mind which meant clearing ship for action; on the contrary her instinct told her that this man was somehow completely pregnable and quite defenseless. When Ardita defied convention—and of late it had been her chief amusement—it was from an intense desire to be herself, and she felt that this man, on the contrary, was preoccupied with his own defiance.

She was much more interested in him than she was in her own situation, which affected her as the prospect of a matinee might affect a ten-year-old child. She had implicit confidence in her ability to take care of herself under any and all circumstances.

The night deepened. A pale new moon smiled misty-eyed upon the sea, and as the shore faded dimly out and dark clouds were blown like leaves along the far horizon a great haze of moonshine suddenly bathed the yacht and spread an avenue of glittering mail in her swift path. From time to time there was the bright flare of a match as one of them lighted a cigarette, but except for the low under-tone of the throbbing engines and the even wash of the waves about the stern the yacht was quiet as a dream boat star-bound through the heavens. Round them bowed the smell of the night sea, bringing with it an infinite languor.

Carlyle broke the silence at last.

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

Ardita yawned.

“I’d rather be you,” she said frankly.

“You would—for about a day. But you do seem to possess a lot of nerve for a flapper.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call me that.”

“Beg your pardon.”

“As to nerve,” she continued slowly, “it’s my one redeeming feature. I’m not afraid of anything in heaven or earth.”

“Hm, I am.”

“To be afraid,” said Ardita, “a person has either to be very great and strong—or else a coward. I’m neither.” She paused for a moment, and eagerness crept into her tone. “But I want to talk about you. What on earth have you done—and how did you do it?”

“Why?” he demanded cynically. “Going to write a movie about me?”

“Go on,” she urged. “Lie to me by the moonlight. Do a fabulous story.”

A negro appeared, switched on a string of small lights under the awning, and began setting the wicker table for supper. And while they ate cold sliced chicken, salad, artichokes and strawberry jam from the plentiful larder below, Carlyle began to talk, hesitatingly at first, but eagerly as he saw she was interested. Ardita scarcely touched her food as she watched his dark young face—handsome, ironic faintly ineffectual.

He began life as a poor kid in a Tennessee town, he said, so poor that his people were the only white family in their street. He never remembered any white children—but there were inevitably a dozen pickaninnies streaming in his trail, passionate admirers whom he kept in tow by the vividness of his imagination and the amount of trouble he was always getting them in and out of. And it seemed that this association diverted a rather unusual musical gift into a strange channel.

There had been a colored woman named Belle Pope Calhoun who played the piano at parties given for white children—nice white children that would have passed Curtis Carlyle with a sniff. But the ragged little “poh white” used to sit beside her piano by the hour and try to get in an alto with one of those kazoos that boys hum through. Before he was thirteen he was picking up a living teasing ragtime out of a battered violin in little cafés round Nashville. Eight years later the ragtime craze hit the country, and he took six darkies on the Orpheum circuit. Five of them were boys he had grown up with; the other was the little mulatto, Babe Divine, who was a wharf nigger round New York, and long before that a plantation hand in Bermuda, until he stuck an eight-inch stiletto in his master’s back. Almost before Carlyle realized his good fortune he was on Broadway, with offers of engagements on all sides, and more money than he had ever dreamed of.

It was about then that a change began in his whole attitude, a rather curious, embittering

change. It was when he realized that he was spending the golden years of his life gibbering round a stage with a lot of black men. His act was good of its kind—three trombones, three saxophones, and Carlyle's flute—and it was his own peculiar sense of rhythm that made all the difference; but he began to grow strangely sensitive about it, began to hate the thought of appearing, dreaded it from day to day.

They were making money—each contract he signed called for more—but when he went to managers and told them that he wanted to separate from his sextet and go on as a regular pianist, they laughed at him and told him he was crazy—it would be an artistic suicide. He used to laugh afterward at the phrase “artistic suicide.” They all used it.

Half a dozen times they played at private dances at three thousand dollars a night, and it seemed as if these crystallized all his distaste for his mode of livelihood. They took place in clubs and houses that he couldn't have gone into in the daytime. After all, he was merely playing to rôle of the eternal monkey, a sort of sublimated chorus man. He was sick of the very smell of the theatre, of powder and rouge and the chatter of the greenroom, and the patronizing approval of the boxes. He couldn't put his heart into it any more. The idea of a slow approach to the luxury of leisure drove him wild. He was, of course, progressing toward it, but, like a child, eating his ice-cream so slowly that he couldn't taste it at all.

He wanted to have a lot of money and time and opportunity to read and play, and the sort of men and women round him that he could never have—the kind who, if they thought of him at all, would have considered him rather contemptible; in short he wanted all those things which he was beginning to lump under the general head of aristocracy, an aristocracy which it seemed almost any money could buy except money made as he was making it. He was twenty-five then, without family or education or any promise that he would succeed in a business career. He began speculating wildly, and within three weeks he had lost every cent he had saved.

Then the war came. He went to Plattsburg, and even there his profession followed him. A brigadier-general called him up to headquarters and told him he could serve his country better as a band leader—so he spent the war entertaining celebrities behind the line with a headquarters band. It was not so bad—except that when the infantry came limping back from the trenches he wanted to be one of them. The sweat and mud they wore seemed only one of those ineffable symbols of aristocracy that were forever eluding him.

“It was the private dances that did it. After I came back from the war the old routine started. We had an offer from a syndicate of Florida hotels. It was only a question of time then.”

He broke off and Ardita looked at him expectantly, but he shook his head.

“No,” he said, “I'm going to tell you about it. I'm enjoying it too much, and I'm afraid I'd

lose a little of that enjoyment if I shared it with anyone else. I want to hang on to those few breathless, heroic moments when I stood out before them all and let them know I was more than a damn bobbing, squawking clown.”

From up forward came suddenly the low sound of singing. The negroes had gathered together on the deck and their voices rose together in a haunting melody that soared in poignant harmonics toward the moon. And Ardita listens in enchantment.

“Oh down——

oh down,

Mammy wanna take me down milky way,

Oh down,

oh down,

Pappy say to-morra-a-a-ah

But mammy say to-day,

Yes—mammy say to-day!”

Carlyle sighed and was silent for a moment looking up at the gathered host of stars blinking like arc-lights in the warm sky. The negroes’ song had died away to a plaintive humming and it seemed as if minute by minute the brightness and the great silence were increasing until he could almost hear the midnight toilet of the mermaids as they combed their silver dripping curls under the moon and gossiped to each other of the fine wrecks they lived on the green opalescent avenues below.

“You see,” said Carlyle softly, “this is the beauty I want. Beauty has got to be astonishing, astounding—it’s got to burst in on you like a dream, like the exquisite eyes of a girl.”

He turned to her, but she was silent.

“You see, don’t you, Anita—I mean, Ardita?”

Again she made no answer. She had been sound asleep for some time.

#### IV

In the dense sun-flooded noon of next day a spot in the sea before them resolved casually into a green-and-gray islet, apparently composed of a great granite cliff at its northern end which slanted south through a mile of vivid coppice and grass to a sandy beach melting lazily into the surf. When Ardita, reading in her favorite seat, came to the last page of *The Revolt of the Angels*, and slamming the book shut looked up and saw it, she gave a little cry of delight, and called to Carlyle, who was standing moodily by the rail.

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

Carlyle shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

“You’ve got me.” He raised his voice and called up to the acting skipper: “Oh, Babe, is this your island?”

The mulatto’s miniature head appeared from round the corner of the deck-house.

“Yas-suh! This yeah’s it.”

Carlyle joined Ardita.

“Looks sort of sporting, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” she agreed; “but it doesn’t look big enough to be much of a hiding-place.”

“You still putting your faith in those wirelasses your uncle was going to have zigzagging round?”

“No,” said Ardita frankly. “I’m all for you. I’d really like to see you make a get-away.”

He laughed.

“You’re our Lady Luck. Guess we’ll have to keep you with us as a mascot—for the present anyway.”

“You couldn’t very well ask me to swim back,” she said coolly. “If you do I’m going to start writing dime novels founded on that interminable history of your life you gave me last

night.”

He flushed and stiffened slightly.

“I’m very sorry I bored you.”

“Oh, you didn’t—until just at the end with some story about how furious you were because you couldn’t dance with the ladies you played music for.”

He rose angrily.

“You have got a darn mean little tongue.”

“Excuse me,” she said melting into laughter, “but I’m not used to having men regale me with the story of their life ambitions—especially if they’ve lived such deathly platonic lives.”

“Why? What do men usually regale you with?”

“Oh, they talk about me,” she yawned. “They tell me I’m the spirit of youth and beauty.”

“What do you tell them?”

“Oh, I agree quietly.”

“Does every man you meet tell you he loves you?”

Ardita nodded.

“Why shouldn’t he? All life is just a progression toward, and then a recession from, one phrase—‘I love you.’”

Carlyle laughed and sat down.

“That’s very true. That’s—that’s not bad. Did you make that up?”

“Yes—or rather I found it out. It doesn’t mean anything especially. It’s just clever.”

“It’s the sort of remark,” he said gravely, “that’s typical of your class.”

“Oh,” she interrupted impatiently, “don’t start that lecture on aristocracy again! I distrust people who can be intense at this hour in the morning. It’s a mild form of insanity—a sort of breakfast-food jag. Morning’s the time to sleep, swim, and be careless.”



Ten minutes later they had swung round in a wide circle as if to approach the island from the north.

“There’s a trick somewhere,” commented Ardita thoughtfully. “He can’t mean just to anchor up against this cliff.”

They were heading straight in now toward the solid rock, which must have been well over a hundred feet tall, and not until they were within fifty yards of it did Ardita see their objective. Then she clapped her hands in delight. There was a break in the cliff entirely hidden by a curious overlapping of rock, and through this break the yacht entered and very slowly traversed a narrow channel of crystal-clear water between high gray walls. Then they were riding at anchor in a miniature world of green and gold, a gilded bay smooth as glass and set round with tiny palms, the whole resembling the mirror lakes and twig trees that children set up in sand piles.

“Not so darned bad!” cried Carlyle excitedly.

“I guess that little coon knows his way round this corner of the Atlantic.”

His exuberance was contagious, and Ardita became quite jubilant.

“It’s an absolutely sure-fire hiding-place!”

“Lordy, yes! It’s the sort of island you read about.”

The rowboat was lowered into the golden lake and they pulled to shore.

“Come on,” said Carlyle as they landed in the slushy sand, “we’ll go exploring.”

The fringe of palms was in turn ringed in by a round mile of flat, sandy country. They followed it south and brushing through a farther rim of tropical vegetation came out on a pearl-gray virgin beach where Ardita kicked off her brown golf shoes—she seemed to have permanently abandoned stockings—and went wading. Then they sauntered back to the yacht, where the indefatigable Babe had luncheon ready for them. He had posted a lookout on the high cliff to the north to watch the sea on both sides, though he doubted if the entrance to the cliff was generally known—he had never even seen a map on which the island was marked.

“What’s its name,” asked Ardita—“the island, I mean?”

“No name ’tall,” chuckled Babe. “Reckin she jus’ island, ’at’s all.”

In the late afternoon they sat with their backs against great boulders on the highest part of the cliff and Carlyle sketched for her his vague plans. He was sure they were hot after him by this time. The total proceeds of the coup he had pulled off and concerning which he still refused to enlighten her, he estimated as just under a million dollars. He counted on lying up here several weeks and then setting off southward, keeping well outside the usual channels of travel rounding the Horn and heading for Callao, in Peru. The details of coaling and provisioning he was leaving entirely to Babe who, it seemed, had sailed these seas in every capacity from cabin-boy aboard a coffee trader to virtual first mate on a Brazillian pirate craft, whose skipper had long since been hung.

“If he’d been white he’d have been king of South America long ago,” said Carlyle emphatically. “When it comes to intelligence he makes Booker T. Washington look like a moron. He’s got the guile of every race and nationality whose blood is in his veins, and that’s half a dozen or I’m a liar. He worships me because I’m the only man in the world who can play better ragtime than he can. We used to sit together on the wharfs down on the New York water-front, he with a bassoon and me with an oboe, and we’d blend minor keys in African harmonics a thousand years old until the rats would crawl up the posts and sit round groaning and squeaking like dogs will in front of a phonograph.”

Ardita roared.

“How you can tell ’em!”

Carlyle grinned.

“I swear that’s the gos—”

“What you going to do when you get to Callao?” she interrupted.

“Take ship for India. I want to be a rajah. I mean it. My idea is to go up into Afghanistan somewhere, buy up a palace and a reputation, and then after about five years appear in England with a foreign accent and a mysterious past. But India first. Do you know, they say that all the gold in the world drifts very gradually back to India. Something fascinating about that to me. And I want leisure to read—an immense amount.”

“How about after that?”

“Then,” he answered defiantly, “comes aristocracy. Laugh if you want to—but at least you’ll have to admit that I know what I want—which I imagine is more than you do.”

“On the contrary,” contradicted Ardita, reaching in her pocket for her cigarette case, “when

I met you I was in the midst of a great uproar of all my friends and relatives because I did know what I wanted.”

“What was it?”

“A man.”

He started.

“You mean you were engaged?”

“After a fashion. If you hadn’t come aboard I had every intention of slipping ashore yesterday evening—how long ago it seems—and meeting him in Palm Beach. He’s waiting there for me with a bracelet that once belonged to Catherine of Russia. Now don’t mutter anything about aristocracy,” she put in quickly. “I liked him simply because he had had an imagination and the utter courage of his convictions.”

“But your family disapproved, eh?”

“What there is of it—only a silly uncle and a sillier aunt. It seems he got into some scandal with a red-haired woman name Mimi something—it was frightfully exaggerated, he said, and men don’t lie to me—and anyway I didn’t care what he’d done; it was the future that counted. And I’d see to that. When a man’s in love with me he doesn’t care for other amusements. I told him to drop her like a hot cake, and he did.”

“I feel rather jealous,” said Carlyle, frowning—and then he laughed. “I guess I’ll just keep you along with us until we get to Callao. Then I’ll lend you enough money to get back to the States. By that time you’ll have had a chance to think that gentleman over a little more.”

“Don’t talk to me like that!” fired up Ardita. “I won’t tolerate the parental attitude from anybody! Do you understand me?” He chuckled and then stopped, rather abashed, as her cold anger seemed to fold him about and chill him.

“I’m sorry,” he offered uncertainly.

“Oh, don’t apologize! I can’t stand men who say ‘I’m sorry’ in that manly, reserved tone. Just shut up!”

A pause ensued, a pause which Carlyle found rather awkward, but which Ardita seemed not to notice at all as she sat contentedly enjoying her cigarette and gazing out at the shining sea. After a minute she crawled out on the rock and lay with her face over the edge looking down. Carlyle, watching her, reflected how it seemed impossible for her to assume an

ungraceful attitude.

“Oh, look,” she cried. “There’s a lot of sort of ledges down there. Wide ones of all different heights.”

“We’ll go swimming to-night!” she said excitedly. “By moonlight.”

“Wouldn’t you rather go in at the beach on the other end?”

“Not a chance. I like to dive. You can use my uncle’s bathing suit, only it’ll fit you like a gunny sack, because he’s a very flabby man. I’ve got a one-piece that’s shocked the natives all along the Atlantic coast from Biddeford Pool to St. Augustine.”

“I suppose you’re a shark.”

“Yes, I’m pretty good. And I look cute too. A sculptor up at Rye last summer told me my calves are worth five hundred dollars.”

There didn’t seem to be any answer to this, so Carlyle was silent, permitting himself only a discreet interior smile.

## V

When the night crept down in shadowy blue and silver they threaded the shimmering channel in the rowboat and, tying it to a jutting rock, began climbing the cliff together. The first shelf was ten feet up, wide, and furnishing a natural diving platform. There they sat down in the bright moonlight and watched the faint incessant surge of the waters almost stilled now as the tide set seaward.

“Are you happy?” he asked suddenly.

She nodded.

“Always happy near the sea. You know,” she went on, “I’ve been thinking all day that you and I are somewhat alike. We’re both rebels—only for different reasons. Two years ago, when I was just eighteen and you were——”

“Twenty-five.”

“——well, we were both conventional successes. I was an utterly devastating débutante and

you were a prosperous musician just commissioned in the army——”

“Gentleman by act of Congress,” he put in ironically.

“Well, at any rate, we both fitted. If our corners were not rubbed off they were at least pulled in. But deep in us both was something that made us require more for happiness. I didn’t know what I wanted. I went from man to man, restless, impatient, month by month getting less acquiescent and more dissatisfied. I used to sit sometimes chewing at the insides of my mouth and thinking I was going crazy—I had a frightful sense of transiency. I wanted things now—now—now! Here I was—beautiful—I am, aren’t I?”

“Yes,” agreed Carlyle tentatively.

Ardita rose suddenly.

“Wait a second. I want to try this delightful-looking sea.”

She walked to the end of the ledge and shot out over the sea, doubling up in mid-air and then straightening out and entering to water straight as a blade in a perfect jack-knife dive.

In a minute her voice floated up to him.

“You see, I used to read all day and most of the night. I began to resent society——”

“Come on up here,” he interrupted. “What on earth are you doing?”

“Just floating round on my back. I’ll be up in a minute. Let me tell you. The only thing I enjoyed was shocking people; wearing something quite impossible and quite charming to a fancy-dress party, going round with the fastest men in New York, and getting into some of the most hellish scrapes imaginable.”

The sounds of splashing mingled with her words, and then he heard her hurried breathing as she began climbing up side to the ledge.

“Go on in!” she called

Obediently he rose and dived. When he emerged, dripping, and made the climb he found that she was no longer on the ledge, but after a second frightened he heard her light laughter from another shelf ten feet up. There he joined her and they both sat quietly for a moment, their arms clasped round their knees, panting a little from the climb.

“The family were wild,” she said suddenly. “They tried to marry me off. And then when I’d begun to feel that after all life was scarcely worth living I found something”—her eyes went skyward exultantly—“I found something!”

Carlyle waited and her words came with a rush.

“Courage—just that; courage as a rule of life, and something to cling to always. I began to build up this enormous faith in myself. I began to see that in all my idols in the past some manifestation of courage had unconsciously been the thing that attracted me. I began separating courage from the other things of life. All sorts of courage—the beaten, bloody prize-fighter coming up for more—I used to make men take me to prize-fights; the déclassé woman sailing through a nest of cats and looking at them as if they were mud under her feet; the liking what you like always; the utter disregard for other people’s opinions—just to live as I liked always and to die in my own way— Did you bring up the cigarettes?”

He handed one over and held a match for her gently.

“Still,” Ardita continued, “the men kept gathering—old men and young men, my mental and physical inferiors, most of them, but all intensely desiring to have me—to own this rather magnificent proud tradition I’d built up round me. Do you see?”

“Sort of. You never were beaten and you never apologized.”

“Never!”

She sprang to the edge, poised for a moment like a crucified figure against the sky; then describing a dark parabola plunked without a slash between two silver ripples twenty feet below.

Her voice floated up to him again.

“And courage to me meant ploughing through that dull gray mist that comes down on life—not only overriding people and circumstances but overriding the bleakness of living. A sort of insistence on the value of life and the worth of transient things.”

She was climbing up now, and at her last words her head, with the damp yellow hair slicked symmetrically back appeared on his level.

“All very well,” objected Carlyle. “You can call it courage, but your courage is really built, after all, on a pride of birth. You were bred to that defiant attitude. On my gray days even courage is one of the things that’s gray and lifeless.”

She was sitting near the edge, hugging her knees and gazing abstractedly at the white moon; he was farther back, crammed like a grotesque god into a niche in the rock.

“I don’t want to sound like Pollyanna,” she began, “but you haven’t grasped me yet. My courage is faith—faith in the eternal resilience of me—that joy’ll come back, and hope and spontaneity. And I feel that till it does I’ve got to keep my lips shut and my chin high, and my eyes wide—not necessarily any silly smiling. Oh, I’ve been through hell without a whine quite often—and the female hell is deadlier than the male.”

“But supposing,” suggested Carlyle, “that before joy and hope and all that came back the curtain was drawn on you for good?”

Ardita rose, and going to the wall climbed with some difficulty to the next ledge, another ten or fifteen feet above.

“Why,” she called back “then I’d have won!”

He edged out till he could see her.

“Better not dive from there! You’ll break your back,” he said quickly.

She laughed.

“Not I!”

Slowly she spread her arms and stood there swan-like, radiating a pride in her young perfection that lit a warm glow in Carlyle’s heart.

“We’re going through the black air with our arms wide and our feet straight out behind like a dolphin’s tail, and we’re going to think we’ll never hit the silver down there till suddenly it’ll be all warm round us and full of little kissing, caressing waves.”

Then she was in the air, and Carlyle involuntarily held his breath. He had not realized that the dive was nearly forty feet. It seemed an eternity before he heard the swift compact sound as she reached the sea.

And it was with his glad sigh of relief when her light watery laughter curled up the side of the cliff and into his anxious ears that he knew he loved her.

Time, having no axe to grind, showered down upon them three days of afternoons. When the sun cleared the port-hole of Ardita's cabin an hour after dawn she rose cheerily, donned her bathing-suit, and went up on deck. The negroes would leave their work when they saw her, and crowd, chuckling and chattering, to the rail as she floated, an agile minnow, on and under the surface of the clear water. Again in the cool of the afternoon she would swim—and loll and smoke with Carlyle upon the cliff; or else they would lie on their sides in the sands of the southern beach, talking little, but watching the day fade colorfully and tragically into the infinite langour of a tropical evening.

And with the long, sunny hours Ardita's idea of the episode as incidental, madcap, a sprig of romance in a desert of reality, gradually left her. She dreaded the time when he would strike off southward; she dreaded all the eventualities that presented themselves to her; thoughts were suddenly troublesome and decisions odious. Had prayers found place in the pagan rituals of her soul she would have asked of life only to be unmolested for a while, lazily acquiescent to the ready, naïf flow of Carlyle's ideas, his vivid boyish imagination, and the vein of monomania that seemed to run crosswise through his temperament and colored his every action.

But this is not a story of two on an island, nor concerned primarily with love bred of isolation. It is merely the presentation of two personalities, and its idyllic setting among the palms of the Gulf Stream is quite incidental. Most of us are content to exist and breed and fight for the right to do both, and the dominant idea, the foredoomed attest to control one's destiny, is reserved for the fortunate or unfortunate few. To me the interesting thing about Ardita is the courage that will tarnish with her beauty and youth.

"Take me with you," she said late one night as they sat lazily in the grass under the shadowy spreading palms. The negroes had brought ashore their musical instruments, and the sound of weird ragtime was drifting softly over on the warm breath of the night. "I'd love to reappear in ten years, as a fabulously wealthy high-caste Indian lady," she continued.

Carlyle looked at her quickly.

"You can, you know."

She laughed.

"Is it a proposal of marriage? Extra! Ardita Farnam becomes pirate's bride. Society girl kidnapped by ragtime bank robber."

"It wasn't a bank."



“What was it? Why won’t you tell me?”

“I don’t want to break down your illusions.”

“My dear man, I have no illusions about you.”

“I mean your illusions about yourself.”

She looked up in surprise.

“About myself! What on earth have I got to do with whatever stray felonies you’ve committed?”

“That remains to be seen.”

She reached over and patted his hand.

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

“As if it mattered.”

“But it does—because I think I’m in love with you.”

He looked at her ironically.

“Thus swelling your January total to half a dozen,” he suggested. “Suppose I call your bluff and ask you to come to India with me?”

“Shall I?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“We can get married in Callao.”

“What sort of life can you offer me? I don’t mean that unkindly, but seriously; what would become of me if the people who want that twenty-thousand-dollar reward ever catch up with you?”

“I thought you weren’t afraid.”

“I never am—but I won’t throw my life away just to show one man I’m not.”

“I wish you’d been poor. Just a little poor girl dreaming over a fence in a warm cow country.”

“Wouldn’t it have been nice?”

“I’d have enjoyed astonishing you—watching your eyes open on things. If you only wanted things! Don’t you see?”

“I know—like girls who stare into the windows of jewelry-stores.”

“Yes—and want the big oblong watch that’s platinum and has diamonds all round the edge. Only you’d decide it was too expensive and choose one of white gold for a hundred dollar. Then I’d say: ‘Expensive? I should say not!’ And we’d go into the store and pretty soon the platinum one would be gleaming on your wrist.”

“That sounds so nice and vulgar—and fun, doesn’t it?” murmured Ardita.

“Doesn’t it? Can’t you see us travelling round and spending money right and left, and being worshipped by bell-boys and waiters? Oh, blessed are the simple rich for they inherit the earth!”

“I honestly wish we were that way.”

“I love you, Ardita,” he said gently.

Her face lost its childish look for moment and became oddly grave.

“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 old hair, and the way you go over the side of the rail when we come ashore. In fact, Curtis Carlyle, I like all the things you do when you’re perfectly natural. I think you’ve got nerve and you know how I feel about that. Sometimes when you’re around I’ve been tempted to kiss you suddenly and tell you that you were just an idealistic boy with a lot of caste nonsense in his head. Perhaps if I were just a little bit older and a little more bored I’d go with you. As it is, I think I’ll go back and marry—that other man.”

Over across the silver lake the figures of the negroes writhed and squirmed in the moonlight like acrobats who, having been too long inactive, must go through their tacks from sheer surplus energy. In single file they marched, weaving in concentric circles, now with their heads thrown back, now bent over their instruments like piping fauns. And from trombone and saxophone ceaselessly whined a blended melody, sometimes riotous and jubilant, sometimes haunting and plaintive as a death-dance from the Congo’s heart.

“Let’s dance,” cried Ardita. “I can’t sit still with that perfect jazz going on.”

Taking her hand he led her out into a broad stretch of hard sandy soil that the moon flooded with great splendor. They floated out like drifting moths under the rich hazy light, and as the fantastic symphony wept and exulted and wavered and despaired Ardita’s last sense of reality dropped away, and she abandoned her imagination to the dreamy summer scents of tropical flowers and the infinite starry spaces overhead, feeling that if she opened her eyes it would be to find herself dancing with a ghost in a land created by her own fancy.

“This is what I should call an exclusive private dance,” he whispered.

“I feel quite mad—but delightfully mad!”

“We’re enchanted. The shades of unnumbered generations of cannibals are watching us from high up on the side of the cliff there.”

“And I’ll bet the cannibal women are saying that we dance too close, and that it was immodest of me to come without my nose-ring.”

They both laughed softly—and then their laughter died as over across the lake they heard the trombones stop in the middle of a bar, and the saxaphones give a startled moan and fade out.

“What’s the matter?” called Carlyle.

After a moment’s silence they made out the dark figure of a man rounding the silver lake at a run. As he came closer they saw it was Babe in a state of unusual excitement. He drew up before them and gasped out his news in a breath.

“Ship stan’in’ off sho’ ’bout half a mile suh. Mose, he uz on watch, he say look’s if she’s done ancho’d.”

“A ship—what kind of a ship?” demanded Carlyle anxiously.

Dismay was in his voice, and Ardita’s heart gave a sudden wrench as she saw his whole face suddenly droop.

“He say he don’t know, suh.”

“Are they landing a boat?”

“No, suh.”

“We’ll go up,” said Carlyle.

They ascended the hill in silence, Ardita’s hand still resting in Carlyle’s as it had when they finished dancing. She felt it clinch nervously from time to time as though he were unaware of the contact, but though he hurt her she made no attempt to remove it. It seemed an hour’s climb before they reached the top and crept cautiously across the silhouetted plateau to the edge of the cliff. After one short look Carlyle involuntarily gave a little cry. It was a revenue boat with six-inch guns mounted fore and aft.

“They know!” he said with a short intake of breath. “They know! They picked up the trail somewhere.”

“Are you sure they know about the channel? They may be only standing by to take a look at the island in the morning. From where they are they couldn’t see the opening in the cliff.”

“They could with field-glasses,” he said hopelessly. He looked at his wrist-watch. “It’s nearly two now. They won’t do anything until dawn, that’s certain. Of course there’s always the faint possibility that they’re waiting for some other ship to join; or for a coaler.”

“I suppose we may as well stay right here.”

The hour passed and they lay there side by side, very silently, their chins in their hands like dreaming children. In back of them squatted the negroes, patient, resigned, acquiescent, announcing now and then with sonorous snores that not even the presence of danger could subdue their unconquerable African craving for sleep.

Just before five o’clock Babe approached Carlyle. There were half a dozen rifles aboard the *Narcissus* he said. Had it been decided to offer no resistance?

A pretty good fight might be made, he thought, if they worked out some plan.

Carlyle laughed and shook his head.

“That isn’t a Spic army out there, Babe. That’s a revenue boat. It’d be like a bow and arrow trying to fight a machine-gun. If you want to bury those bags somewhere and take a chance on recovering them later, go on and do it. But it won’t work—they’d dig this island over from one end to the other. It’s a lost battle all round, Babe.”

Babe inclined his head silently and turned away, and Carlyle’s voice was husky as he turned to Ardita.

“There’s the best friend I ever had. He’d die for me, and be proud to, if I’d let him.”

“You’ve given up?”

“I’ve no choice. Of course there’s always one way out—the sure way—but that can wait. I wouldn’t miss my trial for anything—it’ll be an interesting experiment in notoriety. ‘Miss Farnam testifies that the pirate’s attitude to her was at all times that of a gentleman.’”

“Don’t!” she said. “I’m awfully sorry.”

When the color faded from the sky and lustreless blue changed to leaden gray a commotion was visible on the ship’s deck, and they made out a group of officers clad in white duck, gathered near the rail. They had field-glasses in their hands and were attentively examining the islet.

“It’s all up,” said Carlyle grimly.

“Damn,” whispered Ardita. She felt tears gathering in her eyes “We’ll go back to the yacht,” he said. “I prefer that to being hunted out up here like a ‘possum.”

Leaving the plateau they descended the hill, and reaching the lake were rowed out to the yacht by the silent negroes. Then, pale and weary, they sank into the settees and waited.

Half an hour later in the dim gray light the nose of the revenue boat appeared in the channel and stopped, evidently fearing that the bay might be too shallow. From the peaceful look of the yacht, the man and the girl in the settees, and the negroes lounging curiously against the rail, they evidently judged that there would be no resistance, for two boats were lowered casually over the side, one containing an officer and six bluejackets, and the other, four rowers and in the stern two gray-haired men in yachting flannels. Ardita and Carlyle stood up, and half unconsciously started toward each other.

Then he paused and putting his hand suddenly into his pocket he pulled out a round, glittering object and held it out to her.

“What is it?” she asked wonderingly.

“I’m not positive, but I think from the Russian inscription inside that it’s your promised bracelet.”

“Where—where on earth——”

“It came out of one of those bags. You see, Curtis Carlyle and his Six Black Buddies, in the

middle of their performance in the tea-room of the hotel at Palm Beach, suddenly changed their instruments for automatics and held up the crowd. I took this bracelet from a pretty, overrouged woman with red hair.”

Ardita frowned and then smiled.

“So that’s what you did! You *have* got nerve!”

He bowed.

“A well-known bourgeois quality,” he said.

And then dawn slanted dynamically across the deck and flung the shadows reeling into gray corners. The dew rose and turned to golden mist, thin as a dream, enveloping them until they seemed gossamer relics of the late night, infinitely transient and already fading. For a moment sea and sky were breathless, and dawn held a pink hand over the young mouth of life—then from out in the lake came the complaint of a rowboat and the swish of oars.

Suddenly against the golden furnace low in the east their two graceful figures melted into one, and he was kissing her spoiled young mouth.

“It’s a sort of glory,” he murmured after a second.

She smiled up at him.

“Happy, are you?”

Her sigh was a benediction—an ecstatic surety that she was youth and beauty now as much as she would ever know. For another instant life was radiant and time a phantom and their strength eternal—then there was a bumping, scraping sound as the rowboat scraped alongside.

Up the ladder scrambled the two gray-haired men, the officer and two of the sailors with their hands on their revolvers. Mr. Farnam folded his arms and stood looking at his niece.

“So,” he said nodding his head slowly.

With a sigh her arms unwound from Carlyle’s neck, and her eyes, transfigured and far away, fell upon the boarding party. Her uncle saw her upper lip slowly swell into that arrogant pout he knew so well.

“So,” he repeated savagely. “So this is your idea of—of romance. A runaway affair, with a

high-seas pirate.”

Ardita glanced at him carelessly.

“What an old fool you are!” she said quietly.

“Is that the best you can say for yourself?”

“No,” she said as if considering. “No, there’s something else. There’s that well-known phrase with which I have ended most of our conversations for the past few years—‘Shut up!’”

And with that she turned, included the two old men, the officer, and the two sailors in a curt glance of contempt, and walked proudly down the companionway.

But had she waited an instant longer she would have heard a sound from her uncle quite unfamiliar in most of their interviews. He gave vent to a whole-hearted amused chuckle, in which the second old man joined.

The latter turned briskly to Carlyle, who had been regarding this scene with an air of cryptic amusement.

“Well Toby,” he said genially, “you incurable, hare-brained romantic chaser of rainbows, did you find that she was the person you wanted?”

Carlyle smiled confidently.

“Why—naturally,” he said “I’ve been perfectly sure ever since I first heard tell of her wild career. That’d why I had Babe send up the rocket last night.”

“I’m glad you did,” said Colonel Moreland gravely. “We’ve been keeping pretty close to you in case you should have trouble with those six strange niggers. And we hoped we’d find you two in some such compromising position,” he sighed. “Well, set a crank to catch a crank!”

“Your father and I sat up all night hoping for the best—or perhaps it’s the worst. Lord knows you’re welcome to her, my boy. She’s run me crazy. Did you give her the Russian bracelet my detective got from that Mimi woman?”

Carlyle nodded.

“Sh!” he said. “She’s coming on deck.”

Ardita appeared at the head of the companionway and gave a quick involuntary glance at

Carlyle's wrists. A puzzled look passed across her face. Back aft the negroes had begun to sing, and the cool lake, fresh with dawn, echoed serenely to their low voices.

"Ardita," said Carlyle unsteadily.

She swayed a step toward him.

"Ardita," he repeated breathlessly, "I've got to tell you the—the truth. It was all a plant, Ardita. My name isn't Carlyle. It's Moreland, Toby Moreland. The story was invented, Ardita, invented out of thin Florida air."

She stared at him, bewildered, amazement, disbelief, and anger flowing in quick waves across her face. The three men held their breaths. Moreland, Senior, took a step toward her; Mr. Farnam's mouth dropped a little open as he waited, panic-stricken, for the expected crash.

But it did not come. Ardita's face became suddenly radiant, and with a little laugh she went swiftly to young Moreland and looked up at him without a trace of wrath in her gray eyes.

"Will you swear," she said quietly "That it was entirely a product of your own brain?"

"I swear," said young Moreland eagerly.

She drew his head down and kissed him gently.

"What an imagination!" she said softly and almost enviously. "I want you to lie to me just as sweetly as you know how for the rest of my life."

The negroes' voices floated drowsily back, mingled in an air that she had heard them singing before.

"Time is a thief;

Gladness and grief

Cling to the leaf

As it yellows——"



“What was in the bags?” she asked softly.

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

“Perhaps I can guess the other one,” she said; and reaching up on her tiptoes she kissed him softly in the illustration.

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