

Strange Sanctuary, F. Scott Fitzgerald

The little girl with dark blue eyes and last summer's golden tan rang the doorbell of the Appletons' house a second time, then turned to the Negress behind her.

"I know there's somebody in, Hazeldawn, because I can hear them. Just leave the suitcase and you can go back to Mrs. Martin's."

"You sure, now, these people expect you?"

"Well, Mrs. Martin said she telephoned both places before she fixed things up; so if it wasn't the Sidneys', this must be where I'm expected. Somebody has to take me in," she added wryly. The little girl's name was Dolly Haines and her age was thirteen.

The door was suddenly answered by a youth whom Dolly had never seen before. Startled by the strange face, Dolly turned back to Hazeldawn: "Don't go yet. There may be some mistake."

"The Appletons don't seem to be around," the boy said. "There was a maid awhile ago, but she doesn't seem to be around either." Seeing her hesitate, and experiencing a quick response to her beauty, he added, "But come in. Glad to have you. I been making myself at home for two hours."

He was fifteen, tall without being gangling, ruddy-cheeked and full of laughter and loose in his clothes. Liking him immediately, sophistication flowed into Dolly. She said to the Negress:

"Thanks oodles, Hazeldawn, Tell the postman about the mail—and bring me my laundry when it's ready."

The boy carried her bag and Dolly followed. They sat on the sofa in the living room, at home within five minutes.

Clarke Cresswell turned on the radio. "I'm beginning to think I own this place," he said. "Have you been here before?"

"This'll be the third time—if they take me in. I've been visiting around like this since father got sick last April, and I'm tired of it."

"Don't I understand!" the boy agreed darkly. "My parents were drowned in China when I was two, and I was shipped home by registered mail. I've been a guest ever since. But I'm not visiting the Appletons," Clarke went on; "I'm only here for dinner. They've got measles at my prep school, so I'm visiting my aunt, Miss Grace Terhune."

The name made Dolly sit up. "Why, she's the assistant headmistress of my school!"

"Don't blame me."

She wouldn't have blamed him for anything.

"Let's light a fire," he suggested, and she agreed that a fire would be nice.

They sat before it and discussed what makes a girl popular and such matters until a maid called Dolly to the phone. It was Mrs. Appleton:

"I'm so sorry, Dolly. We've been delayed. We ran over a pig near Annapolis and we

thought it was a man. It looked just like a man... Have Evelyn cook supper for you and Clarke right away."

Dolly looked at herself in the hall mirror before she went back into the library. She had never been happy in just this way before, and she wanted to see what she' looked like. Returning to the fireside, she said, "Go on."

"What were we talking about?" Clarke asked.

Next day there was an invitation to a Halloween party and a letter from her father:

You're always regretting the lack of relatives. Well, now you've got one. Cousin Charlie Craig (uncle to you!) is on his way back home after ten years in Europe. His house is at 2008 St. Paul Street. Go call on him—he writes me that he'll be delighted either to put you up or dress you down while I'm away. He's peculiar, but I think you'll like him.

The news was interesting, but it was overshadowed by the more vivid presence in the city of Clarke Cress-well. Or rather his specter, for Dolly didn't see him again all that week. At last she inquired around school whether any of the girls had met him. Her eagerness was communicated to her friends. Overnight he became a sort of legend: "Has any one met Clarke Cresswell?"

When Saturday arrived, Dolly thumbed through the telephone book. In a moment the fact that an uncle was in town became the most important thing in the world. For Miss Grace Terhune, Clarke's aunt, lived only two doors away from him.

She had been considering a shopping trip to the five-and-ten, but now it was plain that her duty was to call on her uncle.

St. Paul Street was in the old residential section. On summer days the passer-by could glance through the tall windows at family portraits that had hung undisturbed for a hundred years.

But today the blinds on 2008 were drawn and there was such a long silence after Dolly rang the bell that she nearly gave up. Then the door opened a little way and a birdlike young woman cooed, "What is it?"

"I'm Dolly Haines. I came to see my Uncle Charlie."

The tiny woman scrutinized her, and Dolly thought she was very pretty with her doll's hair and china-blue eyes. "Who sent you?" the woman asked.

"My father. He wanted me to call on Uncle Charlie because I've never met him and he thought I ought to."

The woman hesitated. Then she said, "Well, I'll see. You come in."

Dolly stepped into the hall and the door closed behind her. Inside it was very dim. Rectangles of cheesecloth indicated paintings on the wall, and the same material protected clocks, busts, lamps, and books.

"I didn't mean to call so soon," said Dolly. "I know Uncle Charlie just got home."

"How did you know?"

"Father told me." Dolly was glad, in view of the woman's inhospitable attitude, that she had brought her father's letter. "This'll tell who I am."

The woman took the letter and held it to a bulb of dim orange in the hall. Then she said, "Wait a minute, little girl, right where you are," and flew up the long stairs. Then a door opened and closed above.

As she waited, Dolly's mind began to turn on the house two doors farther on. Her reverie was interrupted by a man coming downstairs. He was tall and handsome, with a blond hairline mustache; he held out a friendly hand and said, "Hello there! Bit dark, what?"

"Are you my Uncle Charlie?"

"What? No; name's Redfern—Major Redfern. Sorry to say Charlie's not up to much today. Touch of liver... Do you live around here?"

"I used to live with father. But he got arthritis and had to go to New Mexico." Dolly rambled on for a moment, even though she had still to be asked to sit down.

Major Redfern interrupted her suddenly: "You'll soon be a debutante, won't you?"

"Me? Oh, not me—not for a long time. But I know a lot of debutantes who went to my school last year."

"Did they, now? Who? I have letters of introduction to some debutantes, but I seem to have mislaid them."

Dolly began naming debutantes she knew. Major Redfern interrupted:

"Duckney? That'll be the daughter of L. P. Duckney, won't it? The one who's having a big party Monday night?"

"I suppose so. I sit behind her in church."

He laid down the hat and stick he carried. "Forgot something upstairs," he said.

"If Uncle Charlie is sick, tell him never mind," Dolly called after him. "I can come another time."

"No, no. Sit tight. He wants to see you."

Presently the little woman fluttered down, Major Redfern after her. The woman was more friendly now; she introduced herself as Miss Willie Shugrue, adding, "Your uncle can't see you today, but he sent his love."

"My father's been sick too, so I can sympathize."

"I'm the trained nurse," volunteered Miss Willie. "But I—"

Major Redfern interrupted abruptly: "I'll do the talking." Then, to Dolly, "Always welcome here in Charlie's house, I know. Maybe you'd like to pay us a little visit."

"I couldn't exactly leave these people I'm visiting right now," Dolly said. "I'd be glad to come later, though." Dolly felt that the call had run its course. "Good-by. Tell Uncle Charlie I hope he feels better tomorrow."

"Well—I may see you in church tomorrow," said the major. "What church do you go to, by the way?"

Dolly told him.

Once the door had closed, her uncle's household was far behind her. Did she dare ask Mrs. Appleton, she wondered, to invite Clarke to luncheon? Could a guest ask such a favor? If not, she would probably never see Clarke again, and at that dismal thought a wave of revolt swept over her. After all, Mrs. Appleton had been her mother's best friend. With her lips moving in rehearsal, she went slowly upstairs toward Mrs. Appleton's room.

Then, just outside the closed door, she stopped—her name had suddenly twisted through the keyhole.

"Dolly is here because she had no other place to go."

"But I don't see why we have to be the ones, mother. Does her father expect her to visit all the rest of her life?"

"That doesn't sound like you, Lila."

"Well, I can't help it. I'd counted on having these girls for a visit, and now Dolly's got the guest room. Don't tell me that charity begins at home!"

Dolly tiptoed to her room, packed her suitcase hurriedly, dashed off a note to Mrs. Appleton explaining that her Uncle Charlie wanted her to visit there for a week, and crept unobserved from the house.

In the morning she walked to church with Major Redfern. She had passed a curious evening, with the major beating years of dust out of a bed and Miss Willie flitting about, not at all like the trained nurse who had taken care of her father last spring.

"Dashed unlucky about those letters of introduction," said the major as they walked along. "Of course I came down to look after your Uncle Charlie, but I planned to have a bit of amusement, too. And now I can't find the things. I say, be a good fellow and introduce me to the thingumbob girl if we run into her."

Dolly was glad to be of service. As the crowd rolled into church she spotted Angela in the vestibule and introduced major. Angela, good-natured and full of her current importance, was more than charmed.

"How long will you be here, Major Redfern?"

"Couldn't say. Been taking care of Dolly's uncle and haven't had a chance to see the city. Seems a bit dead to an outsider, you know."

"You mustn't be an outsider. We take a certain pride in our hospitality."

During the service Dolly divided the congregation into quadrants and scanned each sector for the sight of a tall young form, but to no avail, so with regret she followed the major and Angela down the aisle.

"Of course you must come," the young lady was saying. "There's no time to send you a formal invitation, but I'll just write 'Monday evening' on my calling card and give it to you right now."

As they emerged into the sunshine it occurred to Dolly that in spite of being handsome the major had a sort of trigger face; if the nose pressed down only a

little more it might touch his mouth and precipitate an explosion. He's a fast worker, she thought. Like Clarke: Clarke was a fast worker, too. But where was he? Back at school? She must know—right off.

Her impatience must have been apparent, for as they walked away the major said, "Not polite to leave any one so quickly. Really ought to consider manners, what?"

"I'm sorry."

"That's America," said the major tolerantly. "This little Duckney— she's the type, now. Not a brain in her head. Just an easy clink, that's all."

"What's a clink?" inquired Dolly.

"Eh?" He looked at her sharply. "Oh, that's just an expression."

Now they were approaching Miss Terhune's house... But what was that upon the door—that rectangle of pink? She came close enough to read the one word: Measles.

The major must have seen the dismay in her face. "What's trouble?"

"I just forgot—I got to get something at the drugstore."

"Well, cheerio. By the way, I wouldn't mention your Uncle Charlie there. He doesn't want it known that he's ill."

In the drugstore she telephoned Miss Terhune's house and asked for Clarke Gresswell.

"I saw that sign on your house—"

"I hoped nobody would."

"I'm staying with my uncle in the same row as you," she ran on hurriedly. "So I just called up."

"I'm not in bed; I loaf around and play the radio. Say, listen: have you got a funny skylight—like a box, sort of—on top of your house?"

"Have we? It's right in the ceiling outside my door."

"Well, after dinner, you come on out of your skylight and you'll see me in mine. You won't catch any measles."

"My uncle wouldn't like it," she said perversely. "And anyhow I've got to make a Halloween costume. Good-by."

Dolly walked home thoughtfully. As the door closed her into the gloomy front hall, the feeling of desertion came back. Meeting Miss Willie on her way upstairs, she said, "Is my uncle better? Couldn't I see him today?"

"Not today. He's not well enough."

"He knows I'm here?"

"Yes; he wants you to make yourself at home."

After dinner she set to work on her costume while the major smoked and Miss Willie

looked on.

"Where's your party going to be?" she asked Dolly.

"Just around the corner."

"Some friends?"

"Of course," said Dolly. "A girl I've known all my life."

"Isn't that jolly!" said the major, turning to Miss Willie. "Dolly and I will both be stepping out tomorrow night. Beastly shame you have to stay home with Uncle Charlie."

Miss Willie didn't answer.

"What's the costume?"

"Sort of black thing with a mask, like a witch. We're going all around the neighborhood and howl—that sort of thing."

"Are these rich people?" asked Miss Willie.

"Stow it," the major said abruptly.

Looking up at him, Dolly decided that she didn't like him, after all. She didn't like him any better than she did Miss Willie. Why did Uncle Charlie keep such people around?

"Do you like your school?" asked Miss Willie quickly.

"Very much. And I've got oodles of English history to study."

Gathering her sowing, she went upstairs. As she passed Uncle Charlie's room she hesitated for a moment, tempted to open the door quietly and at least look in upon the sick man. She was convinced that he was being neglected, for Miss Willie seemed a poor sort of nurse.

But she passed on up to her third-floor room. There was the pillbox skylight, reached by a cute little ladder, and she wondered if Clarke were really waiting for her two roofs away.

On impulse, she brushed her hair before the mirror, climbed the ladder, pushed open a slanting strip of glass, and scrambled to the roof. In the clear autumn air her sense of oppression lifted. She shivered, not from cold, but as if shaking from her what she left below.

On her right was a fire escape leading to an alley, and northward were four old-fashioned skylights projecting from the flat continuous roof. The second would be Miss Terhune's. Dolly's shoes sounded flat on the cemented pebbles as she walked toward it. Framed vividly by the intersecting planes of the parallelepiped, a face stared out at her and shouted, "Can you hear me?"

"Heavens, yes!" She stopped with her back against a chimney.

"I wondered if you could," Clarke said. "I've been yelling ever since I caught sight of you. And I've been sitting on this ladder for almost an hour. Where've you been?"

"I told you I wasn't coming."

"Oh, but that's just like a girl. Honest, though, I did think you weren't coming. I thought I'd come over and give you measles in revenge, and then we'd be quarantined together."

"You look quite dumb in there," Dolly said. "I don't want to be quarantined with you, the way you look."

"You look dumb out there. Which is funniest—you that can't come in, or me that can't come out?"

"The whole roof is kind of dumb, isn't it?"

"Well, why do you live in such a funny old town?"

She was about to say "I don't know" when the fact swept over her that she didn't know. Standing here beside a chimney on a prairie of roofs seemed as logical a location as any she had been in for months.

What Clarke said next was as good as though he had guessed her thoughts: "I was looking at a cloud, and then you stepped out of it."

It was almost too much. And Dolly couldn't say, "Open the skylight and let me come down and have your measles with you." All she could say was, "Good-by. Glad you're looking so well."

"Are you going?"

"I've got to get back."

"Oh, bunk! Your uncle won't mind. My aunt says she used to know him."

For an instant Dolly felt the urge to tell Clarke everything. But he was so beautiful there in his glass prison. She would not let her troubles come even that near to touching him, if she could help it.

Dolly worked late at lessons, and was rather upset, deep in the evening, when Miss Willie flew up with some drugstore sandwiches and the information that her Uncle Charlie sent his love.

"Has he had the doctor?"

"Of course."

But somehow Dolly was far from reassured.

Next afternoon, after leaving her friends at school with staccato assurances that they would meet at the party, she pondered the advisability of wiring her father. On her way upstairs she heard Miss Willie's voice in the major's room:

"You had studs when we left."

"I have studs now, if I can find them. Cheer up! I can always borrow Uncle Charlie's."

Miss Willie laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh, both shrill and shrunken, like a

bird so used to being scared that she never knew whether to start a song or not. Dolly, heartened by her familiar day at school, was once again tempted to try Uncle Charlie's door; but a sudden scuffle in the major's room sent her flying upstairs in a panic.

"What must I do?" she asked herself. "I can't tell anybody, because it's my uncle's house."

On her way downstairs some time later, she heard the major and Miss Willie bickering in the lower hall, and drew back in the shadows. But from the sudden fading of their voices she knew that they had heard her footsteps, so she continued on down.

The major wore a full-dress suit. His stick like a slung gun, the white gleam of his gloves, the thin string of his monocle—all these made Dolly sure he would be a success at Angela Duckney's that evening. And she resented it. She was sorry now that she had ever introduced him to the older girl.

"Ah, the future debutante," remarked the major gallantly. "May I drop you anywhere?"

"Oh, no. I'm just going around the corner."

Throughout the supper and the finding of old friends under black satin dominoes, Dolly was haunted by the image of the Englishman. She had never before known what it was to hate, for her father had thrown a protective screen about the motherless girl.

The Halloweeners, about to start outdoors for the real fun of the evening, stood in a group of two dozen, black-masked, clown-white with flour. Suddenly Dolly wiped the flour from her hand on a bare spot under John Hamilton's ear.

"Hey, quit!" he protested. "Or, if you must act your age, try it on the boyfriend."

"What boy friend?" she asked John.

"Oh, you don't know? Well, everybody else in your school seems to know his name. Clarke Somebody."

"Clarke Cresswell? Why, how— Where is he?"

"Over there, lapping up ice cream."

A tough voice broke out suddenly over the soft young raillery: "All out, now—one by one. Just a formality, boys and girls."

"I think that man's a detective!" John whispered into Dolly's ear. "Something's been stolen, I bet."

She scarcely heard him. As they trooped toward the door she kept looking about for Clarke, hoping to spot him before the mask dropped over her face and obscured her vision. The edge of the mask was tipped at the door and the rough voice said, "O.K., little lady."

She was next to the last one out; the last was a girl clown-white with flour. On the front steps the host stood and whispered something to three men who kept their hands in their pockets. The party hesitated on the sidewalk.



"Go on, go on, children," directed the host suddenly. "What's happened doesn't concern you."

It was just at that moment that, from some person indistinguishable in the darkness, Dolly heard a trill of high birdish laughter.

Miss Willie! Which one of the masked faces was hers—and where, oh, where was Clarke? There! That tall one. She darted toward him and lifted her mask.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Well, where were you when the crown jewels disappeared? I thought sure you had them."

"I thought sure you had the measles."

"So did the doctor; but that was his mistake. He just thought if everybody in my school had measles I must have them too." In the light of a street lamp he bent to look at her. "You're shaking! What's the matter?"

A sob broke from Dolly. "I'm worried about Uncle Charlie. They won't let me see him."

"Who won't?"

"The friends that are staying with him." Even in her anxiety she forced herself to be no more specific.

"Anything I can do?"

They were tagging a little behind the others. Suddenly she said, "I think he's alone now. I want to see him. Will you duck the crowd and go with me?"

Uncle Charlie's front door was locked and Dolly had no key.

"I've got to see my uncle," she said. "Can't we climb up that fire escape in the alley? It goes right by his room."

Clarke inspected, then reported back: "It's ten feet off the ground. But we can go through my aunt's house and over the roof."

Miss Terhune's house was inky black, but when they came out on the roof cold autumn stars were showing.

"Now tell me what it's all about," Clarke demanded.

It was about her pride, but she could never tell him that. "Aren't the stars nice?" she said. "China eyes."

"Honestly, you're the funniest girl I ever knew! Once I thought you and I had a lot in common, but—"

"How'll we get down to Uncle Charlie's room?" Dolly interrupted.

"The fire escape, of course. We can get down, even if we can't get up."

The night was chilly, but Dolly felt warm. They backed down the iron skeleton, Clarke ahead so that if she slipped she would fall into his arms. On the second landing they faced a dark window.

"It's stuck," whispered Clarke. "I'll try from the top."

That worked, and she scrambled in.

"Can I come in?" Clarke whispered from the fire escape.

"Yes—and turn on the lights!"

The bed sprang into life. It was a great dust-covered heap of blankets and pillows piled a yard high.

There wasn't any Uncle Charlie, then, and never had been. Dolly knew it, plain as plain. "May I come back to your house?" she asked. "And stay all night at Miss Terhune's?"

"You know you can."

"Let's go," she said. "Now!"

"But what about your uncle?"

"I never want to hear of him again. And I don't want you to tell Miss Terhune anything!"

"All right, if you don't want me to. We'll just tell her you got locked out."

"Come on! Hurry!" Dolly had heard the sound of voices and footsteps in the lower hall.

Major Redfern usually tipped the taxi driver, but tonight he only had a brusque "Thanks very much" and a stray thought as to whether the driver would be liable to remember where he had picked up his fare.

For the major had seen a ghost at the exact moment when he had presented Angela Duckney's card at her ball. Even though seen obliquely and halfway across the room, the major had identified it immediately as that of one Hep J. Morrison, who was built on somewhat the same ruthless dimensions as himself. There was no room there for both of them, so the major withdrew precipitately, even neglecting to go down the receiving line.

But he felt sure, as he stood in front of the checkroom, that his business rival had not seen him.

"Yes, my hat. And a cape and a stick," he agreed mildly.

Let there be no ambiguity at this point. The major was a bad man with high hopes, and the Baltimore venture had been among his hopes. But with Hep J. Morrison working the same town there were no more hopes.

Except, of course, the little girl! He considered the possibilities all the way home. Then, turning from the taxicab, he saw a small form on the stoop, shivering in a black domino and with a face so caked with flour that he hardly recognized it.

He opened the door, almost throwing Miss Willie inside. "Now what is it? Where've you been?"

"Look!" Out of her pocket she drew an emerald bracelet. Then from the top of her stocking she produced a platinum-and-diamond wrist watch. "Look at that!" she sang

proudly.

"Where did you get this stuff?"

"At the party around the corner. I didn't touch anything else—honest! There wasn't another thing worth taking."

"Once a klep, always a klep," he said. "Look here. We're leaving right away. Hep Morrison was at the ball, so we'll have to try Atlanta. Where's Dolly?"

"She's still with the party. They have no idea who snitched the stuff."

He unwound his white scarf, folded it, and put it in his side pocket. "Soon as we're packed we'll go find that kid and then clear out. Is there anything to drink?"

"There's some gin up in 'Uncle Charlie's room.'"

With that the major and Miss Willie went upstairs.

Dolly had left her bag behind in that awful house, and the fact haunted her at school next day. She was even more worried when, after her first class, she was summoned to Miss Terhune's study.

"Sit down, Dolly." The teacher leaned forward over her desk and said, "Tell me: Was there any trouble at your uncle's last night? My nephew won't tell me a thing."

"All I want to do is get my bag, Miss Terhune. I left it there, you know. Then I'm going back to the Appletons'. But I certainly appreciate your taking me in last night."

Miss Terhune shifted in her chair. "Dolly, a telegram has just come from your father. He is on his way to Baltimore. And until he arrives you'd better stay right with me. This afternoon I'll have Clarke go with you to get your bag. And if your uncle is there, tell him I'd like to see him."

The door of 2008 was open when they got there, and the front blinds were up. Dolly peered in cautiously. Then she turned to Clarke and said, "There's three men inside. Will you go in with me?"

They were jostled suddenly by an expressman who had been trundling a small truck in the street. "Who you looking for?" he demanded.

"I happen to have left a small suitcase here," said Dolly.

"Well, talk to the man that owns the place."

The children hesitated, but were swept almost literally into the hall ahead of the expressman and his trunk. "Even before they were well inside, a man collared Clarke and marched him toward two other men within. The first was a quiet gray-haired man of fifty in the act of pulling a piece of cloth from a painting; the second was a grim-faced six-footer with a pad in his hand.

"That's not the pair," said the gray-haired man. "Why, these are just kids. What do you want here?"

"They might be working for the couple—" began the tall detective.

But the gray-haired man was looking at Dolly, "Open that other window," he said. She returned his gaze without fear, for he seemed like her own sort at last. And as the light came in he said, "You're Morton Haines' child."

"Are you Uncle Charlie?" Dolly demanded.

The man with the notebook was also surveying Dolly closely. In a low voice he said, "Be careful, Mr. Craig."

"It's all right," said Uncle Charlie. "This is my niece."

Dolly made one of those lightning decisions that sometimes got her in trouble, sometimes stood her in good stead. She would never say anything about what had occurred—never anything at all.

Catching the negative headshake by which she signaled this decision to Clarke, the detective frowned.

But Charlie Craig continued, "It's all right. I'd vouch for her anywhere, with her father's eyes and nose."

"Well, if you're sure, sir."

"Of course I'm sure. I know my kin." He turned to Dolly. "You might introduce your friend."

"This is Clarke Cresswell. He's a nephew of Miss Grace Terhune."

Mr. Craig turned to the detective. "That clinches it. I've known Miss Terhune since she was a foot high. You're my guest here, young lady. I wrote your father I'd be glad to put you up. Where are your things?"

"I brought my suitcase over," said Dolly, lying promptly.

He came close and took her hand. "I want to know you," he said.

"So that's that," the detective said to Mr. Craig. "The man is known as Dodo Gilbert, but he calls himself Lord Dana or George Whilomville or sometimes Major Redfern. And the woman named Birdie or Willie Lukas is an old hand at shoplifting."

"I haven't missed anything here so far. But I'm glad my niece didn't come into this house three days ago!"

They heard the phone ring and Dolly answering it.

"Just a minute," she said; "you want my uncle." She raised her voice: "Somebody wants you, Uncle Charlie." And then, "What? Oh, daddy! When did you get here?"

After she rang off, she gazed at the hall, glowing from newly opened windows. Clarke did not know what the new light in Dolly's eyes was, but it meant she was home at last.