

# Our Weekly Serial Story Installation

## STRAIT GATE

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### SYNOPSIS

Sarah Lynn Dana, youngest of the Dana women of Danavale, Calif., chafes at the well-ordered life approved by her mother, Adelaide, who is trying to marry her to Duncan Van Doren, Detroit society youth. Great-Granny Dana, covered-wagon pioneer, and community matriarch, recognizes in the girl the restless adventurousness of the "dark Danas," a trait shared by her and Cousin Sally Ann Dana, traveler and author, and pleads with Sally Ann to take the girl abroad. Uncle Lynn, wheelchair invalid, adds his plea to Sally Ann to save Sarah Lynn, as does the girl's young brother, Bill. Another plea comes from Miss Pennington, "Penny," adoring governess of the girl, saying she is unhappy and misunderstood. At a family dinner party, Sally Ann first hears of Keaton Dana's ultra-modern wife, Ardine, who runs a roadhouse called the Stewed Prune, and is trying to wangle a flight with Gunnar Thorwald, Norwegian ace, famous for his refusal to fly women, through their mutual friend, Jim Allison. Gunnar Thorwald arrives with Jim Allison, and Sarah Lynn is attracted to him. Duncan invites her to the Stewed Prune. Sarah Lynn refuses to drink anything but ginger ale, which Ardine herself serves. Cousin Mary Dana Webster tells Sarah she suspects Ardine and her friends of framing on Gunnar, and Sarah Lynn, in an increasing stupor, decides to warn him.

### CHAPTER IV—Continued

"The customer is always right," his helpmate reminded him.

"Say, I'd rather lose the account," he moaned.

Ardine came back with the cool bottle and the tall amber glass. "Here, baby! This will brush out the cobwebs." Then she looked at her sharply. "Listen, darling—did you have a couple of drinks before you got here?"

Sarah Lynn said: "No!" explosively.

"You know she never touches—" Mary Webster began indignantly.

"Of course; that's why I'm wondering. I've never seen her this way. I thought maybe Duncan had a flask, and that while they were driving around—Oh, well—never mind." She looked at Ned Webster. "The rising rector pretty low?"

His wife nodded.

"Well, look," the hostess said quickly, "why don't you take him home and we'll deliver the customer at your door in the rosy dawn?"

Mr. Webster made sounds of faint pleasure.

"More people are coming, and he has so large a displacement, I'd rather have him do his sleeping in his own bed, if you don't mind."

"All right, soldier; the pardon has come," his wife prodded him. "Thanks a million, Ardine."

Sarah Lynn, watching their exit, yawned widely again. "I can't imagine what makes me so sleepy," she apologized, drinking thirstily.

The other regarded her shrewdly. "Well, if you really haven't had anything"—Sarah Lynn was shaking her head violently—"it must be just this foul air. Shut your eyes and doze baby Duncan's very, very busy proving he isn't afraid of his nearly mother-in-law." She gave her a pat and went away.

Sarah Lynn was thankful to be left alone. Except that she must stay awake to warn Gunnar Thorwald she would be thankful for this drowsiness.

"But I won't go to sleep," she told herself. "I'm going to sit up straight and watch for Gunnar Thorwald and warn him away. It would be too horrible . . . one of their silly tricks . . ."

Suddenly, silently, the flier stood on the threshold, looking into the Stewed Prune. He was very tall, and he wore an odd foreign aviator's suit of creamy leather and a stern helmet which gave to his lean young countenance an austere and classic expression.

He was angry. Jim Allison had missed connections with him in some way, and it was long past the hour set for the start of their night-flight to Los Angeles.

He saw Ardine Dana across the jammed, smoke-blurred room. She would know. He took a forward

step and halted at a queer, choked cry.

Not far away, alone at a small table, he saw the thin, dark girl he had noticed at the fine old country home where Allison had taken him early that evening to see the writing woman whom he had met in Vienna. She had not seemed, on that first impression, the sort to be found here; but after the metamorphosis of Jim Allison he would never be surprised again at these Americans.

She was staring at him. She made the low, strangled cry again, and got unsteadily to her feet. There were scarlet patches on her cheeks and her eyes were those of a sleep-walker. She pointed a thin finger at him, holding to the edge of the table with her other hand.

"Go away!" she said thickly. "Don't come in here!"

The face of the young Norwegian, returning her scrutiny, seemed bleakly composed of narrowed eyes and compressed lips.

"Fly away!" Sarah Lynn exhorted him. "Fly away in the night!" Then her face contracted swiftly into a wistful semblance of nursery glee. She chanted: "Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home!"

She let go of the table in order to wave both hands, and instantly her knees buckled under her, and she sat down upon the floor, passed groping fingers over her eyes, fell forward on her face, and slept.

It was the major thrill in the existence of the Stewed Prune. "Not Sarah Lynn?" they gasped. "In person! Simply blotto!"

Duncan Van Doren reproached her heavily. "Oh, no! You wouldn't have a drink when I asked you. Oh, no!"

"Oh, Duncan, hush, before I slap you down!" Ardine snapped at him, taking competent charge. The girl, one thin hand trailing, was rushed to the dressing room, and the hostess turned to the flier. "Gunnar, I'm sunk, that this had to happen. The poor baby—it's the first time she ever—"

He cut coldly into her speech. "I seek Jim Allison."

"Oh, yes, of course! He telephoned—he was detained, but he was going right out to the field and he'll warm up the plane or whatever it is. Doc Reedley'll drive you out. Lieutenant Thorwald, this is almost—Dr. Reedley. Just dashing down the home-stretch to a degree and he'll be so glad to—"

The flier interrupted again. "At once, please, we go."

### CHAPTER V

Jim Allison and a couple of his friends had arrived at the field. "Evening, Petey!" Allison greeted the man who stepped forward. "Lieutenant Thorwald's delayed, so I'll warm up for him."

"Okeh, Cap'n Allison."

The aviator's keen bitter eyes ran over the outlines of the ship as he walked toward it.

"Gas her, will you? Get the weather report. He'll want to hop immediately."

"I betcher! Told me he was off at—"

"I told you he was delayed. Snap into it, will you?" Allison said sharply.

"Okeh, sir." He started away.

"May have to sleep out in Mexico; there's a big roll of bedding to stow away."

"I'll tend to it, sir."

"You do what I told you. I'll take care of the bedding. You let it alone; understand?"

The man hurried off. "Walk wide of him this night," he told a youth in overalls, out of the corner of his mouth. "He'll bite the head off you."

"Yeah? Had a couple drinks again? He better cut that out."

They were standing together when Reedley and Lieutenant Thorwald drove up, and the older man saluted clumsily.

"She's purrin' like a pussy cat,

sir, but Cap'n Allison, he went home sick, poor feller. He couldn't hold his head up. He says you must hop without him and he'll telygraft to Los Angeles."

"Very good," the Norseman nodded. He turned to the medical student with a stiff bow. "I am obliged. You may go."

"All right, then," Reedley said, relieved. "I sure hope there won't be any more jinx!"

The aviator did not answer. He was stepping swiftly about his ship, ice-blue eyes keen for the faintest flaw in her shining perfection.

Reedley ran back to his car, jumped in, backed and turned and slid into high and was off at top



Incredibly, out of all reason, someone was standing behind him.

speed. Half a mile down the road a parked car snapped on its lights and honked noisily, and he jammed on his brakes and came to a slithering stop.

"Okeh?" Jim Allison asked hoarsely.

"Well—Lord, I guess so!" Reedley said. Beads of sweat stood on his face. "Boy! What a night!"

"And what a day is coming!" someone in the flier's car contributed. "Say, Jim, those doors don't fly open — or — or — anything, do they?"

"No," Allison said shortly.

"Well—better beat it back to the Prune and rehearse our parts with Ardine."

Sarah Lynn said to herself: "I can't possibly sleep with the music beating and pounding, but I don't want to wake up, because I can pretend I'm flying . . ."

Her head ached hideously and her mouth was dry. But the air in her nostrils now was sharp and sweet and cold, and she was shivering.

"I'm pretending so hard that I'm actually cold!" she exulted. "But I won't open my eyes, because Duncan will think I'm asleep, and let me alone." She dozed again. Then "I wonder if I could open my eyes . . . they're so heavy. I never heard such noisy music, and there isn't any tune; just throbbing and pounding and roaring."

"I think I'll open my eyes for a minute, now, but I'll keep right on making believe I'm not here." Then she was saying in a scared whisper: "I can pretend with my eyes wide open! Sitting right here in the Stewed Prune with the horrible music roaring at me, I can pretend I'm in a plane, up among the stars, flying away in the night!"

Her teeth were chattering; her

heart was in her throat; her head blazed with pain. "But why am I pretending to be all wrapped up in blankets? Mercy, if I can make-believe like this I needn't ever be afraid of anything again—not Ardine, nor Mother, nor Duncan, nor Detroit! Nothing will matter!" Her nostrils dilated and she pulled deep drafts of cold air into her lungs. Her head cleared. She sat bolt upright.

A rush of air, chill, stinging, sweet. A great round moon of dazzling platinum. Stars; stars; stars. The steady pounding throb of a motor. A small, compact space enclosing her, and—directly before her, and—directly before her—square shoulders in creamy leather, a head in a sternly classic helmet.

Sarah Lynn heard her own voice in a strangled whisper—

"Am I even pretending—him?"

Gunnar Thorwald, Norwegian ace, was flying in a cold rage. He was hurt, disappointed, deeply disgust-

women up," the American flier had explained, "under ordinary circumstances, but in this case, if you could possibly make an exception I'd appreciate it no end. You see, the fact is, Ardine—and of course her husband, too—awfully decent chap, Keaton Dana, rather heavy, perhaps, but a prince"—he added hastily under the bleak young gaze—"are very special friends of mine, and she's set her heart on going up for a spin with you."

"I am sorry," the yellow-haired youth said civilly.

"Makes it pretty awkward for me. I dare say I—well, I strutted a bit about what pals we are, and I'm afraid I let Ardine infer that I could fix it up for her."

"I am sorry," Gunnar said again. "I take no women in my ship."

He might well have expanded his pronouncement to say that he took no women anywhere. Sisterless, cousinless, girl-friendless, rigidly reared by a stern grandmother, he had pledged her and himself to keep his mind wholly upon his work until his career was well established.

The night was clear and calm with excellent visibility; his hop to Los Angeles would be without excitement.

He came swiftly out of his musings as the nose of the plane dropped, the whir of the motor increased and they leaned toward a downward pitch. He pulled on the stick to regain normal position, wondering what freak of air currents caused the small disturbance. He was aware of a slight jar. Had he, perhaps, struck a high-flying night bird?

He was immediately in level flight again, eased off on the joy stick and began to re-establish the course which had been briefly abandoned, but directly he released his pressure the nose dropped a second time.

There was a jar again, more perceptible this time, and he turned his head to look back through his ship, and found his vision blocked. Incredibly, out of all reason, someone was standing behind him.

His mind refused to accept it. The thing was impossible. It was the figure of a woman!

Then young Gunnar Thorwald, Norwegian ace, experienced an anger the like of which he had never known in all his years of living. It was the sort of berserk rage his ancestors knew, tricked by a wily foe, and which they eased with sudden blood. Jim Allison had made mockery of his rule. Jim Allison had flouted him—his friend—to please the whim of his light-o'-love; made a fool of him in the eyes of the tipsy wasters at a tawdry roadhouse. His teeth ground together and his breath came quickly.

The woman lurched forward and caught at his shoulder to steady herself, bent closer to speak above the roar. Their cold cheeks touched.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Young Babies Show Remarkable Strength; They Represent Man in His Arboreal Days

It is said that very young babies will grasp one's fingers, holding on with remarkable strength so they can be lifted to a sitting position because they represent man in his arboreal days when he still swung from limb to limb in the treetops, writes J. Otis Swift in the New York World-Telegram.

Habits stored in the subconscious and handed down generation to generation are so strong in men, animals and plants that they perform certain things, even in their sleep. Beside roads and pasture paths, in vacant lots of towns, and growing on city dumps, the bare, sere stiff skeletons of cockle-bur, clot-bur, Xanthemum strumarium, with summer leaves broad-ovate, mostly three-lobed dentate, stand asleep dead, lifeless apparently.

The oblong burs or seed containers are armed with rigid uncininate prickles, little hooks for reaching up and seizing the wool of sheep, hair of dogs, stockings of human beings, that they may ride away and the seeds be scattered. These adventurous rides begin as soon as

the seeds are ripe in the autumn—but millions of years of doing it have made the habit so strong they do it even in midwinter when the stalks are dead—like the grasping hand of a miser which reaches out for gold even after the soul has gone where gold is not a medium of exchange. In case of the cockle-bur weed it is a worthy thing, this instinct strong in death, for it teaches the weak-hearted that there is terrible earnestness in Life's determination to persist on earth. Though the word xanthemum is from the Greek for yellow—the plant once used to make that dye—the scratchy burs are not "yellow" in spirit—they are brave men in hibernation or death.

### "Right Wing," "Left Wing"

The "right wing" in connection with politics is the conservative element, or, as in Europe, it is often the monarchist element in a political party, legislature, parliament and so on. The "left wing" is made up of the more radical element of a political party or legislature.