

Our Weekly Serial Story Installment

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

Copyright D. Appleton—Century Co., Inc.
WNU Service

CHAPTER XI—Continued

Ed Dana put a hand on Sarah Lynn's shoulder. "You wanted me to know? Well, don't you want me to come to your wedding?"

"Dad, dear!"

"We'll be there, all your brothers and I, and old Penny, of course. I—I doubt if your mother—"

"I know."

"Your mother is pretty set in her ideas, for all she's so gentle. This thing, about Duncan, I mean, goes pretty deep. But I want you to know the rest of us—the boys and I—are satisfied, Sarah Lynn."

She couldn't speak. It was a comfort to have him go on talking.

"We're pretty proud of you, Sarah Lynn, and we like Gunnar. It's fine what the old lady has done for you, just now, when things are pretty lean with me. Of course, we always knew she would remember you substantially, and it wasn't any surprise to find she's left everything to you and Sally Ann. Well, that'll make it nice for the boy. He'll be free to keep right on with the things he's interested in. I'd hate to think of his having to keep his nose to the grindstone," he said. He gave her a hard hug and got quickly into his car.

Sarah Lynn went for a last walk with Miss Pennington, out to their meadow. She dreaded it a little, but the old governess was briskly commonplace. "I wonder at you, really I do," she said severely, "marrying without a new stitch to your name! It would have given me pleasure to mark your things. I cannot help but feel this haste is unseemly."

Sarah Lynn drove herself out to the airport to say good-by to her plane and her friends, young Bill's adoring presence beside her.

"Gee, Sis, some people have all the luck!" he moaned. "Gosh, I wish I was going with you and Gunnar!"

"Bill—this is a secret—cross your heart? Well, you get through high school, and I'll send for you to come over to Norway and learn to fly."

"Gee!" he gasped. "Golly! Hot ziggotty! No foolin'?"

No fooling, she pledged him, her heart warm. She did have all the luck, all the love. She felt a great uprush of happy gratitude, an ardent longing to give something away, to do something for somebody.

The Ladybug was to furl her wings for the present. They expected to send for her, after a while. Vance Le Roy was to keep her as the apple of his eye, old Pete on guard as well.

A group gathered about her—Vance Le Roy, old Pete, the mechanics, a few fliers and students to tell her good-by, to wish her happy landings.

Kitty Medill was standing alone by her shabby ship. Kit, poor Kit, she remembered, had been grounded three months for discipline and had just been permitted to fly again. Sarah Lynn waved and Kit answered sullenly.

"Boy!" gasped a student flier. "Are they going to hop the ocean—the two of 'em?"

"They're not doing any broadcasting," Vance Le Roy growled.

Sarah Lynn walked over to the stunt woman. "Hello, Kitty! I'm so glad to see you!" Cool, dark, slim, immaculate, offering her hand.

The hand Kit gave in return was smeared with grease and had a look of chronic as well as temporary soil, but the nails were a gleaming pink. "Well, I'm glad somebody's glad. I'm pretty darn' sick of being in the doghouse. What do they want me to do? Fly this old crate like I was pushing a baby buggy round the park? And now I can have my blue dishes again if I promise to be a good little girl and play gently! The heels! Look at those guys over there now, watching us! You'd think I was Poison Ivy. Don't want

their angel child to catch anything off me! Everybody high hatting me and—"

"Oh, not everyone, Kitty! I'm glad to see you. I'm glad I can say good-by to you. I—we're flying east—"

"Yeah. Big Swede in a fireman's hat."

Sarah Lynn laughed. "He doesn't wear it any more, Kit, and it's Norway, not—"

"All right, all right; let it go at that. But for all your soft line you wouldn't hop with me on a bet, would you? Sure you wouldn't." There was authentic bitterness in the high voice.

"Why, yes, I would, Kitty!" Sarah Lynn said, her voice warm. "I must be home in a little while, but I'd love to go up for a spin with you. I've never flown with you, have I? But I've seen your stunts in pictures and I think you're wonderful! Bill"—she called to her hovering brother—"you wait for me. I'll be down in a jiffy."

"Well, let's make it fast then," the stunt flier said.

She taxied down the field and took off smartly. Sarah Lynn thought the inside of the ship looked a good deal like its pilot—shabby, hectic, not quite clean. "Kitty, is your husband—" she began, conscientiously chatty.

"Husband? Listen; all men are dogs," she was circling the field. She looked down. "I bet this burns 'em up—that bunch down there, you flying with Poison Ivy." She began a sudden and reckless climb.

"No, Kit! Why should it?" But Sarah Lynn had an uneasy conviction that Gunnar and Conrad Jordan would sternly disapprove. She knew their feeling about the Kitty Medill type of flier. Why had she come?

"They say I've lost my nerve. Say I'm all washed up. Well, I'm not. I'm just as good as I ever was. I'll show 'em." The small face seemed wholly composed of sulky mouth and stubborn jaw. "I'll show 'em right now. Hang on, kid! We're going to the circus!"

She allowed her plane to stall in level flight, held her joy stick back and her rudder on and went into a violent tailspin.

Sarah Lynn's heart turned over and over. She clutched and clung, thanking her stars that Gunnar was not watching. Could the mad-cap recover? What were the men thinking down on the field, her friends?

Kit closed her throttle, pulled back on her stick, regained her flying speed, straightened out smoothly; a brilliant performance. She grinned at her passenger. "All washed up, am I?"

"Of course not! You're marvelous! That was a gorgeous thrill, Kit, but I believe we'd better go down, now."

"Oh, let's take a little ride!" They were shooting skyward again. "Why don't you come up sometime?" She leveled off and headed for the hills.

Sarah Lynn took pains to speak pleasantly, casually. "Kit, this has been great fun, and I'll bear witness that you're a wonder, but I really must be getting back. My brother's waiting and I have a hundred things to do before we leave."

She held the ship doggedly to its course. "Say, listen. I'd be doing you a big favor if I never flew you back to your fireman. You take it from me; they're all heels. I could write a book about 'em, babe. All alike from that ace of yours to the dirty deuce I drew!"

Sarah Lynn achieved a laugh. "But, just the same, I must be getting home, Kit." She was fighting a swiftly growing anxiety, her eyes on the instrument panel, her ears listening earnestly to the motor. There was something about it she didn't like, an alien sound.

They were flying low over the mountains, now.

"Remember that night in Fresno, when the fireman baled you out like a sack of mail?"

"I do, Kitty, and how kind you were to me! I'll never forget it."

I've never stopped being grateful, and I've always hoped I could do something for you, sometime." She forced herself to speak steadily.

"Well, you squared it all right when you hopped with me, just now, showing those bumps you had confidence—" she broke off, frowning.

Stark terror laid hold of Sarah Lynn. "Kit, what's the matter? Let me fly her! Here, let me! Kit, what's wrong?"

"Just everything, that's all," the stunt flier said, her voice rasped and shrill. "Just everything in the world! Well, what do we care, babe! Stand by for a crash!"

CHAPTER XII

Kitty Medill crawled slowly and painfully out of the wreckage. Her clothing was grotesquely torn and blood ran brightly from cuts on her face and body. She limped unsteadily to a large flat rock at a little distance and sat down, her hands over her eyes, shaking, whimpering cursing.

She kept herself resolutely blindfolded. "It's just a lousy dream,"



"Everybody's high-hatting me and—"

she told herself. "Just a nightmare, like when you eat something awful. Pretty soon I'll wake up." She pressed her hands tighter over her eyes. "I won't look. I'm not going to look till I'm sure I'm awake. Just a lousy dream. I never took her up. I never—" She was on her feet, reeling back to the remnants of her plane.

She screamed when she saw what she was looking for. Sarah Lynn was pinned to the ground, face downward, one hand flung clear, an olive-skinned, sun-tanned hand, delicately muscular and thin with faintly pink nails. In the midst of breakage and tragedy that hand looked normal and comfortable and unworried.

"You're not dead!" the flier addressed her harshly. "You're not dead. I won't—let you—be dead, do you hear?"

Sarah Lynn did not hear.

Kitty Medill began to weep wildly. She got down to her knees and touched the hand. "I told you you weren't dead!" she triumphed.

"Now all I got to do is drag you out." She began a slow and thorough investigation. The weight resting on Sarah Lynn's back was utterly impossible for her to move even the fraction of an inch, and it held her like a vise from her shoulders to her hips. One arm was under her; the other, her legs, her head, were free of encumbrance. "Well, that's all to the good," Kit continued to talk to her. "All I got to do is find something I can use to pry that junk loose so you can wriggle out."

She stood erect and walked un-

steadily away. They were on a ledge in a canyon with mountain crests rising all about them. One, higher than the rest, she thought must be Mount Umunhum, named in the Indian days. There were no trees. She stood on a rock to look. There was absolutely nothing which she could use as a lever to pry the load off Sarah Lynn.

She walked back to the smashed ship and took stock. Exploration discovered her flask half full of whiskey, matches, four sandwiches in a tin box. She set her treasures together on a flat stone and turned at a sound. Sarah Lynn was moaning.

Kitty Medill ran to her. "Hello, babe! Okeh?"

"Kit?" a faint whisper came.

"Yeah! Kit's right here!"

"My . . . back . . . Could you lift . . ."

Kit swallowed hard. "Well, you see, kid, it's pretty heavy. I can't quite cut the mustard, alone. But they'll be along, now, most any time, and we'll have you out before you know it."

"All . . . right . . ." another sighing whisper answered.

"Sure we will. They were watching us, all those birds at the field. They know the course I took, and when we don't show up, they'll be out after us." She thought Sarah Lynn was asleep.

The whisper came again, "Kit—"

"Right here, babe!"

"My back . . . Couldn't you lift it . . . a little?"

She would try, she told her. She did try, frantically, futilely, straining until she was crimson and gasping. "See? Can't make the grade. But just as soon as the boys get here—and they'll bring tools and everything—"

Her passenger did not appear to be listening. After an interval she said, "Water . . ."

The stunt flier managed a very good laugh. "Well, that's the joker. Didn't have any on board, and I dissent go barging around looking for a spring and get lost in the dark. But I'll tell you what I have got!" She retrieved the flask.

"No more water round here than you'd find in a speak, but a lil' swig of this'll do you more good anyway!" She crawled as close as possible to Sarah Lynn, slid an arm beneath her head, managed to lift it a few inches and held the liquor flask to her lips, but she coughed and choked. "Well, for Pete's sake, don't waste it! Well, anyway, I'm going to put my handkerchief under your face; keep it off the dirt." She smoothed the square of soiled pink linen and spread it beneath the bruised cheek. "I betcher that feels better!" She stood up and looked down at her for a long moment. "It's just your back that's caught, babe. Arms and legs okeh. Might be a good idea to move your legs once in a while, you know, exercise 'em. Try it, will you?"

Sarah Lynn was motionless.

"Go on, kid! Just to please me? Move your legs!"

Crows, as Pets, Can Be Taught to Talk; Tongues Naturally Split, Expert Asserts

If you are bored with the usual kind of pet and want a new thrill, get a crow, and while teaching him to talk, teach him various tricks, writes Medora Hamilton Crist in the Baltimore Sun. You will never tire of him, for he will do something surprising each day.

When strangers hear my crows talk they never fail to ask: "Did you split their tongues?" Certainly not. A crow's tongue is naturally split. It is seemingly loose at both ends and works on a central pivot.

The next question invariably is: "How long does it take to teach one to talk?" I have never been able to make one talk in less than ten months. He will learn to bark like a dog, mew like a cat and jabber a number of unintelligible words, but to pronounce words really clearly takes almost a year. In the meantime, he will be up to all kinds of mischief and will learn some new trick each day, including quite a few things that you do not teach him.

One day I placed a pan, containing several pieces of clothing, on my

Sarah Lynn said, "Are you sure . . . my legs . . . are there? I don't think I have . . . any legs."

"All right," Kit said after a pause. "Let it go. Prob'ly better to just lay still and rest, anyhow, till they come for you."

"Why, I'll bet they're tumbling out to hunt already, planes and people on horseback and Boy Scouts and everything. Don't you fret. I got you into this jam and I'll get you out of it. Sure; the posse's out now, I'll bet, to rescue you and to string me up. Well, see if I care!"

She sat down as near to her as she could get and took hold of the one free hand. Dusk filled the canyon. "Gee, it gets dark fast up here. Like dropping a curtain, or switching off a light. Well, that's all right; sooner it's night the sooner it'll be morning. Just don't you fret yourself, babe. You hear me? Don't you worry."

"I won't . . ." the whisper answered.

A bird, somewhere above them, began a plaintive call which consisted of small, sad notes dropped down in groups of four, over and over.

"Oh, cut that out, will you?" Kitty Medill demanded. "We heard you the first time."

When it was completely dark a cold wind came up, and there began to be countless queer and disturbing night noises. She could identify the howling of coyotes but they seemed to be a comfortable distance away. It was the fluttering, the creeping and crawling close by which filled her with sick terror. Owls called eerily to each other. Occasionally she struck a precious match to look at Sarah Lynn, and twice she was able to break off bits of a sandwich and get her to swallow, but what she wanted was water. Kit wanted it herself.

"Wouldn't that slay you?" she thought. "Me—craving water?"

When she found it was useless to try to make Sarah Lynn talk she put her head down on her knees and slept in broken snatches. Good idea for both of them to get their rest; the Big Swede would be after them by daybreak, and after them was right; two ways.

The world was bright with morning light long before the sun made its way into their canyon.

Kit yawned and stretched and got stiffly to her feet. It was crisp and cold and quiet and the sky was serenely blue. Sarah Lynn seemed to be talking to herself.

"Well, good morning!" Kit said raggledly, "if that's what you call it. But it's got the night beat a million miles, anyhow, and—listen! Listen! Planes!" She began to dance up and down, to cry and to laugh. "Babe! Don't you hear 'em? Gee—there they are! Planes—flying over us!" She waved and screamed wildly, but the ships passed over and were gone, though they could still hear them.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

lawn and went into the house for clothespins. When I returned I found that each piece had been taken from the pan, dragged in the dust and put back into the pan.

Patience is the keynote in teaching crows to talk. Only the clearest pronunciation and the same tone and accent must be used when teaching difficult sentences.

I have spent at least two hours a day saying to my crows words that I wanted them to learn. They would almost fall from the perch and go through the most terrible contortions, twisting their necks as if in agony while trying to say some new word.

Black Country

The name Black country is applied to a district of the English midlands including South Staffordshire, with parts of Worcestershire and Warwickshire. The name is due to the numerous collieries and furnaces, and the desolation of scenery caused by the mining of coal, ironstone, clay and dependent industries.