

Our Weekly Serial Story Installment

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

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CHAPTER XII—Continued

Sarah Lynn's voice said hoarsely. "Buzzards . . . buzzards . . . Didn't you know . . . we were . . . dead?"

"Say, listen, we're not dead and we're not going to be dead! I tell you they're on the job, looking for us! It won't be long, now!"

The planes kept flying over them. They returned again and again, but they never hesitated. Kitty Medill stood on her rock and waved and screamed, but the pilots gave no sign of noticing her.

"You fools, you fools! You blind bats!" she sobbed, cursing.

Then she made a careful survey of their situation and realized that they were hidden from above by a ledge over the one on which they had crashed. She might gesture and yell the rest of her life without being seen by the fliers.

"Okeh, then. I'll get out where they can see me," she decided. She didn't try to tell Sarah Lynn. She took half her matches and a sheaf of maps and charts and walked in the direction of Mt. Umunhum, stopping constantly to mark the trail in some fashion, tying to the chaparral the ribbon from her hair, her belt, her pink satin garter. When she found a bare rocky space she tore up her papers and gathered twigs and dry leaves and got her fire going. She broke off branches of manzanita and fed the flame, and she discovered that green stuff made a denser smoke.

In an incredibly short time the planes were back, three of them, dipping and circling. She could see the pilots peering down. She stood away from the fire and tore off her blouse and waved, and one of the airmen waved an arm in answer. He flew perilously low, and she recognized the Hermod with Gunnar Thorwald leaning out to look at her. She pointed back toward the place where she had left her passenger, and he nodded and flew away in the same direction.

Kit's knees gave way and she sat down and the breeze blew acrid smoke into her eyes and mouth, but she was up in a moment, running back to the wreck.

"Babe, it's okeh! He's here! I mean, he will be in a minute—your boy-friend in his bus! Kid, it's all right, do you hear me?"

If Sarah Lynn heard she gave no evidence of it. She seemed to be busily preoccupied talking to herself, and the free hand opened and closed and tensed stiffly, so Kitty Medill raced back again to keep her fire going and wait for Gunnar Thorwald. He was an intolerable time in coming. She had moments of panic in which she was sure he hadn't seen her after all; that she had imagined the Hermod.

But at last she saw him working his difficult way swiftly through the thick, harsh underbrush.

"She lives?" he demanded hoarsely.

"She's alive, sure."

"Hurt? How?" Ice-blue gimlets, boring into her brain.

"Well, you see—it's on her. On her back. The ship is. I tried to lift it off but—"

"Take me there!"

She turned and ran back, Gunnar following so closely that he almost trod upon her. "Quick!" he kept saying. "Be quick!"

When they reached the wreck Kitty Medill shut her eyes. She didn't want to see his face when he saw Sarah Lynn, but it was almost as bad to hear him. It sounded as if he had flung himself down on the ground beside her, and Kit thought he must be talking in his own Swede lingo, for she could not understand the words, but she understood perfectly the terrible, racked sobbing.

When she heard him working Kit took her hands away from her eyes and looked at him. He was working so fast, so furiously, so surely, with such fierce efficiency. He wrenched

and chopped and tore away, twisted and pried, dead white, with sweat pouring from him. It seemed to Kit, watching the cold frenzy, that he could have done it all with his bare hands.

Once he called to her and pointed to his canteen. "Give her water—a small drink at first." He looked at her fully for the first time. "Only that I may need your help," he said levelly, "I would kill you."

"You needn't trouble yourself," she said jauntily. "I can 'tend to that little chore." She crawled close to Sarah Lynn and managed to make her take three swallows.

Two other men came running through the chaparral presently, with young Bill Dana following. They set to work instantly under Gunnar's directions and that speeded up the affair tremendously, Kit could see, but she was sure the ace could have done it alone.

One thing he did do alone. When the weight was finally dragged off Sarah Lynn the others stood aside and let him stoop and lift her.

She screamed once, a short, dreadful cry, and he put her down on the blankets Kit had spread. Sarah Lynn looked up at him, her eyes big in her burning face, recognizing him clearly. She said thickly, "Go away! Don't come in here!" She held up a warning hand. "Fly away in the night! Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home!"

When he bent over her, murmuring, she pointed an accusing finger. Her hoarse voice said, packed with scorn, "Keep away from me, drunken fool!"

Once again, Sarah Lynn Dana, social registerite, member of the exclusive suburb of Danavale, became news, furnishing hectic headlines in San Jose and San Francisco papers for many days.

She had flown with the notorious Kitty Medill, famous stunt-flier and moving picture double for dangerous scenes, who was making a first hop after being grounded by the Department of Commerce for reckless flying; she was lost; she was found, and found by Gunnar Thorwald, Norwegian ace, her fiancé; she would die; she would live; she would live, but she would never walk again.

It was after this last announcement that Kitty Medill committed suicide, quietly and with a good deal of reticence and dignity.

They did not tell Sarah Lynn about Kitty Medill. They did not, in the first days, tell her about anything. She was constantly under opiates. Sometimes, when their effect wore thin, she murmured feverishly, anxiously.

"Gunnar . . ." the name came through the confusion again and again. "Gunnar . . ."

Her mother, her beauty deepened and clarified by draining grief, hung over her in an agony of tenderness. "Yes, darling! What is it, darling? What are you trying to say? Tell Mother!"

"Let me," the nurse said capably, taking her place. "Yes, Gunnar. I understand," she said slowly and clearly. "You want to see Gunnar?"

The head, held rigidly in a frame, could not move, but the eyes rolled wildly in negation. "No, no, no!" She made a great effort. "Tell him—tell him—"

"Yes, I understand. What shall I tell him?"

"Don't come in here . . . Don't come in here . . . Go away!"

"All right, dearie, I'll tell him. Now you go to sleep again." Miss Burke straightened up. She was young enough and gallant enough to revel in the drama of the case and she thought that particular phase of delirium pretty sad. She followed Mrs. Dana out into the hall. "Of course, that doesn't mean a thing," she was beginning briskly when the mother interrupted.

"Mr. Thorwald is downstairs?"

"Goodness, yes! always. I don't know when he eats or sleeps. He—"

"Then, will you kindly go down and tell him exactly what my daughter has just said?"

The nurse hesitated. "But, you understand that she is delirious, Mrs. Dana? It doesn't mean—"

The large and lovely lady drew herself to her full imposing height. "You will be good enough to do as I ask, Miss Burke. Tell him exactly what she said, and without comment," she said levelly.

Miss Burke disdained the elevator and ran down three flights of sound-proof stairs on her heelless rubber soles. "Aha! So, that's the scenario!" she told herself, deciding to tell the Norwegian ace exactly what she pleased. She found him as usual



"You needn't trouble yourself."

al walking up and down the long hall.

"A change?" he demanded in a queer, spent voice.

"No. We weren't expecting any change, you know. She is certainly no worse."

"She—she asked for me?"

"Well, not exactly, asked, but she talks about you a lot. I mean, she's under opiates all the time, but she keeps murmuring your name."

"When—when can I see her?"

"Well, not just yet. They seem to think it isn't wise. The shock—"

"You will tell me when I can see her?"

"I'll tell you." She put her well-groomed hand for an instant on his arm. "It's a promise. But in the meantime, you know, a little eating and sleeping—"

Duncan Van Doren arrived within the first week after the accident.

Duncan's well-bred face showed the effects of grief and shock; its pleasant veneer was rubbed off. "Well, I'm here now," he said, "and I'm here to stay until she gets well—or—doesn't get well."

Mrs. Dana gave him a wan smile. "Duncan dear!" It was certain, they had assured her, that her child would live. "But Bixford, who is the greatest bone specialist this side of Chicago, won't make any prognosis yet about the spine."

Conrad Jordan, who had left Tahoe instantly to join in the search, remained to look after Gunnar. "Though there's nothing I can do," he admitted to Lynn Dana, "except walk up and down that horrible-smelling hall with him, burbling about all the injured spines I've known cured, and dragging him out to eat infrequently. He begrudges every instant away for fear it might be the time they would let him see her." He shook his head. "And why can't he see her?"

"Why, I understand that no one—"

his friend began.

"On the contrary. All her family, the old governess, the large, plushy, optimistic aunt—That's the abominable part of it."

The man in the wheeled-chair was aghast. He seemed to have aged years in days. "You think they are definitely determined to keep him away from her? She isn't conscious enough to ask for him?"

"Even if she is, they won't let him in!" Mary Dana Webster said hotly. She managed to run in to see Lynn Dana every day for a few minutes of aching sympathy. "It simply burns me up to look at him," she told her husband. "He knows what it means. Do you suppose he blames himself, Neddy?" she asked him. "That makes it a million times worse if he does."

"Well, he might at that," Ned Webster had shaken his head. "If he and the old lady hadn't given her the plane—"

"But, if she hadn't gone up with that miserable bum of a girl—"

but the drama goes out of the situation, presently. I mean, they get used to the fact, and life goes on again, and—well, the calls and the flowers and books and things dwindle away."

"There'll be whole conservatories full of flowers now that Duncan is here," Mary said bitterly.

CHAPTER XIII

Gunnar Thorwald was pacing the corridor when Duncan Van Doren got out of the elevator. Duncan's head was down; he did not see the flier. Gunnar stared incredulously, striding toward him, thrusting out an arm to block his way.

"You have seen her?" There was an emphasis on the first pronoun which made the question at once a demand and a protest.

Duncan looked at him with swimming eyes, nodding, his face convulsed. He manifested no resentment, no conviction that before him stood the cause of the tragedy; only an engulfing flood of sympathy and sorrow. He gulped, groping for his handkerchief—"Horrible—cruel—"

Gunnar pushed past him toward the elevator, but it rose as he reached it, so he turned and went leaping up the stairs. A woman with a big bouquet of garden flowers shrank out of his way.

"Mercy!" she said to her husband. "That fellow looks like a mental case!"

He flung himself through the door in spite of the card in the brass frame which read:

Dana

Drs. Dunn and Bixford
NO VISITORS

but he stood still on the threshold, staring.

Mrs. Dana, standing at the window, her back to him, turned at the sound of his entrance. "Please leave the room!" she said in an angry whisper. "No callers are permitted. My daughter is—"

Gunnar was not listening. There was nothing she could tell him about her daughter. He continued to stand still, looking at her.

"Leave this room instantly! I will ring for an orderly to put you out!" Mrs. Dana cried wildly. "Haven't you done enough? Aren't you satisfied with the suffering, the agony—" she was bearing down on him in soft fury. "Do you want to kill her?"

But Gunnar had reached the bed. He had leaned over Sarah Lynn, shaking, and said her name.

She was as nearly white as the olive and amber and ivory of her skin could be, and her nose, her brow, her chin, her cheek-bones were as sharp and salient as if they had been chiseled from marble. Her eyes flew open, bigger and darker than ever, sunk in shadowed hollows, and a startled recognition came into them at once and a blazing joy.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Fierceness of Bald Eagle Is a Myth; Never Saw Bird Attack, Student Says

The perennial yarns of the predatory fierceness of the bald eagle once again have been dusted off and are being broadcast throughout the land. Just a short time ago I read in a national magazine of wide circulation that "the eagles are seldom gentle and are among the fiercest birds of prey," writes N. R. Casillo in Nature Magazine. "They attack sheep, rabbits and often wolves. Eagles have tremendous appetites and have been known to devour a calf, a sheep and a dog in a single week." The author of the article, however, fails to disclose whether it was a single bird or a group of them that "devoured" the formidable beast. But, he does convey the impression that eagles had actually brought down the animals mentioned.

In another influential periodical it was averred that eagles have been known to attack children, and one was seen to fight and carry off a wildcat. Paradoxically, in another issue of the same paper there was an item about an eagle being ignominiously vanquished by a six-months-old Plymouth Rock rooster,

the latter actually killing the large bird of prey.

With apologies to the Bard, "what manner of bird is this?" It surely cannot be the same bird that I observed daily during my three-months' stay in the Alaskan archipelago; a period during which I never once saw an eagle attack anything alive, unless the few salmon that they pirated from ospreys could be considered living prey.

My observations of the birds were not casual, but were systematically conducted studies.

Owls That Are Beneficial

The owls of the country, which have been set aside as beneficial, are the barn owl, eastern screech owl, snowy owl, western burrowing owl, Northern barred owl, great gray owl, long-eared owl, short-eared owl and saw whet owl. Only the great-horned owl has been adjudged harmful. Since this owl is none too common, one would do well to leave all of the owls well enough alone. They have a record for destroying vermin that is little less than amazing.