

Our Weekly Serial Story Installment

STRAIT GATE

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued

Sarah Lynn pushed Penny away. "I knew what Gunnar thought. He'd told me over and over. I don't want his pity and his duty. I wanted him to be free. I want him to be free, always, not even to remember me, not even to be sorry any more." She cried again, then, long and terribly and the governess wrung her hands in helpless grief and fright. After a while Sarah Lynn said in a small, tired voice, "You'd better bathe my eyes, Penny, and powder my nose. They'll be coming home soon. And you'd better be reading Duncan's book."

Duncan Van Doren was the first to return. The dentist had given him an unpleasant afternoon and he was pale and fagged looking. He studied Sarah Lynn's face anxiously. "Sarah Lynn, aren't you feeling well? Is anything the matter? Well, then, did you—did you miss me at all?"

"Yes, I missed you a lot, Duncan," she told him gravely. "And I've been thinking a lot, too. Duncan, if I keep on improving, if I'm able to walk again, and not be such a burden, if you still want me—"

"Sarah Lynn!"

"And if you'll take me away to Detroit and keep me there always, and never let me hear planes going by in the sky—"

Hot color flooded his face; he was shaking and stammering. "Oh, Sarah Lynn! I'll take such care of you! I'll make you happy! I'll make you happy—"

"I'll try to make you happy, too, Duncan," she said levelly. "I'll do my best. I promise."

It was in the dawn, chilly and dark, that Miss Pennington in Mrs. Dana's discarded dressing-gown went padding across the floor to stand beside Sarah Lynn's bed.

"You're not sleeping."

"No, I am not, Penny. It doesn't matter."

"Have you pain? Do you feel the brace too much?"

"No," she said again after a pause. "I don't feel—anything."

The governess went down on her plump knees and groped for Sarah Lynn's hand. "Oh, my dearie, why did you do it? Why? Why did you do it?"

It was a long moment before she spoke. "It makes Mother happier than anything else in the world; it pays Duncan back; it pays them both back."

"Ah, but you, Sarah Lynn! You!"

"It doesn't matter, Penny." She laughed. "It matters not—Remember Uncle Lynn's pipe-rack? The rest of the verse is silly: master of your fate and captain of your soul. That's sentimental nonsense. But it doesn't matter how strait the gate is. Will you give me a drink of water, please, Penny? I am so thirsty."

Miss Pennington brought it and stood waiting while she drank. Tears were running down over her bright, hard cheeks and the tip of her nose was red.

"Thank you, Penny dear," Sarah Lynn said clearly, handing back the glass. "And there's one other reason. Gunnar. If ever he hears—and he will hear, sometime, through Uncle Lynn or Conrad Jordan or Sally Ann—he will think everything is all right. You see, Penny, I want him to be free, free always, the way I knew him. I don't want him to have one thought that's remorseful or sorry. I want him to forget all about me, but if I ever do come into his mind I want him to think: 'So! She married the first suitor! She lives the soft life, safe and dull. It is finished.' And I'm going to forget him, too, Penny. I'm going to—"

She broke off with a muffled cry and put her hands over her ears.

Miss Pennington stood listening. There was the throbbing of a motor far above them.

CHAPTER XV

For once Mrs. Edwin Dana defeated the press. The betrothal of her daughter to the son of her dearest friend was kept an absolute secret. Tenderly triumphant letters went from Danavale to Detroit and Detroit to Danavale, but the colony itself had only surmises and the public was in ignorance.

It was to be a rather long engagement—until Sarah Lynn was walking normally—and the wedding would be the simplest and quietest possible. She fed her fancy upon that. There had been enough publicity before to pollute a reticent lifetime. She shaped the notice she herself would send to the papers: "Miss Sarah Lynn Dana, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Dana of Danavale, and Mr. Duncan Van Doren of Detroit were quietly married at four o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday, the seventh, at the family home on Loma Vista drive, with only the immediate relatives present. Mr. and Mrs. Van Doren sailed the following day for the Orient and after a few months of travel abroad will make their home in Detroit."

The vision of it in type restored the years that the locusts had eaten.

Sarah Lynn traveled to new milestones of progress and left them behind. She could sit up for half the day; she could walk about the room; she could walk about the garden; she could be taken for gentle rides in the family motor-car. On one of the first drives her mother took her to call upon Lynn Dana. His chair was on the lawn in the bright winter sunshine and the elderly chauffeur drove the machine close so that they might talk without Sarah Lynn's leaving the car. Mrs. Dana did most of the chatting. Then they went to see dear Aunt Helena where Duncan met them for tea.

Sally Ann came back but she stayed in San Francisco and came down for a day or two at a time, only.

Lynn Dana had her for luncheon with Mary Dana Webster and Conrad Jordan.

"What do you hear from Gunnar?" the traveling cousin asked the flier once.

"Nothing."

Sally Ann stared.

He shrugged. "He never writes, and I don't. I had a brief and very formal note of thanks from him after he left."

"Then—he doesn't know about Sarah Lynn's recovery?"

"Not from me. He clearly wanted to make a clean break. What point would there be in telling him now? She's going to marry Van Doren."

"Besides," Mary Dana Webster said crisply, "to rush back now when she's well, after bolting when it seemed hopeless, wouldn't be very handsome, would it?"

Gunnar Thorwald's only defender was silent.

Sally Ann said: "I'm off to New York in a week or so. I've seen Sarah Lynn, and that's what I care home for. I've seen her four times—and I haven't seen her at all. Duncan was there, or Cousin Adelaide, but even if I'd had her alone I doubt if I could have punctured that—"

—that cellophane calm which covers her!"

The aviator said, "Why try?"

"Yes, why?" the man in the wheeled-chair wanted to know. "Good Lord, Sally Ann, if she has achieved peace—if she's happy—"

"Peace?"

"Happy?" The two women scorned him hotly. "She's like a sleep-walker," Mary said. "She's deliberately doped herself with Duncan and Detroit; that's my analysis. She has simply ceased to matter to herself; she simply doesn't count—and she doesn't care—and it's too hideously cruel and I could howl my head off!" She wiped away angry tears.

Jens, the valet, came upstairs at his slow and lumbering tread. Miss Pennington was calling, and it was very, very important, and she must see Mr. Dana immediately.

"Send her up, of course, Jens," Lynn Dana said, but she passed the man-servant in the doorway.

Her cheeks were pale and she was out of breath. "Oh, Mr. Dana, I found him on the drive—coming to the house—I made him come here first—I made him—he doesn't know—"

There was the sound of someone taking the stairs in bounds and suddenly the little old Hank Dana house was full of drama and confusion and alarm and Gunnar Thorwald was among them.

He didn't seem real. He didn't seem to be a living person but a presence which they had conjured up out of their grief and rebellion. He was utterly white and his eyes were bluer by contrast, and he was thin and gaunt. He looked older and he seemed taller, so tall that



"Stop, Gunnar! Wait! You don't understand."

he towered over them, and his harsh and urgent youth made them seem soft and safe and middle-aged.

But there was a more subtle change in him, they were to decide, discussing it later among themselves: the young cocksureness was gone, the proud arrogance was gone, the fine bones of his face were more insistent through the flesh, chiseled and chastened into strange humility.

He made no amenities of greeting. "I have come for Sarah Lynn," he said simply. "Twelve days I have been coming to her; I can no longer wait." He made a slight gesture toward the governess who had delayed him. "I will take her with me. Or—if the doctors do not allow—I stay beside her until she can go." The small sentences came out roughly, hammered into crude shape on an anvil of strong feeling.

"I should not have gone; she turned from me, she sent me away, but it was the pain, the drug. Now I know. I flew away, but—" he groped for words—"but I did not leave her; always she was with me, land, sea, air, in my work, eating, sleeping. To forget was my wish. 'It is finished,' I said, but it was not finished. So, now, I come again. If she says, 'Never fly,' then I do not fly. I take her or I stay beside her." He stopped talking and turned toward the door. "Now I go to her." Conrad Jordan was on his feet. "Stop, Gunnar! Wait! You don't understand—"

The tall youth nodded. "I understand. She will shrink from me still?" His face worked. "At first, maybe. No matter. I go to her." The older flier said desperately, "Gunnar, I must tell you—"

He gave a muffled cry. "She lives?"

"Yes, but she"—he laid a hand on Gunnar's arm but he shook it off, striding toward the door.

It was Mary Dana Webster who blocked his way.

"Gunnar—wait! I've got to tell you—you've got to take it. Sarah Lynn is well again. She's been walking for weeks, now, and she won't even be lame. But—" she cut through his shout of joy—"Gunnar, listen to me! She's going to marry Duncan Van Doren next week."

Gim Jung, the cat-footed Chinese second-boy, came padding up the stairs to tell Mrs. Dana that a lady was calling, and she went down to find Ardine standing in the hall. The serene sunniness of her face clouded over a trifle. Ardine had never come to see Sarah Lynn in all her long imprisonment, although expensive flowers had arrived at the hospital with the card of Mr. and Mrs. Keaton Dana.

Ardine did not even return the thinly gracious greeting. "I thought you'd like to know," she said. "Gunnar Thorwald is back." She was out of breath with hurrying, and her hot-looking hands with their crimson nails were trembling.

"Here?"

"Here. I saw him, just now, going into Lynn Dana's house."

Mrs. Dana drew herself up with the ancient gesture of a lady putting an upstart in her place. She was milk-white. "Thank you. I—I appreciate your thoughtfulness, not, of course, that it could make any difference now, but—"

Ardine lifted one full shoulder in a languid shrug. "All right. I just thought you'd like to know." She let herself out of the front door.

Mrs. Dana stood still in her handsome hall, clenched hands pressed to her jaw-bones for long moments. She went to her own room and rubbed her pale cheeks with a rough towel and pinched them and went back to Sarah Lynn and Duncan, who were playing chess.

He smiled up at her ruefully. "Your daughter is about to check-mate me!"

"Oh, no!" Mrs. Dana said sharply.

"See if I care!" Duncan said ardently. "When I remember that this time next week we'll be 'way out on the Pacific; that's Wednesday, and this is Saturday, today, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday—" he counted off the days on his slender fingers.

"And everything finished and ready now!" Mrs. Dana said with an odd laugh. "You could—you could be married tomorrow—or this evening!"

"That's an idea!" Duncan agreed fondly. "Why not?"

Sarah Lynn said, "Your family will not be here until Monday." She waited for Duncan to move.

"Of course!" her mother said. "We couldn't disappoint them. But if you should want a romantic elopement—Everything's ready, even to the license!"

Duncan deliberated with his knight. "Not our line, is it, Sarah Lynn? Old and settled and sedate—" he moved the piece.

Sarah Lynn's hand hovered over the board, hesitated, came to rest on the table's edge. She spoke in a voice they had not heard for a long time. "Duncan, are you very sure? I mean, are you satisfied?"

"Of course I am," he said quickly. "Your play!"

"I haven't tricked you, have I?" she went on. "You said you'd be content with half a loaf, but sometimes I think it's just a few crumbs, Duncan." She looked at him steadily. Sally Ann would have seen a crack in the cellophane. "Are you sure?"

He gave her hand a pat. "I'm sure you're going to beat me in a minute!"

After a pause Sarah Lynn made her move. "Check!" she said in her usual voice.

Her mother went to her own room and talked agitatedly over the telephone to Aunt Helena. The family seeress was startled but she pulled her serenity over her head like a sweater. Dear Adelaide was to lie down at once without a pillow, with an iced towel over her eyes, and relax, drawing long rhythmic breaths. There was not the slightest cause for alarm. The intruder would hear from Lynn Dana of Sarah Lynn's impending marriage and he would go again.

CHAPTER XVI

Mrs. Dana's rhythmic breathing was interrupted by three telephone calls. She rose swiftly at each bell before a servant could answer, and said the same things in turn to Mary Dana Webster, Sally Ann, and Lynn Dana.

"No, I will not call her," she stated firmly. "No; I will not give her that message. There is absolutely no point in telling her: it can make no possible difference now in her plans. . . . I tell you it would make no difference—it is simply that I do not wish to have her disturbed and distressed by the revival of painful memories. . . . No. . . . No!"

She went downstairs to find Gim Jung, the cat-footed Chinese second-boy. "Gim Jung, telephone ring, every time, you call me. Company come, say, 'Miss Sarah Lynn,' never mind, you call me!"

"All right," he agreed, incurious almond eyes on her face. "I call."

"Maybe letter come, maybe telegram, Miss Sarah Lynn, never mind, you bring to me!"

"All right," he said again. "I bring."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Giant White Oak Tree in Georgia Now Known as "the Tree That Owns Itself"

A large white oak tree in Athens, Ga., is known as "the tree that owns itself." The ground on which the tree stands was once owned by William H. Jackson, a professor at the University of Georgia. He was born about the close of the Revolutionary war and was the father of James Jackson, who was chief justice of the State Supreme court at the time of his death in 1887. Professor Jackson was so fond of his oak tree, states a writer in the Indianapolis News, that about 1820 he wrote a deed conveying to the tree full possession of itself and the land on which it stands. The original of this so-called deed is not a matter of record and it is not probable that it was ever registered. According to a well established tradition it was to the following effect:

"I, William H. Jackson, of the county of Clarke, state of Georgia, of the one part, and the oak tree (defining the location) of the county of Clarke of the other part: Witness, that for and in consideration of the great love I bear this tree and the great desire to have for its protection for all time, I convey entire possession of itself and of the land within eight feet of it on all sides."

Of course a tree, like other chattels and things, can not legally own property, but Jackson's admiration for the tree led him to adopt this means of preserving it after his death. His sentiment has been respected. However defective the tree's title may be in law, it is recognized by the people of Athens who cherish and protect the tree as if it were "a freeholder" of the city. Soon after the beginning of the Twentieth century a private citizen at his own expense had granite posts connected by chains placed around the Jackson oak for its protection, and a white marble block, inscribed with part of the words of the traditional deed, was erected nearby.

Hard and Soft Woods

Hard wood is the wood of the deciduous or broad-leaf species—that is, the trees which shed their leaves. They include maple, oak, birch, hickory, beech, poplar, gum, chestnut, mahogany, walnut, cherry and teak. Soft woods are the woods of the evergreen needle-leaf trees and include white pine, yellow pine, spruce, cedar, douglas fir, hemlock and cypress.