

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

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CHAPTER X—Continued

Sarah Lynn leaned back in a great deep chair which made her seem childish small, and the aviator stretched himself flat again, his hands folded behind his yellow head.

"This was the one I liked," Jordan said, his fingers halting.

"But I shall go down from this airy space, this swift white peace, this stinging exultation; And time will close about me, and my soul stir to the rhythm of the daily round, Yet, having known, life will not press so close, And always I shall feel time ravel thin about me, For once I stood In the white windy presence of eternity."

Sarah Lynn felt a little shiver of appreciation. She had known it, the swift white peace, the stinging exultation. Life would never press too close on her, on Gunnar; they wouldn't let it! They were not earth-bound; they had dominion.

Jordan played on and on, quietly now, with a conviction of serenity and permanence, and the crimson of the hearth died down to a hot, gray ash. It seemed to Sarah Lynn that her heart must literally burst with its weight of surging happiness.

Gunnar let Sarah Lynn take the Hermod up alone one day and stood waiting proudly while she brought it smoothly and beautifully to earth. It was her accolade: sign and symbol of his utter trust.

They walked on the shore beside the blue, bright water and he took her in his arms. "So," he said, lifting his head after a long kiss, "you are fearless, also wise. You fly safely and skillfully my Hermod. I love you."

Sarah Lynn pulled herself out of his embrace to look up at him. "Gunnar, do you love me? Me?"

"Have I not said—" "I know. But I mean—is it only because I've learned to fly properly? Because I'm not afraid? Because I do the kind of things you like? Or is it—myself?"

He laughed aloud. "This is a folly. I love you because you are you—without fear, and wise, a good flier. It is answered."

"No, but"—there was a shadow in the eyes of the queer, dark Dana girl. "Don't you think we ought to care for people themselves, not for what they do? Not even for what they are? I think—"

"It needs no thinking," he said. "But—Gunnar, suppose—suppose I stopped flying?"

"Suppose you stopped living? Enough of folly! We finish!" He kissed her again.

Lynn Dana wrote to his traveling cousin:

"I wish you were here to see them now, Sally Ann. By and by, I suppose, an inexorable calendar will catch them and clip their wings, but now they are soaring!"

"Their visit at Jordan's Tahoe lodge seemed to set them free. They are armored against everything now, even poor Cousin Adelaide. They say little of plans but I gather they are to marry in a fortnight and go at once to Norway where he has excellent prospects."

"I think—at least, I suspect—that they will fly the Atlantic in the Hermod, in complete secrecy. I doubt if they will even tell me."

"Of course I shall miss them blankly, bleakly; it doesn't need your nimble and trained imagination to understand how much of flavor and fragrance will go out of things, but I shall manage to rejoice for our dark duckling hatched into an eagle's mate."

"There's something lyric, something mythical and symbolic about their romance: partly, I suppose, because of its evanescent quality, because they are looking constantly into the bright face of danger. It's hard to imagine them middle-aged and portly; I can't see beyond youth for them."

"Doubtless this is all because I'm a little low in my mind on another count. Granny is going down hill very perceptibly, and it gets me. Everything dimming—eyes, ears; a slowing down all around. She senses it of course, and she loathes it."

"So, then! Sorry you're missing the skylarks but glad you are being spared the matriarch's defeat."

Her great-grandmother's condition was evident even to Sarah Lynn's high-keyed preoccupation, and she ached with pity and protest. The old woman sent for her and went at once to the point.

"Sairy Lynn, I guess I don't need to tell you I'm getting older every minute."

"I know, Great-granny." She took a small, lean claw in her warm grasp. "And I wish I could give you twenty years."

"The last ones? Think now, looking so far ahead, that you won't want 'em? Well, you will, let me tell you; you'll want 'em the worst way. And you'll know you can't have 'em. Well, I'm obliged to you for the wish."

"I'm sorry," Sarah Lynn said. "Oh, Great-granny, I wish there was something I could do!"

"Well, there is," the nonagenarian said briskly. "That's what I'm getting at. That's why I sent for you. I know you're getting married and putting out, quick's ever you can."



"Enough of folly. We finish!"

Sairy Lynn, and that's right. I want you should. But there's a favor you could do me first."

"Anything!" she said gladly. "Anything I can—"

"I should admire to have a ride in your flying-machine, Sairy Lynn."

"Of course, Great-granny! I'd adore it."

"Well, there's plenty that won't," she said grimly. "When the folks hear of it there'll be the devil to pay and no pitch hot, but I don't care. I've got a hankering to see what it's like. I want to ride up in the sky and look down at birds flapping their wings that I always envied, and I want to look down at Danavale and all the foolish houses the folks built and the road your Gre-gramper and I come over in the covered wagons, dirty and dog-tired and snailing along with the half-dead critters hauling us. I want to do that once before I die."

"And you shall, Great-granny, dear," she told her. "I promise—cross my heart!" Gunnar would loan her the Hermod for this ritual.

CHAPTER XI

It was a pretty day. Gunnar approved the weather, and he warmly approved the project. It was exactly what he wished he might have done for Grandmother Gudrun.

Lynn Dana was deeply pleased. "She gave you your wings; right to share them with her," he nodded.

The colony came, the protestants, at least, anxious, indignant, annoyed, and the harried Emma Waters kept saying, "Now, Mis' Dana, where's your handkerchief? Mis' Dana, you went and took your knitted jacket off!"

Wrapped like a little old royal mummy, she was finally lifted into the cabin of the Hermod in Gunnar's long arms.

"I'm obliged to you, young feller," she thanked him. "And I'm real pleased about you and my child. I've set store by Sairy Lynn from the first minute I laid eyes on her in the cradle. I believe you're going to make her a good husband."

"I will make her a good husband," he told her gravely, fastening the seat belt about her, getting

out again, passing through the group of disapproving faces.

The matriarch rapped on the window with her lean knuckles and waved at her elderly daughters, her middle-aged granddaughters, and gave her shrill, cackling laugh.

"Now, go on home and don't fret," she admonished them, "you poor old things!"

Then Sarah Lynn Dana took her ship away from the pleasant landscape into the calm skies, carrying the ninety-seven-year-old pioneer who had crossed the plains in a covered wagon to found the dynasty of Danavale.

Sarah Lynn looked back at her often and every time she smiled all over her small parchment face and waved a claw.

"I'm having the best time I ever had in all my born days, Sairy Lynn," she chirped, unaware that her wavering treble did not carry over the sound of the motor. "Beats everything. Even the first day in

the head did not lift. Then the pilot headed for the coast, over the Santa Cruz mountains to the Pacific and flew low along the shore. After a while she shook the tears out of her eyes and looked into the sunset; she thought she had never seen one so lavish, so jubilant.

She rose and climbed and set out for home and when she circled the field at San Jose she could see the diminished descendants of Sarah Ann Kittredge Dana, pioneer, in an anxious huddle, gazing up. When she set her ship down gently her head was high.

Gunnar opened the door, looking closely at her, and the rest came hurrying up. She got out slowly, without speaking, and they stared at her. She wasn't crying, but they could see traces of tears on her face.

"Mother!" some of the elderly daughters called, and "Oh, Grand-ma!" a middle-aged granddaughter cried out shrilly.

Then there was a wild clamor of talking and weeping, of questions and reproaches. Sarah Lynn stood quietly in the midst of them, trying to keep remembering how the sunset had looked. "Great-granny," she steadied her voice, "Great-granny—didn't—come down."

Gunnar comforted Sarah Lynn in the difficult days which followed. "Do not listen to the wailing," he admonished her.

"But they say I killed her, Gunnar."

"And I say you gave to her life again. Not choking in blankets but boldly in the sky, as she would wish, that small grandmother. Age closed her in like a trap, you opened the door."

"Oh, I know! But, I keep dreaming of her, huddled down in her seat, swinging over the belt—"

"That is folly. Think of her looking down with pleasure."

"Yes. Only I did so want her at my wedding. It—it isn't going to be a very nice wedding, Gunnar."

He shrugged. "What matter? It is a wedding. That is enough. Then we go!"

They were walking back to her house from an evening with Lynn Dana.

"Gunnar, I promise, I'll stop grieving about Great-granny."

"That is well. Death in age, in sickness, in helplessness is good. All such should be put away."

She came out of her mood of exaltation with a cry of protest. "Oh, Gunnar—no! That's horrible!"

"Man," he persisted, "must learn from Nature. To let survive—how do you say it?"

"The survival of the fittest, but who can say, who can judge and decide who is the fittest? Don't you see what a frightful danger it would be? How wicked people could bribe and corrupt—And some of the finest minds and spirits are in frail bodies. Do you want a world full of prize-fighters? Think"—she said hotly—"think of my Uncle Lynn!"

He shrugged. "You speak now of the exception. That would be bad. But in the end, after five hundred years, would not the race be greatly improved?"

Sarah Lynn wasn't interested in the state of the race five hundred years ahead. She was disturbed. Gunnar had aired those ideas before, but never so vehemently.

She had to put herself to sleep that night resolutely, remembering the thrilling beauty of the plane against the moon.

But she kept her promise to stop mourning over the death of the ancestress. All her loyal cohorts helped, and a long, understanding cable from Sally Ann, and most of all, the man in the wheeled-chair.

"Let's put a period to it, Sarah Lynn," he said. "You were privileged to pay back in an hour what you had owed her all your life. She gave you your freedom; you gave her hers."

So peace came back to Sarah Lynn for her last days in Danavale. She said to her father, "Dad, I'm to be married in Great-granny's parlor Monday morning at nine, and then we're flying east. I wanted you to know. I'm telling Bill, too."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Awaited Perry's Ships

While the ships were being built at Erie for Oliver H. Perry to use in the Battle of Lake Erie, the British fleet was waiting outside the bar to smash them to smithereens.

THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

I felt such a shivery feeling just now, I think that I'm falling in love. I know it won't last but it's nice for a while—Oh, Cupid, please give me a shove!



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