

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

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THE STORY

CHAPTER I — 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.

CHAPTER II

Sally Ann Dana got through the first difficult moments of her meeting with her third cousin by making persistent talk about the nonagenarian.

"But— isn't she priceless? Ninety-six—and so quick and keen and clear! She's like—what?—a crisp, brittle little old autumn leaf blowing along."

"Exactly," he agreed. "And I'm hoping that she may just blow on and away, some day. It should be like that."

"I believe it will be. One can't conceive of helplessness and indignities for her. I'm sure she'll just suddenly—and simply—stop."

She walked to the window and stood looking out, her back to him.

"Gasping for your tea?" He rang. She turned toward him and he nodded approval. "You've pasted down the calendar, haven't you, Sally Ann?" He offered her a cigarette.

She shrugged leaning nearer for a light. "Aunt Helena says I'm skin and bones."

"Nice skin and bones. The grand-girls, as the matriarch calls them, will thirst for your gore; a lot of too, too solid flesh at Danavale. Thanks, Jens. Miss Dana will pour for me. You remember Jens, Sally Ann?"

"Of course! How are you, Jens?" The tall, stooped Swede was very well and hoped she was the same. He arranged the tray with heavy care and went creaking away.

"Oh, this is nice!" the traveler said contentedly. "Did Jens make these sandwiches? Fancy—with those sledge-hammer hands! But—why the third cup?"

"Sarah Lynn. She's very keen to meet you here, rather than at home, or at Aunt Helena's."

Sally Ann's black brows lifted. "Must I muss up my first returning raptures with the Infant Class?"

"This child is rather special. Enough like you to be, in kennel talk, your little sister."

"Ah! 'The dark one' Great-granny wants me to take abroad? Well, I won't." She took a second sandwich. "I haven't the faintest intention of weighting myself with entangling alliances. I'm utterly, comfortably selfish and intend to remain so. That's what keeps me young and spry," she told him cheerfully. "Duty-doing Danas, I observe, wax portly."

The man in the wheel-chair laughed. "Isn't it astonishing how the dark legend persists?"

"Absurd, of course."

"Exactly. Though Cousin Adelaide—Sarah Lynn's mother—rose to battle with the foolish fable. She considers it a quaint and annoying tribal superstition. If Sarah Lynn is a square peg—which she does not for a moment concede—she must and shall, notwithstanding, be snugly fitted into her round hole."

"And does she bring it off?"

He shook his head. "Sarah Lynn merely walks through her part, usually scowling. Cousin Adelaide gave her a large and heavy coming-out party, but she didn't emerge. Now I fancy the idea is to get her married as expeditiously as possible and whisked away from the local

landscape."

"Married? I thought she was a child."

"Nineteen. Her mother imported a pallid youth named Duncan Van Doren a couple of years ago—son of her dearest friend in her native Detroit, who needed a milder climate, winters, and who match-makes busily but to no avail."

"Ah?" said his third cousin civilly but without enthusiasm. "Lynn, you haven't said whether you liked my 'Musical Miles'?"

"Enormously! I wrote you, but the letter evidently passed you at sea. Extraordinarily nice piece of work, Sally Ann. The Salzberg 'Festpiece' chapter was a gem! You're having topping notices, aren't you?"

"Not bad. Someone's coming." A door had banged below.

"Come up, Sarah Lynn!" the man called.

But thundering steps took the stairs in bounds and a boy of seventeen burst into the room. He was fair and freckled, with a wide mouth and singularly innocent eyes.

"Bill!" Lynn Dana greeted him, surprised. "This is Sarah Lynn's brother, Sally Ann."

"How do you do, Bill? Will you have some tea?"

"Gosh, no," he said, shocked.

"No, thanks, Uncle Lynn, I can't sit down. I got to beat it before Sara Lynn gets here, and don't peep to her that I came, will you?" He turned to the woman with a vivid fusion of embarrassment and urgency. "Say, listen, would you take my sister with you when you go traveling again?"

Sally Ann smiled at him. "Afraid I couldn't do that, Bill."

"Gee, she's simply got to beat it, that's all! he can't stick around here much longer."

"But—why?"

He looked nervously out of the window. "Well—I can't make you understand, I guess, because I got to make it snappy, but she's different from most of the dumb eggs around here and my mother can't see it, and she makes her do all the things they do, and there's a dumb egg here from Detroit that my mother's always pulling for and Sarah Lynn can't see him with a spy-glass, but I'm scared stiff she'll just sort of boil over, if you know what I mean, and do something dumb!" He came to a breathless stop, his round blue eyes on her face.

Sally Ann found him singularly appealing. "Oh, I'm sure she won't, with you to look after her, Bill! Great luck for a girl to have a brother on the job."

"Yeah, but look—I'm in high school all day and in bed all night, account I'm in training, and she has to do all these dumb things, and she's absolutely cuckoo about my mother and she wants to please her and when my mother's sore at something, why Sarah Lynn just pretty near dies, so it's got me down, kind of, worrying, and—" he looked out again. "Gee! I gotta take it on the lam! Here she comes! Well, look—you kind of think it over, will you? Uncle Lynn, you tell her!" He plunged out of the room and they heard him leaping down the stairs.

"Rather a dear, that lad!" Sally Ann said. She set her cup down and walked to the window to see a girl and a greyhound coming up the road at a smooth and lively speed. "She's wearing exactly the right dog for her type, isn't she?"

"Quite! It's a thing to watch—Sarah Lynn and Lightning skimming over the fields," said the man who had sat in a chair for more than 20 years.

Sally Ann walked to the fireplace and looked at a pipe-rack done in painstaking pyrography with some unconvincing red poppies painted in. Below, in unsteady letters, was the verse:

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

His eyes followed her gravely. "My word, Lynn! You still have it."

"Yes," he said.

Sally Ann was remembering the golden-curl, violet-eyed, mother-of-pearl maiden who had made that atrocity for Lynn Dana in the first frightful months after his accident. "If only she hadn't died!" she reflected.

Sarah Lynn came up so silently that the traveling cousin didn't know she was in the room until she heard

Lynn say—

"Hello, Sarah Lynn! Why didn't you bring Lightning up?"

"I did ask her, Uncle Lynn, but she didn't care to, this afternoon." It was an oddly deep voice for a girl.

"Sally Ann, meet yourself at nineteen!" the host said with the air of a showman.

She saw a thin young thing in a brown knitted sports frock and beret, olive-skinned, big-eyed, awkward now, in spite of the graceful swiftness she had observed from the window.

"How do you do, my dear? He flatters me! You are far nicer than I was."

"Am I?" the girl interrogated her gravely, looking at her swiftly and away again. "I don't think I can be."

"How do you take your tea, Sarah Lynn? Nice name, isn't it?"

"Lemon and cream. I mean lemon and sugar." She flushed and her cup rattled on its saucer.

"You might safely dive into the thickest cream. We"—she took her casually into the dark sorority—"never seem to put on upholstery."

The girl, however, could not be put at her ease for all the kind pains. Sally Ann had the feeling that she was silent because she was afraid of saying, "Please, please, won't you take me away?"—if she spoke, and she was sorry for her and a trifle bored and a good deal annoyed. Her first long-looked-forward-to visit with Lynn! She stood up presently, eyes on her wrist.

"Nearly six! I'd forgotten these afternoon Dana dinners! Aunt Helena'll be agitated. Want to walk along with me, Sarah Lynn?"

They went down together, stopping for a word with the ancestress. Outside, the greyhound, brindle-brown, sharp-curved and flat as a book-mark, sprang upon Sarah Lynn with extravagant rapture.

"Lightning, dear," she said absently.

The creature went bounding ahead of them. She made the traveler think of the figurines in white metal, futuristic and exciting, which had been a recent rage in Paris. "I don't believe I've ever met a greyhound socially before. Are they satisfactory?"

"I think so. She doesn't mind very well, but I—"

"—don't mind very much?" Sally Ann finished for her.

"No. I think it gives her more character. All the other dogs are so busy heeling and retrieving and



"Oh, that's so absolutely true!"

charging and obeying." She was clearly more comfortable now, falling into rhythm with the older woman's long strides.

"I know. They strive to please. There is something rather servile about it, crawling back to lick the foot that kicks them, dying on their master's grave. Lightning, now, would hardly die on your grave unless it fitted in conveniently with her regular plans for her demise?"

Sarah Lynn gave a sudden laugh, deep and brief. "Oh, that's so absolutely true!"

"Well, here we are at Aunt Helena's. Nice to have seen you, Sarah Lynn. I'd like a walk with you and Lightning soon."

Her hostess was waiting in the hall, dressed for dinner, and there was the pleasantly muted sound of other Danas foregathered in the living-room.

"I'll be done and down in 20 minutes, Aunt Helena," the guest encouraged her.

The limp brown lace had been painstakingly pressed and her bath was drawn, but a short and stocky figure rose up before her.

"Miss Dana! If I might bother you a moment?"

"Penny! How do you do, Miss Pennington?"

"The bad penny turning up, eh?" the old governess said, rather out of breath. "As the saying is, but really just—still here."

"Where you belong as an integral part of Danavale," Sally Ann said cordially. "So nice of you to run in, but I'm afraid I must plunge into my tub—I'm frightfully late."

"I won't keep you, Miss Dana. It's just this: if you could possibly see your way to taking my child back with you? Sarah Lynn, I mean. She's not happy here, and she's not understood, and she might be so—so splendid!" Her close-clipped words came in a rush.

The traveler was pulling her dress over her head. "We'll talk of this again, Penny, dear. I'm afraid it isn't possible, but we'll discuss it fully. But now I must really—"

"Yes, of course," the English-woman said meekly, "and do please forgive my intrusion, but it's so terribly important!" She went away at her short-gear trot.

Sally Ann went irritatedly into her ablutions. Great-granny, Lynn, young Bill, old Penny, all importuning her on her first afternoon! But not all four nor four-and twenty could saddle her with unwanted responsibilities. She was to laugh at herself before she slept in the wide, old-fashioned double-bed, realizing she had offered to take Sarah Lynn abroad, not to please the four who wanted it, but to annoy the one who did not.

(Continued Next Week)

FOR SALE—TWO BILLY GOATS

About one year old. G. A. Broughton, Zebulon.

STATEMENT PYRAMID LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY Charlotte, North Carolina CONDITION DECEMBER 31, 1937, AS SHOWN BY STATEMENT FILED

Amount of Capital paid up in cash	\$ 111,394.00
Amount of Ledger Assets December 31st of previous year, \$822,288.41; Increase of Capital during year, \$810.00; Total	823,098.41
Premium Income, \$168,081.39; Miscellaneous, \$46,857.15; Total	214,938.54
Disbursements—To Policyholders, \$71,624.52; Miscellaneous, \$171,375.15; Total	242,999.67
Business written during year—Number of Policies 184; Amount	185,798.00
Business in force at end of year—Number of Policies 5438; Amount	6,753,546.00
ASSETS	
Value of Real Estate (less amount of encumbrances)	\$ 68,093.65
Mortgage Loans on Real Estate	155,950.95
Loans secured by pledge of Bonds, Stocks, or other collateral	6,221.88
Loans made to Policyholders on this Company's Policies assigned as collateral	174,599.94
Premium notes on Policies in force (of which \$0 is for first year's premiums)	4,992.48
Net Value of Bonds and Stocks	357,248.65
Cash	25,472.21
Interest and Rents due and accrued	11,303.57
Premiums uncollected and deferred	52,394.57
All other Assets, as detailed in statement	36,852.52
Total	\$893,130.42
Less Assets not admitted	17,605.21
Total admitted Assets	\$875,525.21
LIABILITIES	
Net Reserve, including Disability Provision	\$ 717,440.00
Present value of amounts not yet due on Supplementary Contracts, etc	32,093.12
Policy Claims	None
Dividends left with Company at interest	694.76
Premiums paid in advance	381.71
Unearned Interest and Rent paid in advance	436.49
Commissions due to Agents	None
Estimated Amount payable for Federal, State and other Taxes	2,406.14
Amount due Stockholders	None
Dividends due Policyholders	None
Amount set apart for future dividends	None
All other Liabilities, as detailed in statement	1,907.52
Total amount of all Liabilities, except Capital	\$ 755,359.74
Capital paid up in Cash	\$111,394.00
Unassigned funds (surplus)	120,165.47
Total Liabilities	\$ 875,525.21

BUSINESS IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA DURING 1937

Policies on the lives of citizens of said State in force December 31st of previous year	ORDINARY		GROUP		BANK LOAN	
	No.	Amount	No.	Amount	No.	Amount
958	\$1,871,500.00	265	\$132,235.00	1988	\$273,559.00	
Policies on the lives of citizens of said State issued during the year	0	None	0	None	0	None
Total	958	\$1,871,500.00	265	\$132,235.00	1988	\$273,559.00
Deduct ceased to be in force during the year	202	324,000.00	118	58,878.00	1986	273,009.00
Policies in force December 31st	756	\$1,547,500.00	147	\$ 73,357.00	2	\$ 550.00
Losses and Claims unpaid December 31st of previous year	1	2,500.00	0	0	0	0
Losses and Claims incurred during year	1	2,500.00	0	0	1	100.00
Total	2	5,000.00	0	0	1	100.00
Losses and Claims settled during the year, in full, \$0; by compromise, \$0; by rejection, \$0	2	5,000.00	0	0	1	100.00
Losses and Claims un-	0	None	0	None	0	None

Premium Income—Ordinary \$38,094.96; Group \$971.36; Industrial \$0; Total \$39066.32.

President E. E. Jones Secretary Ernest E. Harden
Treasurer John R. Pender Actuary Ernest E. Harden
Home Office 109 W. 3rd St., Charlotte, N. C.
Attorney for Service: DAN C. BONEY, Insurance Commissioner, Raleigh, N. C.

Manager for North Carolina Home Office.
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
Insurance Department

Raleigh, August 26, 1938
I, Dan C. Boney, Insurance Commissioner, do hereby certify that the above is a true and correct abstract of the statement of the Pyramid Life Insurance Company, of Charlotte, N. C., filed with this Department, showing the condition of said Company on the 31st day of December, 1937.

Witness my hand and official seal the day and date above written.
DAN C. BONEY,
Insurance Commissioner.