

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

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"Why not? Women have courage; the skill they may learn. In the ancient history of my country the women fought often beside their men."

"I know." She remembered the governess' books from the library. "My grandmother," he began again, his voice warmer than she had heard it before, "there could be no more of courage in woman or man." Presently he said, "Your grandmother I also like."

Sarah Lynn kindled. "Oh, Great-granny's splendid! She ran away from home when she was fifteen and joined an emigrant train and came across the plains in a covered wagon, and there were Indians and hunger and thirst and—"

They were running into Danavale. "Oh, not my uncle's house! I want to go home, please. To the left." It would be over in a moment and there was a thing she must ask. "I've been wondering. There isn't any fear, I know that, of course, but when you're flying alone, hour after hour, do you ever think about death?"

"Often," he told her readily. "With great interest. But not with—what is your word?—eagerment?" She nodded; it seemed an excellent word.

"This house?" The large, comfortable dwelling of Edwin and Adelaide Dana was all golden windows. "Of death: yes. An adventure," Gunnar Thorwald said, stopping the car. "Life is one adventure; death is another. I wish you the good-evening."

Sarah Lynn stepped out, and instantly, without another word, he was away.

Gunnar Thorwald drove Conrad Jordan's car swiftly back to the airport and found the Hermod put away for the night and his friend waiting for him outside the hangar. "So," the Norwegian ace said gravely, "you are satisfied? I have asked the pardon; I have taken her to fly. It is finished."

It must have been almost at the same instant that Lynn Dana was typing to his traveling cousin in Geneva. "And so, Sally Ann, my dear, it has begun!"

Sarah Lynn was twenty years old on the fifteenth of June. Her first waking thought was, "Now I'm exactly old enough to begin my flight training!"

For months she had been saying, "I'd like to fly," and "I want to fly," and finally, "I'm going to fly!" but without any deeper delving into the proposition.

Sarah Lynn's place at the breakfast table was festive with flowers and tissue-and-ribboned packages. Her mother made much of birthdays.

Her dark and difficult daughter opened her gifts with grateful warmth and ran to kiss and thank her.

"I'm so glad they make you happy, darling. But you haven't looked at the big box yet," she reminded her archly.

It would be from Duncan Van Doren, of course, from the smartest of San Francisco florists. She lifted away damp layers of glistening green paper and registered authentic appreciation. She touched lilies-of-the-valley and forget-me-nots and tiny pink rosebuds with her brown finger-tips. "Duncan has perfect taste."

"Ah, yes, hasn't he?" her mother said gratefully. "Will you arrange them now, dear? The low green bowls and the little crystal vases for the lilies?"

"You fix them for me, Mother, please! You do it so much better—and Penny's waiting. I promised to walk with her."

Mrs. Dana was wistfully cheery about it, sure that a brisk walk would do her child good. "But don't stay away too long, darling!" she said with the look which meant her sly, sweet hopes. "Happy plans for the birthday."

Sarah Lynn found the governess and the greyhound waiting for her. They set off together through the increasing loveliness of the day.

"Queer! No presents from Great-granny and Uncle Lynn!"

"Ah, well, the day's not done!" Miss Pennington wagged her head in its stern, out-dated sailor hat.

"Penny, where shall we go? The high meadow? Remember how I used to tease the ladybugs and make them fly away home and tell them their houses were on fire and their children would burn?"

"I remember." "Uncle Lynn and Great-granny used to call me Ladybug, didn't they? I haven't thought of that for years."

"Haven't you, indeed?" Something in her tone made Sarah Lynn halt. "Penny, dear, we are going too fast? Lightning seems to set the pace but we can shift into low if you like!"

"Certainly not!" "Oh, look at Lightning!" The greyhound, at the bend of the road, tensely silhouetted, was gazing fixedly into space. "Isn't she glorious when she's sighting something? Her lines do things to me, like sunsets and symphonies."

They rounded the curve and Sarah Lynn cried: "There's a plane! Look, Penny—a plane in our field!" She began to run, Lightning bounding before with shrill, suspicious barks.

There in the center of the broad meadow, searing already toward the long, bright, rainless summer, an airplane rested on the ground like some great bird briefly breaking its flight. It did not look disabled to Sarah Lynn, and the pilot stood unhurt beside it. Out of gas, probably. There was a closed car close by, and she was abreast of it before she realized it was the one shared by her great-grandmother and her uncle.

She stood still, then, beginning to shake with excitement.

The ancestress hopped nimbly out of the machine and hurried to her. There were dabs of dull crimson on her cheek-bones and she was laughing in her shrill, cackling giggle.

Her great-granddaughter managed a strangled whisper. "What—what is it?"

"It's your covered wagon, Sairy Lynn!"

"For me? To keep?" Questions going off like a string of small fire-crackers.

"Yours," Lynn Dana answered from the windows of the car.

She ran to him, her mouth working. "Uncle Lynn, Uncle Lynn! Not—belonging to me? To fly?"

"All yours and only yours. Many happy returns from Great-Granny and me. We let Conrad Jordan and Gunnar Thorwald pick it out for us, but we were very firm about having a Gipsy Moth." He grinned at her. "It was the nearest we could get." Then she saw what he meant. The

little ship was painted a clear, sharp, lacquer red with its name in black letters—LADYBUG.

The pilot tugged briefly at his cap. "Le Roy's my name. Flew her over for you." He had a deeply scarred face and a bitter mouth, but there was a look of weathered and seasoned youth about him. "Want to take a hop?"

Continued next week

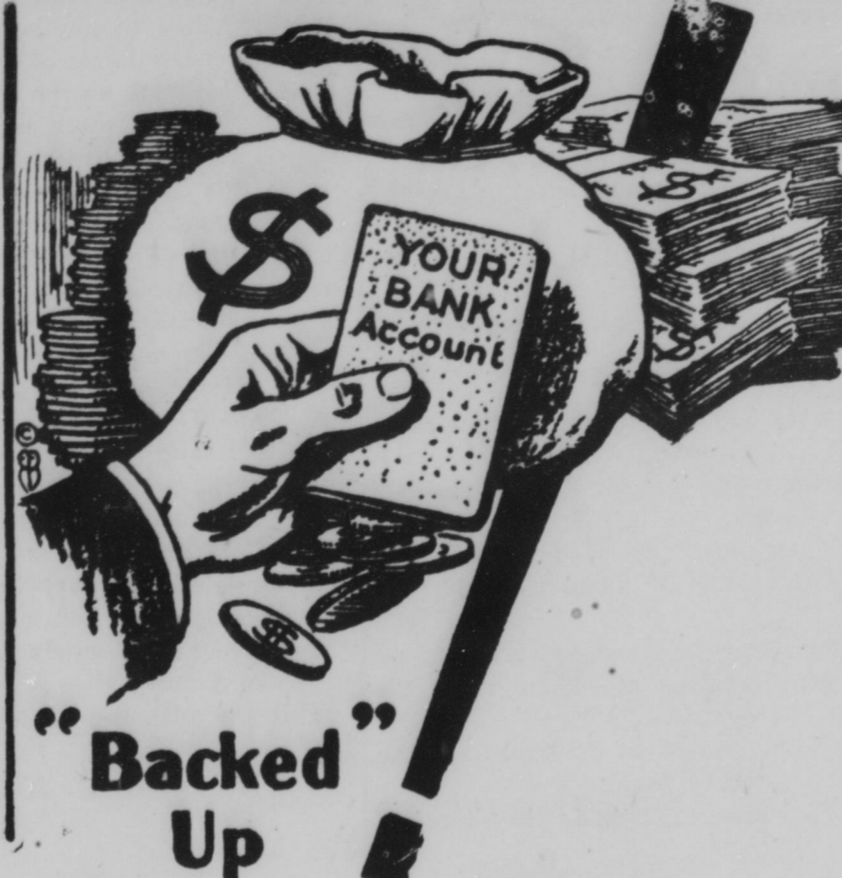
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