

STRAIT GATE

By RUTH COMFORT MITCHELL

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CHAPTER IX

The Gate was richly golden, bathed and burnished in a strong metallic radiance, and the sun was sinking into the western sea in a molten blaze of unbelievable glory.

Pop perched on the edge of his seat, looking off, looking down. His unpleasant pallor was enhanced and there was a pinched look about his nose and mouth. He was breathing badly, but his eyes were enraptured. He caught her scrutiny upon him and smiled at her, drawing a long, quivering breath, tipping his head back, relaxing like a swimmer about to float on a gentle sea.

The Hermod swooped and swirled like a gull, dipped and rose again. Sarah Lynn pulled herself to attention. This proud dominion over the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea was not a bird-like inconsequence but a business of infinite important detail, of levers and gears and hair-trigger precision. The seagulls, white dots against green-blue, far below them now, flew because they couldn't help it, but men flew because they had conquered.

The taxi-driver was waiting for them. "Hi, Pop," he said, "you bet-



"It is good! Now you remember always?"

ter beat it! Lena, she's fit to be tied!"

The little man tried to thank Gunnar but he made only a series of embarrassed gurgles.

The flier gave him a comradely clap on the shoulder. "It is good! Now you remember always?"

Sarah Lynn escorted him back to the restaurant.

Driving back to Danavale she said again, "I want to come down in a parachute, Gunnar."

"Yes. After you have soloed for a month. Then I will take you."

"Take me?"

"You shall do it from the Hermod. I will remove the door, for your Department of Commerce, Conrad Jordan has told me, makes you wear two chutes when it is the jump of intention."

"Oh? In case one doesn't work? And it would be too bulky to get out through the door? But after I'm once out, it's perfectly simple, isn't it, Gunnar? Just to wait long enough to be clear of the ship before I pull the string?"

"That is all," he agreed. His mouth looked rather grim.

"Gunnar, did you mind when you did it?"

"On the ground, before, I had fear like a great sickness. In the air it left me."

Le Roy suggested her first flight alone in secret but she decided against it. It was due Great-granny and Uncle Lynn and old Penny if they wanted to come, and at the last instant she whispered to her young brother Bill. Bill's freckles, standing out like brown polka-dots on his paled face were the last things she thought about as she walked over to the plane.

She slipped round to the further side, unobserved, and laid her face against the Chinese lacquer red. "Don't be jittery, darling!" she whispered. "I won't even nick your nail-polish. I promise! I'll take you up like a swallow and bring you down like a leaf."

She got into the cockpit and went through the routine she had rehearsed again and again. It had become an integral part of her mental process.

The assistant sprang aside from the propeller.

"Clear!"

Clear, oh, clear! Forever and forever, life for the queer dark Dana girl, shining and clear.

Sarah Lynn pushed her throttle to the stop and Ladybug went forward with a roar, left the ground and began to climb into the wind. Sarah Lynn reached the attitude she wanted, readjusted her stabilizer to take the load off the joy stick, leveled off, banked to the left, building her own road as she flew. She exulted. "No matter what comes to me, if I live to be a hundred, I can never be as happy as this instant!"

The little ship quivered under her hands, sprang forward at her touch, dipped, soared. It was a living thing, vibrant, sensitive; delicate and dear; helpless in her care, depending upon her courage and skill. "I'll take care of you!" Sarah Lynn pledged her plane.

Ladybug, Ladybug, fly away home!

Mary Dana Webster went to drink tea with Lynn Dana, an anxious pucker between her eyes.

"Ardine is perfectly poisonous about Sarah Lynn."

He shrugged. "Is it important?" "Probably not, but it disturbs me. She's such an exceptionally good hater."

"Doubtless. What's the basis of it?"

"Partly disgust at having the ugly duckling turn into a skylark, and at yielding first place as Danavale's center of shocked interest, but chiefly on account of Jim Allison. She has worked it out in her nasty little mind that Sarah Lynn, by being the victim of her joke on Gunnar Thorwald, is responsible for his complete and final defection."

"And that goes deep?"

"Apparently. In her predatory fashion," his young kinswoman said, "she cares enormously. Did you know he'd been grounded? Yes. Drinking. Nice lad, to begin with, and what a mess she's made of his life!"

Lynn Dana nodded. "Of every life she really touches. Poor old Keaton!"

"I don't think he's ever come fully out from the ether," his cousin scorned him.

"But as to Sarah Lynn, I don't see, Mary—After all, the only two things in the world which matter to her are flying and Gunnar Thorwald. Ardine could no more ensnare him than she could take an ax to the plane, much as she would enjoy both activities. I really don't see what she can do."

"Well. I don't either, Uncle Lynn." Her plain and pleasant face lifted a little. "But just the same, she sort of worries me."

The parachute jump now held the limelight in Sarah Lynn's thoughts. She read and studied and asked questions and listened eagerly to Conrad Jordan and the ace, and Lynn Dana sat in his wheeled-chair and approved.

"Won't it be pretty bulky with two chutes, one in front and one behind?" she wanted to know.

"I have said I will remove the door," Gunnar reminded her.

"Then you can dive out, forward, and that's much handier than backing out," Conrad Jordan said, lighting a cigarette. "Then you'd have to push your way, with your back against the door, against the air-pressure."

Lynn Dana's amused gaze, slight-

ly grim, went from one calm speaker to the other. "If you don't mind, Sarah Lynn, I'd rather like you to take whatever precautions suggest themselves."

"Of course, Uncle Lynn! I want to be sensible."

Sensible: the small, slight thing with her clear olive-and-ivory face and its crowding eyes, her fine, thin hands relaxed in her lap, planning this dazzling danger as casually as her cousins made dates to go dancing.

"The mental reactions are very different," her uncle's flying friend said, "in a premeditated jump and baling out in an emergency, to save your life. All the breaks are with you now. You're going at the thing scientifically, you have no fear and no nerves, and I prophesy it's going to be a tremendous satisfaction to you, at the moment and in your memories. But I want to tell you frankly that you'll have some bad minutes before you go up." He leaned forward to knock off an ash. "Never knew it to fail. The most hardened jumpers experience it, though I dare say in most cases it's purely physical and subconscious. I know a young chap at an airport who does exhibition jumps, but always before he goes up he turns deathly pale and his face and hands twitch. And the minute he gets into the ship he's fine."

"Like a soldier in the trenches waiting the command to go over the top," Lynn Dana contributed. "Or, I remember before a big game, the agony of waiting, of wishing you had elected to play tiddley-winks instead of football, and the departure of all doldrums when the whistle blew."

"Exactly. Tremendous relief in definite action: setting the body into directional motion toward a determined objective. Physical action replaces mental; fear evaporates. My conviction is that with a normal

mind danger brings a calm and alertness and a cleverness far beyond ordinary experience."

"That I also believe," the Norwegian ace said.

Jordan went on. "There's the case of an English army officer, years ago. His chute caught in the ship and tore, leaving only the harness on him. He didn't know it, and the motion-pictures showed him calmly feeling round the harness and rip-cord, trying to figure why his umbrella didn't open, almost the whole way to the earth." "Cheery anecdote," Lynn Dana said a trifle tartly.

"That was an old-fashioned affair, Lynn. Sarah Lynn'll have two modern, absolutely reliable chutes."

"Fool-proof," she grinned at him.

"Fool-proof, which is superfluous in your case," he grinned back, approving her warmly. Lynn Dana's study pulsed with approval, with affection for her. Her uncle's lifelong devotion, the cordial friendship of his friend, the cool comradeship of the flying boy from Norway. What more, besides a Gipsy Moth, did a girl need for happiness?

Fliers did not marry.

"I have wondered if I'd really remember to pull the string," she said, "but I was reading Lieutenant Cramer's account of his first experience. An old-timer told him he couldn't keep his finger away from that ring if he tried!"

Jordan nodded. "Your only difficulty will be to wait until you are entirely clear of the ship." He faced Lynn Dana. "She'll have two chutes fastened to the webbed harness about her body. The main one has a 28-foot spread and the second a 24. That's on her chest."

"Made of silk"

"Light, but entirely substantial. Both have pull-rings and rip-cords to unlance and throw up the parachutes, and the rings are handily placed. You'll have everything clear in your mind a hundred times over, Sarah Lynn. The thing you must be prepared for is the scream and the flapping of the silk and the report, like a gun, and the violent jerk when your parasol opens. After that"—he ground out his cigarette—"it's really delightful."

"But—I was reading yesterday—when I'm almost down, within a hundred feet of the ground—"

"Then you must reach up and hang onto the big rings above the sling in which you're sitting, and lift yourself, and take some of the bump out of your earth contact."

Sarah Lynn nodded gravely. "Uncle Lynn, what about Great-granny? Shall we tell her, and let her come out to the meadow and watch?"

(Continued Next Week)

WAKELON NEWS

NEIL HARTLEY, Faculty Advisor

New Year's Resolutions

New Year's Day is almost here. We should begin thinking about our New Year's Resolutions. We say we are going to be smart and name a long list of resolutions and abide by them. For example, we say we are going to spend more time on our Biology lesson or we are going to stop talking on study hall. We list these things and abide by them for a week or two. By that time we are deep into the study of different groups of the plant kingdom or Johnny had something to tell me and I had to listen to him. We have also gotten deep into the study of Caesar's Gallic Wars or we are deep into the study of Enoch Arden. We get tired of studying so hard and the list we were so proud of on New Year's Day is just another scrap of paper. We begin to talk on study hall and stop studying our Biology, English, and Latin. We also begin giving our teachers excuses that they have heard so much. We think we are pulling the wool over their eyes but really they have learned our secret and immediately put a zero beside our names for that day's assignment.

—Jean Flowers

Wakelon Graduates In College

The 1938 graduates in college this year are doing good work. Cornelia Herring is at Meredith in Raleigh. She was a character in the play "Doll's House" by Ibsen,

presented by the Little Theater on Tuesday, December 13. The cast was chosen by tryouts open to the whole student body. Cornelia's role was that of the villain. She is also in the Public Speaking Club.

Ruby Bridgers is at Cullowhee, a college in the heart of the Smokies. Ruby is singing in the college choir, which is a high honor. She takes part in all sports, but is especially interested in golf.

Charles Hinton and Eugene Finch are going to State College. They are taking a great interest in their work and expect to make a good record. Louise Baker is doing good work at Campbell College at Buie's Creek.

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