

CHAPTER XI

THE GATES OF DEATH

OUT of the night, like a huge specter, came the ambulance, without warning and without lights. The driver, a young American boy recently from home, leaped lightly from the running board almost before the machine stopped,

"Whatcha got?" he demanded.

"A Chinese with some lead between his ribs," was MacGregor's answer.

"Germans trying to fill up the chinks, I suppose."

Fortunately for Jeanne, this was in English. As they lifted Yao to the ambulance, MacGregor said to her: "I think you had better go too. It's the quickest way to get you out of here, and everybody else has left."

"I intended to," she replied.

"Umph," grunted MacGregor to himself. "Mind of her own."

"Whew," ejaculated the American, with a whistle; "a lady passenger. Step lively, gentlemen," he called to the imaginary males. Seeing her about to enter the ambulance, he asked, "Hadn't you rather ride up front?"

"*Qu'est-ce?*" the girl asked.

MacGregor came to the rescue. "He asks if you do not prefer to ride outside." After a few words from her, he turned to the driver. "No, she says, but you may take her trunk, if you will."

"In other words, I get the sack, eh? Gee whizz, she prefers the company of a heathen Chinese to a real white man! That's one on me, Gertie."

"That Chinaman's as white as any man you ever

saw," responded MacGregor. "Captured a German spy to-night — that's when he got the bullet."

"What's the matter with me? Isn't my back hair on straight?" continued the young man, not hearing the remark about the spy.

"Looks all right in the dark," answered the captain, in the same vein.

"Well, here goes. There's no accounting for tastes."

The ride was a rough one, and the motion seemed partially to waken the unconscious man. He did not really recover consciousness, but was delirious. He spoke consecutively in all three languages he knew — first a sentence or two in this; then, in that. In Chinese he was arguing violently with some one. The English was directed at MacGregor whom he called "Sir." There was silence for a time, then Jeanne was startled by the sentence spoken slowly, "I hope tabby won't get their baby birds."

She looked to see if he were conscious, but in a moment he babbled off into something else. She had a momentary pang. Where was tabby? Jeanne had absolutely forgotten her, but was soon comforted by the recollection that tabby could go into or out of the house under the back door and that the house and fields afforded plenty of forage in the shape of mice. She would not suffer.

It was a nerve-racking trip for Jeanne. She kept bathing the head of Galahad with her wet handkerchief, and she noticed how hot his forehead was. The ambulance bumped and rocked as if the young man at the wheel was trying to show her what a devil-may-care sort of fellow he could be. Once, however, he did slow down to hand his water bottle in to her.

At last, after traveling well beyond the danger zone, they drew up before an old *château*, where the Red Cross had opened a hospital. Willing hands helped her out and carried the unconscious form on the stretcher

directly to the operating room. Jeanne was led into the waiting room by a sweet-faced girl in nurse's uniform. Florence Ballard was an American who had come out with the first Red Cross contingent and, because of her knowledge of French and her experience, had been put in charge of one of the most important base hospitals. She had partially broken down under the strain and now was in this quieter place. Telling Jeanne to sit down, she followed the stretcher bearers, but returned in a few moments and said: "He will be kept here. You may go now."

"Go?" asked Jeanne. "Go where? I have no place to go. I have just left the shelled area. I came with him."

"But haven't you any friends to go to?"

"No, they are all dead or refugees too."

"Well, we can't keep you here unless,"—happy thought—"you would like to stay and help in the hospital. Antoinette, one of our girls, was called home this morning."

"Oh, let me stay, mademoiselle; I'll do anything you wish if I can see him," she answered, blushing.

"See whom, that Chinaman? Why, what could you want to see him for?"

"You would not ask if I told you how he saved my honor twice, and perhaps my life, and now he may be taken—" she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"There, there; sit down and tell me all about it," comforted the nurse. Miss Ballard was used to thrills. She had had plenty of them, from air raids blowing up her wards to wounded millionaire majors trying to make love to her; but here was the promise of a new sort of thrill—a Chinese Prince Charming rescuing a French peasant maid. And she was not disappointed. As Jeanne went on with the story, her heartstrings began to vibrate in response, and she began to think of that handsome young American doctor over at Mantoux.

"Well, *ma chérie*," she said, putting her arm about the girl, as the story of the spy was finished, "you shall see him every day." She was as good as her word. Galahad was placed in a room by himself, and one of the tasks assigned to Jeanne was to keep his room clean. It was also understood that she might sit a few minutes with him in the afternoon if her other work was done.

"I suppose I am doing wrong to encourage it," said Miss Ballard to herself, "and I wouldn't do it if she were an American girl; but, somehow, the French people are so broad. They have a place in their hearts for every kind of man and do not ask what the color of his skin may happen to be."

The doctors had looked grave when Yung-fu was on the table. "It's in a nasty place," said the chief. "We can get the bullet all right, but the question is what damage has it done. His fever is already way up, isn't it, nurse?"

"One hundred three degrees, two fifths," answered the nurse.

"I thought so," said the surgeon.

The next morning, when Jeanne entered Galahad's room, sweetly attired in her uniform, he stared unbelievably. Then, as she curtsied and said, "*Bon jour*," he smiled. He was too weak to talk much. "I'm glad they let you come," he whispered.

The following day he was worse and for several days continued to lose. "Pneumonia induced by the wound," the doctors said. The bullet, after shattering the collar bone, had glanced downward and lodged under his shoulder blade. For days he hardly knew when she or the nurse came or went. Her heart was heavy.

"I am sorry to tell you, Jeanne," Miss Ballard had said one morning, "that your Mr. Galahad hasn't much chance of getting well. I thought you would want to know it."

She did not cry out nor break down. She had faced

death four times in her short life and each time under different circumstances.

That morning, as she entered his room for the daily work, he roused a little, as if he had been listening for her. She said, "Good morning." He put out his hand. It was very thin.

"Miss Rouget," he began in a feeble voice, "I am afraid my time has come. Before I die I want to tell you something." He paused as if to gain strength. "May I take your hand? I have never touched the hand of any girl before." She laid her hand in his. "I want to tell you how much you have meant to me. You have indeed been Chên-an, True Peace, to me. I never knew before that women could be so beautiful, so pure, so brave. You have taught me what love means, Jeanne. I love you and I only dare to tell you because I am going away. And if ever I had any doubts as to the reality of your Christ, they have all gone since I met you. Oh, how I wish our Chinese women, my mother, my sisters, my aunt, could be like you!"

She had sunk to her knees by the bed, still holding his hand. Almost in a whisper, he went on: "O China, when I think of the superstition and degradation, the cruelty to women, the lust, the sin, it seems as if I couldn't die yet. I don't want to die. I want to live and go back to my poor China to bring them the message of liberty and love I have learned here." He was nearly exhausted with his emotion.

Jeanne pressed his hand to her lips, then he heard her praying, "*Bon Dieu*, please let Galahad get well, for my sake and for China's."

For a time he lay quiet, with his hand in hers, and she remained upon her knees, crying softly and praying. He did not have the strength to speak further, even if he had been so disposed. He had done something in telling her of his love which he had never dreamed of doing. It was to him an altogether unique experience; indeed,

he had never even known any one who had made a confession of love. There were no models for him to follow. There was no traditional method for him to adopt. In the commonly accepted standards of his people no provision was made for romantic love. There was no love-making except illicit love. Few young men ever saw the girls whom they were to marry until the bridal veil was removed. Love-making was a lost art.

During these few months, when sentiments were stirring him of which he was almost ashamed, he had thought often of those passionate love poems in "The Book of Odes" which he had learned by heart in school. They seemed to be the very expression of this new-found sentiment, and they were older than Confucius. How had the Chinese kept the letter and lost the soul of these marvelous bits of crystallized passion? And how had teachers for hundreds of years taught their pupils to recite and expound these burning lyrics, and yet been able to conceal from their minds and withhold from their emotions any of this fire? Convention had robbed youth of its finest jewel by denying it occasion for the free expression of this divine urge.

Yung-fu felt like an adult who has to learn to walk as a child learns. He seemed extremely awkward to himself. He had not yet mastered the first principles of this art, much less could he have analyzed the experience. He did not know what elements to look for to make sure he did love her. No wonder it was somewhat hazy. The factors in the spontaneous affection of a man for a maid had never been given a chance for combustion. Marriage was all so businesslike, so proper, so well managed by others, so cold and formal. It was an alliance, not an *affaire de cœur*.

When a man and a woman have never laid eyes on each other till she steps from the sedan chair in which she has followed him from her home to his, there may be the tremendous excitement which the gambler feels

who has wagered his patrimony on a single turn of the wheel of fortune, but there can hardly be any romantic attachment. Besides, the new bride is only partly his. She belongs rather to the clan. She is the daughter-in-law rather than the wife. She and he are only cogs in the machine called the family.

With romantic love, on the contrary, heaven and earth may pass away, but the lovers would be more or less oblivious to the catastrophe. They are the only persons in existence for the time being. Emotion and not reason is in the ascendancy. There is a fourth dimension, imperceivable by ordinary mortals. Men and women are expected to fall in love. They do not step into it or drift into it; they tumble in like a fly into the sirup pitcher. Not the coldly calculated plans of the mind, but the fiery impulses of mutual attraction count most here.

There are amazing starry elements which normally appear to the Occidental in love which do not rise above the horizon of the Chinese heart, chilled as it is by the icebergs of propriety. There are the exalting of the one loved to a superlative place, the desire to possess which consumes the whole being, and the strange combination of sexual attraction and almost religious adoration. There are the conviction that the object of affection is the one desirable element to complete happiness, without which happiness is impossible, the conflict of the emotions of fear and hope, the sleeplessness and dreams, and the indifference to convention.

If all these were demanded of Yung-fu, he could not have qualified as a real lover. Doubtless love meant something different to him than to Jeanne. There was no question about the romantic character of her affection. He had come to her rescue twice. Her mother instinct of preservation for a weaker one had been stimulated and strangely satisfied by her care of him in his illness. The whole episode of their acquaintance—his

distant origin, together with the fact that she was alone and had no one to whom to turn—supplied all the necessary factors of a consuming love. Such is impossible to argue with. It is beyond logic and above reason. It loves and that is all it cares, except to be loved in return. Galahad had said very little, but it was enough for her. She knew.

The next morning the doctor said to the nurse, as they came out of Yung-fu's room, "What has happened? His fever is down this morning."

"Yes, I know it," she said.

"These Chinese have the most wonderful constitutions I ever saw," he exclaimed. "They'll live where a white man would die in no time, but once let them think their time has come, and they will turn up their toes and proceed to expire. They're out-and-out fatalists."

"Evidently, then, this one doesn't think his time has come yet," laughed the nurse.

"That may be it," replied the doctor, "and I don't think so, either."

The patient grew stronger every day, but shyer. Somehow he seemed abashed when Jeanne was near. He would not or could not talk much. It troubled her somewhat, for she did not understand it. One day he said, "I wonder whether you will ever forgive me, mademoiselle."

"Forgive you for what, Galahad—for saving my life and getting almost killed for your pains?"

"No, no, that was nothing," he said. "For saying what I did the other day when I was so sick."

"Why, didn't you mean it?" inquired the girl.

"Mean it! Why, I meant it ten thousand times more than I said," he confessed; "but that is just the trouble, I had no right to talk to you that way."

"Why not, Mr. Galahad?"

"Because I am a Chinese and you are French; and because, now that God has answered your prayer and

given me back my life, I must go back to China. But I cannot honorably ask you to leave your beautiful France, your glorious liberty, and your own people to bury yourself in that land of darkness with me."

"Why not?" she asked. "Don't these missionary ladies leave their homes and go to China to live? Perhaps I could do as much good as they."

"Yes, but they are different."

"I do not see that they are different except in the fact that they do not have chevaliers appearing at every turn to protect them. Would you be ashamed of me in your mother's home?"

"Ashamed of you! I should be the proudest man in Shantung province; but I can't bear to take you from your own surroundings, and subject you to all I know you would have to endure in that home. China is filthy."

"Then some one must teach them cleanliness," she interjected.

"And our family customs are hard and tyrannous."

"We will set them a better example," Jeanne said, firmly.

"Besides, my people are ignorant and suspicious."

"Cannot love overcome every barrier?" was her earnest reply.

He had said all he could to undo the word of the previous day. He was setting her free; but she did not want freedom. She wanted that which is better than freedom, that which is "woman's whole existence," and for it she would go to the ends of the earth.

He had looked into his own heart and found love, simple, spontaneous; and he had rejoiced in it and imagined he knew all it comprehended. That was discovery; but here was revelation. That was, by comparison with what he now saw in her heart, a miniature pine tree growing in a bowl; this swept the sky with its top. That seemed worthy of heroes; but this, of gods.

As he lay looking up, Jeanne's form seemed to expand and to recede until she was standing upon a cumulous bank of amethyst clouds. Little rainbow cloudlets drifted about. Long, flowing garments were draped about her and swayed in the breeze. Smiling maidens, each having Jeanne's features, grouped themselves gracefully near her, looking questioningly, now at her then at him. She seemed to be floating away from him, and he closed his eyes in agony lest it be true.

"Then you don't want me to go to China with you?"

"Oh, don't say that," he cried, opening his eyes. "I want you so much. Somehow, we seem to belong to each other. We Chinese have a proverb which says, 'Though born a thousand miles apart, souls which are one shall meet.' It is like cutting off my hand to say what I have said, and I only do it for your sake."

"I will be back in a moment." She returned almost immediately with a book. "I want to read you something," she said. Jeanne drew a chair to the side of his bed and began to read the story of Ruth. He had never heard the story before. As she read how Naomi tried to persuade Ruth to remain in her own land, he realized that this was Jeanne's answer.

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

She looked up and saw two tears glistening in his eyes. "*Ma petite,*" he said yearningly. She bent over him and their lips met. As she laid her face beside his upon the pillow, her heart too full for words, she heard him ask, "How do you suppose our little larks are getting on?"