

CHAPTER XX

MAGIC LACE

FOR days after his meeting with MacGregor Galahad seemed preoccupied. This did not escape the notice of his wife, nor did the fact that he began to look over his few English books.

"What did you and Captain MacGregor talk about the night you spent with him?" she asked, looking up from her sewing.

After a pause he started up from his book, asking guiltily, "Did you say something?"

"Yes," she replied with a twinkle, "twice."

"I am sorry I did not hear."

"You are early contracting the disease of husband's deafness, I see."

"Husband's deafness?" He was mystified.

"Yes, they get it only on one side."

"Which side?" He fell into the net.

"The side toward their wives," laughed Jeanne. "You have had it severely for several days."

He looked reprovingly at his wife, who was enjoying his discomfiture.

"I asked you," she went on, "what you found so interesting to talk about that you and Mr. MacGregor sat up half the night?"

"Why, we talked about you for one thing," he said evasively.

"About me? Is it good Chinese form for gentlemen to talk about their wives?"

"No, of course not," he said apologetically, "nor should I have done so, but he brought up the subject."

"And what did he say about me?" persisted Jeanne.

Galahad hesitated. "Oh, lots of nice things."

But Jeanne would not let him off so easily. "Nice things? What sort of nice things?"

"Why, he said you were brave and unselfish and that you were a reasonable young woman and wouldn't—" Her husband began to flounder.

"This is extremely interesting. Go on, wouldn't what?"

"I guess that's all," he went on hurriedly. "He told me, of course, about his plans of becoming principal of that school in Chefoo, but I have told you that before."

"Look here, young man," said his wife with mock severity, but well satisfied with her cross-examination, "didn't he tell you that you must not let anything stand in the way of your completing your education?"

"Well, he did say I ought to keep up my English," he replied, taking up the book and trying to close the conversation by pretending to read.

"Are you listening, Galahad? Did not Captain MacGregor say that you must go to Chefoo to school, and that as I was a reasonable young woman I would not stand in the way of your making the most of yourself?"

The poor fellow looked miserable enough. "Can I have been talking in my sleep?" he muttered to himself. A welcome interruption came in the form of a caller to congratulate him on winning his suit at law.

But Jeanne had heard enough, and what she had not heard she had seen. Her husband could not conceal from her his unrest of spirit. She knew that he was longing to join Captain, now Principal, MacGregor, to whom they both were deeply attached. It was perfectly evident, however, that Galahad did not intend to betray his desires. He even felt disloyal for having them. He would never consent to go to the coast and leave her in the interior unless she could make it apparent to him that she was not a clinging vine but

able to stand alone. The whole future of her husband lay in the resourcefulness and tact of his wife. This "reasonable young woman" began forthwith to cast about for some plan by which she could persuade this unreasonable young man to do just what he most wanted to do.

Jeanne had spread out on the bed, one day, some bits of Valenciennes lace which she had taken out of her trunk. They seemed laid with no special purpose in view, but in reality were arranged with all the forethought and craft of a hunter baiting his traps. Any one entering the door would be sure to catch sight of them. Her intended victim was in the outer room browsing in the fields of English prose.

"May I borrow your pencil, Galahad?" called Jeanne. "Mine is broken." It was the call of the huntress.

Her husband appeared at the door, book in hand, bearing the pencil. As was expected, his eye fell upon the beautiful lace.

"What have you here? I haven't seen this before," he asked, as he took it up. "Isn't it exquisite?"

"That is magic lace."

"Magic lace?"

"Yes, if you look at it in the right way you will see in it a young man sitting in a schoolroom."

Galahad held it up to the light and looked at it closely. "I can't see anything," he said dubiously.

"I said that it was magic lace. Not every one can see the design. You look at it another way and you will discover a young woman very happy in *her* work."

Galahad glanced at her curiously and continued to turn it over. "Show me how to look at it."

"First let me ask you whether you think the girls of the village would like to learn how to make it."

"What for—to wear?"

"No, to sell."

"Could they do it?" he asked doubtfully.

"How can you ask such a question? After the beautiful embroidery I have seen done by the Chinese girls, I am convinced that there is nothing too intricate for their supple fingers. Why, just those paper cuttings which your sister cut out of a piece of red paper with a clumsy pair of shears are simply marvelous. No better evidence is needed of artistic sense and skill. Of course they can do it."

"But who will teach them?"

"I will. My mother was an accomplished lace maker, and during the days when she was not strong enough for housework made quantities of it. I served my apprenticeship to her and, while not her equal, I understand how to do it."

"Why, you could have a lace school!" exclaimed Galahad enthusiastically.

"Exactly my idea. Would they come?"

"Come? You couldn't get a building in town large enough to hold them."

"But I am not satisfied just to give them lacework. I want them to know more. You have said that this whole prefecture hasn't more than a dozen girls' schools. Couldn't we have half a day of study and half a day of handwork?"

"Great," said her husband, "but you would need a teacher for that."

"Wouldn't your uncle help us out?"

"Uncle? Never. He has old-fashioned ideas on the education of females. I can just hear him say: 'Women learn to read? What good will it do them? A waste of time teaching girls anything more than cooking and sewing.' As he said this, Galahad brought his powers of mimicry into play, and one could have sworn the old schoolmaster was in the room.

"We had better get a woman teacher," he went on seriously. "Perhaps Mr. Herbeth could send us down one of their girls."

"I have thought of that."

"But what shall we do for a schoolroom? I should hardly like to ask Uncle for his guest room."

"We shall not need to bother your uncle. We'll use this room."

"That will never do. It would not be proper for me to be coming and going with the young ladies here."

"No, I have planned for that. Of course we could not have you about."

"You have planned for it?" exclaimed her husband in surprise. "Then where have you planned to put me?"

Jeanne looked at him steadily and said, "You will go to Chefoo with Mr. MacGregor."

Galahad looked at her as if hypnotized. The words seemed to take a long time to reach his brain, then he caught her in his arms, "So this is the magic lace you have been weaving about me, you little witch."

"Do you see," she asked, holding up the lace before her face, "the young man in school now?"

"I must first see the contented young woman before I even look for the other picture," he answered, kissing her through the filmy lace.

Jeanne knew that she had won. She would need Galahad's help in getting the school started. He would have to go to Chefoo for the thread and schoolbooks and to see about a Chinese teacher. He could at that time make his arrangements with Mr. MacGregor both for himself and his brother (for Galahad's heart was set on his going also) to enter school.

In less than two weeks fifteen misses from the best families in the village gathered in Jeanne's sitting room, now transformed by tables and benches and a black-board into a schoolroom. With their slender ankles and tiny feet they reminded her for all the world of sleek, wide-eyed gazelles.

Miss Liu, the Chinese teacher, was a sturdy, intelligent-looking young lady with unbound feet enormously large in the eyes of the others, but redeeming this deformity by having her clothes cut in the latest style. Besides, she knew how to teach, and, although some of the girls were nearly as old as herself, how to keep order, checking at once the foolish giggling which threatened to become habitual whenever a question was asked.

The sound of their voices conning over the morning's lessons or joining in songs of praise came to be in Jeanne's ears the sweetest music. In the afternoon the books were put away, the lace pillows were brought out, and swift and deft fingers, under Jeanne's instruction, moved the tiny spindles in and out weaving—the magic lace.

