

Shadow Shapes

(Memoirs of a Chinese Student in America)

ANONYMOUS

PART TWO

A GIRL'S BEDROOM

THE TRAIN was moving in a series of jerks.

A dark complexioned man was sitting on his neck, his feet resting idiotically on the back of a seat in front. It was impossible to tell whether he was singing in English or in Mexican. The words were mostly swallowed together with the content of a bottle of pop which he held in both hands.

He must be a Mexican, Thomas Lee said to himself after having studied the man since the train left the Union station at Denver. He remembered seeing men of this type in motion pictures. Always carrying American girls on their horses with some two-gun heroes in hot pursuit.

No, he should not have too much faith in the movies. He used to, but he had lost most of it during the last two days.

When the train was passing through the deserts of Utah and Wyoming, he scanned the horizons for a sight of cowboys throwing lassos and brandishing pistols. Instead, he could only see Fords running wild on the highways.

An hour more he would be in Colorado Springs. Endless blocks of buildings would be the best description of Lee's image of the city. Colorado Springs! How familiar the name sounded to him! It seemed as though he had always lived there. He could almost see himself descending from the train and walking into a huge station where people were rushing, pushing, battling, going everywhere, yet nowhere—just the kind of railway station he saw in motion pictures.

Slowly the train came to a complete

stop. With one jump Lee was on the platform. Something must be wrong. The station looked more like a wayside inn. There were only half-a-dozen men around the place. The train was slowly pulling out of the station. Lee wanted to run back to the train, but he was too stunned to move.

He felt the weight of a hand on his right shoulder. He turned to see a smiling, well-built youth, who asked timidly, "Are you Mr. Lee from China?"

"Yes," answered Lee mechanically.

"My name is Dell—Cecil Dell." Lee grasped the outstretched hand and shook it warmly.

"Bob Chen wired me to meet you," explained Cecil. "So you met Bob at Seattle. How was he? He certainly is a great boy! Do you know Nicholas Young? You do? How interesting! Nick was here last year, and everybody just fell in love with him. Mighty glad to see you coming to study at Colorado College. A wonderful school. Splendid! You are studying journalism? You will probably take some courses under Professor Allen. A fine fellow. You will like him."

Meanwhile Lee was escorted to a waiting automobile. As the car sped along the streets, Lee noticed that most of the houses were little bungalows. The streets were deserted, and the lamp posts looked pathetically lonesome. A mind picture of skyscrapers shrinking, crumbling.

Lee was alone in his room. Pulling off his shoes, he sat on the bed musing. He thought the Dells were perfectly charming. The way "Papa" Dell munched his

cigar. Cecil teasing his mother who ran after him with a broomstick. Dorothy, Cecil's sister, insisted that there would be no potato, had there been no gravy.

He tried to picture his mother running after him with a broomstick. Somehow it refused to take shape. Too absurd. He remembered how his father had once censured his mother for calling him by a pet name. His position as the eldest son of the family demanded respect, not affection. She never kissed him when he went away, and probably would not write to him. As he grew up into manhood, a gulf widened between him and his mother. They belonged to two worlds, each having its own set of duties.

The thought pained him. He left the bed and walked to a dressing table. He toyed with his necktie, took off his coat, dropped it on the floor, and looked at the prostrate garment. Sleeves lay helplessly on the floor. Ready-made clothing, soulless and without character! Minister, robber, banker, thief, whoever put it on, was its master. A feeling of contempt suddenly seized him. He picked the coat up and tried to find a place to hang it. Yes, hang it somewhere!

He opened the closet door. His lips fell apart like a dumb man. He rubbed his eyes with the knuckles of his hands. Consciousness returned. The closet looked at first like a maze of silk and laces. Gradually he saw slips, skirts, waists, hats, pink dresses, shoes, dainty and small.

A girl's room! The words flashed in his mind, then ran down his spine like an electric current. The entire room seemed to be transformed. Lee inspected the new place timidly. He remembered he had left his soiled collar on the dressing-table. He must be crazy. Didn't he see the perfume bottles, the powder box, rouge compact, lipstick and cold cream jar standing orderly on the table? He could see them now.

Behind a hand-mirror was the photograph of a young man with the following

inscription written in bold strokes, "To Dorothy, from Jack." So this was indeed a girl's room! Dorothy's. She had let him use her room. Lee's mind was not troubled about where Dorothy was sleeping that night. He felt like a rat caught in a trap. The first thing he would do the following morning, he promised himself, would be to find a room somewhere else.

Lee had never been in a girl's room before. To him, girls lived only in sitting-rooms, listening attentively to discussions among the male members of the family, and running away behind closed doors when the servants announced the presence of some callers at the door.

But this—pink slips—silk undies—rouge compact—small dainty shoes—bedroom! He could not believe his eyes. He was terribly frightened. Turning off the lights, he began to undress. But eyes were all about him, curious mocking eyes. The pink slips were teasing him. The silk sleeves pointed at him with accusing fingers. He felt as though he was undressing in public. The idea horrified him. He jumped into bed and pulled the sheets over his ears.

THE PITKINS

Two little girls answered the door bell. The elder one, of about fourteen years, had such rosy cheeks that Thomas Lee wondered whether the color was natural, or she was blushing. The younger girl clung to her sister's waist, giggling sillily.

"Is Mrs. Pitkin home?" asked Lee, although he was almost certain that she was not.

"No, mother just went downtown to see some friends," said the elder girl. The sisters followed every movement of the visitor. Lee felt like a wild animal in a zoo, irritated by the children's curious eyes. To hide his embarrassment, he marked circles and squares on the doormat with the toe of his shoe.

"I called Mrs. Pitkin over the phone this morning. . ."

"So you are the Chinese boy who is going to stay with us!" interrupted the elder girl.

"Gertrude, didn't mother say he can sit beside me at the table?"

"Isabel!" Gertrude looked reproachfully at her younger sister, then turned to Lee.

"Mother will be back shortly. She told me to show you your room in case you were here early. If you will come upstairs with me. . ."

Lee sized his suitcase and followed them.

Mrs. Pitkin was one of these women who spoke "yes" more readily than "no." She was just too nice. So nice that she got on Lee's nerves. Mr. Pitkin was the official clown in the family. His face was twisted into an infinite variety of shapes, being made to resemble every object under heaven, from a bull-dog to a pumpkin. He fell on his big, red nose, and the children laughed. He got up crying like a two-month baby, and the children grew hysterical with merriment. At every gesture of his, some of Lee's ideals of fatherhood was knocked and tumbled on its nose.

The Pitkins were all excited. They never had a chance to be so closely associated with a Chinese. Every inch of Lee was a novelty to them. From his room Lee could hear them talking in the kitchen. Every now and then the children would giggle and the voices would lower to whispers.

For a moment Lee felt terribly lonesome. He wanted to be home where people would understand him. He wished he had never come to America. But he would never say anything to his mother. She would be so worried. Dear mother! He would tell her something more pleasant—that he had a good time on the train, that the college lived up to his expectations, that everybody was just lovely to him, and that he was feeling fine—all the things people write to their mothers when they are away from home. Most

mothers know that their sons are not telling the truth, nevertheless they anxiously wait for the mail deliveries, cry over the unmistakable lies, show them to the neighbors and finally go to bed at night with the letters under their wet cheeks.

He had never written to Ivy since he went away. He could not understand why. Somehow or other, he forgot. But, Ivy, who was she? He never knew her. He could only remember two children playing beneath the apple trees. A page from some story book. A tale of his childhood days. The picture would linger in his mind, and would soon fade away. Perhaps he would write her some other day. Not now.

The moon, full and purple-colored, hid between the branches of the poplars. Masses of shadow filled the room. Lee, his eyes half-closed, breathed in the soft night about him. A lonely leaf floated, hesitated, then fell over the grass with a sigh.

Presently there were girls' voices. Their words grew more distinct. Noise of approaching steps on the sidewalk. Two girls talking at the door. It closed behind them with a bang. Voices in the kitchen. The house was silent.

The moon had emerged from the tree tops into the empty heaven above. She lit up the world with her dazzling whiteness. Mist floated across the meadow like silver waves vibrating with one movement. Lee felt weak and intoxicated. His heart yearned for something. Just what, he did not know. He lay in his bed, stretched at full length, his lips apart, his eye-lids closed, his hands open, and motionless. Then he remembered—on the Pacific—in a moon-lit room—bare shoulders—white arms—lovers—roses showered upon their naked limbs. Memories mixing with dreams. Two streams of tears flowed from Lee's eyes and fell slowly upon the pillow. He pressed his mouth hungrily to the spot wet with tears, and rubbed his cheeks gently against it.

BLONDE AND BRUNETTE

Breakfast was ready. Beside the Pitkins there were one blonde and one dark girl at the table.

"Mr. Lee, Miss Edna Griffith, Miss Josephine Marco," observed Mrs. Pitkin rather casually as Lee entered the room. While the two girls murmured the customary "glad to meet you," there was a noticeable stiffness in Edna's voice.

The two were perfect contrasts. Edna was tall, thinly built, with light chestnut hair, and bluish gray eyes. She was quiet and reserved. Josephine, on the other hand, was aggressive and always "on the go." She had large black eyes, and straight hair. Edna looked practical and serious. She appeared to possess a charm and a kind of self-reliant courage. She was perhaps more spiritual than the other.

"Say, Mr. Lee, don't you put any sugar in your tea?" Josephine noticed that Lee was drinking his tea plain.

"No, we don't do that in China."

"No?" Josephine's voice registered both doubt and surprise. The idea was simply too absurd to her—drinking tea without sugar.

"Do you like American food? I'll have to learn to cook chop-suey sometime." Mrs. Pitkin spoke with a mincing accent.

"I like your food," replied Lee not too enthusiastically. His mind was occupied in something else. He did not know which was the proper way to eat his fried egg. He thought of breaking it into many small pieces. But then the yolk would run all over his plate. He could not remember seeing anything about this in his etiquette book. He balanced his egg, yolk and all, on his fork, then with a quick movement pushed it into his mouth to the surprise of all, and to the great discomfort of his tongue.

A phonograph playing in the parlor. While she rocked her chair back and forth, Edna hummed all to herself.

"Don't you like dancing, Mr. Lee?" Josephine put on a new record.

"I don't know how. I never danced before."

"Why, don't people dance in China? Everybody does over here." She executed a difficult step while talking.

"Boys and girls don't mix in China. At least not so freely like you do here. Naturally they think dancing a horrible thing."

"They do! They don't know what they miss!" She turned impatiently to Edna.

"Come on, let's dance!"

"I can't lead," said Edna as she rose from her rocker.

With one arm around her partner's waist, Josephine slid and fox-trotted across the floor.

Edna and Josephine had gone to a baseball game in the park. Mrs. Pitkin did not like people going to a baseball game on Sunday, and was glad Lee did not go with the girls. Lee would have gone, if he had waked up in time. At lunch time the girls told him to be ready at two. He took a nap and did not wake up till three.

Lee could not remember how they started talking about Edna and Josephine. Mrs. Pitkin was telling him that the girls came from New York City, and that they were in Colorado Springs for their health, when Gertrude interrupted her mother.

"But, Tom, you ought to see them stepping out!" The Pitkins had decided that they would drop the more formal "Mr. Lee" and would call him "Tom" for short.

"What do you mean by 'stepping out'?"

"Don't you know what 'stepping out' means? Have a good time, that's what it means. Wait, let me show you their picture albums." Gertrude was off before she finished the sentence.

Pictures of places around Colorado Springs. The girls dressed up like dolls on "Kid Day." Edna and Josephine

hiking in the mountains with their arms locked with those of some tough-looking men.

"This is George, Josephine's beau!" Gertrude pointed toward the picture of a short, dark-complexioned man.

"Don't you know what 'beau' means?" Gertrude was surprised at Lee's limited English vocabulary.

"When a girl has a beau, she has a boy friend. Alice, a girl in my class, is only fourteen, and she has eight beaus!"

"How many beaus have you got?" Lee teased her.

She laughed and pointed to another picture, "Look, here's Archie, Edna's boy friend." The man was tall, with light wavy hair. Beside him was Edna grinning from ear to ear.

"Are they engaged?"

"Oh, no, heavens no!" Both Mrs. Pitkin and Gertrude laughed till they nearly doubled themselves up in their chairs. Apparently over the absurdity of the question.

"You have a lot to learn about American girls, Tom," Mrs. Pitkin finally explained. "These boy friends don't mean anything. The girls go out with them, kid them along, and have a good time. When they get tired of each other, they quit."

Lee's mind was in a state of strange upheaval. All his ideas about sex relations were being upset. A boy could only love one girl, and she should have nothing to do with anyone else. That was his code of love. "For a good time only—kid them along—" A girl like Josephine would naturally be that way. But Edna, how could she? And he thought she was more spiritual than the others!

A FOOTBALL GAME

The game between Colorado College and the University of Utah was the first American football contest Thomas Lee ever witnessed. He had heard people talk about American football in China. None could give him a clear idea of the

way the game was played. All he could gather was that the game was rough.

Two days previous to the game, automobiles began to stream into town, bringing with them students of the Utah school, and the alumni of Colorado College. Social activities at the different fraternity houses boomed. Dances—dinners—. In classrooms, students begged the professors not to lecture on Shakespeare's tragedies. They wanted to talk football. Between glasses of coca-cola at the soda fountains, there were bettings offered on the result of the coming game. Bettings on number of touchdowns—bettings on number of field goals. "If McDougal won't make a touchdown, I'll be busted for the month..." "Greiner, our best punter, won't be in the lineup...had an injured knee...Hell, I bet six bucks on Colorado!"...The campus fizzed with football talk.

Then came the night before the game. The student body went crazy at the pep-meeting. The girls sat on one side of the stadium, and the boys on the other side. A big bonfire was blazing in the centre of the field. "Yeah...Tigers!... Yeah!...Tigers!...Eat 'em Tigers... Coach...Coach Mead!..." There were speeches. The coach...the captain. Nobody could hear the speakers. They promised to beat the Utah team, and the students applauded. They sneezed, and the students applauded.

Brass band, torches, boys and girls—here they came, singing and cheering as they marched through the busy section of the town. "Hey! Boys, let's stage a little surprise for the crowd in Rialto theatre!...Here we go!" "Rialto... Rialto..." the mob followed its leaders.

The motion picture was suddenly cut off. The lights in the theatre were all turned on as if by a magic hand. Before the crowd could half realize what was happening, a young man leaped on the stage. "One...two...three...here we go!"

"Rah! . . . Rah! . . . Rah! . . . Colorado . . . Rah! . . ."

The game was quite a gala affair. Co-eds of the two schools sprinkled bright colors among the crowd. The brass bands of opposing teams were trying to drown out each other's playing, with the trombones doing their duty. "Ice-cream cone . . . Orange Crush . . . Hershey's chocolate bar . . ." Everybody was eating or drinking. Lee never saw a more hungry mob.

Suddenly people sitting on the north side of the stadium were on their feet—rooters from Utah. Their team had appeared on the field. Almost instantly the Colorado section was yelling too. The Tigers were practicing punting.

A strange silence fell upon the crowd when the game started. A Colorado man was running with the ball toward midfield. The rooters on the south side went wild, while the other cheering section remained silent. Colorado lost the ball on downs, and on the next play, a Utah man tore through the line and was not stopped until he was within the shadow of the goal posts. Yells and songs on the north side. Hats sailing in the air. "Fight 'em Tigers! Hold 'em Tigers!" groaned the Colorado section. The Tigers held the line, but the other side dropped back and kicked a field goal. Every one of the Utah section, men and women, waved their banners and shrieked. They were so excited that they shook each other fiercely, and jumped up and down like bounding rubber balls. The half ended with the ball in midfield.

The second half opened with the Tigers taking the offensive. They fought desperately to score, but the Utah line tightened. There was a short cheer for every man carried off the field, injured or knocked unconscious. Only five minutes more then the game would be over. There was a fumble. McDougal, a star Colorado player, picked up the ball and sprinted down the field like a frightened deer with the Utah men at his heels. People on the south side were temporar-

ily insane. Their voices were so hoarse with yelling that they were croaking. McDougal had raced over for a touchdown. Colorado won!

The students asked for a holiday to hold a parade the following day. The petition was refused, but the students "cut" the classes and held the parade just the same. And the eight students, who did not join the parade, were thrown into a lake near the campus in their B.V.D.'s.

A number of co-eds witnessed the ducking. As they watched the eight boys covered with mud, crawl out of the lake, the girls powdered their noses, and laughed most invitingly.

LEE MAKES A DECISION

It was only with slight compunction that Lee fell into the custom of spending his evenings in the company of Edna and Josephine. He criticized them to himself, harshly. Josephine was nothing but a flirt. She could be chummy with everybody. He had thought Edna was different. Perhaps she was, but he could not forget those pictures in her album.

Josephine would spread herself out over the piano. No matter how many wrong notes she struck, she never lost the intention of a passage. She brought the substance of it across by some irregular and astonishing means.

Lee would play his saxophone. He had learned to play the instrument in China. Sometimes they made him sing. He had a baritone voice, not rich but pleasing. Edna could not jazz, so Josephine played the fox-trots, and Edna the ballads.

In their presence, he felt he was only making the most out of life—a very simple and obvious adventure. But he was afraid that they might make a fool out of him, like they did to the others—George and Archie. The feeling of distrust in his mind sufficed to discourage any tendency to romanticize their relationship. He was afraid, somehow.

The thought of hunting up a new lodg-

ing occasionally suggested itself. Perhaps it would be hard to find another place so comfortable—and then his very limited finances had to be considered. His lips would twist in an uneasy grimace. It was foolish for him to stay at such a place—a refuge for beaux and flappers! Of course, he could never be lonesome here. In fact, life was perfectly enjoyable. But that was not what he had come to Colorado Springs for. What did he care about women?—much less American women. Some day he would go back and marry Ivy, or some other girl. His life would be dull. He knew it, anyhow. Still that would be better than to let some fickle girl make a fool of him.

One morning as he passed through Dale street on his way to the college library, he noticed a "room-for-rent" sign posted on the porch of a dingy house. Right across the street there was a place where he could get his meals. The thought of moving into a new place grew. But months passed with Lee still staying with the Pitkins.

Edna, Josephine and Lee were talking one evening in the parlor, when Archie and George appeared. Edna seated herself at the piano and asked Lee to play his saxophone. That was too much. Lee murmured an excuse and withdrew into the kitchen. Both girls followed him.

"Please, Tom, please..."

"I don't feel like playing tonight."

"If you won't try to please them, try to do a favor for two invalids," pleaded Edna.

"We never told them to come, Tom," added Josephine.

"Your friends are waiting for you...go and entertain them...I feel sleepy...going to bed..."

"They can wait," Edna stood between him and the door leading to the staircase. But Lee ran out of a side door before the girls could catch him.

There was nothing to keep Lee from moving now. He thought the girls had

insulted him. Would a girl in China do that to him? No, she would have more respect for him. "We never told them to come, Tom." What liars! And Edna told him to entertain her beaux! They were not kidding him. They were torturing him. He would move tomorrow.

Why should he take it so seriously? Jealous? That was absurd. He was nothing to the girls, and the girls meant less to him. His pride was hurt. That was it. Lee was satisfied with the explanation.

A little dingy house on Dale street. Lonely sometimes, perhaps, but he would be by himself there. Nobody would bother him. He might like that kind of life after a while. Who knows? Anyway, he must get out of this house—away from the Pitkins, Josephine, Edna and all.

Lee dreaded the time when he had to make known his decision to the Pitkins and the girls. There would be some sort of an excuse, but everybody knew the real cause of his going. The ordeal came out to be easier than he had expected. "Want a room near the campus...to save some money..." He had prepared a short speech in advance. The girls, however, would not let the express men take his trunk away until he promised to come to see them every week on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday evenings at seven o'clock.

Mrs. Walker, Lee's new landlady, seemed to be the only other person in the house. Her daughter, Bonnie, stayed out so late at night that she spent most of the daytime in bed.

The noise of a woman sobbing downstairs awoke Lee from his sleep one night. It was about three o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Walker called a number. "Mary, did you see Bonnie at the dance?...yes, she was with Jack...was she there when you left?...But Bonnie hasn't come home yet...yes, I called Jack's house; nobody answered the phone...I am so worried..." "What a world!" Lee

sighed, adjusted his pillow, and went back to sleep.

Lee was running downstairs to go across the street for his lunch, when he saw Bonnie talking—mostly laughing—at the phone. Evidently she jumped right out of bed to answer the call. A kimono, which she had thrown over her shoulders, lay around her feet. She had nothing on her but a night-gown of excessively thin material. Her limbs, smooth and cold as marble, were entirely bare.

Lee lowered his eye-lids and made a dash for the door. Before his hand could reach the door-knob, he heard Bonnie calling him.

"Mr. Lee, come back right after lunch. I want to try that new piece, 'Roses of Picardy,' with you."

Lee took his meals at the Davises. They never served good food at Mrs. Davis' table, but there were always plenty of arguments.

Mrs. Davis sat three-hundred-poundedly in her chair, and quoted Bible profusely. Her husband was a bootlegger by profession. He talked in a language all his own—"hog" for pork chop, and "soup" for gravy. He dined in his overalls, and slept in his overalls. Whenever Bill, their son who had been twice fined for vagrancy, caught his father eating with a knife at the table, he would shout at the top of his lung, "Dad, you ain't got no good manners!"

Katherine, their six-foot daughter, was the "baby" of the family. She was always "sick" in the morning. That was why Lee never saw her at breakfast. After lunch Katherine would drive all over town in her little Ford coupe, and would come home at night to tell her mother she was a "crazy, old fool." The fat woman cried and forgot.

(To Be Continued)