

## Shadow Shapes

(Memoirs of a Chinese Student in America)

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ANONYMOUS

### PART IV

#### WHAT A MOTHER HAS TO SAY

AS SOON as he went home that evening, Lee shut himself up in his room. At first he felt stunned. What had happened in the afternoon was almost unbelievable. He saw the trees, the paths, the park, the river, Edna, and he again felt the pressure of her hands, while the leaves rustled and the reeds whistled.

The days following passed with a new sweetness. Each time they went to the same bench by the river. They sat very close to each other, dreaming of the summer evenings, sweet with that same perfume of green fields, tranquil and warm. He made her give him an account of her day, of her most trivial acts, of her thoughts, generally most uninteresting, which he interrupted with remarks like, "What are you thinking about? tell me, quick." Then they laughed at each other, and she went on with her story.

"Tom," she once said, "Don't you know that you almost never called me by my name?" That was a peculiar habit of his. He would never call a person by his name, unless he was forced to, not even his sister. Many times he would keep an important remark to himself, just because he hated to call a person's attention by speaking his name which to Lee was embarrassingly familiar. And she was determined to see that this past neglect was amply made up, so he had to call her by her name whenever it could possibly be introduced into their conversation.

They made elaborate plans for her birthday. The bench in the park had come to be a sacred spot in their hearts, but they wanted to go some place where they would be alone. Her birthday, the day of days! They wanted to have the whole day to themselves. Somewhere up the North Cheyenne Canon would be best. They knew a place where they could talk and rest. Like school children, they eagerly waited for the time to go on their all-day picnic.

But the day before, she came later than usual. "You are sad," said Lee, looking at her in tender fashion.

"Yes."

"Is it because something happened?" he went on. "Certainly you are not thinking of not coming to see me any more, are you?"

"Tom, it's alright for me to meet you in the park. But tomorrow, we will be in the mountains all day by ourselves. Not that I do not trust you, Tom. I know I shall be safe with you at any time, at any place. But it just does not seem right to me."

"Do you mean that we are not going to the mountains tomorrow?"

"You know I want to go as much as you do. If we only can get mother's permission."

"Did you talk to your mother about this?"

"No. I am not much of a talker anyway. And I am so afraid to tell mother.

She does not know a thing, and she will never understand."

For a long time they sat there in silence, not knowing what course they should follow. His admiration for her adherence to conventional virtues was forced to the background by his bitter disappointment in the apparent dropping of the following day's program. Then the incident caused him to doubt the strength of her character, her independent will power, which were necessary to stand future social persecutions, and to fight off much more complicated obstacles.

"I shall see your mother this evening," Lee suggested. "Would you go then if I could get your mother's permission?"

She could have hugged him for the suggestion, had there been no children playing on the lawn. She squeezed his hands and leaned her head against his shoulder, showing her approval. She would go to the confession that evening, which she had neglected since they saw each other daily in the park, and would tell her mother to wait for him.

"Till tomorrow then!" said Edna unwilling to let go his hands in her lap. She walked backward and waved her hand, bumping almost right into a baby-carriage.

"I am not so dumb," said Mrs. Griffith. "I can see things and I know more than you think I do. Besides, Edna told me everything before she went to the confession."

"What did she say?" asked Lee.

"She likes you, of course, but she said she was not sure whether she likes you enough to marry you." She paused for a moment to watch the effect of her remark, then continued, "Don't be a fool, Tom, you are not the only fellow she knew. You have been in this country long enough to know that. In some ways her mind is just like that of a child. Many times she thought she was in love, only to realize her mistake almost the following day. Then she dropped them like

that!" Mrs. Griffith emphasized her point by snapping her fingers sharply. "I know more about her than you do. Her heart has never been touched by love, and I don't believe any man can win her heart."

"But Mrs. Griffith," replied Lee. "Edna told me that she believed she loved me, and she only wanted time to think the matter over more carefully."

"She did! She is a fool!" Mrs. Griffith evidently lost her temper. Then she quickly controlled herself. "Think what will this mean to your mother. It will break her heart. And you will both be outcasts. You will have nobody but yourselves. You can never be happy. I like you, Tom. Honestly, I do, so take my advice. You are too young, much too young to think of marriage."

"What you say is correct," admitted Lee, "but you have forgotten that we don't reason in these matters. Our mind has no control over our heart. I know just as much as you do that everything is against us. We are ahead of our time. A mixed marriage will inevitably bring us suffering and possibly unhappiness. I have struggled, but my emotional self won."

"I agree with you," she said, "we don't reason in these things. Then Edna is old enough to decide this for herself. Our duty, as parents in such cases, is to give advices. You two can go to the mountains tomorrow. But be sure to take good care of her."

When the young man disappeared down the street, jubilant over the success of his mission, Mrs. Griffith smiled. She was playing for time. Soon Lee would be in Missouri, and new happenings might enter Edna's life during his absence. Like all infatuations of young people, she thought to herself, the flame would soon die a natural death. Pleased with her masterful strategy, she picked up a book and read with amused eyes.

## BABES IN THE WOOD

Edna and Lee selected a secluded spot in the wood where the trees gave way to a little open space of grass. And there they spread a blanket, scattered their provisions about, and sat down to enjoy the delights of talk and love-making.

Lee was struck with the perfection life could reach at moments. Those great quiet mountains, so uniform in their shade, so peaceful, rested his soul. The mighty Pikes Peak, towering above the clouds, commanded vast stretches of green land, little cottage settlements and towns. Less than twenty yards from their shady nook, a little mountain stream chattered on its way. The sandy banks glistened like pearlshells.

The two invented and played games of the most elaborate sort, with an unabashed childishness, pretending to be castaways on a desert island, kings and queens in fairy stories. They dramatized these situations to the utmost, and made long speeches to each other and to imaginary personages.

But they did not restrict themselves to speech-making. Lee had brought her some birthday presents.

"The design is supposed to be the figures of a dragon and a lovebird," said Lee, spreading a piece of Chinese tapestry in black and gold over Edna's lap. "In China they are symbols representing king and queen, or husband and his bride." Edna liked the silk scarf and some Chinese hand-made lace he gave her, but she went "crazy" over a gold vanity-case. It had all the appearances of a cigarette-case, and she was puzzled when he first showed it to her, knowing that none of them ever touched a cigarette.

Their conversation quite naturally drifted back to their own problems. Lee was at first very pessimistic over their future. Discriminations against the Chinese in America discouraged him and dampened whatever enthusiasm he had in mixed marriages.

"In a way, Tom, you can't blame them.

All what they see in this country are laundrymen and chop-suey cooks. You read nothing about them in the newspapers except tong wars and opium dens. We never met any better-class and educated Chinese. When I marry you, Tom, most people over here will never understand. They will think awful things about me, but what do I care? They don't know my Tommy, do they?" She tied a long narrow leaf around his ring-finger.

"I believe the best thing for us is to go back to China."

"Do you think they will look down upon me over there?"

"No. I know a number of persons occupying high governmental positions who have foreign wives. Then there is a traditional caste system in China. The laboring class have little chance to despise anybody, and the educated class are too enlightened to have any prejudice against mixed marriages. But, Edna, when you go with me, you will be giving up your country and your people."

"Isn't your country my country, and your people my people too?"

"You may not like them. Everything will be so entirely different."

"I shall go where you go. Where you are happy, I shall be happy. I think I shall like them. But if I don't, does that make much difference? I am not marrying the whole country, Tom. You, not your people."

Gradually conversation took a secondary place and then was altogether neglected. They were happy, like two care-free children together. Unconsciously their hands groped for each other's fingers, while they gazed with upturned eyes at the white fleecy clouds, pure as Hanchow silk, sailing across the sky. Two souls had become one.

Lee was running down to the brook to fetch her a drink. The water was too muddy along the banks, so Lee with a cup in his hand jumped from one stone to another heading for the center of the

stream. The stones covered with moss and ferns were treacherously slippery. One time he slipped, and both his feet were in the water. He brought back a cup of cold water, and a pair of wet shoes and socks.

"Take off your shoes and socks and dry them in the sun," suggested Edna.

"Take off his shoes and socks before her!" Lee's sense of modesty was shocked at the idea. "No, nothing doing."

"You will catch cold with those wet shoes on."

The wet shoes were heavy and uncomfortable. Edna tried to untie the strings, but he would not let her.

"I'll be mad with you."

The water in the shoes sent a chill up his spine. Then he laughed. What a fool he was. And Edna was as right as right could be. She could not have made a more sensible suggestion. Sockless feet. It sounded bad, but what of it? No decent man in China would take off his shoes before a girl, and no girl would suggest it. Sometimes people were perfectly silly, he thought to himself.

Edna was apparently puzzled by his over modesty. She was looking at the mountains while waiting for him to come to a decision, but when she turned around to voice her last protest, Lee had taken off his shoes and socks and was covering up his bare feet with fallen leaves.

She was so amused with the sight that she stuck behind his ear a rose which she had worn and called him her "silly but adorable boy."

A cool breeze came up, and they sat closer together for warmth, wrapping themselves in his coat. They were silent, regretting that this must all presently come to an end.

"I don't want to go home," said Edna in a muffled tone, her head on his shoulder.

"I don't either," Lee whispered.

"Let's stay here always."

"All right," said Lee and drew her

closer to him. It seemed to him that this was the happiest hour of his life.

"This is wonderful," he whispered.

"Yes," she breathed. "Wonderful!"

He pictured her to himself working in the evening by his side beneath the light of a lamp (they may not have electric lights in their home in China). She would look after the house. She would fill all the home with her charm and her gaiety. He would make her happy. This would last forever.

To the gallop of dream horses, Edna was carried away towards a new land, whence they would return no more. They went on and on, their arms entwined, without a word. She heard the chiming of wedding bells, and she saw a little cottage, shaded by a palm-tree, in the heart of a gulf, by the sea, where they would stay. They would row in gondolas, swing in hammocks, and their existence would be filled with sunshine.

For a while all hardships and obstacles that they had to conquer in the future, miraculously vanished from their minds. Her optimism and faith in her never failing God gave him new courage and strength. Yes, love would find a way. They would win!

"Tom," whispered Edna dreamily. "Don't you know you have never kissed me?"

Good gracious! It was true. He never kissed her. But then he had never kissed anybody. Not even his sister, or parents. People just would not do it in China. He remembered reading about it only in "bad" novels. Why, no husband and wife would even hold each other's hands in public.

When he was thinking that Edna would be the first one he ever kissed, two arms slipped behind his neck, and two lips met his in a long, lingering kiss. She pulled him to her. She felt her body tremble and go weak. The two rolled into the grass, and Lee forgot that the dry leaves had fallen off his sockless feet.

## CAÑON DAYS

Lee waited each morning for Edna at the Busy Corner where they took a trolley down South Tigon street. The street car rolled off into the country, rows of little bungalows followed one upon another, and the road constantly narrowed towards the mountains.

They knew it from end to end. They knew that after a meadow there was a sign post, next a school house, a cold-drink stand, or a gasoline station. Then on a sudden the cañons appeared. Sloping down like the claws of a monster dragon, and drowned in trees, the cañon paths stretched out beyond the ridges confusedly.

A moment later they took possession of their little place in the wood like happy children. Dropping their provisions and coats over the grass, they rushed into each other's arms and into that kiss they put a fierce revenge for the hours they had spent apart. In the sheer delight of their lips, arms and breathing breasts, time passed unregarded. And it seemed to them as though they could stay forever in that happy state of young passion, in which the touch of hands and the sound of murmured endearments yielded more than the heart could desire.

In the distance the open country spread away with a monotonous movement till it touched the vague line of the pale sky. Seen thus from above, the whole landscape looked immovable as a picture. A green lake curved around the Broadmoor Hotel. The chimneys belched forth brown fumes that were blown away at the top. One heard the rumbling of distant waterfalls, together with the clear notes of cowbells in the fields.

Their hearts swelled as if all the lovers in the past had sent into the mountain air the passions they fancied theirs. Their love grew in the presence of this vastness. They gazed into each other's eyes with voluptuous laughs, and tender names. Her chin upturned and her hair streaming in the wind, she said softly,

"Isn't it wonderful to be away from all the world—just you and I! Oh, I'm so happy!"

They talked—their future plans. Lee was to continue with his school work. He had always wanted to get into the newspaper game. He would study a year at the University of Missouri for his B. J. degree. They would be together again next summer when he would spend three months with her before he was to go to Columbia University, New York City, to work for a degree of M. S. in journalism. And then—they hugged each other at the thought—and then they would get married! Just two years from now!

And Edna would wait for him. She wanted him to stay in Colorado Springs, but he had finished his undergraduate work at Colorado College which did not offer any professional or graduate courses in journalism. And what did two years mean in their lives? She could never be so selfish as to let the desire for a momentary pleasure interfere with his work. The two years would be terribly long and lonely. Without him, all the fire and joy would go out of her life. "I will wait," Edna smiled bravely.

Presently they found themselves talking about Ivy. Edna had not been quite clear upon the subject.

"You were not engaged to her, were you?" she asked.

"No."

"Do you think she cared for you?"

"Poor girl, she never knew what love is."

"I can't see why you should worry yourself about her.."

"In China," Lee explained "marriages are arranged by parents. The children have no voice in the matter. Ivy knows that her parents want her to marry me. The news of my engagement will break her heart. I hate to see a helpless girl suffer through no fault of her own."

"Can't you explain to her?"

Lee really did not know how he could manage it. Perhaps his sister, Minnie,

would explain things to her. Yes, that would be a lot better. Then he would have to tell everything to his folks. How would they receive the news, he wondered? Father won't kick. Mother might feel hurt in the beginning but she would soon get over it. Minnie would never approve of their marriage. But then Lee and his sister had never agreed on anything. They were such dead enemies? Curious thing!

Their first quarrel was over religion. To be married by a Catholic priest, Edna told him, he had to get a dispensation from her church, and he had to promise not to try to change her religion, not to interfere with her religious worship and to bring up their children in Catholic church. He had agreed to it, for the Catholic church, to him, was as good as any other. Though he believed in no personal God, he had a strong admiration for any person who embraced a genuine faith. But when she insisted that no marriage was a proper marriage unless it was sanctioned by a priest, they disagreed.

"Which do you love most, me or your church?" resented Lee.

"I will never give up my religion for any man!"

"Then you think I am of secondary importance compared with your church."

"The two things are separate. You can't compare them. I am either married by a priest, or not at all!"

"Love should be greater than anything else."

"My body belongs to you, but my soul belongs to Him."

Edna thought Lee's love selfish, trying to take everything away from her. Lee could not stand the idea that their love was secondary to something else. Love to him, was the supreme thing in life. It was almost his God, his religion. They were silent. Their faces turned conspicuously in opposite directions. But they were instantly sorry that they had quarrelled. They looked at each other through

the corner of their eyes, each hoping the other would break the silence. He took her hand. She returned the pressure of his fingers, and in an instant they were locked in a cushioning embrace.

"We should never have quarrelled, sweetheart," murmured Edna.

"We will never do that again, Edna," he covered her cheeks and eyes with kisses.

"No, never again."

"We will be married by a priest. If one priest is prejudiced against mixed marriages, we will find another one."

"If none of them will, I shall live with you just the same." She was surprised at her own daring.

"Are you still mad at me, darling?"

"N-o-o" she nestled closer into his arms.

They saw a light in her mother's room when they were walking up the hill. At the door they withdrew into the shade of a poplar tree. It was not the first time that they had seen moonlight, a starry sky, that they had heard the wind whispering in the leaves, but no doubt, they had never admired all this, as if nature had not existed before, or had only begun to be beautiful.

They did not fail to make fine phrases, finding the world beautiful and full of poetry. She even began to whisper softly—

*"If Life with lavish hands should  
name*

*The choice of riches, power, or fame,  
I'd say I wanted nothing new,  
Just you.*

*If Life with lavish hands should  
bring*

*To me the love of prince or king,  
They could not love me as you do,  
Just you."*

Edna was altogether too happy at the moment. Lifting her head and putting Lee's warm cheek against her own, she began—

*"If Life should ask, in years to be  
The dearest thing it gave to me,  
I'd say what is so very true:  
Just you."*

At times the shadow of the trees hid her completely; then she reappeared suddenly, like a vision in the moonlight. Looking at her it seemed to him that his soul, escaping towards her, spread like a wave about her slender figure. He knelt on the ground before her, and with arms around her knees, he chanted in a subdued voice—

*"Who knows, who knows,  
But in this perfect place  
Of peace, of parting's pain,  
Where I have touched your lips, your  
face;*

*Who knows  
But we shall come again:  
You as the thirsting Rose,  
And I—the Rain."*

"But why sad poetry?" Edna rubbed her cheek against his, which was wet with sudden tears. She bent over him, and murmured, as if choking with intoxication, "Tom, do you love me?" And she did not listen to his answer in the haste of her lips that fastened to his mouth.

Their separation was becoming intolerable. They tore themselves apart, only to run back again to embrace once more. Motionless in front of each other, they kept repeating, "Till tomorrow, till tomorrow." Suddenly she seized his head between her hands, kissed him, crying "Good night!" and rushed up the hill.

#### MONUMENT PARK

When it came to parting from Edna, Lee was in a depressed and downcast mood. He really did not want to go to Columbia, Mo. But there might be a great future for him, if he would continue with his school work. He would study hard for Edna's sake, and for their love's sake. Hence he must go and in so doing must leave her. It looked mighty tragic.

From a bridge across the Monument

Creek, where she came to meet him the night preceding his departure, they walked gloomily into the park. They counted the lapse of the hours after which he would be with her no more. They pictured the day when he would return from Missouri to spend the summer months with her. Lee had a faint foreboding fear of the events which might intervene. He had read stories of men who had left their sweethearts to struggle for a future, and had come back to find their loved one unfaithful and changed. He might not hold her. And yet she had given him her word and she was in love with him—no doubt of that. That yearning look in her eyes. What did it mean if not eternal love? Life had brought him a great treasure—a great love.

The autumn stars saddened him more. It was a wonderful world, but bitter to endure sometimes. There was happiness and peace in store for them probably. Only two years and he and Edna would live in each other's embrace and by each other's kisses. It must be so.

Lee was beginning to be aware of his duty and responsibility. The life and happiness of a girl was in his keeping. There were obstacles that he had to conquer which would be at least twice more numerous than if he had loved a Chinese girl.

Edna was the braver of the two. On a bench by the creek, she sat on his knee and twined her arms about his neck. Finding their parting so near, they went wild, a kiss for every month they were to be apart. But there were enough kisses exchanged for each day of the year. Now that he had plumbed the depths of her emotions and thoughts, he concluded she was the most wonderful being he had ever known. No woman had ever revealed herself to him so unselfishly and so courageously in love. To hear her discussing calmly her sacrifice for love and her complete devotion to their future, set his soul vibrating with emotions. Lee gathered her in his arms. He kissed her over

and over, forgetting in her embrace all the sorrows he had ever known.

Despite the fact that she was older than he, there was a breath of youth and innocence here that held him. Her body was almost fragile. Her feeling about life and love was tender and beautiful. Most Chinese women were emotionless, or had kept their feelings to themselves. A frankness and materialism in American women often bordered on vulgarity. Her confidence in Lee was supreme. Someday he would be a great man, and that, to her, could not be long.

"Don't look so sad, Tom," Edna rubbed her hair gently against his face. "Is it because you are going away—because you are leaving what is dear to you, your little Edna? Ah! I understand. When you are gone, I shall have nothing here. You are all to me, so shall I be to you! But we have to be brave, my dear. Think what the future has in store for us. Only two years! Only two years, my Tommy!"

"Look, I am smiling!" Tears were choking her voice. She was making a heroic attempt to smile. She was irresistible. Lee was smiling too.

"How sweet you are!" he said, seizing her in his arms.

"Really!" she whispered. "Do you love me?"

"Do I love you—love you? I adore you, my darling!"

"Oh," she went on, "I love you! I love you so that I cannot live without you, do you see? And soon you will be in Missouri. Perhaps you will meet some other girls. They smile upon you, those college flappers! Oh, no. No one pleases you. There are some more beautiful. There are some younger and more charming, but I love you best. I can't tell you in words, but when we are married, I shall show you how much I really love you. You are clever, you are good, you are strong! My Tommy, my lover!"

They were growing very sentimental. They exchanged promise after promise to remain faithful to each other when he

was away. They were not going to have "dates", or go to dances. He would have to study. He simply must finish his work in Missouri within a year. She would do some sewing. House dress, aprons, pillow cases—all for their future home.

She put her signet-ring on his finger. Her father gave it to her when she was ten years old. After examining the finger and the ring with smiling eyes, she warned him in a solemn voice never to part with it. He promised to send her one from Missouri. She asked for an aquamarine ring. Diamond was too expensive, she thought. He would buy her one when they could afford it. What did a ring mean to her? She loved him and he loved her. That was all that she wanted.

Then they recalled the lovers in the book they had read, and the lyric beauty of these romances began to sing in their memory. They had become themselves an actual part of these imaginings, and the heights of sentiment sparkled under their thought. Had they not suffered? They were afraid in the beginning. At times they had given up all hopes of realizing the love dream of their youth. But now their love triumphed over prejudices and discriminations, and their love so long pent up burst forth in full joyous bubblings. They made vows to one another, only to interrupt them with kisses. She, looking at him through half-closed eyes, asked him to call her again by her name—to say that he loved her.

She would have wished never to leave Lee. Midnight struck. Slowly they walked towards her house. Every few steps they turned and kissed. Some mischievous ones in automobiles parked along the road honked every time their lips met. They laughed and skipped across the lawn.

They were in front of a long flight of steps, the short-cut route from the park to the street more than twenty feet above. "Shall I carry you?" Lee said laughing in an undertone. With an outburst of energy, characteristic of his age, he seized her and carried her like a child,



for he was well-built for his size and was an athlete in college. He went up the first twenty steps at a breath, pleased with the feeling of two lovely, cool bare arms about his neck. The steps looked longer and less pleasant, when he began to feel the weight of a woman's body in his arms. His breath almost failed him, but he was afraid to take a second breath for fear that he would collapse in the exhaling.

When they reached the street, Lee thought his lungs were bursting. His heart almost popped right out of his throat, but he pretended to be unextended by the ascent of those steps. If she only knew he was panting inside like a piano-mover!

They walked to the door, still holding each other's hands. She was white and trembling. Tomorrow morning Lee would leave for Missouri, and he had told her not to see him off at the station. It would be too trying for them both, and Edna had agreed to this decision.

Edna finally recovered her own poise with an effort and led him back under a tree. To reassure him, she opened her vanity-case and powdered her nose. Her hands were nervously clasping and unclasping.

"Are you my brave little sweetheart?" she asked tenderly.

"Yes. I shall write to you when I change trains at Kansas City, and I shall drop you a note the first thing I get into Columbia."

"I shall write to you every day starting from tonight. When I go in I shall write my first letter to you, honey, and mail it tomorrow morning. It will go with you on the same train. I shall address them to the general delivery office until I hear from you."

"I shall write to you every day, Edna."

"Write me long, sweet letters. If you are busy, just say 'I love you', and I shall understand." Tears began to gather about Edna's eyes. Her slender frame was breaking under the emotional strain.

"You better go in, sweetheart," Lee suggested. "Be brave."

"I shall try to be brave for your sake, Tom," she was crying.

"Goodby!" They kissed, but they were too excited to even kiss right. And Lee watched her eagerly, sadly, bitterly, as she walked lightly from him, disappearing like a shadow through the dark and silent door.

*To Be Continued*