

Shadow Shapes

(Memoirs of a Chinese Student in America)

ANONYMOUS

PART SIX

YOUNG HEARTS

Edna had taken a room at Mrs. Dives' place, since her mother returned to New York.

Dearest Tommy:

I am so glad that I came here. For hours I sat in your room thinking of the terrible days you must have spent there tortured by a secret, hopeless love. I dust your desk every morning, take my afternoon nap in your bed, and hold your pillow in my arms before I say my evening prayer. They tell me about every little thing you did, and they all like you. Mrs. Davis tells me you can have your old room when you are here in June.

I wish my mother had read MY CHINESE MARRIAGE. I am sure she would be impressed and it probably would help our situation out a lot. I can't understand why people are so prejudiced. God teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves, but how many do? Well, dearset, maybe our children will see the day when there won't be any race prejudice. I hope so anyway, because it will make life easier for them. But if not, I hope the future generation will stand up for their love against the world, just as we are doing now.

Your Edna.

The only cloud remaining in their minds was the possible objection from

their parents. Not that they thought their parents could prevent the marriage. That never entered their head. They just had an idea that with their parents' approval, their love would be "perfect." And in her mother's letter, Lee's name was never mentioned. There were, however, bitter remarks against the Chinese.

Sweetheart:

I didn't get any letter today, and I am so disappointed. A day doesn't mean a thing to me, without a letter from you.

I did get a letter from mother though, and she gave me another nasty little dig. Here's what she said: "The Chinese are sure cutting up and getting themselves disliked in this country. I see in today's paper that 163 were sent back to their own country and a whole lot more are rounded up to be sent back. If they can't act decent and behave themselves, they ought not come over here. No other race gives our government so much trouble?" Isn't that an awful statement to make? We are going to have a hard job winning her over, Tommy. You know down in her heart, she doesn't really think those things. When she sets her mind on anything, you can hardly change her. She is inclined to be domineering too. She said those things with the intention to hurt me and to make me change my mind. She can't do it though.

I am taking good care of my health. I stepped on a weighing machine at the Busy Corner yesterday. It read 115 pounds. I never weighed that much before. There must be something wrong. Anyway, I am glad that I am gaining weight, for I want my Tommy to have a strong and healthy wife.

Your Edna.

Passions are formidable enemies to reason. Edna and Lee were prepared for every struggle, even with the world, in order to keep each other. Ivy in the meantime had withdrawn quietly. A sharp sarcastic letter. Then nothing was heard from her again. Lee had explained everything in a letter to his father shortly after his arrival in Missouri. Lee knew, at the time of writing, that his parents would be shocked. They were well educated, thoroughly "modern" in every sense of the word. He could have concubines. He could even accept a sing-song girl's hand in marriage. Anything, and his parents would raise no serious objection. But a mixed marriage! Never.

For months he did not hear from his parents or Minnie. Lee never told Edna about this. He was worried. They had either severed relations with him, or the long silence was intended to be a veiled threat. But finally the letter came. It was from his father.

My dear Boy:

As I write you I am still all in a tremble from the terrible anxiety we have had. The most affected of all was your mother. Ever since we got your letter she has been sick. We sat up in bed many nights unable to go to sleep. I suppose I should tell you that it is on your account, and nothing to do with us, that we are anxious and depressed.

What have you done, my boy? Do you realize what you are doing? We have suffered and struggled to save enough money for your education. When you were selected to

study in America, we thought some day you would come back to win fame for your family. Our mission in life would be fulfilled.

If you have any appreciation of what your parents have done for you, forget about Edna. We do not know anything about her. We have nothing against her. But see for yourself what has happened to the mixed marriages in the past! They either ended in suffering, or in a divorce court. You say you love each other, but you should have sense enough to know that race prejudice will always exist. She may love you now. Who knows that she may not leave you in future years?

It means that you will have to give up your future. You with your youth and training, have splendid opportunities. The men who are ruling the destiny of our country now started their career with no better a chance than what you have today. But how far can you go with an American wife? Nowhere. Not only that, you will not be accepted in society. You don't know what you are doing. You are putting an end to your whole career. You will suffer all your life for what you do now.

Besides, you are too young, much too young, to even think of marriage. You are only twenty-one. Finish your education. Give yourself a chance to have a start in life. When you are successful, when you are famous, then pick the girl you want. Which beautiful girl wouldn't marry you then? On the other hand, if you marry Edna now, you will have to give up your studies. You will have no future. You and all of us will be the joke of our friends and the town.

Advices on such matters, I know, are never welcome. You are old enough to take care of yourself. We cannot forbid you to do anything.

Parents can only advise. We have done our duty, and the rest is left to your best judgment.

Your Father.

But the young lovers could not see it that way. What did it matter if no one would approve of their marriage? Future, career, wealth—they mean nothing to a romantic mind. Their love, their happiness, their life together, and nothing else mattered. Didn't people always say "love will find a way?" When one is young, heart calls more vehemently than the mind. The heart speaks in pure exaltation and takes frequent flight into the ideal.

As he walked every morning to school, Lee hummed, wanted to run, and would willingly have leaped over a bench in front of Neff Hall, so agile did he feel. The world looked radiant to him, prettier than ever. He was in one of those moods of ecstasies when the mind comprehends everything with keener pleasure, when the eye sees more perfectly, seems more receptive and clear, when one finds a livelier joy in seeing and feeling, as if an all-powerful hand had revived all the colors of the earth.

He experienced such a sense of freedom and clear-sightedness that all the obstacles seemed trival to him. Edna, like Lee, had an absolute faith in their love. The world thundered "no," but there was a big "yes" in their hearts. Their home, his job, a long future—these were dismissed from their minds as easily as if the problems could be solved by a kiss.

Why, their love could not fail. Things might look dark sometimes, but the light would soon appear. Lee had no prospect of getting a paying position right away. He had not even enough money to support himself. How they were going to start their life together, they had no idea. But something, something would turn up to help them out. Somehow they seemed to know it.

ADA

With Helen gone, Lee decided to drop his plan of presenting the Chinese play in which she was to star.

Ada, one of the most beautiful classical dancers in the university, had been asked to give incidental dances. She was naturally disappointed at his decision, and frankly told him so. They hardly spoke to each other at the Farewell Night. The club members were especially surprised at Lee's sudden change of mind, but he refused to explain his action. He was to take Ada to the May Fete the following afternoon. That night she told him she would go alone.

In the morning, however, Ada called. Somebody had told her about Helen. She wanted to say that she was very sorry and that her fullest sympathy went out to him. She was being noble. Of course, he was to take her to the May Fete. She reminded him to be at her place early, for she had to go to the Fete ahead of time. She was to be one of the principals in a dance.

Ada was twenty-three, or perhaps twenty-four. Her red-brown beads looked well against her cool brown neck. She was a well-developed girl, and very handsome. All the life of Ada was in her eyes, which were usually dark, but could flame with light like a conflagration. She rarely varied from her swinging, forward, walk. Occasionally she would challenge Lee to a race down the street.

Bareheaded, her short skirt showing her limbs to the knee, she laughed and ran with shining eyes and flushed cheeks. He, in snug gray flannels revealing an athletic figure, coolly ran beside her without haste, with the easy elegance, and the passionate attention with which he indulged in all sports. About a block from the Quadrangle where the Fete was to be held, she stopped, with her handbag held between her knees, and powdered her face. They were tired and out of breath, but thoroughly enjoyed their childish ex-

citement, that enjoyment of little kittens jumping from chair to chair.

It was about this time when Lee received word from Edna that the Davises were planning to move to Denver and that she wanted to go with them. Bill, their son, was in California, and Katherine, their daughter, had just married. Mrs. Davis had always wanted to live in Denver, and with her children gone, she felt lonesome in her house in Colorado Springs.

Edna thought it was best for her to live with Mrs. Davis in Denver. When Lee would go to see her in summer, he could have a room in the same house. On the other hand, if she should stay in Colorado Springs, she would have to find a room somewhere else, and people, who knew nothing about her, would most likely be hostile toward her love for Lee, and might criticise their being together during the summer months. Then her father was getting old. Her expenses in the West had cost her father all the money he had saved. He certainly needed the money for his old age. Edna thought she should try to get a job some place to earn a little spending money. Chances were she probably could find something in Denver, being a larger city than Colorado Springs.

Lee did not like the idea of Edna working. Although he realized that working girls were common in American life, he could not overcome a prejudice against such system which would be condemned in China. Furthermore, she had never had any professional training. She was a switchboard operator once. But the idea, his future bride a switchboard operator! What would his friends in China think about it? No, he could never approve of this!

He was simply furious when a few days later Edna carried out her plans in spite of his vigorous protests. She had moved to Denver with the Davises, and was reading every Sunday the want ad section.

While his mind was more or less upset by the defiant letters from Edna, Ada sought his company constantly. At his hour of sorrow and anger, Ada tactically showed her sympathy, and listened attentively to his troubles. While the other girl refuted and ignored his opinion, she comforted him and employed all the womanly arts to please him.

One night, alone with Ada under the Columns, Lee was particularly moody. He had received a letter from Edna during the day that drove him to madness. She resented his attitude toward her religion. She was apparently unhappy, knowing then that her people might not approve of her marriage to Lee.

"My father" Edna said in her letter, "has been wonderful to me. I cannot but feel sad to think that our marriage may break his heart. My poor father! I shall marry you, even if it is against my parents' wish, but I shall be always unhappy to think that I have been ungrateful to them."

His soul was suddenly moved with an impulse that was even more terrible than anger. So that was her idea of love! If she should enter into the marriage with a feeling of regret and unhappiness, she had no business to marry him. Of course, he ought to have known better. Her religion, her people, her ways of living—she never had the courage to break down the chains of prejudices, and she never wanted to, either.

Under the trees, further on, the moon was shedding among the branches a shower of fine beams that seemed to wet the lawn, spreading out all around Ada and Lee. They sat under the towering Greek Columns, drinking in the agreeable coolness that exhaled from the surrounding vegetation and watching the vine-covered structures which cast long shadows across the Quadrangle.

They remained a long while talking in the shadows. In a soft, and almost broken voice, Ada told the story of her life.

Her parents died when she was but a baby. It was their dying wish that a friend of the family was to take care of the child, and that their property was to belong to their friend in payment of the expenses in bringing up the girl. The man's son became in love with Ada who soon grew up to be a charming girl. She liked him too. He was of a stocky build, had no education, but was doggedly devoted to her. She finished high school with high honors and won a scholarship to study at the university.

From then on a gulf seemed to have widened between them. The boy was a hard worker and was faithful to her, but they had nothing in common. She hungered for literature and arts, which were meaningless to him. She talked about things that had no interest to him. He, in turn, became resentful that she should prefer the company of other men.

"He will be here next week to take me home," she was crying and continued in a choking voice, "and he wants me to marry him this summer."

"Why don't you tell him everything?"

"But I am afraid to. He loves me so much. Of course, he won't say a word. He'll just run away some place and live a wretched life."

"Then you do care for him."

"Yes, in a way. But I am sure I can never be happy with him."

They remained speechless for a long while, feeling for the first time that they were very near one another, nearer than they had ever been, in this hour of sadness.

Then suddenly Ada was on her feet. With eyes still wet with tears, she said, "I want to dance for you." She raised one foot first and then the other, and kneeling on the lawn, after the manner of a devotee, Lee seized the shoes and took them off.

Lightly she moved like a butterfly fluttering across the lawn. There was a radiant look in her eyes. A vision arose

in his mind of a Greek maiden scattering flowers about him, the cool perfume of the peach blossoms which revived the atmosphere about them. And she had never seemed so pretty to him as she did standing in front of him, laughing in the moonlight, her hair dishevelled.

As he bent down to raise the foot that seemed to float between the dress and the grass, and somewhat chilled by the night air, the pinkness of the flesh escaped through the almost transparent stocking. He was suddenly seized with a mad desire to kiss that graceful, delicate limb.

It gave him a strange, selfish pleasure to know that some one was sympathetic at his hour of suffering. He thanked her for it, as a wounded man lying by the roadside would thank one who had stopped to give him a drink. He thanked her with all his wounded heart, and he pitied her a little, too, in the depths of his soul. As the human emotions unrolled themselves before him, the vision of a dancer in an Athenian garden vanished, and the foot resting in his hands carried an impression of complete and bold nudity. He quickly replaced the shoes.

RECONCILIATION

Thoughts, cruel and violent, thronged upon Lee's mind of all the letters that he had received lately from Edna, now to torture him with bitter sarcasm, now to tell him that his love was selfish and domineering. Never had anything caused him such emotion, nor startled him so violently, nor so set his poor heart thumping, as the sight of those letters.

Sitting at his desk, he thought: "Oh! for a girl who could have the love of one and the affection of another! Is there anywhere in the world a love that is supreme, to which everything else bows in surrender? She can keep her religion, if she hates to give it up. We will try to win the consent of her parents. But when circumstances make it necessary

for her to give up everything for our love, is she ready to make the sacrifice? She can never be happy with me, if she does not gladly give up her church, her people and her country to live with me."

He had promised to write her that day telling her whether he would be able to leave for Denver on June 1, as he had planned. No sooner had Lee a pen in his hand than he began to reflect. Edna seemed to him again a part of her prejudiced, bigoted people. Her recent attitude toward their marriage problems had suddenly placed a distance between them. At one time he thought he understood her perfectly. But now she was a stranger whose emotions and thoughts he could not follow.

Love, to Lee, accepts no condition. It can bring happiness or sorrow into one's life. If Edna could not be happy unless he accepted her religion, and her parents had given their approval, she did not love him truly. He could not see how in any way he could marry a girl knowing that the marriage would bring her sorrow and regret.

Instead of telling her about his visit in Denver, he never mentioned the subject in his letter, and frankly told her that he did not really think she cared for him enough to marry him. He advised her to give their marriage problems a more serious consideration.

Tears started to his eyes almost the minute he dropped the letter into a mail box. He seized her letters, the sight of which only a few minutes ago aroused him to such bitter thoughts, and buried his face amidst the glossy paper. The thought that he would never receive more of them filled him with unutterable sorrow.

He took a long walk that day. He felt a terrible distress at the bottom of his heart and his legs were heavy under him, as if his suffering had loosened all the springs of his energy. He felt so lonely, so utterly abandoned. The forest appeared to him silent and void. As he sat

in the swing on the porch, he would recall to mind their afternoons in the canons, the days when he passed whole evenings alone with her. Such bitter sorrow would tear his heart that he felt he must start at once for some strange city or else leave the country forever.

In his long walks through the thick-nesses of the woods, he vainly hoped to forget his unhappiness. He one day came again to the spot under the Lover's Leap where Helen had once told him of the story how a disappointed lover plunged to his death from the top of the rock into the Hinkson Creek. It was now a gloomy place, almost as black as night, with impenetrable foliage. No place would have appealed more forcibly and more touchingly to his imagination. Lee seated himself to contemplate at ease. To his diseased mind, the rock and the muddy creek became splendid and terrible symbols, telling to him, and to all who might pass that way, the everlasting story of a disillusioned love.

Then he went on his way again, sadder than before, slowly and with eyes downcast. Again he asked himself what were probably her thoughts when she received his letter. Did she suffer? Would she regret she had not shown more devotion to their love? Or had she merely laughed at his sorrows and thought nothing more of him? His desire to learn the truth was so strong and so persistent, that the fear and the hope that she might send him a letter of a telegram at any moment kept him in his house all the following week. He was in his room when one afternoon, the postman brought him a letter from Edna. The excitement was so great that his breath failed him for a moment and his legs bent under him. His heart beat violently as he opened the letter. And yet he could not dare hope that she assured him of her love.

Tommy:

Are you going to leave me like this? Oh, Tom, what have you done to me? I have been so sick all day

today that I think all the fight I put up for my health in the past months has been in vain. My knees tremble so I can hardly walk. I have no appetite. My stomach just won't hold any food. I have a nervous cough and temperature. Tom, you have misunderstood me. You have taken me up wrong, very wrong. You read things in the letters that were never there. Quite a few months ago we talked this subject over, and I told you that I would do anything for you. Why then, oh, why did you have to start this again. I told you that if it is necessary, I'd give up anything for you, but that this won't be necessary unless you make it so. If you love me with this great wonderful love you have told me about, you won't think of asking this of me. I have told you that I would do anything for you. Now Tom, would you do anything for me? Your love should be tested as well as mine.

Oh Tom, my dearest, come to me. Please, write quickly and say you are coming. Nothing else matters. Without you life holds nothing for me. Are you coming? Oh God speed the day until I hear that you are coming to me.

If you don't come, I will always think that you stop loving me. But you love me, don't you? You are going to come and hold me in your arms and tell me you love me. Didn't we always say that everything would be talked over satisfactorily if only we could be in each other's arms? Tom, come to me and let's prove that this is so. I can't, I won't believe that you can throw me down so easily. No human being can do that, if they loved the way I thought you loved me. No, I didn't think it. I know it. I know you love me and that you are coming to me June 1. A love like yours should be fair

enough to give a girl a chance of proving her love in person, and not relying entirely in words. Writing is a very inadequate way of expression.

Tom, are you coming to me, or are you going away? That's all that matters to me now. If you go away, I have lived my life. I have no more to live for. My fight against ill health is finished. It can have me now. I don't care what happens. If you don't come this summer, I won't be in this world long. A few colds will be enough to break down my lungs.

But I don't want to die, just when I start to live and love. Oh, Tom, what are you doing to me? Aren't you mine? Am I not yours? How can you talk of going away and leaving me all alone? Tom, you are coming to me.

Your Edna.

His emotion was so great that he had become pale. He held his lips glued to the paper he had in his hands. As Lee re-read her letter, all trembling with his newly lighted love, he recalled to mind their last night together in the Monument Park when they exchanged vows of eternal love. She loved him! Everything in the house seemed to be a witness to his supreme joy. Every little sound was an echo to a cry in his heart—"she loves me! she loves me!"

Already he had forgotten the heart-aches of the past week which but now had caused him so much worry. He did not even wait for his change when he paid for a message to Edna. He dashed out of a down-town telegraph office, and hurried home to pack his trunk.

WESTWARD, HO!

The night preceding his departure was a horribly long one to Lee. He got through it somehow. The anticipation of the journey had made him feverish, and he had not slept a wink. The darkness

of his room and its silence broken only by the noise of passing automobiles that served to remind him of his longing to be off, had weighed upon him all night long like a prison.

At the earliest ray of light that showed itself between his drawn curtains, the gray, sad light of early morning, he jumped from his bed, opened the window, and looked at the sky. He had been haunted by the fear that the weather might be unfavorable. It was clear. There was a light floating mist, presaging a warm day. He dressed more quickly than was needful, and in his consuming impatience to get out of doors and at last begin his journey he was ready two hours too soon, and nothing would do but he must get a cab. As the car jolted over the streets, its movements were so many shocks of happiness to him. When he reached the railroad station and found that he had fifty minutes to wait before the departure of the train, his spirits fell again.

At last he felt himself moving, hurrying along toward Edna, soothed by the gentle and rapid motion of the train. His eagerness, instead of being appeased, was still further excited. He felt the desire, the unreasoning desire of a child, to push with all his strength he seat in front, so as to accelerate the speed. For a long time, until midday, he remained in this condition of waiting expectancy.

The train was passing through a rich farming district. It was in that lusty season when the land gives generously of its sap and life. Great light-colored oxen, and huge, red bulls stood by the fences or lay down among the pasturage. There seemed to be no end to this fresh fertile land. In every direction little streams were gliding in and out among the fields, partially concealed by a thin screen of herbage. For an instant they disappeared only to show themselves again farther on, bathing all the scene in their vivifying coolness.

When he had changed trains at Kansas City, he experienced a strange calmness. The night fell. The moon was hanging over the trees. He was in a very gloomy mood, and sat there looking out into the dark night. Then he came back to his days in Missouri with an ache. They were actually gone, and were so beautiful. He would never really see Helen any more. Or Ada dancing in the moonlight! He clenched his hands with the hurt. What was this thing, life? Poets wrote about it, Li Po, Tu Fu, Li Shan-yin. He thought of a little poem which he had learned years ago.

Under this door, a year ago,
I saw a face as lovely as the peach
blossoms;
The face is gone and I know not
where,
But the peach blossoms are still
mocking the summer breeze.

Life, the house of disillusion and broken dreams. A mysterious and colossal phantom. Like the sands of the Gobi Desert, life is forever different—and yet forever the same.

He seemed to be leaving something, something beautiful behind, every inch of the way. Not that Lee cared for Helen or Ada. Somehow it always made him sad to see something going out of his life.

During the last forty minutes, seized with an impatient longing to be at his destination, he took out his watch twenty times. His head was constantly turned toward the window of the train, and at last he beheld the city where she was waiting for his coming. The train had been delayed, and now only an hour separated him from the moment when he was to meet her. By mutual agreement, she was to wait for him at the house.

He jumped into a taxi-cab which started off in the direction of a tall building on a hill. Soon they passed the down-

town section and little bungalows were seen built closely adjoining one another. Lee looked straight ahead with beating heart, scrutinizing up and down the intersecting paths. Lean-legged boys and girls were playing about the streets. Immediately—in a moment—he would be there. He would see her at the door of one of those pretty, brown houses. He would recognize her form, her step, then her face, and her smile. He would be soon listening to her voice. What happiness! What delight! He felt that she was somewhere near him, knowing that she was soon to see him again.

With difficulty he restrained himself from uttering a cry. For there, down the street, the form of a young girl was visible. It must be she. There could be no doubt of it. He recognized her. She was all in blue, like the heavens in springtime. Yes, indeed! he recognized her, while as yet he could not distinguish her features.

But when the car stopped in front of the house, he did not dare to go toward her, feeling that he would prob-

ably blush and stammer. Edna, however, had eyes for nothing but the adored form walking toward her. Never had she seen him so handsome. He seemed to her to have changed, without her being able to specify in what the change consisted. He was bright with a brightness she had never seen before, which shone in his eyes and upon his flesh, his hair, and seemed to have penetrated her soul as well. All at once there arose within her a feeling of delirious delight, such a joy as seizes you when the desire of your life is attained. At last he had come to her.

They held each other's hands and were whispering meaningless phrases—"how are you?"—"very well"—"Did you sleep good on the train?" But the trembling of their voices gave the words their true meaning. As soon as they were inside the house, she held him in her arms a long while, standing, lips against lips, assuring herself by the quivering of their kiss that he was still all hers.

(To be Continued)