

DONALD C. LEE

ECLIPSE
OF THE
BRIGHT
MOON

— A NOVEL —

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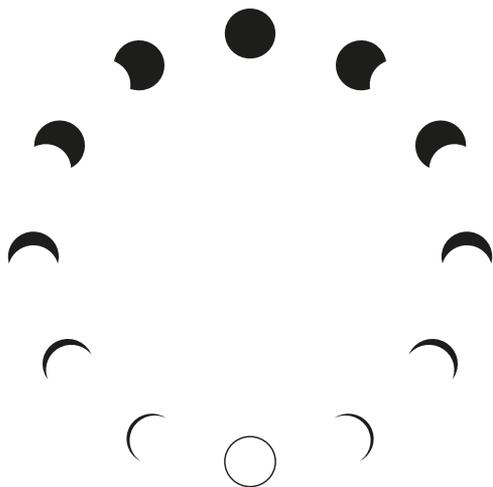






PART I

APRIL:
UPRISING



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

APRIL 15, 1989

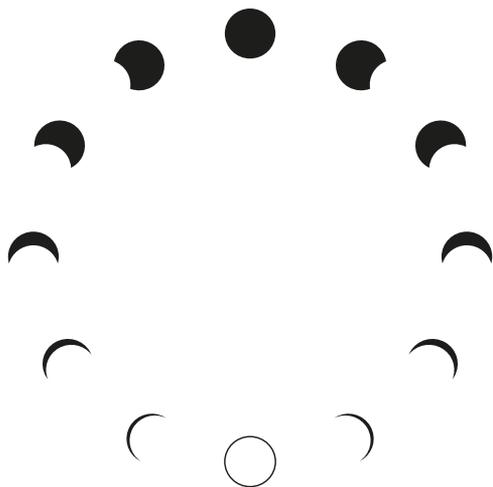
DENG XIAOPING SAID THAT WHEN YOU OPEN THE windows, the flies come in. In the Spring of 1989, China opened its windows wider than ever before to the fresh breezes of freedom. From Deng's point of view, the flies had come in and needed to be swatted.

One fly had stopped beating its wings today. Hu Yaobang had died, and the government would not announce it for three more days. Then the rumor would brew that he had been swatted. The rumor would be enough to stir up the hurricane of events, the eye of which would sweep across Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and the winds of which would extend out thousands of miles to batter all of China. Eight hundred miles southwest of Beijing, the city

of Xi'an, where Professor Dan Norton was teaching American literature and Western history, would be especially hard hit. Dan Norton had almost finished his year as an exchange professor at Shaanxi Teachers University.

In mid-April, he had no way of knowing that in two weeks' time, he would be under threat of Chinese prison, accused by the police of harboring a fugitive and engaging in espionage. Would he do what the police wanted him to do to get himself out of trouble? He would apparently have to choose, just as the Chinese students had to choose between cooperating with corruption, fleeing, or standing up for their values at grave risk.

The dark labyrinth of his tortured soul had led Dan to China to seek redemption. But that is not the heart of the story, only the fictional occasion for its telling. The heart of the story is the actual struggle of the Chinese people against the corruption of their government, which mirrors the history of many such struggles throughout human history. They are stories of fear and hope, cowardice and courage, naïveté and wisdom, selfishness and generosity. Battles for justice are fought and lost time and again; but after many failures, there are often victories, if sometimes not for decades or centuries.



THERE WILL BE BIG TROUBLE

April 18, 1989

THE BLARE OF THE CHINESE NATIONAL ANTHEM from the loudspeakers outside jarred Dan Norton out of his sleep as they did every morning. The communal alarm clock. It had taken him out of his recurring Vietnam nightmare. He pulled the pillow over his ears until the anthem stopped.

Memories of Vietnam exploded in his brain. As a twenty-three-year-old Second Lieutenant forward observer for an artillery battery, he had directed four-deuce mortar shells at a village harboring Viet Cong in 1964. When the Marines moved through the shelled village later in the day, he saw bodies of women and children, gray-haired old people, but no young men, no Viet Cong soldiers. The smell of death and the sickness of guilt and anger

burned deeply into his soul. A hundred ghosts from Vietnam tugged at the sleeves of his memory every day.

He lurched down the hall into the bathroom. Cold water on his face helped him feel more human. He poured a glass of water from the pitcher and washed the dark brown taste out of his mouth.

He went back through the living room and opened the balcony door. On the soot-encrusted veranda, he squinted into the new day, the sun shining through the gray smog. Sunlight warmed his cheeks as he looked down at the small, grass- and mud-covered courtyard and the red tile roof of the dining hall. The sweet, suffocating smoke of countless coal fires cooking morning breakfast filled his lungs and made him cough.

Out in the streets, dozens of elderly Chinese citizens would be doing their morning Tai Chi-like calisthenics—all the original spirit of the moves forgotten during years of atheist propaganda. In dozens of kitchens, women would be preparing tea, rice, and sour pickles for breakfast.

He heard the key rattle in the front door and the squeak it made when it opened behind him. He pulled the bathroom door closed. It would be the woman delivering the daily thermos of boiled water for his tea. She never knocked on the door. A minute later as he dressed, he heard the bang of the door closing again.

When he had eaten his breakfast of creamy peach yogurt and baodzes—sticky steamed buns with a dab of almond paste in them—he stepped out the front door and met Tyson Bates, his neighbor on the second floor. Ty lived with his parents who taught conversational English while he studied Chinese language and history here at Shaanxi Teachers University. He stood a lanky, medium height in his cowboy boots, had curly brown hair, gray eyes, a tan face, and a Roman nose. He wore a red checkered shirt,

blue jeans, and smelled of Old Spice. They had kept to themselves, and Dan did not know them well yet.

“Did you go on the outing for foreigners yesterday?” Dan asked. “I had to miss it because of a class.”

“Skipped it. Once you’ve seen a dozen Imperial Tombs, the excitement seems to wear off a bit,” Ty grinned. “Guess I’m more interested in the living than the dead. It’s a drag to spend the party-time of my life in China. They’re as repressed here as the folks back in my hometown. They don’t know what fun is. I could as well have stayed in Plainfield, Texas.”

“Lust and wild parties what you want? You came to the wrong country.” Dan smiled. “But I’ve heard that there are places foreign students go dancing, like at the Highway Institute.”

“Parents don’t let me go dancing,” Ty’s shoulders drooped. “Temptations of Satan and all that bull. A Baptist family must be my karmic punishment for a parade of sinful past lives. At least I hope that’s the reason. I’d like to know I once had some fun, even if I can’t remember it ’cause it was in a past life.”

“Christianity and karma?” Dan laughed. “I’m not sure I understand your religious beliefs.”

“Me neither.” Ty grinned. “Say, I hear you know a lot about Chinese culture. Do you understand the *Tao Te Ching*?”

“A bit.” Dan recognized the same search for identity he himself was still struggling with.

“Could you explain what it means when it says, ‘When all the world recognizes beauty as beauty, this in itself is ugliness. When all the world recognizes good as good, this in itself is evil’?”

“That has to do with correlative terms.” Dan heard voices coming up the staircase. “There can’t be ugliness except by contrast with beauty, so ugliness doesn’t exist until—”

Ty's parents came charging up the stairs. They were both short, blond, and obese. Mrs. Bates led the way clutching an inch-thick stack of money.

"Aah, payday." Dan pounded the wall with the edge of his fist.

Mrs. Bates came to a sudden halt and stared at Dan, mouth agape, panting.

"Oh, sorry," Dan said. "Didn't mean to startle you. I'm just angry at Wu. I just remembered I'll have to see Wu to get paid. I hate to deal with him."

"Having problems with Wu? Aren't we all?" Mrs. Bates straightened her dress and patted her hair. "What's your problem?"

"Don't mean to bother you about it. But . . . he was supposed to pay for my flight over here. He hasn't reimbursed me yet—after seven months—and I can't afford to buy a ticket home until he pays me what he owes me. Sorry for pounding on the wall."

"I know the feeling," Mr. Bates mumbled.

"We've had the same problem too," Mrs. Bates said. "The man's a liar. Tells you he'll pay for your ticket and doesn't. And you can't buy a foreign flight with Chinese money, and they don't take credit cards in China. So, you need dollars."

"Exactly." Dan felt better to know he wasn't alone. "And the book on teaching in China says we should get ten percent of our pay in dollars each month. But Wu didn't put it in the contract he sent me. He keeps making excuses. I know it may all be a misunderstanding. My friend, Professor Gao Baima, insists that it's just the Chinese system. He says Wu will pay the money when I need it—"

"Don't count on it," Mrs. Bates said.

"Well, Gao told me it's just that in China, everyone has to get permission from his superiors to get anything done. And those

superiors have to kowtow to their superiors and present small gifts—”

“Bribes,” Mrs. Bates interjected.

“And so on up the ladder. Everyone along the way has the power to say ‘no,’ but no one has the power to say ‘yes’ without approval from higher up.”

“Right,” Mrs. Bates said. “He did the same to us, but we put our foot down, had him rewrite the contract, and he paid us what he owed us.”

Dan bit his lip on hearing that they had gotten their money. He had to practice his Buddhist wisdom to control his anger. A few deep breaths.

He needed a walk to clear his head and to consider what to do about Wu. He hadn’t walked on the city wall since autumn. He got on a bus for downtown, pushing and shoving with the rest of the crowd to get a place standing in the middle with several bodies pressed against his own. A head taller than most people on the bus, he could breathe above the cloud of garlic fumes.

Dan got off at the Ming Dynasty city wall and climbed the worn stone steps to the top. He walked a half-mile before he could get his frustration for Wu out of his mind. Thinking about history was always a good escape from the grief of worldly troubles. He admired how the wall encircled the center of the city. It was seven miles long with four major gates and ninety-eight defense towers. Above drab contemporary buildings, he could see the blue roof of the ancient Drum Tower, and at the center of the city, the three-story Bell Tower, each story with its own green-tiled roof.

Xi’an had been the capital of China for so much of its history, which was the reason Dan had been eager to teach here. His love of literature and history had drawn him to the ancient heart of

China. Dan had been awed by the army of Terracotta Warriors, just outside the city, that protected the tomb of the Qin Emperor. He had unified China and made Xi'an his capital. To the south, Dan saw the top of the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, where the first Buddhist manuscripts had been brought from India. Xi'an, once called Chang-an, had been the terminus of the Silk Road to the Roman Empire and capital of eleven of China's most important dynasties. All around Dan were imperial tombs and famous temples. Dan had been so excited to be in the center of it.

It depressed him that the luster of its ancient glory had been dimmed by the smog of chemical factories, inefficient toxic fume-spouting "one ox" diesel tractors, yellow smoke from half a million cooking stoves that burned cheap, soft coal, and glacial loess dust kicked up in clouds by busses and trucks.

Dan didn't like the view from the wall to the north of the ugly flat-roofed four to six story concrete socialist style buildings. They hid the shorter, more attractive older gray-brick houses with sloping red-tiled roofs.

The view to the south of grassy slopes plunging into the old water-filled moat was spoiled by the cacophony of trucks, busses and tractors weaving among the hordes of bicyclists on the main street on the other side of the moat. Dan smelled the diesel fumes even on the wall.

Dan thought of one of the many ancient poetic references to the city—Du Fu's *Autumn Meditation*:

“. . . Chang-An looks like a chessboard.

Won and lost for a hundred years, sad beyond all telling.”

That was an understatement. It had been won and lost for three thousand years. Ironically, Xi'an means “western peace.” It seemed lost in its cloud of pollution.

Dan walked another mile, turning the corner toward the north and turned back so he could get to class on time. Halfway back, he met a Japanese student, Yoshiko Sato. She wore a purple and blue silk kimono with three golden chrysanthemums and a matching blue sash. She stood out like a blue morning glory on a lawn of dandelion flowers in the sea of Chinese women with their printed blouses and slacks. Her short, cropped black hair shone with glints of red in the sunlight.

Dan knew from a reference someone had made to her childhood that she must be in her late thirties, but she still looked like a rosy-cheeked, young girl.

Dan had been attracted to Yoshiko's grace and beauty for months. Sometimes she sat with the other Japanese students in the dining hall for foreign guests. Occasionally, she had caught him looking at her. Dan had talked to her and found out that she studied Chinese and interviewed local Buddhist monks for a Japanese Buddhist magazine. He thought a forty-eight-year-old Westerner had no business trying to start a relationship with a younger Japanese student, as much as he might have wanted to. After two failed marriages, he had been avoiding relationships.

Dan was about to turn away, to look over the wall as though he didn't see her, but she glanced at him, and her wide-set brown eyes met his, and she looked down modestly. He couldn't ignore her now. He walked toward her.

"Miss Sato. How are you?" Dan stopped and bowed his head slightly. He spoke in Chinese. "A beautiful day for a walk. You're very dressed up today. What's the special occasion?"

Yoshiko bowed back. "So beautiful. Yes. Professor Norton. I am coming back from taking photos with Buddhist monks at a monastery. How are you?"

He hadn't been out with a woman in five years, since his second divorce. He could ask her out to dinner, but it didn't feel right. "I'll be on the university outing to Hua Ching Hot Spring tomorrow. Will I have the pleasure of seeing you there?" Dan smelled her orange blossom perfume.

Yoshiko blushed. "Hua Ching Hot Spring . . . so beautiful. I wanted to go. But the trip has been canceled."

"Canceled? I didn't know that. Why?"

"The radio reported that Hu Yaobang died . . . three days ago. I just talked to Mr. Wu. He's worried that there will be big trouble." She looked down meekly.

Dan wondered, why cancel the trip? "Hu Yaobang? Former Secretary of the Communist Party? But why would there be trouble?"

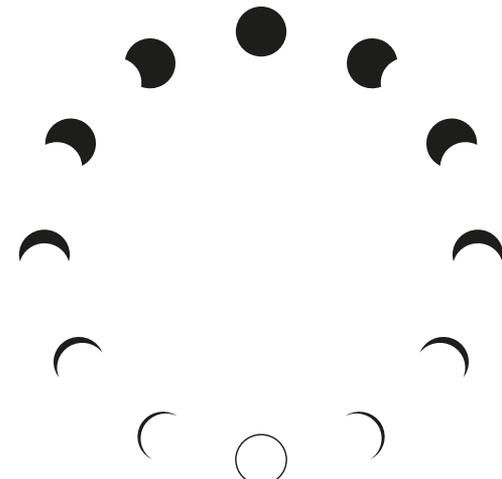
"I don't know. I'm so sorry." They both stood silently for a moment.

He considered a restaurant he could ask her to. The Golden Flower Restaurant, but that was way across town. Maybe the Jiaodze Restaurant. Or the . . .

"So nice to see you." She bowed and walked past him.

Dan bowed his head slightly. Her perfume lingered. She was slipping away because he had hesitated. She smiled at a crowd of schoolgirls who giggled at her kimono, hands over mouths. Opportunity lost.

"Sayonara," he mumbled.



HE WHO DIED
SHOULD NOT HAVE

APRIL 20

AS DAN ENTERED THE FOREIGN GUESTS' DINING hall, he thought about the posters he had heard were going up all over campus criticizing the government. That was how other serious political movements had started in China; "big poster" campaigns.

In the hall, bright lavender and chartreuse crepe decorated with paper Easter bunnies, multi-colored eggs, and flowers, a bit bedraggled now, still hung from the white concrete walls. Chinese students had made them for the foreigners. The Chinese loved any excuse for a celebration, even the Western holidays. Now the students would turn their creative energies from Easter decorations to political posters. He hadn't seen any posters yet and wanted to ask someone about them.

Perhaps it was just another Chinese rumor.

The Australian Physics professor, his wife, daughter, and son sat at one table. Dan often joined them, but they were almost finished. The head of a whole fish stared up from a platter. Five Japanese students sat at another table. He remembered Yoshiko's orange blossom perfume. She wasn't there. The strength of his disappointment surprised him.

Beyond the Japanese students, three American students devoured lotus root, pork, and cabbage cooked with star anise and pepper, and peanut chicken with rice. Ty Bates, in his cowboy shirt and boots, drank *qi shui*—what passed as orange soda in China. The other two—freckle-faced Susan, who had had a runny nose and cough for six straight months, probably from the polluted air, and Ed, who looked like Mr. Spock of Star Trek fame except that he was balding in the back—both drank beer. Ty waved for Dan to join them.

Dan asked, “No jiaodzes or noodles today?”

They shook their heads. He loved jiaodzes—steamed or fried dumplings with various meats or vegetables in them, usually pork and cabbage.

The famous Jiaodze Restaurant in downtown Xi'an served two hundred varieties of jiaodzes, each in the shape of its ingredients: pork in the shape of a pig, chicken in the shape of a chicken, cat in the shape of a cat, and so on.

Dan ordered what the students were eating, plus a beer, and sat down with them.

“Your parents aren't eating with us tonight?” he asked Ty.

“They're explaining Christianity to a group of students at the Clock and Watch School. They'll eat there.” Ty deftly scooped a ball of rice and cabbage into his mouth with his chopsticks.

“I’ve never known your parents to miss a meal here,” Dan said. “Even after the disaster with the Thanksgiving turkey.”

Ed, Susan, and Dan roared with laughter, and even Ty managed one chortle.

Ty’s mother had gone to incredible lengths to get a whole turkey and wanted to cook it herself, but the cooks, Ding and Ting, wouldn’t let her in the kitchen. Ding threatened to quit over the incident. The turkey arrived alive, so she told them they would have to cure it by hanging it up to let the blood drain, then soak it in saltwater. She gave them elaborate instructions on how to prepare and serve it. Instead of curing it, they slaughtered it, roasted it fresh, sliced it up with the bones cut willy-nilly so every bite was loaded with bone splinters, and served it the Chinese way, with the head and feet on the platter.

“Your mother should learn a bit of Chinese,” Susan coughed.

Ty shrugged his shoulders, glum as a hound dog. “It was the toughest, stringiest bird I ever tasted. And the yams, string beans, and potatoes were all cut up and stir-fried with garlic and Peking peppers. That can of cranberry sauce—she had to pay the airline extra for her bag being just over the weight limit because of it—was a pretty lonely reminder of Thanksgiving.”

Susan chuckled. “I think Ding and Ting matched that this week with the birthday cake.”

“Another episode in her eternal and doomed struggle with the cooks,” Ty said.

Mrs. Bates had invited several students for Ty’s birthday and had given Ding and Ting the recipe for an American cake. It came out looking like Betty Crocker herself couldn’t have done better. Yellow frosting with Ty’s name done in blue, spelled correctly and all. Little blue candles Mrs. Bates had brought from home.

“That woman thinks of everything,” Dan said.

“Ding and Ting had just about made up for the turkey,” Susan said, “until the guests tasted the cake. Someone had put salt in the frosting instead of sugar.” Susan laughed and coughed.

“My mother should give up trying to eat like an American while she’s in China,” Ty said. “She’ll never get the cooks to make it her way. They always botch it up.”

“The Chinese have developed cooking to a high art for thousands of years. And Ding and Ting are excellent cooks.” Dan frowned. “Imagine trying to tell a gourmet French chef he should cook like you do at home. I doubt if the salt in the frosting was a mistake.”

They all sat and stared glumly at their plates for a moment.

Dan brought up the issue that he thought would be on everyone’s mind.

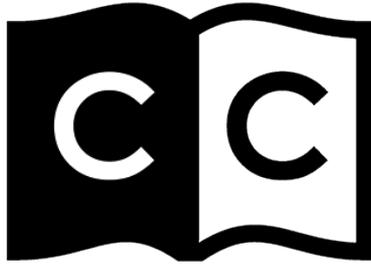
“I’ve read about the big poster campaigns, like at the Democracy Wall ten years ago, and now posters are appearing right here in our university.” He dipped his chopsticks into his cabbage. “But I haven’t seen any posters yet.”

“Every major political event in China starts with posters,” Ed said. “That’s how the pro-democracy demonstrations in ’86 to ’87 began.”

“But they were put down quickly enough,” Susan sniffed.

“Tell me what’s happening,” Ty said. “I haven’t seen any posters either.”

“Hu Yaobang, the former Communist Party Secretary, died on April 15, and the government didn’t announce it until the 18th.” Dan had gotten the story from his friend Gao. “He’s the one who was ousted for encouraging reform and failing to crack down on the student demonstrations.”



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HE THOUGHT HIS MOST DIFFICULT MORAL CHOICES WERE BEHIND HIM. THEN HIS STUDENTS CROSSED THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT.

In mid-April 1989, in the days leading up to the infamous Tiananmen Square Massacre, former US Marine Dan Norton was finishing up his year as a professor at Shaanxi Teachers University. Little did he know that in two weeks' time, he would be sought out by the police under threat of Chinese prison. Accused of engaging in espionage and harboring a fugitive, Dan struggles to balance his military training with his newfound Buddhist practice. Should he bow out of this fight by returning to America—or risk his life by standing with his students?

Meanwhile, university students Song Yingying and her boyfriend Gao Mingyue both disobey their fathers' strict orders to avoid all political activity. Their secret poster campaigns swiftly escalate, and before they know it they're leading demonstrations, too. Can they bring about change without losing their lives?



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