

From *Donald Duk*
by Frank Chin

Donald Duk's heart thumps hard and fast. So hard he feels every thump inside his chest. It beats so hard it is hard to breathe. He is quiet as he can be, climbing the stairs off the roof into the building again and slipping into his dark apartment.

No one is up in the front room watching the TV. No one is up using the bathroom. No lights on. Nothing has changed since he left with the little P-26A. Donald Duk steps one silent step after the other into his apartment and past the doors to the front room and the dining room. He shines his flashlight in to see if the room looks that much different with one little plane gone. His light hits a face!

"Where's my Lee Kuey?"

"Uncle Donald!"

"What did you do with my Black Toronado?"

"What?" Donald Duk doesn't ask if he means the American Cong on the roof. Already Donald Duk is keeping the American Cong secret.

"My airplane! I saw you climb on a chair and take it down."

"I didn't see you."

"I didn't want you to."

"You won't tell Dad, will ya?" Donald Duk asks his Uncle Donald Duk in his nicest, most sincere voice.

A faint light soaks through the thin curtains in the front room and stains the darkness with a sickly glow. Donald can now see a little by this dead light. Donald wants his eyes to take more time getting used to the dark. His uncle is not moved by a sweet voice, a polite manner. The old man's black eyes glower. Donald Duk does not want those eyes to see him and steps back.

"Your Baba is like my little son. You want me to help you lie to your father?"

"Not a lie. It won't hurt him."

"You burned his Black Tornado."

"He won't miss it. He'll think...it got lost."

"You don't know the 108 heroes of *The Water Margin*, do you?" Uncle Donald says, smiling and glowering at the same time.

"What do you mean?"

Uncle Donald Duk leans back in his chair and laughs low enough not to wake anyone sleeping in the rooms down the hall. "The Water Margin is a place in China, kid. It's a huge swamp and marshland about the size of Rhode Island. It's kind of like the Okefenokee or the Everglades. You ever hear about those places, kid? I don't see any recognition light up in your eyes."

"Recognition?"

"You ask your teachers about the Okefenokee in Georgia and the Everglades in Florida. Ask them about what they call the Seminole Indians. Ha ha ha." Donald Duk is a large pudgy man. He wears a beard that is neither short nor long. "How can I tell you about The Water Margin if you don't know nothing? Hmm. Do you know the story of Robin Hood? Maybe you seen the movie with the star Errol Flynn. They show it all the time on the Disney Channel. I know you get cable TV, so you can watch the movie even if you have never seen it before. That movie was made before your daddy was born, and still you can see it, good as new. Shortcut to history."

"I know Robin Hood. Everybody's talking about Robin Hood these days."

"Good for you. So you know what Sherwood Forest is, right?"

"That's where the good farmers and Robin Hood hide out and become the Merry Men, who rob from the rich and give to the poor."

"Yeah. The Water Margin was a place like that. In the middle of the swamp there's a mountain. Mount Leongshan. Bad government just like in *Robin Hood*. Bad guys in charge of the works. All the good guys who want better government are badmouthed by the guys in charge, and they go outlaw and hide out or get killed. Just like Robin Hood. But in the Chinese book, there are 108 Robin Hoods. They all lead gangs that have hideouts all over, and they all come together in one super gang and build a city of outlaws and huge stronghold on Mount Leongshan, in the middle of the Water Margin. Every Chinese boy and girls knows those 108 Robin Hoods like you know Robin Hood and his Merry Men, Little John, Friar Tuck and all them guys.

“One of those 108 Chinese Robin Hoods is a hood name of Lee Kuey. Nickname: the Black Tornado. His skin is so what they call ruddy they call Lee Kuey black. He is not too smart. He gets mad very easily. When he gets very mad, he takes off all his clothes. He goes naked and runs into a fight with a thirty-pound battle-axe in each hand. He loves to fight and kill people. When he runs out of the other side of a battle, his body is covered with layers of other people’s drying blood. Kind of sickening, huh? But he’s got principles. Ha ha!” Uncle Donald Duk laughs, catching the look on little Donald Duk’s face. He laughs again.

“Here’s a flash for you, kid. I know how that snooty private school you go to has pulled the guts out of you and turned you into some kind of engineer of hate for everything Chinese, but your real name is your Chinese name. And your Chinese name is not Duk, but Lee. Lee, just like Lee Kuey. I myself have performed the role of the fierce and terrifying Black Tornado many times on the stage of the Cantonese opera. I myself made that plane you stole to fly and burn all by your selfish little self over Chinatown. Now you ask me to keep it secret. You think your daddy won’t notice one little plane is missing from his dining room sky? Ha! He will notice it! He will expect me to get red in the face and demand some explanation.”

Uncle Donald stares a hole through little Donald Duk faster than little Donald can dodge. “I don’t need any explanation from you. You hate your name. You blame every Chinese who ever lived, everything Chinese you ever heard of for the way white kids act like fools when they hear your most famous ancestor is one bloodthirsty homicidal maniac.

“Hey, I’ll tell you this much, kid. There are stories in *The Water Margin* about our ancestor that will hit you like a kick in the stomach and make you sick! I can tell them to you, but I don’t want to give you bad dreams.”

“I already have bad dreams.”

“Bad dreams! About what, kid?” Uncle Donald Duk asks, and Donald might be dreaming this. Donald Duk has been here before. He is no longer afraid. The plane is a long long time ago. “The old railroad,” he says. “I like trains. I always liked trains.”

“Your great-great-grandfather was the first of our Lees to come over from China. He worked on the Central Pacific when it went east over the Sierra and on to Promontory.” Uncle Donald stops and sighs. “Did you ever see that old photograph of the Golden Spike Ceremony, where the C. P. Huntington and the Jupiter are cowcatcher to cowcatcher?”

“Yeah. People all over the locomotives waving their hats...”

“Did you ever wonder why there are no Chinese in that picture? Your great-great-granddaddy and lots of other Chinese were there. So why don’t you find a picture of your great-great-granddaddy there? But here in this old railroad book of your daddy’s...” He opens a book and says, “Go ahead, turn on the light, kid.”

It is a winter scene. Chinese with ling-handled shovels, sledgehammers and pickaxes stand in the snow. Black pants. Black *minop* jackets. Black flat-brimmed, crowned hats. Black work boots. A white gang foreman on horseback wears a high-crowned, rolled, brimmed hat and a puffy hairy fur coat. Uncle Donald Duk points to a smiling Chinese face in the photo. “Look at how young we were when we came to build the railroad. Look at that kid. He’s on foot in the snow, and smiling. He can’t be more than sixteen. Your great-great-granddaddy was even younger than that. More like your age, kid. How old are you now? Eleven? Twelve?”

Donald Duk has never seen this book before. He has never seen this old photograph before. He has been there. His feet say so. He recognizes the snow. It is the first winter the Chinese will spend in the mountains. Donald turns to go to his room and continue into the dream he knows is waiting for him. Uncle Donald’s voice emerges inside Donald Duk’s mood. “Just a minute. Tomorrow. You will tell your father what you did with the little plane. And you will offer to build the replacement in time for the flying and burning of all 108 off Angel Island. Your daddy will ask my permission, since I built the model in the first place. Of course, I will say it is okay with me.”