

Larry:           We spend half our lives  
cheering ourselves up,  
and the other half  
bringing ourselves down,  
so what does it matter  
if I stay here for a year, and  
you return to dear old England  
with Hu-Chi?

We're all a mixture of humour  
and horror wherever we are,  
whatever we do.

I need this chance to see.

The arrangement had been made.

Larry and Hu-Chi had agreed to swap  
places for a year.

A Chinese culture for a Western one, and a Western one  
for a Chinese one.

They were all three: Larry, Sandy and Hu-Chi, seated on the floor of Hu-Chi's hillside stone hut, a few hundred yards above the riverside village.

They sat in silence.

Sandy rose, and came over to Larry.

She embraced him and kissed him on the cheek.

Sandy:           Twelve months then.

She went outside.

Moments later, Hu-Chi appeared in Larry's clothes.

Sandy:           Larry?

Hu-Chi smiled, and shook his head.

Hu-Chi:        No, I am Hu-Chi.

Sandy smiled, and saw Larry emerge, wearing Hu-Chi's clothes, such as they were: simple cotton shorts, and shirt, and rope sandals.

Larry:        Me voila. (indicating Hu-Chi)  
                 Isn't it amazing?

They strolled back towards the village.

Larry left Sandy and Hu-Chi with a wave,  
and a smile.

Sandy and Hu-Chi descended into the peapod boat, and the tour continued, concluding with the return to the cruise liner, for the evening meal.

In their cabin, Sandy wondered if Hu-Chi could cope. She had just shown him how to use the toilet; that had been an exercise in mime, but he seemed to twig everything quite quickly.

Sandy:            Thank goodness that's over with,  
thinks Sandy.

There were two beds in the cabin.

Hu-Chi:          It is all right. You can trust me.  
I will not intrude upon you.

Sandy:            No, I know you won't.

Hu-Chi:          I do not wish to behave like your husband.

Sandy:            That's quite OK. You see, my husband  
has not intruded upon me

for years anyway.

Hu-Chi looked thoughtful for a moment, then a huge grin crossed his face.

Hu-Chi:           Good.

                      Then everything is easier.

Sandy: (thinks) How will he cope?

                      This is a 5-star liner.

                      We're going to have to go down for  
                      dinner.

                      Still, not that that means much these days.

                      Most of the guests arrive in shorts.

                      Oh, it'll be all right.

                      This guy seems bright.

                      I shall guide him.

Hu-Chi was seated at the cabin's picture window,

watching the bank of the Yangtse drift by,  
with its endless display of life:  
boats, crewmen, cattle grazing,  
houses on the hillsides.

Hu-Chi:        I am leaving.  
                  I am happy.  
                  Goodbye for now.  
                  Goodbye for now.  
                  All that I love.  
                  I will return, but I need to go.  
                  I need to see.

## CRISIS: STEP 1

The first night and morning were terrifying for  
Larry.

His nerve weakened.

The hut was one room.

He slept in one corner,

ate in another,

sat in a third,

and walked about the fourth.

Outside, there was a garden and wall.

They were both in a decrepit state,

but offered a little further semi-privacy.

His first step had begun.

After he had said goodbye to Sandy and Hu-Chi, he had returned to the hut, not wishing to encounter the villagers more than was necessary.

Hu-Chi had explained that he, Hu-Chi, was seen in the village as a kind of shaman.

He lived in silence, never speaking to anyone, only looking at people with a holy gaze.

The villagers had for many years respected this, and they left food for him every day.

So, for Larry, the opportunity offered was practical. He would not have been able to stay with the village otherwise.

Although he intended going into the wilderness of the mountains for long periods, he was not yet ready, and was glad to be able to acclimatise.

So, in the evening, he settled into the hut, and watched through a window that was simply a square hole in the wall.

At first, he was relaxed. He felt bemused with himself that he had taken this plunge with Sandy's help, and of course Hu-Chi's. The air was warm.

The light faded. The deep black of the sky showed many stars. This was exciting. He was going to be all right. Now he could begin. He could empty his mind.

He could, just for a while, a prescribed twelve months, leave everyone, and everything. Life had been a bombardment of influences and knowledge. Clear it all away, just for once in life, if only for a short while, and see what can be found.

He devised a rota-poem, with which he gave love to all his family and friends, and God, and the Rulers of the World, and then, as it were, lay them aside to ponder on the white sheet of his mind.

Deep in his midnight meditation, there came a sound behind him. A breathing. A movement. He opened his eyes, and his heart went cold.

He stood and went to the door which was a crude wooden thing, with a string latch

. He listened again, but the sound was inside the hut.

He went to the window, and leaned out.

There seemed to be everything out there. Every living thing, every star shone on the place, every leaf on every bush and tree shook as if in a great storm.

Then his mind snapped, and he was thrust back into the hut.

He crouched in a corner.

He was sweating.

Stillness returned.

Then, in the wall came two large blazing eyes.

Larry closed his own.

In the morning, he awoke to the sounds of the birds,  
and he enjoyed them.

There were sweet scents in the air.

Everything was musical and pictorial.

He scrambled to his feet, and went into the  
garden.

Larry:           Yes. Yes. I am here.

                  And this is gorgeous.

There was a freshwater stream at one corner of the  
garden. Its water trickled merrily from the hills and  
mountains above him.

It was only after he had washed that he began to  
recall the disturbances of the night.

He shrugged his shoulders.

Oh well, he thought, there's bound to  
be a few demon-nights. I may as well get used to them.

## RETURN TO SOCIETY

Customs proved no problem .

Sandy had instructed Hu-Chi not to say a word.

The taxi ride from the airport proved bewildering to Hu-Chi.

He had never seen more than about fifty people in his whole life.

The aeroplane had stunned him. But he had coped very well.

He kept relaxed, and enjoyed everything.

But, of course, to him it was unbelievable that this giant metal tube could ever leave the ground.

Their return was gradual.

They spent a few days in the London house.

Then Sandy drove them up to the country retreat.

The M 11 fascinated Hu-Chi most of all.

These boxes on wheels hurtling along.

Where were they going?

He loved the countryside.

Sandy was glad it was a sunny day to show everything at its best.

Food had troubled Hu-Chi very little, and he seemed to be enjoying his sojourn in Western Culture.

Sandy was surprised, but relieved at his adaptability.

She liked her new husband.

He was kind and quiet. He was sensible.

He was bright.

In fact, he was rather nice.

The problem of other people did not worry Sandy.

The last few years, she and Larry had lost most of their friends through death. And it was a joke between them that nobody spoke to anybody in England.

## CRISIS: STEP 2

Larry found his food delivered every morning.

He had seen a young woman bring it, but had not shown himself.

They thought he was Hu-Chi.

Once, he caught sight of an old woman leaving his ration.

The weeks passed, and he was settling well.

His first uncertain nights, and madness days, had abated, and as he went on, he felt he would never want the company of other people ever again.

Larry: (thinks)

Good. I shall be all right. I shall find the peace I want.

I'll probably not want to return with Sandy.

He had divided his days up into waking, then  
contemplating, then various strolls around the upper areas  
of the village.

He had cautiously wandered through the village a few  
times, on his way to somewhere else.

People had nodded to him, and he had planted a benign  
smile upon his face.

It all seemed to work well.

It really was a very beautiful place.

He soon discovered favourite spots.

A rocky top to a waterfall.

A clearing of stones, amongst luscious palm trees.

A view over a valley of staggering grandeur.

He thrilled to the colours.

If only he could be a poet, and describe the impact of  
these purples, violets,  
emerald greens, ruby reds and sunny yellows.

Instead he could only gaze  
and wonder.

Birds were everywhere. Tiny humming birds whispered to flower bells.

Parrots and toucans croaked amongst the branches of some enormous trees.

Larry's favourites were those eagles that glided from their rocky summits.

They were huge, graceful, as they silently swept through the sky, surrounding their nests.

He wanted to climb and inspect their homes, but he never could.

They were too far away.

So he watched these masters of the air in awe.

These giants had none of his troubled mind.

They were free, as they floated against the blue and white sky.

It was another lovely day when Larry made his discovery.

He had at first wondered if he should keep a count of the days.

He thought of notching his hut's walls, but decided not to, as he knew he would confuse them.

On this day, he strolled, around mid-day, through a forested area in the mountains, some way behind his hut.

He had learned many of the strange sounds by now, and so was struck by a new sound.

He looked where he thought it was coming from.

At first, he had thought it was a hissing sound from some snake, or cricket.

But he changed his mind, as he realised it was more of a sighing noise.

Then the noise itself changed, and became a sob.

He felt he was very near to the source.

He pulled a bush aside, and there was a small boy, crushed it seemed to the ground.

The boy had wrapped his feet under him, and clutched his frame with his arms. He was shaking, and looked extremely cold.

Larry towered over the boy. He wondered what could have happened to him.

Perhaps wandering alone last night, he had fallen and hurt his ankle and had had to stay there.

The boy looked up, and shrank back when he saw the tall figure above him.

Larry smiled and stretched out his hand.

He reminded himself not to speak.

But to use gesture and expression only.

Larry cleared the ground, and got the boy to sit upright.

Larry had a light cloak of cotton cloth that he removed and wrapped around his young find.

Some investigation showed Larry that the boy's foot was indeed hurt. He would have to be carried down to the village.

The boy was small and Larry felt up to the task.

The boy protested at first, rather like a frightened bird, but once Larry had successfully lifted the boy, the latter smiled and let his head fall back.

Unconscious, thought Larry.

It took some time to descend through the forested slopes, but Larry rested on several occasions.

When he did, he considered the reactions of the villagers, when he would appear with his bundle.

He was soon to discover.

For when he did wander into the first streets, women came running.

They were smiling and laughing, but they had been crying too.

The boy's mother had been in a terrible state all night.

As had friends and neighbours.

They had all feared the worst.

The men had been searching.

Now, suddenly the shaman had brought home their treasure, and all would be well.

They babbled and blubbered, and Larry allowed them .

He would have been quite glad to hand over the boy, and resume his day's walk, but that was not to be.

No, Larry had to be taken to the mother with the boy.

Larry it seemed had to be thanked.

He had to eat with them.

He had to listen to their joyous cries.

The afternoon passed in a party atmosphere. Dancing and music.

The little boy himself appeared, with his foot neatly bandaged. He had been washed, and dressed in fresh clothes. He was very sweet to Larry. This rather confounded Larry. But he accepted.

By early evening, people arrived with gifts for Larry.

Clothes, food, drink, even furniture.

He was not keen to accept, but agreed to a general parade with all the articles up to his hut, where everything could be installed.

*SETTLING IN*

It didn't take long for Hu-Chi to settle into his life in Britain.

Within a few months, Sandy had taught him how to drive, and he had even taught himself how to ride Larry's motorbike.

It was a great day for Hu-Chi when he did the journey to London on the bike.

Hu-Chi:           I have swapped the Yangtse for the M11.

This seemed to give him a great sense of achievement.

And so it should.

A greater contrast could not be imagined.

The sedate glide of the Yangtse, and the screaming speed of the Motorway.

Sandy soon trained Hu-Chi to do Larry's work in the company

This consisted mainly in operating the accounts of clients on the computer.

Hu-Chi was again pleased with himself.

Their life together became contented.

**CRISIS: STEP THREE**

After his social triumph, Larry, though pleased, felt wary that things were beginning to happen here, as they had back home.

Attachments were being formed.

Though by no means a nuisance, the boy he had saved had started visiting.

He had also brought other children.

They came to play in his garden, and to look at him.

He liked children. He always wished he could have had

But the boy and his friends were beginning to upset his plans.

Never mind. Perhaps this is a good time to split from the village for a few weeks, and go to the upper reaches of the mountains.

He planned his trip carefully.

He gathered extra clothing, and packaged them.

He saved food and water.

He started a preparatory series of meditations that he would time for his departure.

He wanted his mind to be clear, and ready for the ascent.

Naturally, he told no one.

He still did not speak.

The morning came for his expedition.

He rose very early, and gathered his travelling items.

He left the door open, so anyone could see he had gone.

This also invited anyone to use his hut,

but he knew no one would.

Up through the familiar forests he walked.

Occasionally, he turned round to look down on the village. The Yangtse flowed by the village, on its way to Shanghai, and to the East China Sea.

Its source was to the west, in the high plateau of Tibet.

Tibet.

The name Tibet made Larry feel good.

It echoed his feelings of timelessness and placelessness, that he had come to perceive here.

Mountains.

These mountains of Central China are the very backbone of the Great Blue-Green Dragon that is China itself.

A dragon of benevolence that provides livelihoods. It can punish misuse.

More than any of the other natural features, mountains seem superior to man.

And Larry had come to admire the mountains for this.

He passed the forest line, and came into the stone reaches.

There were fewer insects and birds, but still plenty of animals, goat-like creatures, and boar.

He had developed a St. Francis of Assisi approach to wild life.

He represented himself to them as like them, and not like man.

It seemed to work; both for the animals and for himself.

It was part of this emptying of the mind.

After several nights, he came to the highest points.

They were bare rock

and here he decided to find shelter.

## **FALLING IN**

Sandy wanted to visit a castle nearby that she had visited often with Larry.

She proposed the idea to Hu-Chi, and he was very interested.

Hu-Chi:       It is only right that I should want to visit English history. I have loved it all my life. It is only young compared to China, but that is, perhaps, its appeal to me.

So off they went for a Saturday afternoon drive.

Sandy was struck by the thought that days dictate what is done on them.

The drive was lovely through country lanes.

Too many people and other cars maybe, but bear up.

The castle was a stately home really, mostly 18th and 19th centuries, and possibly more interesting for that. The paintings and furniture were very fine. The grounds especially pleased Hu-Chi.

Hu-Chi:       Such beautiful greens that roll and roll,  
                   And you keep the flowers very good  
                   organised.  
                   I like them very much.  
                   They have peace, but not spirit.

Tea followed in the orangery.  
 This too was much to Hu-Chi's delight.  
 The drive home, and an evening of videos, after something to eat.  
 The garden at their own house in the country was especially colourful on this day.

Hu-Chi:       You are a woman of peace.

You do not like conflict and argument.  
All the time we are here, you shy from any  
contradiction.  
Why is that?

Sandy: I suppose I don't like rows.

Hu-Chi: Do you row with Larry?

Sandy: No, not as I can recall.

No, never

.

Hu-Chi: You should.

You would have a better life,  
if you did.

Sandy: How's that?

Hu-Chi: It would stimulate you into a life.

Why did you let me swap places

with Larry so easily?

Sandy: Because it is what he wanted

Hu-Chi: And you do not argue?

Sandy: No. I don't want to argue.

Hu-Chi: No. And that is why you do not tell him  
what you want.  
In case you argue.

Sandy: What do you mean?

Hu-Chi: Why do you not have children?

Sandy: Don't ask me that.

Hu-Chi: Can you not have them?

Sandy: I believe I can.  
I don't know any reason  
why I can't.

Hu-Chi: Is it Larry?  
Is he incapable?

Sandy: (laughs)  
Incapable?  
What a funny choice of word.  
No, I don't think he is.  
I told you, we have not had a  
physical relationship for years.

Hu-Chi: Why not?

Sandy: Just don't want to, that's all.

Hu-Chi: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be impolite.

Sandy:           That's all right.  
                      But let's go in.

## CRISIS: STEP 4

The moisture was refreshing to Larry.

He could breathe more deeply.

He could see further.

He could hear more.

Surely this climb would give him fulfilment.

He felt sure of it.

He had been nervous some of the way.

And he had slipped a couple of times, but nothing to worry about.

The mountain was not a snow-peaked Everest type.

He had seen a few yak one morning, but they had only looked at him, and had wandered on uninterested.

No, this was the place for him.

And he had found a cleft in the rock that served him very well at night.

It was warm at night

He was very comfortable.

He was ready for the peak of his crisis.

He felt it was near.

He felt happy and joyous.

He was about to know.

Any day now, or night.

He had been right to take this plunge.

How fortunate Hu-Chi had appeared round that corner.

Larry: I can see him now. I can see the corner.

I can see the sky.

Ha-ha, yes, I see myself as Hu-Chi.

And now, I am here.

I, Larry.

On this beautiful mountain.

About to receive my soul, so long hidden  
from me, by the blinding grime of modern  
life.

## LOVE'S FULFILMENT

It had been on another, quieter, evening when Sandy fell into the arms of Hu-Chi.

She had agreed with him that she did want a child, and he had agreed to make one with her.

Simple as that.

So, on any night, they conceived a child.

## CRISIS: STEP 5

And Larry waited patiently on the mountain.

Weeks dissolved into months.

He thought of giving up, and returning to the village, but each time he decided to go back, he changed his mind.

He had explored the area where he was.

There was nothing else to do, but wait.

It was on a very hot afternoon that he saw a vision.

It appeared as a golden light.

It shone over a heavy boulder.

Larry gazed at the light in ecstasy.

The light spoke.

Light:            Do not think I am outside you.  
                      I am from within you.  
                      You have struggled.  
                      I am your reward.

Larry:            Thank you. I am glad you are here.

Light:            You have overcome many difficulties.

Larry:            Now will I be able to find peace  
                      and return home?

Light:            Do not think I can do that for you.  
                      I come to warn you.

Larry:            Warn me? What of?

What can trouble me, after you?

Light: War.

War with your soul and your self.

Larry: I don't believe you.

I reject war.

Light: Of course you do,  
but it is still within you.

There will come a terrible night upon you,  
and you will have to do battle.

Larry: Tell me how.

Light: I can tell you no more.

The light on the boulder extinguishes.

Larry crumples onto his knees,  
and his face ceases to smile.

## THE BIRTH

When Sandy told Hu-Chi she was pregnant, he was overjoyed.

He did more of the work, so she could take it easy.

He went to the library to get out some books on babies.

Sandy:           Why do you want to read those?

I shall be going to the hospital  
when the time comes.

Hu-Chi:         That's all right.

I just want to know about it.

And know about it , he did.

His reading made him an authority.

Sandy was pleased that he cared.

She had been worried he might become disinterested.

But no, he was going to stand by her.