



# AS TIME APPROACHES

## 滴答滴答

【英】安德鲁·哈里森/Andrew Harrison 著



西北工业大学出版社

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【内容简介】 克里斯和米歇尔这一对恋人原本居住在英格兰，他们平淡的生活因为克里斯要远赴地球的另一边度过四星期的假期而打乱，地震、饥荒、疾病和灾难……整个世界发生了大动荡，他们该如何应对？找寻真爱与和平的道路又会有多少曲折？……

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## Preface

This novel covers a period of approximately 15 years, moving at quite a fast pace. Sometimes though, events only gradually unfold as the story progresses. This allows the reader to use their imagination and explore various interpretations of the text. Then as the reader progresses, they will see whether or not their conclusions were right. There are hints and clues throughout the novel and everything will be clear by the end. Many of these hints and clues can be found within the extracts entitled 'Watchers'. The Watchers are actually angelic beings watching over the world.

The main characters throughout are Chris and Michelle who first met at Chester University in England. They have a lot on their minds as they try to live a normal life in a world plagued by earthquakes, famine, disease and disaster. Their families and relatives are also trying to cope under the pressure of a world where peace has fled and love has grown cold.

Chapter 1 begins with Chris exiting Xi'an airport on his own, at the beginning of a four week holiday in China.

### Questions

To help foreign students of English, questions have been provided at the end of each part, to enable the students to engage with the many aspects of English language learning, such as culture, literature, formal writing, informal writing, dialogue, and different text types such as speeches, instructions and poetry, to name a few. 'As Time Approaches' contains genres such as romance, horror, mystery, humour, sarcasm, irony, suspense, history and murder. It is set in the future, but not the distant future, so it is actually set in today's world. While answering the questions or puzzling over clues, the reader will inevitably analyse the story in depth. This combination of factors is good for developing an independent and inquiring mind, the foundation of true learning and discovery.

I offer this book to you with the hope that you will enter a voyage of discovery and engage with the many mysteries of life.

ANDREW HARRISON  
October 2014

# Contents

<b>Part 1</b>	A LONG WAY FROM HOME.....	1
	CHAPTER 1 .....	3
	CHAPTER 2 .....	13
	CHAPTER 3 .....	21
<b>Part 2</b>	A STRANGE CONNECTION .....	32
	CHAPTER 4 .....	33
	CHAPTER 5 .....	37
	CHAPTER 6 .....	44
	CHAPTER 7 .....	51
<b>Part 3</b>	BLUE MURDER .....	59
	CHAPTER 8 .....	60
	CHAPTER 9 .....	65
	CHAPTER 10 .....	74
<b>Part 4</b>	A CHRISTMAS CRACKER .....	92
	CHAPTER 11 .....	93
	CHAPTER 12 .....	100
	CHAPTER 13 .....	110
<b>Part 5</b>	GETTING AN EYEFUL .....	122
	CHAPTER 14 .....	125
	CHAPTER 15 .....	132
	CHAPTER 16 .....	140
<b>Part 6</b>	SEASONS .....	152
	CHAPTER 17 .....	153
	CHAPTER 18 .....	166

CHAPTER 19 .....	175
<b>Part 7</b> SYMBOLS AND SIGNS .....	183
CHAPTER 20 .....	184
CHAPTER 21 .....	192
CHAPTER 22 .....	203
<b>Part 8</b> ADRENALINE RUSH.....	218
CHAPTER 23 .....	220
CHAPTER 24 .....	227
CHAPTER 25 .....	234
CHAPTER 26 .....	243
<b>Part 9</b> THE END OF AN ERA .....	251
CHAPTER 27 .....	252
CHAPTER 28 .....	260
CHAPTER 29 .....	271
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	283

Part 1

**A LONG WAY FROM  
HOME**



**Qujiang Park, Xi'an**

## **WATCHERS**

*Little do they know what's in store for them over the next few years. The world has experienced many things over the millennia, but here comes something new. Events will unfold that will pierce the soul of all creatures. Long has Creation endured the conflicts, greed and strife! Still, life continues to smooch into oblivion.*

*The heat will gradually increase until we see who comes out glowing from the refining fire.*



## CHAPTER 1

A young man stepped out of the airport terminal at Xi'an airport, wondering how on earth he was going to get to his hotel in the city centre. He was average height for an Englishman, but he still stood with a slouch. His hair swung over his left eye like a sort of cool pirate. This was his first visit to a hot country, and he was both apprehensive and excited at the same time. He felt a sudden blast of heat against his body.

“Can I help you?” The voice came from a young Chinese man who had seen the white foreigner looking confused.

“Err...thank you, who are you?”

“I'm a volunteer. A university student.”

“Oh, I see,” said the Englishman who was a few years older than the student. He had heard that Chinese people were friendly and helpful to visitors, so he decided to trust he was who he said he was.

“I was just wondering how to get to my hotel. It's at the Bell Tower. Do you know where that is?”

“Come this way please.” The young Englishman felt like an honoured guest. “There's a bus take you straight to Zhong Lou.”

“Sorry?” said the Englishman confused.

The university student also started to look confused, wondering why the foreigner said, 'sorry', but he had heard English people say 'thank you' a lot so thought the same must apply to 'sorry'.

The Englishman said, “Pardon, what did you say just then?”

“I'm sorry I don't understand, my English is not standard. You take the bus over here,” said the university student with a slightly embarrassed smile.

“What do I say to the bus driver? Will he understand 'Bell Tower'?”

“Zhong Lou.”

“Oh, that's what you said earlier. So, Zhong Lou is the Chinese for Bell Tower?”

“That's right. Wish you good time in China. Where you from?”

“England.”

“Beautiful country.”

“Oh! Have you been?” said the Englishman thinking he may have something in common with his Chinese companion after all. ‘I wonder which part he's been to, perhaps the Lake District,’ he thought.

“No...It's not easy for me.”

“Oh! I'm sorry to hear that. Thank you for your help anyway, you've been very helpful.”

“It's my pleasure.”

That last phrase didn't seem quite right to the Englishman, although he understood it of course. ‘I know,’ he thought, ‘We usually say ‘My pleasure’ without the ‘it's’, or ‘It's a pleasure’ without the ‘my’; or do we?’

Anyway, he thought the student's English was quite good. He could certainly communicate well enough. He wondered if all Chinese university students could speak the same level of English. This interested him because he was considering teaching English in a Chinese university in the future.

The volunteer guided him to the ‘Airport Bus’ ticket desk and did all the talking to the two shyly smiling attendants. The student got permission to sit with the young Englishman in the waiting lounge.

Just outside the waiting section, building work was under way behind partitions. Inside the waiting area, the seats were dotted with Chinese of all ages, but it wasn't too busy. There were two

wide screen TVs. A Chinese family were watching a Chinese soap on one, while a group of young men were watching football on the other. Attractive dark blue glazed pots stood on the floor at strategic points containing what looked like palm branches reaching over six feet in the air. 'Not bad,' he thought.

They sat near Gate 46 for the bus to Zhong Lou. Eventually, the doors opened and the bus parked ready to receive passengers.

"If you have any problem in China you can call me."

"Okay, thank you." The Englishman was surprised at how friendly his companion was, but he also felt a bit uncomfortable and thought, 'Surely, he's not actually going to give me his phone number!' To his surprise, the student got out his phone and gave him his number. The Englishman was a bit anxious to get on his way in case the bus left, but the student was in no hurry. Out of politeness the Englishman didn't rush him and said, "My name's Chris by the way, nice to meet you."

"My name is Wang Bin, but you can call me Waiting."

"Waiting?"

"Yes."

"Okay, well I'll be on my way." He turned to leave.

"How to spell Chris?"

"How do you spell Chris? C.H.R.I.S.," he answered, trying not to sound too brusque in his anxiety to get away.

"Have a good trip!"

'There he goes again,' thought Chris. 'I'm at the destination of my trip. Shouldn't it be, 'Have a good time'? No, that's if you're going to a party. 'Have fun!' Maybe in a metaphorical sense if we were close friends. 'All the best!' is a possibility, or just repeating, 'Nice meeting you!' Or, 'Hope it goes well!' This English teaching idea wasn't going to be as straight forward as he thought, although Chris

felt quite up for the challenge.

He boarded the bus easily and gave a quick wave back to Waiting. The cool air in the bus was wonderful. He wasn't used to air-conditioned coaches. He sat towards the back on one of the mid-blue coloured reclining seats. There was even a loo situated below a small TV screen. He wondered if anyone would actually dare to use it.

The bus filled to half its capacity before it set off. Chris wondered how he was going to work out where to get off, but then he remembered the Bell Tower was the last stop, so he didn't worry about it. He noticed the young lady sat in front of him release the back of her seat into the reclining position without checking behind her. Perhaps it was common for Chinese to do this, but he still gave a quick glance behind him before he followed suit.

Chris closed his eyes. He was very tired and the events of the last twenty four hours flicked through his brain. Ironically, this trip to China was his chance to clear his head for four weeks, not cloud it further. This break was to be a turning point in his life, or a decisive entry into adulthood. Even though he had four weeks to reflect, his brush with China and its different climate and culture had somehow awakened his senses in a way he couldn't explain. He had already heard that China was a place of contradictions. Things were moving rapidly yet at the same time everyone seemed as laid back as the lady sat in front of him. It was going to be a real culture shock. On the other hand, Chris was not used to such innocent friendliness in such a big city and found it refreshing. If the same friendliness were shown in London or another big city it would set off alarm bells. Are all Chinese like this? Or, are Chinese only friendly to foreigners?

Chris drowsed for about half an hour and woke up to the issues he had to think through on his holiday (or perhaps he should call it a retreat). He thought about Michelle his fiancée, whom he started going out with at university during his teacher training. On the surface, they seemed to be set for married life together. But he wanted to know for sure. They loved each other, without a doubt, and enjoyed being together. They even had plans for children in the future, in a secure home with Chris pursuing his teaching career. He already had a full-time teaching job lined up in Berkshire for September.

Chris remembered his holiday with Michelle in Keswick, climbing Cat Bells Fell together and looking down over Derwent Water through the mist. That moment had sealed their relationship. They both knew they wanted to spend the rest of their lives together.

Then he was reminded of something that at times felt like a brick wall between them, an insurmountable wall with no solution in sight.

\*

Meanwhile, it was morning in Winchester, England, and Chris' fiancée Michelle tried to put on her make-up. Sat up in front of the mirror in her night clothes, she ran through every moment of her relationship with Chris again and again. Should she have been different? Is she not good enough for him? Could she have been a better companion, a better girlfriend? Was it just a university romance and now she had to face the real world? But she had no contingency plans, everything she had planned involved Chris. What if he decided to break off the engagement? She was not going to let that happen! But at the end of the day she was

powerless to influence his decision. They had both agreed on this space to think things through.

'What's wrong with me, I can have anyone I want. I'm attractive, have loads of friends, I get on well with everyone....but I don't want just anyone, I want Chris! I feel so happy and secure with him. He is such a decent man but at the same time not stuffy or geeky. He's intelligent, he has strong beliefs—and arms—but he's not arrogant like other men...and I LOVE HIM!'

\*

Chris sat on his hotel bed switching the seventy or so channels. He found some news being read in English on one of the CCTV channels. He was shocked to hear the 'breaking news' about a Russian earthquake. So far, the initial death toll figures were five hundred thousand. He wondered if it was a mistake in translation. In fact he was sure it must be. They didn't seem to have any pictures available yet so he turned it off and decided to check the news again the next day. Or, if he was miraculously over his jet lag before then he would check his computer and send Michelle an email at the same time. An agitated sleep overtook him again, but it was sleep nonetheless.

\*

Michelle dried her eyes with a piece of tissue, unable to finish doing her make-up. In the bedroom mirror she could see the reflection of her whole childhood through to her tumultuous teens. She saw the cuddly toys, Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore and her favourite teddy, all with memories of their own. Her CD collection had been gathering dust while she had been at university. She was at the beginning of something new and in her

heart she saw only two possibilities: a happy life with Chris or a miserable life without him. She couldn't bear to think about option two. If she believed in a god she would pray, but she didn't believe in anything like that. She just felt lost.

Mum knocked on the door to ask if she wanted to go to the shops after lunch. She thought that was a good idea, pulled herself together, dried her eyes and added a little more make-up.

That afternoon, in her English home town of Winchester, she fell back into her teenage shopping routine she had during her High School days. She became her Mum's teenage daughter all over again, but this time a bit more polite towards her parents, meaning very stropky instead of a complete pain in the neck!

At about 3 o'clock they decided to have a coffee somewhere. They chose Dunelm. The ground floor was large and stuffed with household products. Michelle wanted to have a look round after coffee because it was her Mum's birthday in a week's time. They walked up the stairs to the second floor which was smaller and served as a balcony looking over the ground floor.

As they stood at the counter rail choosing a cake to go with their drink, Michelle began to feel dizzy and sickly. Everything appeared blurred, like a fuzzy tunnel. Her legs were turning to jelly. She saw her Dad at the counter ordering tea for two and a cappuccino, but he looked too distant to call out to. She felt her Mum's hand on her shoulder, "Are you alright?"

"No, I feel strange. I'm sorry I've got to sit down."

"I'll join you in a minute," Mum reassured her.

Dad carried the drinks and cakes on a tray over to their table. "I got you a scone, I don't know if that's what you wanted."

“That's fine Dad, thanks.”

“How are you feeling now?” asked Mum.

“Not too bad, still a little bit shaky.”

“Well, here's your cappuccino. Hope it doesn't make you feel worse.”

“It won't.”

“Maybe it's the time of the month,” Mum suggested.

“Yeah, maybe,” said Michelle knowing she was probably just stressed over Chris. ‘What if he finds someone else in China?’ she thought, but knowing he wasn't really like that.

“Did you read about the Winchester earthquake while you were at university?” Dad interjected.

“Pardon? Oh, a joke, well done Dad!” After all you don't get earthquakes in England.

“That's a myth,” said Dad knowing what she was thinking, “We just don't usually feel them. You ought to know that, being a scientist!”

“I'm not a scientist,” snapped Michelle feeling irritable. “Anyway, I studied Biology, not Earth Sciences!”

Dad got up and went to the counter to ask for some more milk for the tea.

“So how bad was the earthquake then?” asked Michelle.

“Oh not too bad, the funny thing was everyone in Winchester actually felt it.”

Michelle started to worry about Chris again. ‘What if there's a big earthquake like the one in Sichuan or the massive one a long time before that?’ she thought anxiously. Mum realised it wasn't the best topic to talk about in the circumstances so she changed the subject.

“Is Chris skyping you today?”

“I don't know. He doesn't know whether he'll be able to get



onto the internet. He said he'll either send me an email or a text somehow to arrange something.”

“It'll be a bit difficult won't it, with the time difference.”

“Yes, it's seven hours in the Summer, so I'll probably speak to him one afternoon when it's night time for him.”

Michelle thought to herself, 'Little does Mum know the torment I'm going through. I can't begin to explain it all to her, she probably wouldn't understand anyway.' Mum wondered if Michelle was ever going to open up, share her worries and actually admit she had feelings. She didn't want to push it in case Michelle thought she was interfering and she started ranting again.

Dad couldn't face the whole emotion of it, so he just went through the motions of being 'Dad', suppressing his anxiety for his daughter whom he loved deeply. He wouldn't trust any man who took an interest in her anyway. He imagined her university lover stood on a rocky mountain, an earthquake ripping it apart, huge rocks and boulders crumbling, the noise deafening, and her boyfriend screaming for dear life as he fell down into a bottomless cavern, his limbs being severed off one by one against jagged edges on descent. All that remained was a head with mouth open wide and horrified eyes staring up at him through the darkness, getting smaller and smaller until it had completely disappeared....And he hadn't even met him yet!