

Xing Shou Story

Preface:

This story was created by Tse Qigong Centre student, Caroline Forbes. It is woven around the names of the Chun Yuen Quan form, Xing Shou, and was inspired by her own practise of the Chun Yuen skills.

There is a place, a long, long way away from here where not all the people are good and kind, and where some children cry themselves to sleep. In a little wooden house in a little village full of little wooden houses lived one of these children. Her name was Lauren and she was eight years old. She had long black hair and a gerbil called Maurice.

She lived with her mother and father and, before you worry, they were as good and kind to her as any parents should be. But although they loved her dearly they were not parents who spoil her or allowed her to do as she pleased. They were the kind who laughed a lot but who meant what they said about such things as going to bed and eating your greens.

So when Lauren announced that she was not going to go back to the little wooden school at the beginning of autumn they were not amused. They said she must go and learn her lessons with the other children. They said she could play with her friends at lunchtime. They said she could join the football team. She tried to tell them that there were no children in the schoolhouse. That it was full of tigers prowling the corridors and sharks slicing through the playground. That in every chalk dust corner there were snakes coiled dozing in the sunshine just waiting to strike. That every day Lauren went to school she spent her time tip tip tiptoeing round trying to avoid the perils that lurked there. But it was to no avail. Her parents just hugged her and told her it would all be alright.

Lauren was called Lauren after Lauren Bacall, a famous film star much beloved of her mother. She had a big brother called Humprey who was as mean and fierce as his cinematic namesake. But Lauren was not bold and clever, she did not even know how to whistle. Last term she nearly got mauled by lions out playing hockey. So she was very afraid of returning to the little wooden school that was full of beasts wanting to eat her for supper. But she knew that when her parents said she must go there was no point in arguing the matter. So, instead, she packed a few belongings in a small green backpack, gave Maurice an extra bowl of peanuts and kissed him goodbye. She slipped out of the back door after breakfast and headed for the forest surrounding the little village full of little wooden houses.

'They'll be sorry when I'm gone.' Is what she thought as she slipped between the first of the tall silver birches. 'They never listen to me' is what she thought as the bracken closed over her head. 'They should have protected me.' Is what she thought as silver birch changed to tall pine and the forest thickened and darkened around her. And then Lauren swapped being afraid of the tigers and sharks in the school for the

bears and leopards she believed inhabited the forest. And she wished she hadn't been so quick to disobey her mother and father.

She walked between the pines, breathing in the sweet smell and feeling the soft crunch of her feet on pine needles. She told herself she would walk through the forest and come out on the old track to town. She told herself that she knew the way. After what felt like hours she still couldn't see any sky between the trees ahead of her and she sat down and started to cry. Which I think is what any one of us might do in Lauren's situation. When we are frightened of what we have done and how we have got ourselves to where we are.

As she cried she didn't see the monkey slipping between the trees till he was right next to her, his staff spinning in his hands and his head on one side watching her. 'What's up with you?' He asked, giving her a big surprise. She jumped up and backed into a very spiky pine tree. 'Please don't hurt me.' She cried. That was how it was with Lauren, she was always afraid of everything.

But the monkey laughed and said he would help her if she told him what was the matter. And although Lauren had been told not to speak to strange men and although she was still afraid, she told the monkey everything about the tigers in the little wooden school and the snakes and the sharks. She told him about her mother and father and how they made her go to school. She told him about Humprey and how he was fierce and she couldn't even whistle. Because after all, he was a monkey and not a strange man, and anyway, thought Lauren, what difference would it make out in the pine forest.

'Do as I do' instructed the monkey, laying his staff down by the tree. And she did as he did. Standing upright in Chun Yuen stance. Stepping forward and bringing up the Qi so it filled her chest and head and made the pine needles crackle. The monkey turned to smile at her and Lauren knew she had already stopped crying.

'Let's get the tigers first.' Said the monkey, whirling his arms round into a Taiji circle with one point directed deep into the forest. 'Yes please', said Lauren, and her green dragon tail swung round, making the forest dust fly high above her where a great golden eagle spread its wings.

And the monkey showed Lauren how to fake a kick and end up punching the ears of anyone who might be in the way. And he even tried it out on a passing rabbit, turning his body to lock its throat. Then he laughed out loud again and the rabbit just hopped on by as rabbits do.

'How will this defeat the tigers?' She asked, swinging her green tail round to face the monkey. 'This is just playing.' And she stamped her foot as eight year old girls who have run away from home are wont to do.

'Listen and learn,' scolded the monkey. 'Listen to the message of the white snake, look into the fabulous eyes of the peacock as he spreads his tail for you. Learn what you need to learn and you will be fully prepared to fight'

Around her the trees shivered in the wind. The monkey snapped his strong monkey fingers and Lauren saw a whiplash of white snake curl round a decaying log. And the crying, crying of the peacock filled the glade, its tail feathers unfurled for all the world to weep over. Then she knew she must learn from the monkey and her young eyes strained to see all the wonders of the forest.

Between the trees she caught a glimpse of something, or someone. Thinking for a moment it was her mother or father come to find her she ran headlong towards it. She saw someone, and then not. Someone there, and then they moved to one side, Tai Shan lost in the sea of tree trunks. Behind her was the monkey, ahead nothing. She sighed and looked up to see a white crane flying up into the sky, its wings bright against the forest green. For a moment it seemed to Lauren that it looked down at her and dipped one wing. Like a wave, she thought and ran after the crane. And the crane's path led Lauren deeper into the forest till she reached a little wooden hut where she took shelter, closing the back door firmly behind her.

Lauren was delighted with her new secret place. All children must have a secret place even if it is just a shoe box or a corner under the bed. A place they can go where there are no grown-ups to pry. Lauren knew how lucky she was to have this wonderful hut. Out the front she could see a silver river that ran away from her door and up into the sky. She watched the waters flowing so fast, foamy and wild and shivered with pleasure. When a great thunderstorm hit and cracked the ground, booming round her she felt so safe in her refuge that she wanted to dance. She ran outside even though it was raining and met the monkey and together they punched and kicked the air all round the hut.

Later, when the storm had passed, the white crane flew down and held its position, perched on the roof of the hut, protecting Lauren and monkey as they slept.

But secret places cannot last forever and after a little while the monkey woke up and then he woke Lauren and said, 'it's time to fly up and kick the enemy.' And when Lauren asked what he meant he said, 'It's time to go home. You cannot avoid things, you must deal with what is.'

Lauren didn't want to leave the hut by the silver river, and who can blame her. But she also wanted to be home with her mother and father. She was eight years old and this was all a difficult thing for her. The monkey took her hand and squeezed it. 'Soon you will have invincible iron fists.' He said, 'Water and fire will not pass through these fists when I have finished with you' And with that they set off through the forest, opening the bow from left and right and playing beat the tiger, which was a game the monkey invented to keep everyone's spirits high, but mostly Lauren's. And, as the trees thinned, the afternoon sun warmed down through the branches, like a golden snake spinning through Lauren's long black hair.

Finally they emerged from the forest and Lauren could look down on her little village. At the far end lay the school building, and even from the edge of the forest Lauren

could see the playground was full of tigers. Lauren shrank back against the warm fur of the monkey.

'Don't be afraid,' he sprang round her, 'remember, left hook and right stab'. And Lauren's eyes grew wide as he whirled round with his monkey fists flying into a big tornado. 'This is how you will beat and control the tiger.'

At the top of the farmer's field the monkey stopped. He would not go down to the village and must say his goodbyes to Lauren. 'Look the world in the eye, Lauren. Hold up the sky, stand firmly on the earth and what could possibly go wrong.' She begged him not to go. It was as though all her strength was leaving with him and without his help she would be devoured by the tigers and the sharks and the snakes. She pulled on his jacket, held tight onto his arm. But it was to no avail. When a monkey has to go, he has to go. But as he turned to leave he opened one paw and released a dragonfly.

'Let the dragonfly drink water and she will help you defeat the tigers.' And with that he laughed and kicked up a great ball of pine needles as he bounded back into the forest.

Lauren sat down with her small head in her small hands and felt all her lovely Qi drain out of her small brown sandals. The dragonfly flew round her head as she tried to cheer Lauren up.

'You are just a dragonfly, 'she said, 'what can you do to help me?'
The dragonfly said nothing, but her wings sang blue and red and golden and Lauren could not resist and did Fajing from the Dantian till she was on her feet and fully prepared to fight.

So she set off down the track that led to the little village and the little wooden school. She pushed her shoulders back as she walked down the main street passed all the shops. Inside her she was afraid, inside her she could see a tiger pushing the mountain, sweeping it away with a backward kick on the ground. She could see her own self in the playground being devoured by all the tigers. She faltered, stopped to look in the sweet shop window. She thought about running back, back to the little hut in the forest.

The dragonfly rested on her shoulder, its wings kissed her cheek and she turned to face the school holding the sky with both hands. The gates were getting very close now. She remembered the monkey, remembered how they had played in the thunderstorm and practised her double slaps and flying kick, practised flying to kick the enemy all along the lane that lead to her nemesis.

She could hear all the tigers now, roaring and mewing and pounding the playground. She could feel sweat breaking out on her forehead. She was only Lauren, who couldn't whistle, who ran away instead of going to school, who talked to a strange monkey when she should have gone home.

But just thinking of the monkey and all his wisdom and instruction and energy. Just thinking of the journey she had made with him stopped her fear and she went through the gates fully prepared to fight.

Except there was no fight. When she looked round there were no tigers, no sharks or snakes anywhere. There were only other boys and girls playing football or skipping or just sitting talking and laughing. And as she walked through the playground they smiled at her and she wanted to welcome them like she was welcoming the Buddha. And they ran up to her and said, 'Where were you this morning, Lauren?' And they said 'We missed you.'

When the bell finally sounded for the end of school, everyone's Qi sank gently back to their Dantian and Lauren whistled all the way home. Her mother and father had never seen her so happy and even Humphrey stopped being fierce for a moment just to grin at her. As she Shou Gonged herself to sleep to dream of monkeys and thunderstorms Lauren knew she would never be frightened of tigers again.

By Caroline Forbes
August 2008