



The Snowdancer

A Modern Tibetan Love Story

in
Three Tantric Parables

Rolf Gross

Pacific Palisades

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The **book cover** shows a thangka of a benevolent two-armed Heruka with his consort, Vajrayogini, in yab-yum, aquired in Kathmandu in 1999. This thangka (Nyingma tradition) is an exceptional depiction of the anuyoga meditational yidam, who normally has four faces and twelve arms and appears as a wrathful protector. Here he represents the Highest Bliss obtainable in anuyoga ---Heruka and his consort are perceived by the practitioner as one person.

The pair is surrounded by four dancing dakinis – notice their leg wrappings – and four wrathful Herukas in the colors of the Tantric mandala. Above them floats the highest Adhibuddha, blue with a naked, white consort, the supreme Buddha of the Tantra.

This personal meditational deity (yidam) is part of the Chakrasamvara common to all the New Schools (Sarma) of Himalayan and Tibetan Buddhism (Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu ,and Gelug). The form with one face and two hands entered Tibet with the great translator Rinchen Zangpo in the 11th century.

Richard
Active Compassion

1

Exhausted he collapsed into the dirt by the roadside. The truck with the pilgrims vanished in a brown dust cloud over the horizon. Since before dawn they had stood caged in among this cheerful, motley crowd of people while the truck had rattled on shaking them all mercilessly over the potholes of the road west. There had been no room to sit, apart from sitting on the hard floor of the truck bed would have been worse; if one stood with bent knees as far forward as possible, one could at least cushion the worst bumps. Two days ago the truck had picked them up for a small fee at the Tsangpo Ferry outside of Lhatse. The pilgrims were headed for Holy Mount Kailash, another three days west.

Somewhere in the mountains they had camped for the night. The pilgrims had huddled together in the open and had got comfortably drunk on a seemingly limitless supply of Chinese beer. They felt glad to have their small tent to themselves although it had offered little privacy. All the young girls and a few adults had crowded around them, watching the foreigners eat and go to sleep, trying to guess at their relationship. Were they married? Was his companion his girlfriend, or his daughter? Asya had got very irritated by this teasing audience observing every of her movements. "Smile!" He had told her, "if you get angry or wrinkle your brow, they will close in on you and tease you mercilessly until you cry." She complained that her face felt stuck in this grimace.

To put an end to this game he had told them that Asya was his daughter, which did not help much, and made Asya wince. He argued with a laugh, "Our age difference is large enough, it could easily be true!" They finally zipped their tent closed, and tried to find sleep despite the singing in the darkness.

Actually these people had been very kind to them. On the second day, as the novelty of their presence on the truck had worn off, and they had found that Richard spoke a funny smattering of Tibetan, they had shared their food with them and even tried to teach them their songs. Again and again the entire truck load broke into song. The songs were not rousing, rather a chanting of a short melody, stanza after stanza. Ballads he guessed, his Tibetan was too poor. One of the men apparently improvised the text or knew it by heart, he sang the stanza first and then everyone joined in its repeat.

The pilgrims came from Kham, eastern Tibet, and had been on the road for over a week. The men, good-looking, statuesque, tall, with strong faces, a thick strand of red wool wound into their long, dark hair, were a colorful, boisterous crowd. Each wore a short dagger with an intricate silver handle on his belt over a rough woolen jacket. The women looked splendid under their wide-brimmed, bowler hats like those Peruvian Indians wore only taller. They were adorned with all the family finery, silver coins sewn into their dresses, coral and necklaces of turquoise. Richard had found that as a man one had to be careful with the Kham women, they were not at all shy and thought nothing of grabbing one by the beard or between the legs. Everybody had laughed hilariously when this had happened to him. He had grabbed the woman's hand, but in ignorance of their customs had let her go at once. He smiled to himself and sat up. Asya had vanished. She must be hiding behind a rock. Her backpack was lying next to his. He looked around, but despite the complete openness of the land he could not see her anywhere. He shook his head and reminded himself that they had agreed not to worry. They would always find each other again. He was surrounded by a vast desert. Not a bush, not a tree, no grass just brown dirt strewn with small rocks extending for miles. To the north rose a chain of featureless, low, brown hills worn by wind and snow. A rutted track branched off the Kailas road and vanished up a broad valley between the hills. It led into the Chang Tang, the forbidding, empty spaces of Inner Tibet.

It was perfectly still. No wind. No birds. The earth was overwhelmed by an immaculate blue sky, from which the sun beat down, not hot but relentless. He had spent many days and nights in the deserts of Nevada, California, Arizona. The North American deserts were gardens by comparison with Tibet. It was so high here that nothing grew except short yak-grass along the ice-cold rivers. Water was not in short supply, the rivers drained the snow run-off from the higher Chang Tang. In fact, these hills were well over 6000 meters high, only because the place where he was sitting was itself over 4500 meters, did they look so timid.

He felt utterly alone, alone on the moon. He shouted at the top of his lungs "As-yaaa!", but the sound trailed off into space, it vanished into the empty sky without an echo. You could die here and nobody would ever find you, he thought, yes, but the land was so open that it seemed that you could not get lost, except in a snow storm. Where was she? She still had not come back. Had she fallen off the edge of the world? Well, he thought, all he can do is to stay here and wait. He lay down again in the dirt and closed his eyes.

He must have fallen asleep, because he was awoken by the snorting of an animal. Startled he opened his eyes and found himself in the shadow of a man, standing above him, who silently contemplated the strange foreigner while holding a horse by a rope. Richard sat up with a jerk. The horse spooked, dragging the man almost into the dirt. Cussing and shouting at the rearing and whinnying creature, holding onto the rope with all his might, the man ran after his horse. When he had struggled it down, he jumped into the saddle and rode off, soon only a speck in the field to the east.

And then he noticed Asya slowly walking across the expanse towards him.

"I had to be alone for a while," she said apologetically when she reached him. "And then I fell asleep. I am sorry to keep you waiting so long."

"I slept too," he said, "the man with the horse woke me up. Did you see him ride off into the distance? What a place! I thought there was nobody around among these forlorn rocks. One and a quarter person per square kilometer in this area; he must have been the one, the quarter would be invisible!" He laughed. "But you could at least have told me when you walked off!" Wordlessly she squatted next to him. "Where do we go from here?" she asked with a trailing voice. He rummaged in his backpack and recovered a copy of a sketchy map and the trail notes.

He read, "'Beyond Sangsang the landscape is gorgeous.' Well," he said, "gorgeous all-right, like on the moon! 'A well-used trail leads from there to the south across low Sangsang Pay La pass, 5000 meters, to the village and *chörten* of Chung Riwoche. Attempt the ascent to the pass in the morning, there is no water until you are well across the pass.' I guess we better camp somewhere here tonight, it is late. Did you see a trace of the Raga river on your wanderings? It's supposed to be close. We will need some water."

They found the river and a camp site at its bank and set up their tent. He filtered some water for drinking and heated a packaged soup, carefully rationing the gasoline he was burning in the collapsible stove.

Night came quickly and the temperature dropped as soon as the sun had set. A sharp wind started to blow from the south. They sat in the open for a while watching the stars. It was their first night alone outside the inhabited areas around Lhasa and Shigatse.

Never before had he seen a night sky like this, not above the Greek Sea, nor from the deserts of America. A myriad of stars and the Milky Way passed like a silver-belt through them. Overwhelmed by the beauty of the sky they pointed out the constellations to each other until it became too cold to sit outside. They crept into their sleeping bags and fell asleep in a wink.

He had noticed her first on the flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa. Her lithe figure, a beautiful, lively face under dark hair, and her purposeful yet smooth movements had intrigued him. Later she turned up at the Banak Shöl, the old Tibetan hotel in Lhasa, where he had settled. He had watched her for several days, and she knew it.

Most of the time she appeared withdrawn, but she could affect a ravishing smile, which she directed at him as he asked, rather formally, because her radiance confused him, whether he could sit with her at the table in the small restaurant on the roof.

Mesmerized, he thought self-consciously, that she must be thirty-five years younger than he. Her eyes, dark and cool looked at him with a sharp skepticism that belied her smile. They seemed to warn him, stay away, I am not

interested in male company. He ignored this message, and asked her where she came from.

"California" she said simply.

To upset her defenses he asked. "Who gave you your Sephardic eyes?"

Her smile vanished. It was replaced by several deep furrows on her forehead. Her eyes, less forbidding, looked puzzled at him. "What do you mean, Sephardic eyes? Nobody has ever asked me this question."

She knows nothing about her eyes, he thought, and to avoid an explanation he introduced himself. "My name is Richard, I am also from California. What is your name?"

"Asya, As-ya in Russian," she repeated, "or Assja in German." ignoring his offer of a conversation on their common origins.

"Asya?" he said, his surprise audible in his voice, "are you Russian?"

She smiled again, "No, but my grandmother was from Russia, and she insisted on that name. Do you know Russian?"

He shook his head, "Just a little to get around. But I have been in Russia several times. I am a physicist and was invited to teach in this strange country when it was still the 'evil' Soviet Union."

Her eyes looked past him, and without a warning she recited in beautiful Russian three stanzas of a poem by Tsvetaeva.

...Ras-stoyanie: versty, dali. . .

Nas raskleili, raspayali,

V dve ruki razveli, raspyav,

I ne znali, chto eto—splav

Vdokhnovenniy i sukhozhiily...

Ne rassóрили—rassóрили,

Rassloili. . .

Stena da rov.

Rasselili, nas, kak orlov—

Zagovorshchikov: versty, dali. . .

Ne rasstróили—rasteryali.

Po trushchóbam zemnykh shirot

Rassovali nas, kak sirot. . .

Happy that she had offered this piece of stark poetry, he loved Tsvetaeva, he said, "It's by Marina Tsvetaeva: For Boris Pasternak, 24 March, 1925. I once tried to put it into English. It is nearly untranslatable:"

Ripped asunder, miles, spaces. . .

We, unstuck, unsoldered

With two arms spread, crucified,

They did not know, how this fuses

Inspiration and sinews,

Traitors not—banned,

Divided. . .

by wall and ditch.

Ripped asunder, us, like eagles—

Conspirators: miles, expanses. . .

Not deranged—lost.

Into asylants on this vast earth

They made us, orphans.

Your Russian is wonderful. But how do you know this poem?"

He suddenly realized why her name had such a familiar ring to him: Asya had been Marina Tsvetaeva's devoted, younger sister. Pleased, that he had uncovered a shred of her identity, he tentatively asked. "So, you speak

Russian?"

"No, I don't really. My grandmother in her last year taught me this and a few other poems by Tsvetaeva. Grandmother wanted my name to be Marina. She insisted that I was Marina reborn. That is why I am called Asya, after Marina's sister."

"Yes, I just saw this connection. So your full name is Anastasya?"

"No, my mother insisted on Asya. Anastasya, the *Resurrected*, appeared too portentous to her and Marina too obvious. But Grandmother never completely acquiesced. You see, grandmother had been a close friend of the Tsvetaeva sisters in Moscow before she left Russia as a teenager."

This intriguing puzzle only increased her beguiling appearance. He tried to make her tell him more about her grandmother and her relationship to the Tsvetaeva sisters, but she eluded his questions.

"You like Russian poetry?" she asked. "Tsvetaeva's poems are depressing, but my grandmother loved them. She said they expressed her own longing for Russia."

"Funny," she continued after a pause, during which he tried to collect his emotions. "You are the first person who likes this desperate poem. My mother never wanted to hear any of them."

She presented him with her disarming smile. Her eyes looked past him again, but they were softer now. What does she see, he asked himself.

His mind drifted off to his days in Moscow on his last visit and the girl Natasha he had met. "But she had green eyes!" He said aloud.

Irritated Asya asked, "What is it that you have with eyes?" Just as Natasha had done years ago.

"Oh, I was thinking of Marina's eyes", he lied—from her pictures he was sure Marina had had large, dark-brown eyes—and continued his attempts to lift her past. "Was this grandmother your mother's mother?"

"No, she was my father's mother. My mother was German." This was how he found out that Asya also spoke a fluent German, like he.

The electricity suddenly went out, and they sat in the dark for a while. A woman from the restaurant brought a couple of candles to their table. Their soft light eased the tension between them. She appeared lovelier than ever, her eyes less defensive.

He told her, switching back and forth between German and English, that he had come from Germany as a young man after the war to finish his Ph.D. in America. But the real reason for his going to America had been his dream of Tibet. This was the first time he had actually reached Lhasa. He had met Andrea in Germany just before he left for Cambridge. They got married a year later and had two children. After he finishing graduate school he had taken a good job. Wrapped up in a regular, family life, there had been no room to roam central Asia. He loved to drift.

"Like a Buddhist mendicant with a begging bowl and a walking stick."

She said tentatively, "I guess you could call me a drifter too. Maybe I have run away from my life of the past few years: college, boredom, drugs, unhappy relationships, you know. And then one after the other my grandmother and my mother died."

With a sudden, passionate vehemence she added, "I am an orphan looking for an understanding what happened to me."

"Why Tibet?"

"Oh, I know nothing about Tibet. A friend visited Lhasa a few years ago. It sounded like a far away place."

The food they had ordered arrived, a vegetarian plate for her. They ate in silence. The night grew cold. A blustering wind sprung up, flapping the tarpaulin above their heads. Their candle was blown out and had to be re-lit. They built a wall of utensils around the candle to protect it from the wind.

He asked into the flickering darkness, "Do you have any plans for the next few days?" adding that this was his sixtieth birthday. "As a birthday gift to myself I wanted to go to Ganden early in the morning. Would you like to come along?"

She gave him a smile and rather perfunctorily wished him a happy birthday. "I don't have any idea what Ganden is," she said, "but I would like to join you. I have no plans for tomorrow."

Encouraged he thought, well, I caught the drifter in her! He patiently explained that Ganden had been one of the

biggest monasteries in Tibet, high up in the mountains east of Lhasa. It had been completely destroyed in the fifties but was being rebuilt now.

"I feel apprehensive about these dark Tibetan monasteries smelling of rancid butter and death," she said. "But maybe you will help me to overcome this fear. I can see how important religion is to these people. They are so beautiful."

They agreed to meet at six in the morning. The pilgrim's bus would leave at seven from the square in front of the *Jokhang*, the "cathedral" of Lhasa. They said goodnight and went to their lodgings, she to one of the old, cheap rooms, he to his expensive Chinese quarter in the new building with its leaking pipes in the bathrooms. He was happy with the prospect of her company tomorrow. As he fell asleep he recalled her smile.

It was still dark when they hurried through the empty stalls of the *Barkhor*, the circumambulation route around the deserted *Jokhang*. Two Chinese soldiers walked back and forth in front of the police station at the square. They waited for half an hour. Still there was no bus. Despite her thick down jacket Asya was shivering in the early morning cold, unsure of her resolve to join this outing. But then a group of local pilgrims arrived and a few minutes later the bus.

"I will push in to catch two seats," he said, while he tunneled through the crowd for the door of the bus. She arrived among the last passengers laughing: "Why are you so uncivilized? The way you pushed through these poor people into the bus!"

"This is China," he said with a shrug. "Sit down! This is going to be a three-hour ride, which you don't want to endure standing, do you? Besides the roads are miserable, you will see."

They huddled together for warmth, finally making room on the narrow bench for a woman with a small child and two huge sacks. By the time the bus got started there was hardly any standing room left. They slowly moved through the deserted streets of town picking up more passengers who piled on top of the baggage on the floor. The day was slowly dawning above a heavy cloud cover as the bus rumbled along the valley of the upper Kyi Chu. The river, wild and untamed, covered most of the valley floor in uncharted rivulets between islands of rocks and boulders. An occasional village of low houses separated by ragged fences. What looked like laundry turned out to be wind-beaten prayer flags strung between bamboo poles. A few green, irrigated barley fields, carefully rimmed by low stone mounds, the only color in the gray landscape. Eroded mountains on both sides of the valley, bare, rocky, and snow-less. Some hardy shrubs on the lower reaches, no trees anywhere. The road an endless series of potholes and sandy patches through which the bus jumped and jerked at a snail's pace.

After two hours the bus began climbing from the valley floor on a mere spur in endless turns up a mountain side. The pilgrims began a slow, monotonous sing-song, more to calm their apprehension than in expectation of the holy place. The track was soft and dropped precipitously on alternating sides. Occasionally the bus tilted dangerously sideways, but it ground on, steam rising from its radiator.

The clouds closed in. An apparition seen for a few seconds at arms reach: a large amphitheater filled with terraces of burnt-out, half-ruined, three- and four-story buildings. It vanished again in the clouds: Ganden Ling, their destination.

With a last wheeze the bus expired amid muddy puddles on the small parking lot. As they jumped out the clouds broke revealing a blinding sun rising over glistening ice fields only a few hundred meters above. They were higher than either of them had ever been.

Hungry, they sat down for breakfast among bags of barley and beer bottles stacked in a black, rundown "restaurant" near the bus-stop. She ate unsalted rice-congee, he mutton soup. He ordered Tibetan butter-tea for both. She took one sniff at the turbid brew, eyelets of butter swimming on its surface, and disgusted rejected it. The mutton broth was equally revolting, but he finished it bravely and even drank her cup of tea.

When they emerged from the dark hole, the fog was gone and sunspots traveled with the clouds across the barren landscape. The full extent of the monastery complex became apparent. About a third of the buildings had been rebuilt. The place was one construction site: a tractor ferried huge field stones across the deeply rutted, puddle-ridden tracks between the ruins. Men lugged precious wooden beams, which must have been hauled all the way from some distant woods, and a singing group of young girls carried earth in baskets on their backs to a large, half-raised building.

To ease Asya's apprehension, newly enhanced by the revolting smell of the food, he proposed a hike along the *korlam*, the circumambulation route around the place.

After they passed a *lhato*, a sacred marker of twigs adorned with prayer flags, a wide view opened into the Kyi Chu valley and into the mountains and valleys on its far side. The water of the river below reflected the sun like shards of a broken mirror. In the distance snow-capped mountains and a rugged valley extended to the north-west. The sun spots traveled across the yellow-green barley fields. A quilt of earthy colors.

The path contoured the hill behind the monastery. Richard noticed two large vultures circling lazily in the updraft above the slope, an ominous sign, but he said nothing. Around the bend of the hill smoke rose from a fire below, and now he was certain.

"Look," he said pointing at the heavily smoking fire, where he could distinguish three men working, "a sky burial. A rare event to come upon."

He cautiously looked at her from the side. She shuddered.

"What do you mean by sky burial?" she asked.

He explained that, because the ground was frozen most of the year in this barren land, and there was no wood for cremations except of the most saintly men, the corpses of the dead were fed to the vultures. "Nothing is left after they have eaten their fill. The smoke serves both as incense and to attract the birds to their meal. Can you see, several are already sitting around the people down there."

Having arrived at a point directly above the site, they could now discern the mutilated corpse, and a man with a large machete who hacked the body into pieces. She averted her eyes, and grew pale.

"Look," he said, "I think this is actually a beautiful custom. Nothing is left for the living to attach sentimental memories to, no grave, no tombstone. The meaningless, earthly shell of the person vanishes into thin air. His or her soul will be reborn in another child—Asya-Marina!"

He smiled at her. But she hadn't listened to him. Rooted to the spot, her face expressionless, she watched the man down there swinging his hatchet at the dismembered corpse.

"Come, let's go," he said gently. She turned to him and he saw that she was crying.

Around a bend, out of sight of the burial, he took her into his arms and simply held her. "My God," she said, tears flowing freely into their embrace, "my mother's ashes still stand at home, simply because no one in the family was able to cast them into the sea as she had wanted us to do."

She leaned her head on his chest. "I loved my mother. She was my only true friend. For years she fought for her emotional independence from her past, from her husband, from her own limitations. Then one day cancer overtook her, and within three weeks she was dead. Just like that. Vanished, gone. I mourned her for a year. I thought I was over it, I had become detached from her. Yes, I can talk about her, but I am afraid of death."

Silently they walked to the end of the *korlam*. Her mind was adrift, her beauty gone.

The explosive clatter of the cloth awnings above the endless rows of windows whipping in the cold wind followed them as they made their way among the buildings. An open door lead into the dark interior of the main *dukhang*, the meditation hall of the monks. He hesitated, wanting to go inside. She held him back. The dull rhythm of a meditation drum could be heard from the hall.

"You hear the drum?" he asked pushing his arm under hers. "Do grant me this visit, please. Come, I will protect you!" She yielded to his gentle force. They walked into the dark space. A long row of gilded Buddhas and Lamas glowed from the darkness. Hundreds of butter lamps flickered before the images exuding a warm, mammalian smell. On the floor rows of cushions for the monks' meditation services. Colorful *thangkas*, scroll paintings framed in precious Chinese silk-brocades on the columns and walls.

In a corner of the hall a young monk sat cross-legged before a narrow *sutra* book chanting with a monotonous voice and beating the drum. With one hand he worked the large, deep-voiced drum suspended from a wooden frame, with the other he turned the pages of the book. Each time he moved a leaf from right to left he stopped his drum measure and rang a small bell. The rhythm was soothing, maybe even trance-inspiringly slow.

The monk gave them a welcoming smile and waved his hand at a low row of cushions by the wall next to him. He nodded in approval.

Richard lead Asya to the cushions. They sat down. Asya crossed her legs in the half-lotus position of meditation,

straightened her back, relaxed, and closed her eyes.

He was happy to see her at peace at last, knowing that this would be better for her than any of his entreaties. The sing-song voice of the monk and the slow drum beat would calm her anxieties. He concentrated all his energies on her and found that he loved her.

The telephone had rung in her Santa Cruz dorm room late one Friday night. It was her father. Surprised, he did not call often, she said, "Yes Dad, what's up."

"We are very worried about Hanna."

Instinctively she knew that something terrible had happened.

He continued with a colorless voice. "Hanna has not been feeling well for some days. She complained about abdominal pains, and I treated her for a liver infection. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Heatedly she finished his sentence touching on an old argument between the two of them. "And you gave her a heavy dose of antibiotics, right? And then you left her to her own devices."

"Yes," he said meekly. "She saw a doctor today who wants her to come to the hospital on Monday for tests. It doesn't look good."

She sat down, trembling. "My mother, my poor mother."

She drove to Sonoma that very night. Her mother looked weak, but composed. She slept on the couch in her mother's room listening to her heavy breathing.

In the morning Hanna seemed much stronger, the pain had disappeared. It was a glorious day. Hanna asked, "Will you take me on a ride through Napa Valley? I want to see the vineyards. It's the best time of the year."

She drove her up the valley to Calistoga very slowly with excursions into the oak woods of the side valleys. She remembered every minute of that golden afternoon. They talked about the time when Hanna had worked in one of the wineries, her school work as a Spanish teacher, and the people of that class whom Hanna had become very close to.

Somewhere Hanna began talking of her possible death, "I know, it is cancer, Asya, and my days are numbered, only a miracle will save me."

She tried to put this possibility out of her mind and took her up the hill to one of their favorite restaurants. They stood on the verandah together overlooking the valley, and Asya inquired for a suitable evening to have a family reunion there.

"In a couple of weeks, after Christmas I will be finished with school, and then we shall all have dinner together here. I cannot remember how many years it has been since we last did that together."

It had been Hanna's last outing. The doctor found that her liver was completely destroyed by metastases. A last desperate attempt at chemotherapy had not even had a chance to act. Three weeks later she was dead.

The drum was still counting the hours before dying.

Paraphrasing Tsvetaeva, Asya recited.

*. . . Homeless on this earth, an outcast,
She created me, an orphan. . .*

On the following morning Asya did not appear for breakfast. Maybe she was sleeping late, Richard thought over breakfast at 'their' table. When she had still not appeared by eleven o'clock he went in search of her. He found her in one of the dismal rooms on the third floor buried in her sleeping bag. He sat at her bedside and gently tried to coax her to wake up. She finally stuck her head out, her face was glowing. She ran a high temperature.

He inquired what was hurting her. "Oh, all over," she said. "The virus has come back. I had a viral infection when I left home. Father had stuffed me with antibiotics, which I threw into the toilet on the plane to Bangkok. I hate antibiotics, and he always overdoses. What good is aureomycin against a virus anyway?"

She looked pained at him. "It is nice of you to come and look for me though."

He agreed with her dislike of the indiscriminate use of antibiotics, maybe she could sleep it off. But in the afternoon her temperature had climbed even higher. She was fantasizing. He put a cold washcloth on her forehead, and she mumbled mechanically, "Ok, Ok."

He decided to find a doctor. To his surprise this was easier than he had imagined. Within an hour an English speaking member of the hotel staff arrived with a half-Chinese gnome of a man. He was not that old, bent down like a dwarf with bottle-thick glasses, long slicked-back hair, and his dirty, dark suit he looked like a messenger from the underworld.

The doctor put his black bag on the bed and got out his stethoscope. Asya's eyes grew large and frightened when she saw him, but she submitted to his examination. A conversation in Tibetan ensued between the doctor and the hotel employee who translated that Asya had an infection and the doctor proposed to give her a good dose of a wide-spectrum antibiotic and an infusion intravenously. The doctor produced an infusion bottle, a needle, and a small bottle with the antibiotic from his bag and was preparing to stick the needle into Asya's arm when she panicked.

"No, I do not want any infusion!" She cried in alarm. "And what kind of a needle is he using anyway?"

Richard inspected the Chinese made bottle. It had a Latin list of contents: sodium chloride and glucose in distilled water. The needle came from a sterile, single-use plastic wrapper, and on the antibiotic it said something or other ...cyllin. There was really nothing wrong with this equipment, and together they persuaded Asya to allow the man to rig her for a drip.

Richard got a book from his pack and sat by her bed and read to her during the rest of the afternoon while the drip slowly ran down. It was a miracle cure, in the evening the temperature was down, she sat up and even ate some soup he got for her from the restaurant.

She slept through the night and all next day, and when she reappeared on the following afternoon she spontaneously gave him a hug and a kiss.

At dinner on the third day he invited her to come with him on a trek to Chörten Chung Riwoche and the Rongshar Valley. She accepted, and they made plans together.

"It will be a hard trek," he told her, "through one of the most beautiful parts of Tibet. From the high desert plateau into the Himalayas west of Everest. The Rongshar Valley is a *beyul*, a sacred refuge to the Tibetan Buddhists. Chörten Chung Riwoche is one of three great stupas from the fourteenth century that survived the Cultural Revolution unharmed. Far from the tourist roads, it has only been discovered ten years ago. After the first ten days we could abort the trek should it turn out to be too strenuous."

Richard had brought all the necessary gear for camping at high altitude, a small tent, a cooking stove and a pressure cooker, thermal underwear, a good sleeping bag, and a padded parka. Together they carefully went through her things, she had a sensible backpack and everything needed to keep her warm.

He suggested, "All we need are two big Tibetan hats against the sun." They went out and bargained for the hats on the Barkhor, for him a huge black affair—he looked like a Bön sorcerer under it—for her an elegant, dark-blue *chapeau parisien*.

Afterwards they went shopping: instant Japanese soups, noodles, a small air-dried leg of lamb, onions, some eggs, a large supply of tea, sugar, gasoline for the stove, and a bag of *tsampa*, roasted barley flour, the local staple. Their bags were heavy, but outside of Lhasa provisions were scarce. "Oh," he said, "in one of the villages we will hire a yak to carry our gear."

They took the public bus as far as Shigatse, and from there they hitched rides to the trail head near Sangsang.

2

When they woke, they found their tent surrounded by local villagers who had miraculously materialized from nowhere.

Asya whimpered. "Not again on public display!"

"Listen," he said, "I don't like it either, but how shall we find the trail? I looked around last night and could not see the promised track anywhere. Please bear with me. Besides, we might find a pack animal. How about a lovely grunting yak?" he teased to cheer her up.

She screwed on a smile and crawled out of the tent with him. The faces of their audience were mute until he shouted cheerfully "*Tashi delay!*"

An old, bent-over woman approached them holding out her hand with a wrinkled smile. Asya turned away. The woman repeated something they could not understand.

Richard suggested, "She is probably asking for a Dalai Lama picture not for money. I have a few in my pack, but there are far too many people. We will need the pictures for more important occasions." He tried hard to ignore the woman, and with his primitive Tibetan addressed the brightest looking man asking for the path to Chung Riwoche. A discussion ensued among the men, they seemed unsure what to think of his question. Finally an older man offered to lead them to the trail. Richard was relieved, it had worked out just right. But first they had to have some breakfast and pack up the tent.

They made *tsampa* by mixing the coarse, roasted-barley meal with cold left-over tea from last night to make a paste. The crowd stood around and watched them in silence. Some began leaving. The old woman still stood mumbling her request. Not to lose the man who had offered to be their guide, Richard tried to strike up a conversation with him. He was from a village called Tajang, half-an-hour along the trail. "Well, we may even be able to negotiate an animal from him," he said to Asya. That renewed their energies and they were soon packed and ready to go.

By now there were only the three of them and the old woman. Richard's heart had softened, he dug out two small Dalai Lama pictures, one for her, the other for their guide. The response was overwhelming. The old woman kissed the picture, touched her forehead, her throat, and her heart with it and began chanting a prayer. "Pray for a safe pilgrimage for us, Grandmother!" Richard said in Tibetan and added in English, "We shall need the Buddha's blessings badly, I am afraid."

His face covered by a smile the man tucked the revered picture into his overcoat and made ready to go. They shouldered their heavy packs and followed him waving to the old woman who still stood chanting mantras.

The man set out at a fast pace, he was used to the altitude and carried nothing, straight across the rock-strewn plain towards the mountains. They scrambled after him as well as they could. To slow him down Richard tried to continue the conversation, but despite the level course, Richard was soon out of breath.

Richard stopped to take a break and offered the man a cigarette. On a second thought, after he had lit the man's smoke, Richard put his cigarette back into the pack. It would not help to smoke now. They squatted together in the dirt. Asya turned out to be an expert at squatting on her heels, Richard had to sit cross-legged. Richard opened the inquiry into a pack animal to Chung Riwoche. The man smiled. "You are too weak to carry these bags!" He thought that one of the nomad women at the village might be willing to rent them a yak for the two-days march over the pass. But he would not discuss the price. "Women are very clever!" he said with a laugh and a wink. As they started out again the man offered to carry Asya's backpack.

After another half-hour walking across a low hill six black tents, roosting around a single adobe building, emerged from a depression in the land. The man pointed at the tents, "Tajang!" he said. Richard offered the man a small amount of money, which he refused. He pulled the Dalai Lama picture from his overcoat and indicated with a horizontal sweep of his flat hand that this was enough of a reward for his troubles.

They were soon surrounded by villagers, women and children, no men. Their guide had an animated conversation with a tall, impressive woman with fabulously white teeth who invited them into her tent for a cup of tea.

This time there was no escape, not to be impolite Asya drank the milky brew. To her surprise, after she had fought down her aversion, the salty, hot broth was very good for her stomach. Tibet had won a first victory.

"Patience!" Richard admonished himself and repeated aloud for Asya, "this is going to be a long negotiation."

The woman asked the usual questions, "Where do you come from? Oh, from *mei guo*, America, so far, behind the Great Ocean! Do you have children?" Richard explained that Asya was his daughter; his wife and his other two children were back in America.

"Yes, just like me. In the summer my husbands making money in Lhasa. Watching the sheep." But her smile indicated that she had looked through his little lie. "My husbands having girlfriends too when they are away. That is Ok. They are not lonely." Even Asya had to smile.

The oldest daughter poured them another cup of butter tea. She was a true beauty of maybe sixteen years with the red apple cheeks and the immaculate white teeth of the nomad women.

Richard said in English screwing his eyes heaven-wards. "To obtain instructions from the famous guru, the student had to bring him his girlfriend, not older than sixteen years." Asya smirked at him.

"Man saying you wanting yak, carrying your bags to Chung Riwoche." The woman continued. "I finding yak for you. You also needing yakherd. How much you offering?"

Richard wagged his head back and forth and clicked his tongue and said, "Well, honorable mother, I don't know. Is the yakherd eating own food? Sleeping where? Two days? You say price, we haggle!" He made a gesture of clasping his hands back and forth.

Without the slightest hesitation she asked for 200 yuan, about \$25, a stiff price.

Richard mimed being shocked but only by raising his eyebrows. He calmly countered with half that sum. "Yakherd must return over the pass!" the woman objected, "Four days, long time!" They finally agreed on 140 yuan, which was still high, but the yakherd would feed himself and sleep under the open sky. Half of the money Richard offered to pay now, the other in Chung Riwoche. Both sides felt elated. Where was the yak?

A boy was sent out to round up the yak whilst they were offered one cup of tea after the other. "We sure will not need any lunch today," Richard joked, "that is, provided we can hold this soup down and not get diarrhea!" Asya shook herself, swallowed the last mouthful of tea, and looked worried into her empty cup.

An hour later the gently grunting, primeval creature with its curved horns and long black hair appeared, and within minutes their two backpacks had been roped to a wooden yoke on its back. Richard looked around for the yakherd. He had not recognized her, wrapped in shawls to over her mouth, looking very shy, she had been there all along, loading the animal. It was the sixteen-year old daughter!

Richard clicked his tongue, "The great foreign Guru is offered her prized daughter!"

Asya stuck her tongue out at him. He bowed to her, saying with a laugh, "Thank you for the honor! Sticking out your tongue is a sign of the greatest esteem around here."

Accompanied by all the children, Mother waving after them, relieved of their heavy burdens they set out on their pilgrimage into Tibet.

"Did she say she had several husbands?" inquired Asya after their entourage of children had turned back.

"Yes, she probably has three or four. Most often they are brothers. This custom serves two purposes, it guarantees several providers for the family, and it keeps the number of children they have to feed from this barren ecology to a minimum." Asya was surprised. He explained, "This is called polyandry. It is the custom among the nomads. In the cities a woman has usually only one husband, and the noblemen, and the rich in former times also practiced polygamy. But you see, the nomad woman usually owns the tents and flocks. She has probably several dozen yaks and several hundred sheep which the men keep moving from pasture to pasture. They trade with the wool and the meat of their sheep. Until very recently this and salt from the Chan Tang were their only livelihood."

The girl and the yak were soon far ahead of them. The path, now clearly visible, began to rise. The girl had said that she would wait for them at the pass, or so Richard had understood. Being a shy girl, he felt certain that she would not make off with their belongings.

The pass was not high, maybe four-hundred meter above the village. It took them almost two hours. Neither of them spoke as they walked breathing heavily. The girl and the yak were waiting for them by the *lhato*, a cairn, the "soul place" at the summit of the pass, a pile of stones, prayer flags on sticks, and a few *mani* stones topped off by horns of yaks and wild big-horn sheep. A much higher, snow-capped peak rose very close to the east.

The view from the pass was breathtaking. Behind them lay the flood valley of the Raga river and the Gandise Range, before them the Tsangpo-Bramaputra Valley. On the horizon to the south, far away, they could see the snow-line of the Great Himalayas.

Deep below along the Tsangpo, among green fields a tiny speck glittered in the afternoon sun, the golden cupola of the Chörten of Chung Riwoche.

They sat at the lhato for a while taking in the view. The girl was restless, urging them to continue, they would need another two hours to reach the nearest campground with water before the sun would go down.

They tried to stay with her, scrambling down as fast as the steep path allowed. Attempts at conversation with the timid girl were unsuccessful, she would at most say yes or no. They passed two dry side valleys, a third one

carried water from the snow peak. After following the stream for another hour they came upon a small meadow. The girl indicated that this would be their campground for the night.

The girl unloaded the animal, which shook himself and ran snorting into the water to cool off. Intensely watched by the girl, they quickly set up their tent and the stove to make tea and heat another Japanese soup for dinner. They shared the tea with the girl and filled two bottles with boiled water for the night and to warm their sleeping bags. The girl ate some tsampa and then hid in a large sheepskin bag for the night. The sun disappeared behind the ranges in the west.

As they sat and watched the light wane on the snow peaks to the south Asya asked, "Have you ever heard of Koktebel?"

Richard blinked. "Yes," he said, "it is a 'village' of a few houses on the south-eastern coast of the Crimean. Maximilian Voloshin, a painter-poet-philosopher and his mother owned a boarding house there before the Revolution where the Tsvetaeva-sisters and other artists and poets spent their summers. But how do you get to this strange, far-out place now?"

"In her last hours my grandmother fantasized about Koktebel in Russian, but she never told me where that magic place was. I have been thinking of her all day. Some day I will tell you her story."

Thinking of Koktebel, he had already half-dropped off when Asya had another question. "Richard, tell me, do you believe in the 'transmigration of souls'?" Her tone was both childish and urgent.

"You would have to explain what you mean by transmigration of souls." He said to ward her off and go back to his dreams of the blue, windswept Black Sea and the crazy people at Koktebel. But she would not give up.

"Grandmother fervently believed in such a concept, but my grandfather would not hear of anything like that. With his strong German accent he would shout at her to cut out that religious rubbish. Grandfather was a neurologist. He came from a rabbinical family in Dubrovnik. You see, you were right when you asked where I had my Sephardic eyes from, from him. But nobody ever asked me before. Eventually my grandparents got divorced. I became Grandmother's preferred granddaughter."

He had guessed that the transmigration idea was handed-down Theosophy straight from the oracle's mouth, genuine Blavatsky!

"Well," he said, "has Grandmother convinced you of this idea?"

"I don't know. My father was so much against religion and any spirituality, that he did not even let us have a Christmas tree. But Grandmother's beliefs were powerful and very beautiful. I was the only person present when she died. Ever since I have been searching for an understanding of her strength. But her firm belief that I was Marina Tsvetaeva reborn, filled me with horror and rage. I don't want to be beholden to some long-dead person!" He tried to calm her emotions. "Have you ever seen a photograph of Marina? She did not look at all like you. She had a round Russian face and huge eyes."

"No, I have not. All of Grandmother's photos from that time perished in Russia or later in Germany. But you said that Marina had green eyes, and I have black eyes, Sephardic Eyes, if you will!" She said with a laugh. She had caught him, he had no idea of the color of Marina's eyes, all the photos he had seen of her were black-and-white, and on them Marina's eyes had looked dark. He said, "Did she indeed? Well, I guess eyes can change in the transmigration of souls, don't you think so?" He tried to humor her and then recited a few lines from a Tsvetaeva poem that had haunted him for the past few days.

*"And those eyes (upon whom
Did they not deign to rest!)
Demanding a reckoning
For every casual look . . .*

"I cannot recite it in Russian like you, but these lines to Marina's friend and lover Sofia Yakovlevna Parnok, whom she met at the blue Black Sea in Koktebel, have been on my mind for days." He continued in a teasing tone. "Now you are also starting to fantasize about eyes!"

She was silent for a while and then remarked, "Sofia was the older sister of my grandmother! My grandmother's maiden name was Natalya Yakovlevna Parnok, they called her Nelly. Nobody ever mentioned Sofia's name in the Parnok family, only I know that Nelly deeply admired her for her poetry and her courage to lead a free life."

He sighed deeply, "My God, what have I done!" and continued with a laugh. "Soon we will have to engage a Freudian psychoanalyst to unravel this tangle: Asya-Marina the offspring of a lesbian jealousy, conceived in Koktebel! But not tonight, please! I am dog tired. Tomorrow on the way down I will tell you all I know about Koktebel, and you can tell me the story of Nelly."

"Koktebel, Koktebel, we reached it the first time on a creaking two-wheeler cart from Feodosia, only eight kilometers away, but a whole day's travel," wrote Anastasya Tsvetaeva in the memoirs of her childhood. "The landscape became more barren along the way until the earth was covered only by black volcanic rock, which, at noon, burned your feet through the soles of your shoes. We reached the Voloshins' house and behind it lay the ink-blue sea. No green, no tree, no bush, only some tufts of high, bleached desert grass in a few sandy places. Stranded on the rocks. Max Voloshin called it 'Homer's Island'. At night the mythical heroes talked to us. We all went crazy, stricken by Greek madness. Marina was nineteen and I seventeen when we spent our first summer in Koktebel. We returned year after year before 1914. Marina had found her world, as uncompromising and as abstract as her poetry."

There Marina met Sofia Parnok who started a passionate, fiery relationship with her that lasted almost two years. And later she met Seryozha Efron at the Voloshin's house, her "Boy-Prince with the huge eyes", her shining "White Guard," emigrant, turncoat, informer, the father of her children, her husband in eternity, liquidated in Stalin's Gulag, her fate. . . .

Every guest was enthusiastically greeted by Maximilian Voloshin and his mother Yelena Ottobaldovna—the poetry of patronymics! Both dressed in long Tartar caftans, barefoot. Photographs show Max, he was only ten years older than Marina, as a corpulent, genial philosopher-fairy. He wrote poetry and painted, both like a dilettante. His widowed mother, equally voluminous, was a firebrand, the soul of their guest house. They charged next to nothing for their rooms, it was not a fashionable tourist spot. The guests prepared their own meals or walked three kilometers to a ramshackle Tartar café for food.

The noisy, motley crowd of greater and lesser celebrities all fell under the spell of Koktebel, reading poetry to each other, critiquing their art, collecting pebbles, nude bathing, love tangles, moonshine nights by the sea, Max Voloshin as the conjurer and psycho-pomp. . . .

How well he could see them all! Seduced by the blue sea, the barren land under the burning sky! He knew it only too well the Greek Madness. He fell asleep to the sound of the sea crashing on rocks.

When Richard woke after the cold night he found Asya scribbling in her diary.

"Tashi delay!" he said cheerfully, "I hope you were not cold? It must have been well below freezing. Our poor yakherdess, having to sleep outside!"

He watched Asya for a few minutes, but decided to leave her to her scribbles. She was incommunicative anyway. As he crawled out into the frozen world, he found that they had a more immediate problem. The yak and their yakherdess had vanished. At least she had not taken their packs. They were still where they had put them near the tent.

He called Asya with raised eyebrows. "Half-pay, half-trek! We will have to carry our bags downhill ourselves."

Shivering she came to inspect the disaster. They collected themselves and decided to prepare their breakfast of tsampa. He brewed some hot tea and mixed some sugar into the tsampa paste.

They had just finished taking the tent down and stuffing their bags, when from nowhere the girl reappeared with the yak in tow. They greeted her with cheers.

The girl smiled ruefully. With her hands and feet she explained that the *dri*, it wasn't a yak, but a dri, a female yak, had wandered off in search of grass during the night. She had to find her and bring her back. It had taken her over an hour. Yaks were very independent creatures, they do what they like. Relieved they gave her of their hot tea and tsampa. The girl giggled. "Sweet tsampa!" she exclaimed, smacking her lips.

They stumbled behind the *dri* down into the deepening valley. The golden cupola that marked their destination had vanished from sight.

"I have dreamt all night of the strange and crazy people who met 'on the Rocks of Koktebel', but tell me Nelly's story first. Do I have to make a list of characters now, like in all good Russian novels?" he asked as they walked down to Chung Riwoche.

She eyed him with a strange look.

Yakov Ivanovich Parnok had been an officer in the Imperial Russian Navy. He had been stationed as a naval engineer in Odessa where Nelly was born. Sofia had married and left their parent's home when Nelly was only five. She had moved to Moscow with her husband. The marriage had ended after two or three years in a divorce. Sofia had turned to painting and writing poetry. She openly engaged in a series of lesbian relationships, claiming that she had a "right" to her freedom. She also had become involved with some of the young revolutionaries of the time. Her conservative parents, already deeply shocked by her lesbian leanings, became concerned that she would be arrested during one of the frequent purges by the Tsarist Cheka. This was when her parents severed all ties with the rebellious Sofia.

Her sister Nelly was more docile and brilliant in school. Her parents sent her to a private boarding school in Moscow to give her a better education than could be found in Odessa. Nelly secretly established contact with her sister. It must have been Sofia who took her to Koktebel without the knowledge of their parents. Towards the end of the war the school expelled Nelly like many others because of "free-thinking" and revolutionary agitation. Her parents insisted that she come home.

In 1919 Yakov Parnok joined the White Guard. Nelly and her mother were sent to safety in Berlin. They never saw her father again. He perished in the Pacific Provinces.

Nelly, fluent in German and French, entered the university in Berlin where she met her husband, a medical student specializing in neurology. Nelly studied German and Russian literature. They got married and had two children. Her husband, determined that the Nazis would not catch them, sent Nelly and the children to the US in 1938 and joined them a year later.

Eventually Nelly was offered a professorship at a college in Upper New York State. They got divorced. After retirement Nelly moved to San Francisco.

"Grandmother was a beautiful person, petite with a narrow face, a high forehead, and quick dark-brown eyes. To her very end her lively intelligence, sensitivity, and quick-footedness never left her. Despite her husband's outspoken hatred of everything German, she retained a faithful sympathy and interest in things German. She was the only supporter of my German mother Hanna among our larger family. I loved her, because from her I inherited all my best qualities. When she became ill with cancer I kept her company for many months. I was with her when she died."

Asya recited the first stanza of the poem to Sofia Parnok:

*"I thought on the eve of parting,
Towards the end of loving,
Of those possessive hands of yours
I used to love . . ."*

They walked on silently for a while, and then Richard told her his dream of Koktebel.

"How do you know all these details about Koktebel?" she asked in a clipped, skeptical voice.

"On one of my trips to the Soviet Union I met a physicist who introduced me to Tsvetaeva's poetry. I have been fascinated by her vision of the Russian soul ever since. Then I found Anastasia Tsvetaeva's diaries which describes their summers in Koktebel. Like Greece for me, Koktebel was Marina's great experience. Like Tibet. . . " He wanted to add, "will be for you", but he swallowed the comment as presumptuous. To change the subject he returned to Nelly. "But tell me, how did Nelly get involved in Theosophical ideas? A highly intelligent person like her is an unlikely mystic."

"I don't really know," Asya said. "I guess she must have given up her connections with her Theosophical friends when she met my grandfather. There was never any mention of religion or Theosophy in her house, only in her last year did her spiritual side return. I guess mysticism was her Russian heritage." She shrugged. "I did not then and still don't know what to do with this inheritance, because I feel deeply curious towards the spiritual and things mystical, but my head fights against it. I feel that it is dangerous, that I might drown in the ocean of these uncharted emotions."

Reluctant to pry at her personal dilemma, Richard lectured her on the origins of nineteenth-century Russian theosophical lore. "I have been thinking about the idea of 'transmigration'. It came to Russia from Central Asia in

the 1860s. Disconnected bits of Sufic lore spread like wildfire among the superstitious Russian intelligentsia. Much of it was misconstrued by Mme. Blavatsky who, claiming that she was in the possession of the True Tibetan Knowledge, became the grandmother of Theosophy. That is from whom Nelly must have got the idea, probably in Koktebel.... May that be as it is, the Tibetan idea of rebirth is very practical. If your karma is not so meritorious that you can escape to nirvana when you die, you will be reborn. The soul of the departed slips into the womb of a woman who is being made love to. The ability to choose the right womb when one dies is the object of a lifetime of meditation exercises."

He laughed. "There is nothing mystical about this. They are interested in *methods* by which one can improve one's karma and gain understanding of and insight into oneself. If you wish, they practice a kind of 'psychotherapy' designed to answer man's metaphysical questions."

Asya interrupted him, and with a razor-sharp voice said, "Leave me alone with psychotherapy, it does not work, it is just mumbo-jumbo in pseudo-scientific garb!"

Richard was taken aback by the vehemence in her voice. But he could not contradict her, at least not as far as Western psychology was concerned. "The Tibetan sages know more about man than we know in the West, and they are fearlessly radical in their approach. They would make you meditate on your fears, on your death, in a snow field. It would be an earthshaking experience." She was not listening. Discouraged that he could not get past her sharp intellectual defenses he dropped silent. Maybe this crazed, empty land would open her hidden resources.

They had reached the Tsangpo valley. They passed a small village surrounded by irrigated barley fields and according to their guide were only an hour from Chung Riwoche. Tired from the long downhill walk they fell silent, each one pursuing their own thoughts.

Strange, how she swings back and forth between an uncompromisingly sharp rationality and childish petulance, he thought.

Richard said seriously, "Please, do not fall in love with me." Yet in his heart he feared that she might reject him. He added, "I am too old for you, you need a younger man not another daddy!"

"Oh," she said with an enigmatic smile, "I am afraid this has already happened." And continued with another fragmentary line from the poem to Sofia Parnok:

*"I love you like a storm-cloud.
Above you lies sin. . ."*

3

They arrived in Chung Riwoche and decided to spend a day of rest there. Richard took Asya to the chörten in the morning, a stair pyramid, eight-stories high, crowned by a golden dome with a half-moon and a drop, or flame on top. It looked like a wedding cake, white with a square upper story from which four, huge, blue eyes, looked in each direction. In each of the cake's layers were a number of caves, rooms or chapels, their walls covered with murals from the fourteenth century.

He showed her the murals on the first level, Buddhas seated among innumerable, grim-looking creatures in wild dance poses, some with animal heads. Others had many arms and heads. Asya counted eleven heads and twenty-two arms on one image. Most of the wilder ones held naked ladies closely wrapped around them, fiercely probing the women's mouths with their tongues.

Asya asked, "Are they really making love? In a religious painting? Are they devils from the Buddhist hells? "

Richard began to laugh. "No, they are visions from your dreams!" - "Well," she said, "not from my dreams." And

immediately caught herself. "I should be careful, I have had very strange dreams these nights. It must be the altitude."

Richard gave her a long psychological explanation of how these images are used in meditation, and that most of the fierce ones were really not dangerous, but the "protectors" of the practitioner who communicates with them in deep meditation.

She looked at him doubtfully. "Maybe that is so, but I have a strong aversion against psychological explanations. It is one conviction I share with my father, the psychotherapists are charlatans, and they are ineffectual." Richard laughed and objected, "But the Tibetan lamas are much better and much more radical than any Western therapist."

After visiting the chörten they paid a visit to the two-story, flat-roofed adobe building festooned with colorful prayer flags where the monks lived and chanted. A dark room, *thangkas* on the walls, a painted clay statue, all lit by butter lamps. They found four monks and a very old abbot. The monks laughed and joked with Richard. One spoke a few words of English. They were offered uncounted cups of butter tea. Even Asya was getting used to the brew! A younger monk showed them around. At the end Richard presented a white silk scarf to the frail, age-worn abbot with his wise, penetrating eyes. The abbot blessed the shawl and returned it to Richard.

When they had arrived at the gompa a group of pilgrims, a family of nomads, men and women, a few children were circling the stupa mumbling mantras. They walked at a fairly rapid pace, one turn, then another, and again, for hours. When Richard and Asya emerged from the gompa, the same people were still walking their rounds. Richard said, "They collect merit in this way, not atone for their sins as the Catholics do." Asya countered, "What's the difference?" Instead of giving her an explanation Richard joined them, and she came along. At first the pilgrims were suspicious, but then just accepted their presence.

Richard began to repeat "Om mani padme Hum" on his way. Eventually Asya tried it too. At first she was embarrassed, but after she got the hang of it, putting one foot before the other without thinking, just concentrating on mumbling her mantra, she smiled at Richard. "I lost all sense of time and find myself in a state of unexpected happiness, both physical and mental. Is this the state I should learn from walking through this empty land, empty in mind and body? I am still distracted, looking for beauty, unexpected vistas. What if I were to fly through this empty space disembodied, mindless, without any distractions. . . ?"

On the second evening they got into trouble with the local Chinese district officer, who wanted to charge them a hefty fine, because they did not have an official permit to visit Chung Riwoche. But the abbot of the gompa put in a word on their behalf, and they got away with a fine of only fifteen yuan each, a couple of dollars. For another contribution of thirty yuan the district officer found them a *dri* and a yakherd to take them to Dingri for only thirty yuan a day, a real bargain.

Now that they were sure they did not have to carry their loads, they stocked up on their provisions. They bought some excellent potatoes, another leg of lamb, onions, and two cabbage heads from a local farmer. They would not have to live on tsampa alone. They even found some expensive gasoline in the local store to replenish their depleted cooking fuel.

That night Richard prepared a feast, potatoes, onions, and some cabbage leaves with a handful of lamb slivers put into the medley. It tasted like the best food since the restaurant in Lhasa.

After dinner Richard took her down to the Tsangpo river to inspect the late fourteenth-century iron bridge built by one Tangdon Gyalpo, lama, engineer, and founder of the Tibetan opera! It was a mild evening. As they sat at the river bank near the bridge Richard asked. "Are you still having nightmares?"

"No, I slept wonderful during the past two nights."

"During the night below the pass you screamed and were very restless."

"I am sorry, I woke you. Yes, I had a very strange dream that night." She blushed, and in a matter-of-fact tone told him her dream.

"It was a full-moon night by the sea, in Koktebel? Two women, a tall, older woman, resembling the nomad lady in Tajang, and a young girl, were chasing each other stark naked on the beach. They fell down entwined. The older one kissed the breasts of the young girl, who was breathing very fast. It was then that I realized that the young looked like I ! 'Asya,' whispered the older woman intensely, 'Let go! Let go! I love you.' That was when I woke

screaming." She smiled uncertainly at him.

Richard blinked. "*Liebes Kind*," he said in German, "dreams are strange stuff. I have been thinking about dreams for a very long time. Freud's theories about dreams don't make much sense. What associations come to your mind with this dream? You are the only one who knows its meaning."

Asya fidgeted. "I really don't know what to tell you. The only association I had was connected with Nelly. Maybe Nelly once watched those two make love. Maybe I have at one time imagined that. But how I became involved in their tangle is a mystery to me."

The bloated carcass of a sheep drifted down-river. She followed it with her eyes until it disappeared in the distance.

She sighed. "Of course, it may still be because I felt horny. Nobody has made love to me for a long time. For the last two years my best friend has been a lesbian."

Richard silently considered these pieces of evidence, all or none of them could have caused her dream. "You know, only you can interpret your dreams by using associations that come to your mind. You have given me three pieces that seem not to be directly connected. Your aroused fantasy, your involvement with your lesbian friend, and your identifying with Nelly. What do *you* know about Nelly's relationship with Sophia and Marina? "

She retreated into her shell. It has to do with Nelly's dying, she thought, but said nothing.

"Let me tell you my theory about dreams. It is really a very simple neuro-mechanical process." He used that term to defuse her defenses against psychological explanations.

"I am sure you have heard about REM, rapid eye movements during sleep."

"Yes," she conceded, "REM accompanies dreaming, If you are being prevented from having REM you go crazy."

"Exactly. But nobody seems to have addressed the simplest question, why do we move our eyes so rapidly from right to left when we dream? Now, a few years ago a young woman psychologist working with trauma victims, you know, women who have been raped and such, accidentally discovered a simple technique to relieve trauma. She made the trauma victims lie down and asked them to follow her finger as she waved it back and forth in front of the patient's eyes. Then she told the patient to concentrate on the traumatic incidence while continuing to follow her moving finger with their eyes. The result was amazing, after a while the patient became very agitated, 'I see it all, the man is approaching me,' etc. The patient's agitation grew to a climax and then subsided. After about twenty minutes of this, the patient said, 'it's all over. I can now tell you all that happened. My anxiety is gone!'"

Richard looked expectantly at her. She seemed to be thinking.

He continued. "The psychologist woman claims that this simple procedure resolved the trauma completely and permanently. Oh, she has a number of cases to show and is traveling from one conference to another with her story."

"I have heard of these experiments," she said, "and you think what she produces is actually REM, and by inference, that REM dreams release our traumatic anxieties overnight!"

"Yes, doesn't it make a lot of sense? Like the parallel communications cable on your computer the commissure transfers images at high speed from the right to the left hemisphere of the brain at night. And our eyes follow that exchange, which we call REM."

She finished his argument. "You mean, by this exchange of dream pictures from our confused right side of the brain to our ordered side we make that information conscious?"

He smiled. "Unfortunately your horny scream woke you and ended the process. Your computer flashed a sign Attention! Dangerous Territory. . . ! You should go back to that dream and try to finish it, but that takes courage and practice."

She became pensive. "You think the dream had to do with Nelly?"

"Look, I am not permitted to make that guess, but I do think so."

She then told him the association she had had immediately after she woke up and had withheld from him: that it had been Nelly's scream when she died. He mused over this information, but said nothing.

"But I don't feel relieved of the traumatic experience of my grandmother's dying by telling you these things," she protested hotly,

*". . . For I was born outside time.
To no purpose and in vain. . . ."*

The *dri* arrived next morning led by an older woman.

But a surprise was awaiting them. As they walked through the village towards the gumpa and the bridge they were joined by five sheep and a young girl who was even more beautiful than their first yakherdess. Of truly regal bearing, she had a strong, finely modeled face, immaculate white teeth, and long black hair braided in innumerable thin braids. She wore some exquisite jewelry. Richard swore she was at most eighteen.

Slaughter of animals being forbidden to devout Buddhists, the sheep were destined for the professional, Moslem slaughterers in Dingri, and their meat was to be sold on the market. Each of the sheep wore two woven-wool sacks tied around their middle which, as it turned out, contained the belongings of the girl and her mother. When they passed the gumpa the four monks were standing in front of the gumpa cheering them on. One supported the abbot who blessed the little caravan one last time with trembling hands. Richard and Asya were truly moved by this send-off.

The countryside was delightful. Fields along the river, which they followed for a while. Everywhere the farmers were harvesting barley leaving brown stubble. A small village of low houses, some built from brown mud, a few white-washed with awnings of fluttering cloth over the windows. Thorns and dried bushes, firewood for the coming winter on the roofs. Each house was surrounded by a fence of sticks, the richer ones by walls. Round yak droppings the size of a hand were drying plastered to the walls, or stacked in long mounds by the roadside, fuel for the winter. Everywhere prayer flags frayed by the wind and bleached nearly colorless by the sun, on sticks, hanging from lines on the roofs, on the fences, fluttering in the cool breeze. On the river a flock of waterfowl rested on their migration south across the mountains to India.

After a while they left the Tsangpo valley to follow a tributary south. For a while the lovely country continued. Scattered clouds came sailing across the transparent, luminous, blue sky from the Himalayas hidden behind the southern hills. Slowly as they climbed along the lively brook the countryside turned into the stony brown hills again that they had become so accustomed to. Here and there the hills were covered with a thin green fleece, enough short yak-grass to allow grazing. A flock of five black tents appeared, smoke rising from their open chimney holes. The children gathered around them, the women smiled and waved from the distance. Their fabulous white teeth! Yaks moved widely separated along an ochre ridge appearing from the distance like ants against the blue sky. Sheep grazing in closed flocks corralled by small scrawny dogs. A single man on a horse. It was the loveliest pastoral country they had seen in Tibet.

Asya said, "You know, I am pursued by the idea one day to take a leisurely ride down the Tsangpo, from village to village between these fields." They spent a happy half-hour dreaming of how that could be done, a fold-boat for two, the logistics involved in taking the boat to the ferry at Saga upstream of Chung Riwoche.

At around two in the afternoon their two women stopped at a grassy spot next to the fast running brook. The older woman bowed with clasped hands and deferentially talked to Richard in a formal and polite Tibetan that took him a long time to understand. They finally figured that this would be their campground for the night. The *dri* and the sheep had to be sent to pasture, and the two women wanted to rest for the afternoon. They had only traveled five hours, and Richard was visibly disconcerted. But what could he do? He said the woman had told him that this was the custom, and he could not persuade her to continue their journey.

"Well," said Asya, "let's make the most of it. Let us go for a walk, it looks like a nice enough place, besides I want to ask you a favor." She had been very contemplative all morning, and they had not spoken more than the most necessary words. They set up their tent, ate some food Richard had prepared the night before, and then wandered off in search of a pleasant spot. Richard had misgivings about Asya's request, what did she have in mind? They found a place by the brook out of sight of their camp. Asya lay down on the ground and said, "I have been thinking all morning about what you said last night. Your theory about dreams makes a lot of sense. To learn dream-meditation will take practice, and I will not be able to solve my trauma connected with Nelly in this way for a long time. Would you try the finger-waving method on me?"

So that was it. He had feared that she wanted him to make love to her. He had not forgotten the defensive look in her eyes when he had talked to her the first time. He knew that at least for a while love-making was not what she needed.

"I am not a professional, I have never done that nor have I seen anybody do it." He protested with a frown.

Looking at the blue sky above her she said, "But look, it seems a harmless technique, we could at least try it for fun."

Now he got angry. "I certainly will not do anything like that for fun. It is not the technique that bothers me, but what you will find out about yourself. After what you told me last night, lifting the secret between you and Nelly is a matter of life and death. Not a subject to toy with."

She sat up and looked at him most seriously. "I know that. I have tried for five years to lift the veil covering my experience when she died, but I cannot get through the fog. You see, she did not die of cancer, she died of a brain aneurysm. But all I remember about her death is this voluptuous cry you heard from me a few nights ago. This whole experience, it may only have been twenty minutes, is blocking my entire life. I cannot make love to anybody. I am revolted by being touched. It cannot go on like this. Please help me!"

He sat cross-legged facing her. He closed his eyes and sat absolutely still, his hands folded in his lap. He let the images drift by his inner eye, Koktebel, the beach, Marina's and Sofia's faces, their love-making in the full-moon night, Nelly hiding behind a rock watching them, Nelly in bed stricken with cancer, Asya-Marina at her side holding her hand, and then followed an incredible image, Asya and Nelly in bed together. He was so startled by that vision that he opened his eyes and stared at her. All the love and compassion he felt for her flooded him.

She did not evade his look, her eyes were swimming in tears. "Yes," he said, "I will do it, because I love you. But first we have to dry your tears. Crying and self-pity are no attitudes suitable for such an undertaking."

She gave a deep sigh of relief and leaned her head on his chest. "Would you also make love to me sometime soon?" she said.

He stroked her head as if she were his child and said, "Not very soon. You know that you are in no condition to make love. You have to get over your self-attachment first. Maybe after we know what went on between Nelly and you, you will understand what I mean."

He gently laid her down on the ground with her head in front of where he was sitting in half-lotus. If she looked straight ahead she could see only the immense sky.

"Close your eyes now for a while," he told her, "let your inner images surface. Whatever comes to your mind. Don't try to force your mind on anything in particular, look at whatever passes by your inner eye. Let one picture go and look at the next one. Try to relax all your muscles and all your other senses. Finally move your attention slowly up your body and hold it at the top of your head until you feel it is done. Then we can begin."

He watched her quiet down. He sat concentrating his detached love on her, seeing her merge first with Marina then with Nelly.

After a while she opened her eyes. "I am miraculously rested, fresh and alert, only my juices are running out. I don't know why. No, it has nothing to do with you, I know that."

"Look at the sky and follow my finger and concentrate on the happenings when Nelly died. Tell me all you see."

He tried to turn off all his thoughts while waving his finger slowly back and forth above her head.

She spoke. "It is afternoon. Nelly is in bed resting. The sun is shining onto her bed. I am sitting next to her on the edge of the bed. She says she has no pain. 'Listen,' she says after a while, 'listen my beloved child, I shall die soon, very soon. Not of my cancer. Listen, remember that love is the greatest gift a woman has to give. Through love she is able to overcome all adversities even death, including her own. I have learned this from loving Marina.' There is a long pause during which she looks at me, looks through me. I don't know what she is seeing."

Asya shivered. After a while she spoke again, from very far away. "Nelly gets up and undresses before me." A strong emotion ran through Asya's whole body now. Her voice had changed to a deep resonant timber: "Child, will you make love to me? To experience this ecstasy, one last time, with you, with you my beloved child."

Asya becomes rigid for a few minutes. Her eyes follow his waving finger.

Then in Nelly's deep voice, "I know that must seem monstrous to you, an old woman asking her granddaughter to make love to her. But it must not be so, it should be joy, not a violation, a final communion of our bodies."

"I feel like I am in a dream. I have no aversion. She touches my breasts, my belly, my pubic hair. I lie down with her, entwine my legs around her, let my hands rove over her body. I am amazed how beautiful her body still is, her breasts swell under my touch. Her nipples harden. She moans. I loose all inhibition. She begins to breathe rapidly and moans louder and louder, she cries from the depth of her soul, cries on and on, a terrible deep-voiced cry."

There was a long pause. Asya had slackened completely.

Suddenly she screamed in horror, "Nelly is dead, Nelly is dead, Nelly please wake up." Sobs wrenched her whole body. "Nelly I did not want to kill you, wake up. Please wake up Nelly." He stopped waving his finger and kissed her forehead. She lay very still now and looked at him with large astonished eyes.

They started out early. The women had already got their flocks together before Richard and Asya emerged from their tent. The young girl brought them a cup of milk, a true luxury. She watched with pleasure as they drank. Asya was disturbed by the experiment with her buried memories. She was withdrawn and incommunicative. After they had walked for an hour, she looked at him and asked, "Are you disgusted by me?"

"No," he told her quietly, "I had a warning. During my meditation before we started I suddenly saw Nelly and you in bed together. It was this vision which moved me to agree to the experiment."

She asked amazed, "How could you have guessed that, the mere idea is so horrible, granddaughter and grandmother making love, isn't it to you too?"

He said, "No, I find human actions human, maybe I would condone worse things than making love to one's grandmother. For a long time already I cannot tell the difference between good and bad. I never understood sin or guilt, not even as a child. You always find that an evil action has a good side to it and vice versa. Your making love to that dying woman appears magnificent to me."

She walked on, silently considering her plight.

Later she turned to him with her brilliant smile and said, "I was so worried by what you would think that I have completely forgotten to thank you for helping me. I guess my actual experience with Nelly has dropped from being a threat to me to just being an as yet incomprehensible act in my life. We shall see whether I have been truly released from the spell of that afternoon."

Most anxiously he said. "Asya, dear woman, will you let me try to help you understand this event? There is more to your experience than you can see, but I am not sure I speak the right language for you to hear and understand me. There are several layers of understanding underneath the obvious one that you released Nelly from the most powerful trauma of her life. You paid for this compassionate act with a trauma of your own, because you were not ready for her message. Nelly wanted to 'teach' you that life and death are the same and making love is the key to that understanding. A woman has the ability to 'know' this insight, which a man does not have: in giving birth she dies and is reborn in her child. That is another reason why Nelly named you Asya."

He paused looking at her anxiously to see whether she had understood. While he spoke her black eyes had scrutinized him with skeptical detachment, three creases had formed between her brows, but now she suddenly stopped and kissed him.

During the rest of the morning they walked separately. Sometimes she was ahead, sometimes he. At especially beautiful spots they would wait for each other and point at things the one had seen believing the other had not. But he realized it was a game of catch and let go, like two people play who are in love with each other.

4

They had clambered across another pass, higher than ever before. It had been hard labor. Mother and daughter had been far ahead of them for a long time despite that they had to keep their sheep together. At the bottom of the pass the trail passed through a narrow gorge between steep rock walls on both sides. They were fortunate that the brook running at its bottom was low. The going was rough, circling huge boulders, strewn everywhere by the water. Again and again they had to ford the brook from one side to the other and back again. Richard shuddered at the thought of a flash flood raging down this canyon. On a spine, high above the canyon's

exit sat a *dzong*, a ruined castle which must have protected the narrows in times past.

Eventually a village of three houses appeared surrounded by several black tents. They were mobbed by children. They looked very poor and ragged and were more aggressive than ever before. The adults, all women watched from their tents. And the dogs! They followed the children, small, mean, wild-looking animals. "Take a few stones, quick," cried Richard, "and throw them at these beasts or they will tear you to pieces." That worked. Richard hit one of them hard, crying and whining the animal retreated and so did the children. They hurried on to get away from the sinister place.

In the afternoon after they had unloaded the dri and set up camp, Mother approached them. She fell on her knees, then prostrated herself full-length before Richard. Richard, shaken, helped her up. The woman gushed a rapid flow of Tibetan words. Richard tried to calm her. He had only understood a few complete sentences: the abbot had just died. His soul was looking for a beneficial rebirth. It was floating around them. The abbot had told her that Richard was a saint from a foreign country. Would he please make love to her daughter to provide a suitable womb for the abbot's soul to reincarnate in. The abbot had promised her that the gumpa would bring up the *tulku* to whom her daughter would give birth.

Richard was taken aback. He explained the request to Asya. "You see, rebirth is a very practical matter in this land, nothing mystical or esoteric. The good woman has promised this beautiful girl to the abbot as a worthy vehicle for his return to his monastery. It will be a great honor for the girl to be the mother of the abbot's *tulku*, the reincarnation of a holy man. The monastery is going to take care of raising the boy after his fifth birthday and also provide for his mother."

"Well," he said, "she is a beautiful girl. Look at her." He smiled at the girl, who was standing next to her eager mother in perfect poise with lowered eyes. He said. "The *tulku* we could make together would be a singularly beautiful boy."

Asya objected. "But who says that she will conceive, and who says that the child will be a boy?" Richard shrugged. "I am sure the abbot has arranged for his demise to coincide with the girl's most fertile day in her cycle. They have a better anatomical understanding in Tibet than in China. As for the sex of the begotten child, that depends, in the Tibetan view, on the ardor of the parents during love-making. If the woman is the more passionate, it will be a boy, and they realize that if I help them out, I will surely be at best a willing partner to the operation. They calculated that I will not be passionately raping that girl! Very clever and disarmingly practical."

Asya laughed, "So what are you going to do? Do you think that girl understands what her mother is plotting?" "Of course she does, she is not as innocent as she may appear. They all live together in the same tent, she knows more about love-making than you might. Besides sex is a most natural affair among them, as you already heard from the nomad woman in Tajang. There are none of the guilt-ridden taboos we have in the West and few jealousies. But what am I to do? As the 'wise man', they would be very distressed, if I refused. Am I wise enough for this? Do I have the *detachment* required? - Do you?" He looked at her questioningly, and once again she stuck out her tongue.

A flash of recognition went across the faces of the two Tibetan women, both stuck their tongues out. The comical aspect of the situation was not lost on Asya. "Bizarre!" Asya said mostly to herself. "So you think you have an obligation to make a baby with that girl! Now I understand the welcome given us by the monks and the old fragile abbot. And what role am I expected to play in this transaction?" she asked heatedly.

"Let me talk to the mother," he said. Another long discussion ensued between Richard and the woman. On the wings of his rising desire, Richard was getting better at Tibetan with every sentence.

Richard turned to Asya. "I asked them what my girlfriend was supposed to do. Much astonished by that question, they suggested that you should pray for a happy rebirth of the soul of their beloved and worthy abbot. There you see! Active compassion is all that is expected."

He smiled at her. "Listen dear woman, by Tibetan thinking this is a serious request, which I cannot refuse. Please help me! Sit somewhere off-center and meditate on my soul, I will need your compassion more than the abbot."

Asya walked away to steady herself, and Richard sat down with crossed legs to meditate on the consequences of this unexpected request. The mother took her girl to a place at a respectful distance from the meditating wise man and talked to her quietly. The girl looked demure but neither shy nor overexcited.

No, he was not doing this in a frivolous manner, he was too much aware of the seriousness of the women. In his way he believed in this migration into another body during the last stages of dying. For him it was the most plausible, the most beautiful of all speculations on death. It changed death from an antithesis of life into an experiential, sensible extension of it. He was also aware that in the Buddhist tradition even this vision was but a figment of one's imagination, it too was *void* like all other such figments we hold.

His making love to this girl could be an act of true *Active Compassion*, for him, for the girl, for Asya, and the abbot. Maybe that was why the abbot had chosen him. He must act completely detached from his own longings, lusts, and desires.

He stopped himself and almost shouted, "No, you should concentrate on your desire. Let your lust and passion rise and transform them into their mirror-images of love and compassion." That was what *Dzogchen* taught.

Besides, he was the man, the active partner, in this *meditation*, how else could he do it, how would his *vajra* stand up without desire and passion? Laughing he returned to face reality.

Asya had come back and was watching him with a bewildered expression on her face. Still laughing, he shouted at her, "How can I make love without burning of red-hot desire?"

She exclaimed "You look like one of those crazy, devilish creatures in the murals. You are frightening!"

But the young girl was not frightened at all, she approached him without shame or coyness. A radiating smile on her face she took him by the hand and led him towards the tent. She crept into the tent first. Richard sat a few minutes in deep thought in front of the entry.

Asya had vanished.

The old woman had taken up her rosary circumambulating in a large clock-wise circle the tent and the two would-be lovers chanting mantras. It had turned into a truly serious affair. He felt the spirit of the abbot near. "So be it," he said aloud, "bless us," and crept into the tent.

He found her sitting in the narrow space awaiting him. He suddenly panicked before her beautiful body. To calm himself he asked her, "What do they call you?"

"Tsögyel," she said simply.

He undressed and knelt before her. He touched her forehead, her throat, and her heart. She smiled and repeated the same blessing of the Buddha on him, except she ran her fingers around his mouth and did not stop at his heart. Fascinated she twirled his chest hair, and then she ran her fingers down over his belly.

She is not innocent, he told himself with a sigh of relief. Taking his sigh for ardor she moved her hand further down. He shook his head, released her hand, and gently laid her down. Kneeling over her body he slowly began by running his hands from her eyes and her mouth to her breasts, exploring the surface of her lean, slender body. He retraced the way back up with kisses until he reached her mouth. A fiercely fluttering tongue received him and suddenly she bit him.

She opened her legs, and he ran his hand along her thigh. He found her liquid and ready. 'Dusting the Lotus' the Tibetan texts call this, he thought smiling and rubbed her with slowly increasing intensity. She lay perfectly still now with closed eyes. She lifted her legs, and folding them around his waist she pulled him into her mandala. For a few seconds they both held still until a second spasm shook her body.

A great joyous laugh rose from somewhere deep inside him.

There was no holding back any longer, with fierce thrusts he drove into her releasing one spasm after the other. Suddenly she grabbed his hands, and his *chi* exploded. He stayed inside her for a while thinking, may the abbot's spirit wait! The saintly lecher!

Love-making *is* a sacramental act, he thought, and laid both his hands on her belly and repeated "OM, Mani Padme, HUM" three times ending the last invocation with the cry "HRI!" to invoke the *dakinis* as his witnesses. In English he added, "Blessed be thy womb Tsögyelma Khadroma!" She opened her eyes and looked at him both puzzled and happy.

He suddenly remembered the scarf the abbot had given him. He found it in the mess of the tent and draped it over her belly.

Next morning Richard found it a strange sensation to walk between the two young women. As before, Tsögyel kept her distance. She had hardly changed her shy demeanor. Asya, his other love, was despondent. There was little he could do for her. Words would only worsen her condition.

And then, in the afternoon a miracle happened. Asya squatted down next to Tsögyel, hugged her and kissed her on both cheeks. Dear Asya, he thought with a tear in his eye, she has won a great victory over herself. Everything will be well now.

He sneaked away, out of their sight, and sat down with closed eyes. He felt terribly happy. To calm this wild exuberance he practiced his oldest meditation, breath counting, trying to think of nothing, nothing but his breath entering and exiting his body.

Asya found him and lightly touched his shoulder. She was transformed. She sat next to him and in a great rush of emotion told him. "My jealousy has evaporated! I simply decided to love Tsögyel, to make her *my* friend. It worked like magic, I am so happy that I didn't even notice that she smells like the butter lamps in the gompas! She took me aside to where you couldn't see us and reefed up her skirts. She does not wear any underpants. With a completely innocent smile she took my hand and put it into her warm, moist crotch and then drew a circle with my wet fingers over her belly. I am sure she has conceived. She also showed me the silk scarf wrapped around her midriff underneath her clothing. You must have given it to her." Richard lowered his head, and she gave him a kiss. "Are you happy?" she asked.

At night Asya helped Tsögyel milk the sheep. She had once known the trick, had learned it on the farm of one of her German uncles. Unable to communicate in words, the two women giggled over Asya's futile attempts to squeeze a drop out of the small tits. Later Asya brought him half a cup of the precious white, still warm milk. He smiled. "The *dakini* brings me her elixir."

She did not comprehend his allusion, preoccupied with her own conquest she gushed, "I have fallen in love." "I know," he said with a smile. Red faced, she got angry and shouted at him, "No, not with you, pompous Mr. Guru. I have fallen in love with Tsögyel, with these two women, with the Tibetan people." She spread her arms. "They are so full of warmth and joy that words are entirely unnecessary." "I know," he repeated, laughing. She left him in a huff, but he could see by the way she walked that she was not angry with him, not really.

Appropriately, the three women prepared *momos* for supper, small meat-filled Tibetan noodles much like ravioli. They, all four, ate from the same pot. It had been a feast day, all day.

They crossed the last pass before Dingri. From its highest point they saw the magnificent Himalayan chain close for the first time. It stretched the full length of the southern horizon. The ice fields and glaciers glistened in the sun.

After the pass the scenery changed once more. A thin vegetation grew along the rivers meandering between hills. The white skyline of the Himalayas played hide and seek behind them. Sometimes only the tips of the highest mountains showed disembodied above the brown horizon, and then again, from the top of a hill, they saw the entire chain. On their left the long, bare hulk of Mt. Tzipri grew in the near distance, eventually hiding the eastern end of the Himalayas. In the evening, when the sun was low, one could make out some of the gompas along the north-western slope of this sacred mountain.

They would reach Dingri on the following day. Asya walking next to Richard asked, "Are you sad to leave the company of Tsögyel carrying your child?"

Richard shook his head. "It is her child, and maybe the abbot's. I was only the instrument of fate, or as the Buddhists would say, our meeting was caused by a 'pre-existing karmic relation.' I would like to see that boy in ten or fifteen years, but I will probably never come back to Chung Riwoche. It would also only confuse his life, just imagine his lighter skin, and he could have blue eyes. On my father's side they all had blue eyes."

"I will come back to Tibet, I know that with certainty," Asya said. "Would you let me visit his gompa and bring your love to the boy? I would like to tell him tales about the land of his father and the strange events that began his life."

Around noon they reached a large river, which they followed for a while. Richard consulted his trail notes and found that it was the Phung Chu, better known by its Nepali name Arun. It drains the Dingri area and like other Tibetan rivers tunnels through the Himalayas in a deep gorge into the Indian plains.

"According to my notes," said Richard, "we will soon be in for a bath in its icy waters. We will have to ford that river in an hour or so."

They had waded through several smaller brooks on their way, sometimes there were stepping stones, a couple of

times they got their feet wet, but this flow was some two-hundred feet wide and did not look inviting. Asya viewed the fast-running river with apprehension. "How will they get the sheep across?" she asked.

They walked faster to catch up with the women. When they came to where the path headed straight into a wide but relatively shallow stretch of water, the women surveyed the river for a while. Then they removed the bags off the sheep and piled everything on the *dri* as high as possible. Tsögyel tied an additional rope around the *dri* and its load and without a second's hesitation stripped completely, piling her clothes on top of the animal. With her tight, slender body and her small breasts she was a beautiful sight. Still wearing her sneakers, she took the *dri* by the nose gay and walked into the water. Soon she was submerged to just below her breasts. In a few minutes *dri* and woman had reached the opposite shore. She unloaded the animal and returned on its back.

Asya, who had no sneakers only hiking boots, took off her pants and her jacket and prepared to wade in barefoot, but Tsögyel would not let her. "No," she said, "no shoes, no good." Asya was loaded onto the *dri*. Balancing bare-bottom on its back she held on to the long hair of the animal. Dressed only in her shirt she looked like Europa on the Bull.

Tsögyel's mother was meanwhile chasing the sheep into the water. They were very reluctant, but once submerged they swam quite efficiently. Richard who had stripped to his underpants and put on a pair of rubber sandals, which he had brought for just this kind of an occasion, helped the mother crowd the sheep in the right direction by shouting and waving his arms. The water, which went to his midriff, was chilling and the river's bottom full of stones. Without shoes he could not have found secure foothold.

There only remained Mother. Tsögyel had already mounted the *dri* to ferry her mother over, who had reefed all her clothes up to her arm pits unconcerned that her bare lower parts were fully exposed. When they reached shore safely Asya ran with a big blanket to dry and wrap up the shivering Tsögyel and all joined to pummel her warm.

Everyone was laughing and enjoying the impromptu, totally unselfconscious bathing scene.

All of a sudden Asya stripped bare and ran for the river. Tsögyel became very excited, worrying that she might slip and drown, but Asya just wanted to take a quick dip. The pummeling ritual was repeated on her with great merriment. "Why," shouted Asya with rattling teeth, "this was marvelous." They set up camp a few hundred meters upstream of the ford, where the river was running fast and the water was clean.

Before they fell asleep, Asya said, "I think, I am beginning to understand what you mean by *active compassion*. The experience with Tsögyel taught me that. I even begin to see how active compassion can make a person 'good' without losing his or her 'bad' sides and without our Judeo-Christian righteousness. After all you may be right that life and death, good and evil are only two sides of the same thing: 'whole man and whole life'. You must teach me more of this and how you arrived at these insights by yourself. I never met a person like you." He smiled at her. "You know who taught me some of this? Tsögyel! Not, our Tsögyel—although making love to her taught me a new lesson: *detachment* -- no, Yeshe Tsögyel, the consort of their famous teacher Padmasambhava, the great *dakini* after whom she is named. Sleep well, dear woman, you made me a great present today."

5

The spectacular Himalayan chain came almost within grasp as they walked down into the Dingri plain. Richard counted the wild, ice-covered peaks, that glistened in the early morning sun: Makalu, Everest, Lhotse, Cho Oyu all over eight-thousand-meter high and numerous lesser peaks. The massive, triangular peak of Everest-Chomolungma looked lower than its neighbors that stood closer, the long stratospheric snow-flag blowing off its peak gave it away.

Straight ahead, between Cho Oyu and the Everest massif appeared to be a big gap between the mountains. Somewhere in this gap, submerged behind the brown, grass-covered plain, Richard knew, lay the fabled Nangpa La pass into Nepal. One of the most feared passes of the Himalayas, it was used only by smugglers and determined traders. Entire caravans had been wiped out up there by a sudden snowstorm in mid summer. To the right of the gap just north-west of Cho Oyu lay the pass into the Rongshar Valley, the sacred *beyul* they were heading for. It had been "opened" by the poet and saint Milarepa in the twelfth-century as a "paradise", a retreat for the Tibetan people. Its name, "Valley of the Roses" had been given it by the first Europeans who penetrated it from the south. In summer the area was covered with a myriad of wild roses.

As they got closer to Dingri the plain revealed itself as a maze of moors and small rivers covered with brown grass. They reached the Friendship Highway an hour east of Dingri. Even this most important road across the Himalayas was only a wide dirt road.

Richard's plan was to hike from the Rongshar across two passes into the Lapchi valley and from there across two more high passes back to the Friendship Highway just north of the Tibetan border. The area was officially closed to foreigners. His major concern were the Chinese-Tibetan officials in the Rongshar Valley. There were many villages along the way, finding pack animals or basic food would not be a problem, but they would have to sneak out of Dingri during the night and probably carry their packs themselves for a day.

When they reached Dingri it turned out to be a dreary Chinese military camp. A large communications dish, sheet-metal roofed barracks, and a motley array of broken-down trucks and rusting machinery all but crowded out the few Tibetan houses and a small gumpa at their southern fringe. Fortunately there was a foreign tour-group staying in town and nobody noticed them.

Tsögyel and her mother drove the sheep to the far end of the Tibetan quarter, where the Muslim butchers lived. For an hour mother haggled over the price for the animals. Richard asked whether he could be present at the slaughtering. He had heard of the "non-violent" methods used to kill the animals. After making a small incision at their neck the butcher would reach into the body and squeeze the main artery shut until the animal died. But to Asya's great relief, the sinister looking man refused to allow him. The sheep would anyway be slaughtered very early next morning before the first cry of the *muezzin*. The women wanted to take some of the meat home for the winter, so they too would have to stay overnight.

"Let's have a farewell dinner, for the four of us!" Asya suggested. "And I have another idea, if there is a photographer in town let's take a family portrait of us!" Both suggestions were enthusiastically received, sure there was a photographer. Tsögyel steered them through the narrow back lanes to the small, unmarked house where he lived. They found a frail seventy-year-old man of striking facial features. An eagle's beak of a nose dominated his narrow, delicate, high-bred face, complemented by a pair of slender hands with overlong fingers. He certainly came from an old Moslem family. All of Richard's senses were stirred. What an extraordinary specimen of the racial diversity of central Asia! What was this man's story?

Ali Sayed Shah was from Kashgar and spoke immaculate English with an old-fashioned British accent. Richard asked, had he known Shipton, the former British consul in Kashgar? Yes, he had worked for the Shiptons as a young man. "That is where I learned English," he said with a thin smile on his distraught face. "Ali Shah?" asked Richard, "is hardly a Kashgari name, it sounds Arabic, isn't it?" "You are right, Sir," answered Ali with a deepening smile. "My family traces its roots back to the Prophet. We are Sunnis, and migrated as caravan traders from Syria to Turkestan three-hundred years ago. We are very proud of our family heritage. During the ravages of the fifties, on a year-long trading mission to Lhasa, I got trapped in this windy town. The Karakoram pass was closed. I could not return to Kashgar. I married a fine local woman and have lived here ever since."

Richard, with his hands clasped behind his back, made a deep, formal bow before the old man. "I am

delighted to meet a member of such a venerable, old family."

Ali was pleased and suggested that they all go and have Moslem tea at the local *halal* restaurant. Ali invited the two women in formal Tibetan. Tsögyel and her mother had an extended discussion in their dialect, which ended in her mother thanking Ali Shah profusely and excusing herself. But Tsögyel, most eager to experience this new world under Asya's protection, joined them.

Ali told Asya and Richard, that the majority of the Moslem community in Dingri, about five or six families, were yak butchers. He shrugged. "Butchers are unclean to the Buddhists."

The *halal* restaurant, a dark hole of a place a few houses down the street, was crowded with non-Tibetans. The smell of mutton stew filling the small room was so overpowering that Asya almost turned around, but the tea looked wonderful. Served in high glasses, it was crystal clear with a couple of lichee nuts and large lumps of candied sugar submerged in it. Asya, forever skeptical, carefully sipped of the hot infusion and raised her eyes heavenwards. "Why, had I known, this is the best tea I have yet drunk in Asia!" Ali showed himself flattered. "It is quite a trouble to get this tea here. It comes from India via Nepal. None of that cheap Chinese tea the locals drink."

Richard, eager to hear more of Ali's tale asked, "And how did you get into photography? You must have given up a good future in you father's trading house!" Ali straightened himself, "I was the youngest among the five sons of my father. I was destined to become the representative of our house in Lhasa. With this in mind it was arranged for me to work at the British mission. The Shiptons would teach me English and the Western ways, which was considered highly useful for my future profession. Shipton, to my great delight, decided to instruct me in the magic science of photography. Until they had to leave, I was the head of the photographic department of the mission, an interesting and confidential job in those turbulent years between the two World Wars."

"You seem to know something about the history and customs of our area," Ali continued. "How did you get interested in Central Asia?" A delicately posed question after Richard's identity. To defuse his suspicion, Richard told him that he was German. With a conciliatory smile Ali made a small bow to him, "Germany has always been our friend."

Richard then mentioned his long interest in Central-Asian Sufism and his search for its origins in Soviet and eastern Chinese Turkestan. Richard's mentioning the Sufiya drew a cloud over Ali's face. "As a young man I was close to a Sufiya brotherhood in Kashgar," the old man said melancholically, "but we do not like to discuss these things." He finished the subject with an apologetic smile, an unexpected middle-eastern raising of his hands, and a bow in Richard's direction. Amazing, thought Richard, the power of genetics! A Levantine gesture three-hundred years away from the shores of the Mediterranean!

Ali suggested, "Let us go to my studio. I want to show you my old pictures. I have boxes filled with photographs from the days when one could still travel unhindered across the passes of the Aksai Chin."

Ali vanished in a back room and reemerged with three cartons of postcards. "Look at this lost world!" he said, fishing out a few priceless photographs of a caravan of Baktrian camels on their way through the Taklamakan desert, groups of men in long caftans in the Kashgar Bazaar, horse races in clouds of dust.

"Look at this one! Do you recognize this haughty foreigner?" He had pulled the photograph from another box.

Richard studied it for a while. A group of wild looking men on small horses among whom appeared a rather regal foreigner in a felt hat and fur coat. And then he knew who he was. "Is this Sven Hedin?" he exclaimed.

"I knew you would recognize him, yes, of course, it's he! The photo was taken in Leh before Hedin set out on his last expedition into the Chang Tang. I accompanied him for part of that trip as photographer. Ali Bashikar, the man who equipped Hedin's expeditions in Ladakh was a close friend of my father, this is how I got the photographer's job with Hedin." Richard tried very hard to keep his excitement down. "May I buy some of these pictures?" he asked, thinking that he really should purchase the whole lot and publish them. "Be my guest, look through these boxes and take what you like." Ali said avoiding a direct answer to Richard's question.

Together with Asya they had soon collected two dozen postcards. Even if they wanted to, they could not carry more. Tsögyel had also picked a few showing Tibetan dignitaries from the early forties. The question of pay was not mentioned. Richard was not anxious, he knew that he would be asked to give what he thought the photos were worth to him, and that price he could not pay. He would quietly add something to the money he would owe Ali for

the group photos.

"Mr. Sayed," he started, "we had come to you to ask you to take a photo or two of the three of us as a memento of our long travel with this Tibetan beauty and her mother. Would you do that for us?" Ali Sayed began to complain, "I would, I would with pleasure, but to get photographic paper these days is extremely difficult and costly. In fact I had in mind to ask you to bring some paper next time you come here, or to give it to someone who will pass through Dingri. I have stacks of old plates in my room that I cannot print, because I cannot get any decent paper. No, don't send anything by mail, it will surely disappear, we tried that." Richard knew that this was the foreplay to the haggle about the price of Ali's services. "I should love to do that for you," he said, "In fact a friend of mine is going to come this way next year. I will buy you a box of postcard stock and send it with him. What kind of paper would you prefer?" Ali waved his hand, "Thank you very much, Sir, for your kindness," and without the slightest hesitation he asked for the most expensive English paper. He knew very well what was available in Europe. Richard scribbled a note into his diary. "It will be done," he said with conviction.

Ali shuffled back into his darkroom and reemerged with a long roll, which he fastened to two hooks in the ceiling. When he unrolled it, it turned out to be a wonderful kitsch-painting of the north face of Everest in evening glow, Rongbuk monastery in the foreground. Asya let go of an emphatic "Ah!" "Will this be a suitable background for the picture," Ali asked unsure of himself. "Oh it is wonderful!" Richard exclaimed to put him at ease. "It will be a black and white photograph?" he asked. The old man raised his hands. "Yes, who will develop and print a color picture for me here?" He went back to his room and dragged out an old-fashioned, bellows view-camera on a tripod. Richard inspected it expertly and found that it was equipped with one of the legendary, pre-World-War-II Zeiss lenses. Ali was very pleased, when Richard praised the lens. "I bought it from Sven Hedin when he left for Europe to never come back again." He explained proudly. He brought a box for Richard to put one foot on so he would be seen with a bent knee slightly from one side, admiring the two ladies whom he arranged to coyly have one arm around the other. He asked for smiles from the ladies to bring out their beautiful teeth, but Richard had to look serious. The composition suited more and more the mood of the backdrop. Ali spent an eternity rearranging his three subjects from under the black cloth draped over the camera back. Occasionally he would talk to Tsögyel, who was very excited, in Tibetan. He reemerged and held up a stick with flash powder in a shallow pan. "Attention!" He shouted, "don't blink or move now!" and released an enormous magnesium flash that left them all blinded. A cloud of magnesium oxide filled the air, slowly drifting down to add a white layer onto the dust in the room. The two girls hugged each other giggling hysterically. "I have not been through this kind of scary sorcery since I was a child," Richard said, "a magnificent performance!" During the preparation for the shot an idea had come to his mind, "Mr. Shah, do you have a few old Tibetan clothes to drape the ladies and myself in? Could we make another picture in such a guise?" "I think I do," said Ali and vanished with the plate holder in the darkroom. After a long time, he came back with an armful of operatic paraphernalia, a splendid Tibetan coat for Richard, an impressive hat, several precious coats for the ladies and an authentic nineteenth-century Tibetan headgear for Tsögyel. With Ali's help the masquerade was explained to Tsögyel, who was already critically inspecting the Tibetan finery. She had her doubts about the headgear, it came from Kham and did not correspond to the headdress they wore in this area. But with a little patience she was persuaded to try it on. She looked like a princess, even old Ali was enchanted. Asya was trying on a heavy Chinese brocade coat that produced clouds of dust on every movements. She let her hair down, and sure enough she looked Chinese. Richard put on the Tibetan caftan, a short sword, and the precious hat. Ali had taken down the view-from-Rongbuk-in-the-evening and dragged in three chairs, which he put next to each other in the Chinese fashion. "Do you also have some kind of a *thanka* in your *cabinet of requisites*?" asked Richard. "We could hang that behind us, and we would have the perfect picture of King Songtsen Gyampo with his two wives." Ali vanished once more and produced a time-worn *thanka* of a White Tara. "Splendid, splendid!" Richard exclaimed, and added in a low voice, "she is my personal *Yidam*." Things are once more happening beyond my control, he mused to himself. They were seated, Richard in the middle, his sword on his lap, Tsögyel on his left, and Asya to his right. They had

a difficult time calming down Tsögyel, who was shaken by spasms of giggles, which made her cover her mouth with her hand, an entirely impossible gesture for the picture. At long last everyone had quieted down sufficiently to proceed. Ali suggested that they should make heroically serious faces to suit the setting. He disappeared under his black cloth for a while. When he reemerged, he had hardly lifted the cap from the lens, when the second magnesium bomb exploded. Stars before their eyes, they sat in total darkness. Tsögyel and Asya fell into each other's arms producing a cloud of dust from their clothes. They giggled uncontrollably.

Later, when the pictures were printed they would discover that Tsögyel had placed her right hand on her belly with the delicate gesture of a pregnant woman protecting her unborn child.

"Are you staying in town tonight?" asked Ali, "I will need some time to develop the plates and print the pictures. I could do this tonight, and you can pick them up tomorrow."

"As a matter of fact," said Richard, "I wanted to ask you what guest house you would recommend. You see, we don't have a proper permit to stay in town, and therefore, don't want to go to one of the tourist hotels." "No problem," Ali replied. "It is only for you and your lady?" Richard nodded. "No problem, there is a small Moslem hotel with only three or four rooms. Normally, they do not take foreigners, but I shall talk to the owner and everything will be all right. It is immaculately clean, and they do have a miniature bath house. We Moslems need that for our ablutions." Richard nearly hugged old Ali, this was a gift from heaven.

They walked with Ali to the inn, looked at their room, which was better than any they had ever stayed in in Tibet, dropped off their luggage, and went with Tsögyel looking for her mother. They found her at the house of relatives of theirs, who asked them to come in and stay for a cup of tea. Tsögyel in a torrent of words reported their adventures. There was much laughter all around. Everyone gave themselves entirely natural, there was no pretense or shyness. It was a complete change from Ali's over-anxious and suspicious Anglo-Moslem formality.

The man of the house spoke some English. He traded along the Friendship Highway between Shigatse and Nepal. After a while he proposed to take them upstairs to his private meditation room. He had several beautiful old *thangkas* hanging on the walls and a proper meditation seat next to a low table with a bell and a *dorje* on it for his sutra readings.

Richard bowed before the images with clasped hands and asked the man for his affiliation. He was a fully empowered Lama of the Kagyü School to which also belonged the gumpa in town and most of the retreats around Mt. Tzipri. The Kargyüpa, he explained, did not have to live in a monastery or practice celibacy like the Gelugpa. They were a long-standing presence in the Dingri area, tracing their ancestry back to Milarepa, the great Tibetan minstrel and saint. During the early twentieth-century Mt. Tzipri and Dingri had seen a great renewal. His guru had been the founder of this movement.

Richard told him that, though he had no formal Lama in America, he considered Milarepa his guru. The man smiled and congratulated him to his choice. "I hear you are going to the Rongshar *beyul*," he said with admiration. "Now I see why! Do you need any help, or a guide?" Richard had not faced that question in earnest. As a matter of fact, he had thought that they would sneak out of town without a pack animal very early in the morning to shake off anybody following them. He told the man, that they had no permit and did not want to get caught by the Chinese. He would be very pleased if he could help them.

The man told them that Tsögyel's mother had explained to him who he was. She had also described what had happened to them on the trip from Chung Riwoche. He offered himself to take them into the Rongshar and find a horse to carry their packs. Once they had passed Rongshar Qu, the Chinese regional administrative center, they would be safe, nobody would look for them there.

Richard was so excited that he momentarily lost his ability to express himself in Tibetan. He finally thanked the smiling man for his kindness, and they agreed to a very reasonable price without any bargaining. The man bowed and introduced himself as Tsultim Lama. When Richard gave his name, Tsultim Lama apologized for having trouble in pronouncing Richard's name, and with a laugh suggested that in due time he would find an

appropriate Tibetan name for him.

When they returned to the living room, the women were talking excitedly surrounding Tsögyel. They fell silent when Richard entered. He smiled and asked for a good Chinese restaurant in town, where he could take Tsögyel and her mother for a farewell dinner. Politely the two asked to be excused. They had not seen their relatives for a long time and had so much to talk about. They would stay here for the night, maybe they could all meet tomorrow at Ali Shah's photo shop. Richard understood their wish, he guessed that they did not care for Chinese food. Richard and Tsögyel's mother went to a separate room, where he generously settled his account with her. They agreed to meet in the morning, and Asya and he walked off into the night alone for the first time in more than two weeks. "Can you believe it?" he said to Asya. "The spirit of the abbot is following us! Such a streak of good karma needs a celebration." "But you will pay Tsultim Lama for his troubles, won't you?" Asya said to put a damper on his obvious sentimentality. Nevertheless, she shared his excitement and put her arm in his. They looked like an old, though mismatched married couple. They found the restaurant. The Sichuan food was excellent. They did not talk much. He could see how happy she was. When they got to their room he undressed her and they slipped into bed together. Quietly he made love to her for the first time.

The sing-song of the muezzin, calling the faithful to prayer, woke them very early in the morning. "The sheep have died," Richard mocked dolefully. Asya, preoccupied, was listening intensely to the up-and-down of the muezzin's prayer. "What a beautiful melody," she observed, and indeed the man's voice was exceptional. They decided to get up, and their host, disapproving that they were late, remarked that after love-making they should have washed before the muezzin's prayer. He took them to the *hamam*, the bath. In the small separate building, lit by a single candle, a big wooden washtub full of steaming water was waiting for them. Asya stripped and with a deep sigh slowly lowered herself into the hot water. "The best thing to happen in weeks," she exclaimed. "We should have a bath like this every day and life would look so much better!" Richard squeezed in behind her, not caring that the water overflowed. Later they lovingly soaped one another and finally poured buckets of cold water over each other.

As they dressed Asya said, "You know, for the first time I can picture a story Nelly told me about her mother Esther who came from an orthodox Jewish family from some village in the Ukraine. As a child Esther had to accompany her mother to the *mikva* every Friday. You know what a *mikva* is? It's the ritual Jewish bath. Every week before the Sabbath, an adult, menstruating woman had to be made *kosher* by being completely submerged three times in a deep, steaming pool in the slimy basement of the village bath house. The place was illuminated by a single candle, just like this one here, the water looked black and threatening. Later an old slattern with drooping breasts holding a huge towel in her bony hands, looking like a giant avenger angel, would wrap up her dear mother in the towel crying '*ko-o-o-sheer*' three times. Only then was her mother allowed to participate in the Sabbath ritual of the men." She asked. "The strange rites men have spun around women like cocoons. Why do they do that and why does woman succumb so readily? Why is woman the source of all evil? You heard our host grumble?" Richard smiled at her. "Because woman is a sorceress who can excite a man from a distance beyond all his control. And because she bleeds once every lunar month, and because she is more powerful than he is, because She *knows* death!"

The prospect of another bath made them decide to stay another night in this hide-away before setting out on their journey. They went for a walk out of town into the Dingri plain and climbed a low hill festooned with prayer flags. The Himalayas lay before them just awakened by the rising sun. For half-an-hour the sky turned a turquoise blue, the ice fields glowed like precious stones in all shades from pink-blue to yellow. Fog in thin layers drifted over the valleys below the peaks. The rumble of a column of army trucks on the Friendship Highway followed by a dust cloud that slowly drifted across their view stirred them out of their reverie. They were hungry. The couple in the Sichuan restaurant welcomed them like old friends. Richard ordered a breakfast in his rudimentary Chinese, *baochi*, palate-sticking, steamed dumplings filled with onions, tasteless rice congee, a spicy-hot mutton broth, equally fiery preserved cauliflower, and endless pots of un-sweetened Chinese tea. "Now, after our miserable food this seems wonderful, but eating a Chinese breakfast every morning over two months is

terrible." Richard mused thinking of his extended wanderings in China.

They arrived at Ali Shah's shop ahead of their Tibetan friends. Ali had just pulled out the prints when the room exploded in enthusiastic turmoil with the arrival of Tsögyel, her mother, and all the women of Tsultim Lamas' household. Asya and Tsögyel dissolved in giggles and affectionate hugs. Even Richard got a hug and a kiss from his Tibetan 'wife' in front of everyone. Mother bowed to him, formal as ever. The other women stood around beaming their perfect teeth.

The photos were a great success. The women laughed and pointed at every detail. Tsögyel proud and serious clasped her copies. Rubbing her stomach she pointed herself out to Asya on the picture of the three of them under the *thanka*. They did look like King Songtsen Gyampo and his two queens. The other one before the view of Everest was pure nineteenth-century kitsch. A gem of a picture rivaling any of Ali's old photographs.

Richard took Ali aside to settle the monetary question. The old Kashgari asked 20 yuan per enlargement. Richard did not blink and gave him 150 yuan for the lot and the postcards, thinking that he can live of that for a month. Ali lost all his English *hauteur* and overcome by a flood of emotions fell back into effusive Levantine gestures.

"Thank you Sir, thank you. And may Allah protect you and your wife on your perilous journey. Thank you, you are most generous, Sir." He repeated several times. Richard smiled at him with distaste, thinking, I have forgotten that this poor Arab has spent his life in a Moslem ghetto working for the detested Buddhist idolaters. Ali complimented his clientele out the door repeating "May Allah bless your path."

They all went to Tsultim Lama's house to continue the party. Tsultim Lama brought glasses and a bottle of milky-white *chang* and in no time everybody was tipsy. The barley beer was not particularly strong, but at this altitude it had more potency than expected. It had a sour flavor not especially suited to their western taste buds. Asya and Richard were gracefully excused from finishing a second bottle that Tsultim had brought.

The women wanted to start their return trip before noon, their final farewell was upon them before Richard realized it. Eased by the alcohol there were more hugs and kisses. Richard one last time touched Tsögyel's forehead, throat and heart. She took his hand and placed it on her stomach. Tsultim translated Richard's formal good wishes for the child.

They waved good-bye as the two women drove their *dri* down the dusty lane, and then they were gone.

Richard discussed the details of their trek with Tsultim Lama. They would take their packs to his house at night and leave in the morning very early when it was still dark. Tsultim suggested that they wait for him at a small hill along the road.

6

Shortly after the muezzin's call they stole out of Dingri like thieves in the night. A late waning half-moon stood above the barely visible snow fields.

Tsultim took his time. Sitting on the low hill where they had agreed to meet him, they watched the mountains emerge from the eerie moonlight into the first light of the new day. It was cold, they had put on everything they had. From time to time they got up and beat life and warmth into each other. They did not speak, each hanging on to their own thoughts.

Tsultim Lama with the horse and their packs appeared on the road just before the sun rose. Despite the dark he wore sun glasses, looking like the Dalai Lama.

It became an easy, beautiful day. The mountains lay before them all the time. Slowly, out of the gap in the chain the enormous glacier fields rose over which Nangpa La pass led to Nepal. Towards noon the sun's reflections from the ice fields became so strong that they too put on sunglasses. Richard talked to Tsultim, which allowed Asya to practice 'pilgrim-walking', as she called it, quietly concentrating on putting one foot before the other. Tsultim told Richard stories from the life of Milarepa. He began, with a surprisingly pleasant voice, to sing a Milarepa song. It went on and on, stanza after stanza, a long story. Richard was happy.

On Richard's request they stopped early at a campground called Sharto To. A wide-open valley with traces of the fire rings of other campers and a spacious view. The mountains were very close now with the tongue of the Nangpa glacier just to the south. Tsultim tied up the front legs of the horse with a short rope. Because horses cannot pull up the short yak grass, he fed the animal barley from a sack he had brought along. Asya sat down to write in her diary and Richard produced a small Walkman from his pack to record Tsultim's songs. After seven-hundred years Milarepa's songs were still sung all over Tibet.

Tsultim's chanting woke them in the morning. He was performing his morning *puja* reading a sutra text. They remained quietly in the tent listening to him. After a while he stopped, and with a changed voice began singing another of Milarepa's songs. They emerged from the tent and found him sitting cross-legged in the opening of his large sleeping pouch, a big rectangular sheepskin sack into which he had disappeared entirely the night before. Tsultim interrupted himself and shouted "Tashi delay! Good Morning! Listen to this song. It tells how one day a deer completely exhausted and in mortal fright arrived at Milarepa's hermitage. To calm the deer Milarepa sang this song." Tsultim sang the long stanza in Tibetan and then translated it *ad hoc*:

*"Honor to Marpa, I bow before you, my Guru;
Pray, relieve the sufferings of all beings!
Listen to me, you deer with sharp antlers!
Because you want to escape from something in the outer world,
You miss to free yourself from your inner blindness and delusions.
With no regret or sadness forget your mind and outer body.
The time has come for you to renounce all delusions.
The Ripening Karma is fearful and compelling, but how
Can you escape from it by fleeing your delusory body?
If escape is what you want, hide within Mind-Essence;
If you want to run away, flee to the place of Bodhi,
There is no other place of safe refuge.
Uprooting all confusion from your mind,
Stay with me here and rest in peace and quiet.
At this moment the fear of death is fully upon you;
You are thinking, that safety lies on the far side of the hill;
That if you stay here you shall be caught and die.
This fear and hope is why you wander in Samsara.
Abandon fear and hope, and I shall teach you the Six Yogas of Naropa,
And set you to practice the Mahamudra.*

Tears in its eyes the deer lay down when a red bitch appeared, her blood-thirsty tongue hanging from her mouth full of sharp teeth. 'She is the one who frightened the deer,' Milarepa said. 'If I can calm this ferocious bitch

and quench her anger, I might save the deer and the bitch,' and continued with great compassion for the misguided dog."

*"Oh you bitch with a wolf's face, listen to this song of Milarepa!
Whatever you see, you consider your rightful prey;
Your heart is full of hatred and ill thoughts.
Because of your bad karma, you were born a bitch,
Forever suffering from hunger and agonizing passion.
This is why you wander in Samsara!
I will teach you the six Yogas of Naropa
And set you to practice the Mahamudra.*

On hearing this song of the Dharma, sung with such immense compassion, the bitch was greatly moved. Whining, wagging her tail, and licking Milarepa's hands, she put her head between her paws and lay down before him with tears in her eyes.

'There must be a hunter following the dog', thought Milarepa, 'but if ignorant animals can understand my teachings, I should be able to turn the hunter to follow the Dharma.'
He had just finished that thought, when a violent man, hot breath issuing from his mouth, a bow and arrow in his hands, ran onto the scene. He eyed the two animals lying peacefully near each other before Milarepa and shouted: 'You must be an evil magician having bewitched my faithful dog to forgo her prey! That deer is my rightful hunt, give it up. You are not going to feast on my game!' And shot an arrow at Milarepa.
The arrow missed its target, and the hunter was much surprised. Taken aback he said, 'You must be a really powerful man. Not in fifteen years has my arrow failed to hit its target.'
Seeing his chance Milarepa sang:

*You man with a human body but a demon's face,
Listen to me. Listen to the song of Milarepa!
Men say the body is most precious, like a gem;
There is nothing precious about you.
Though you desire the pleasures of life, you will never gain them.
But by renouncing your desires, you will win a great accomplishment.
It is hard to conquer oneself, but slaying this deer will not please you,
But by killing the Five Poisons within you,
All your wishes will be fulfilled.
Do not spend your life committing sinful deeds;
It will be good for you to practice the holy Dharma.
I offer myself to teach you the Six Yogas of Naropa
And direct you on the path of the Mahamudra.*

The hunter, made uncertain by the Milarepa's words, entered the master's cave where he found nothing but green herbs. Seeing the austerity of the master's life great faith overcame him. He turned around and said, 'Revered Lama! You must be a very holy man. Who is your Guru? Who taught you the powers you practice? Where do you come from, and who is your companion? I offer myself to be your servant, and shall prepare this deer for you!'

Milarepa saw that the wild man was softening, but also that he had not yet been touched by the Dharma. Milarepa sang a long song about his austerity and lineage, the hunter was much moved and sang to Milarepa:

*If I slay this deer my ravenous appetites might be satisfied
For seven days, but it would not help me,
I have no more need for food.
Pray, deliver this deer on the Path of Great Happiness,*

*Pray, lead Red Lightening Lady on the Path of Bodhi,
Pray, bring me, Gwumbo Dorje, to the Land of Liberation.
Great Jetsun please teach me the Path of the Dharma.*

Milarepa was pleased, and after expounding the hardships of the life that awaited him, the hunter said, 'A Lama like you is indeed marvelous and would be a great guru to follow. I vow to honor you from the bottom of my heart. Let me go home and tell my wife, and then I will renounce my life and come back to live with you.' Milarepa, seeing that the man would change his mind if he returned home to his wife, sang to him,

*Life flees fast. Soon death will knock upon your door.
It is foolish to postpone one's devotion.
What else can a loving wife do but throw you back into Samsara?
To strive for lasting happiness is more important than to seek it here.
The time has come for you to stay with your Guru,
the time has come for you to practice the Dharma.*

The huntsman abandoned all his former life on the spot and stayed with the master. Milarepa gave Gwumbo Dorje the complete initiation and instructions. In due time the hunter became one of the heart-sons of Milarepa. He is known as Chira Repa, the Cotton-Clad Huntsman. The deer and the bitch too were saved forever from the Path of Sorrows, and the huntsman's arrows which he offered the master can still be seen in Ghadaya Cave on Nyishang Gurda Mountain at the border between Nepal and Tibet."

Richard was moved. "Many years ago in Kathmandu, I looked for a *thanka* for myself. Fate brought me to a very kind and knowledgeable man who showed me many beautiful thankas. Out of his precious storage he pulled a *thanka* of Milarepa. I knew at once that he would be my personal Guru. It now hangs in my room in California. But only now do I understand the scene that surrounds Milarepa clad in a flowing white robe sitting on an antelope skin. At the bottom lie the deer, the bitch, and the ferocious huntsman, listening to the Jetsun! I did not know this song."

Tsultim Lama was pleased to have been able to open Richard's eyes with this teaching story. He said. "I know this *thanka*. You will find the original at Lapchi Gompa!"

Asya and Richard walked together in the morning. They were climbing up to Laiya La, the first pass between the Dingri plain and the Rongshar Valley, and Tsultim with the horse was way ahead of them. Near the *Ihato* on top of Laiya La Tsultim was waiting for them. "Come here, the view is beautiful. Look, the top of Everest just rises above the lower mountains, and you could fly onto Cho Oyu and its glaciers from here without being a very accomplished magician." And indeed they looked down into the valley that drains the Nangpa glacier whose broken vertical end-wall was only a few kilometers away.

To the south-west lay a gray-green, moon-like valley down which wound their track. A fierce head-wind made even downhill-walking a labor. Richard did indeed feel that if he would spread his arms and did a little rowing, he could easily take off and sail across the ice fields. Laughing, Asya grabbed him by his anorak shouting against the wind, "No, don't take off, that would be too easy! Fly? No, the hard path of the *Dharma* is here, in the middle of *Samsara*. I still need you for a little while longer!"

At the end of the moon valley they had to wade through a swift stream, but it was not very deep. It had become late afternoon when four or five black tents of a nomad camp came into sight. Tsultim told them that this settlement was Drakmar, and that they would stay there. They were glad, they had walked for eight hours.

Tsultim Lama knew the people, and all three of them were invited into the head lady's tent for butter tea. Asya

smiled at Richard reminding him of their first visit to a nomad tent in Tajang. "We have come a long way since," she said, "today was a beautiful day."

While Tsultim paid his reverence to the little house altar decorated with Dalai Lama pictures and a small *thanka*, they looked around. There was an old woman holding a baby on her lap and a collection of children of various ages. The women were standing in the entrance eyeing the guests full of curiosity. All were very shy and well behaved in the presence of the Lama. Asya tried to connect the children with the various women, but gave up. It was a hopeless undertaking.

Tsultim returned with a thick, worn Tibetan text covered with colorful silk brocade held together by yellow ribbons. He showed the long rectangular volume to Richard saying, "This is their family treasure. Look, it is printed on old, hand-made Tibetan paper. A sutra of the nineteenth-century." He took the package apart and began to chant the text to the assembled people, moving the leaves one by one from left to right.

While this went on the old woman, whom Asya had thought was the grandmother, opened her wrap-around jacket, took out one breast and began nursing the infant. Asya was dumbfounded. How could this old woman nurse the baby? But not to disturb the impromptu service she kept quiet.

Later she asked Richard, who suggested, "If a woman keeps nursing infants, she can still produce milk even after menopause. That is what the old wet-nurses used to do. But maybe we simply overestimate her age." They were too shy to ask Tsultim for a better explanation.

In the morning the women offered their guests fresh milk, tsampa, and lots of butter tea. Tsultim reminded them that this would be a hard day, they had to cross Poze La, a much higher pass than the last and descend through the Rongshar gorge before they would find another good camp site. "But then we will be in the Valley of the Roses. You will see even this late in season it is beautiful." He pressed for an early start.

Dense fog was drifting up the valley from the south. They had to stay close to the lama in order not to lose him and the track. They passed an abandoned Chinese military camp. On a hillside above the ruins the soldiers had eroded three large Chinese characters into the rocky soil. Richard read: 'Long Live Chairman Mao!' A memento from the unhappy sixties.

Very restrained, Tsultim told them of the refugees that had streamed through this valley into Nepal. A column of miserable, dispossessed, hunted people. It reminded Richard of the end of his childhood fleeing in 1945 from the advancing Russian troops. He had been thirteen then and remembered the fear and dread and the strafing airplanes shooting at the choked columns of fleeing people.

Tsultim sighed. "But your country has finally been relieved of the Communist yoke and been reunited. We still live under this oppressive occupation. Forty-five years is a long time. If only the Dalai Lama could return, everything would take a better turn."

Richard in a realistic mood, pointed at the track which had been bulldozed by the Chinese and noted that this road, the tractors, buses and trucks, the food in the stores, coca cola, thermos bottles, sunglasses, electricity had all come with the hated Chinese.

"Yes," said Tsultim nodding pensively, "our world has changed and will never return to what it was before 1959. I also remember the complete moral decay, the political factionalism that existed in our country before that time, and the stupid isolation we lived in. Ultimately these conditions allowed the Chinese communists to take over Tibet so easily. We do not hate the Chinese. Our relationship with the Chinese is very old, there have been hundreds of years of very close and fruitful cooperation, but also times of deep despair. This is the second time in a hundred years that the Dalai Lama had to flee to India. We cannot live without China, not politically nor economically." He paused pulling angrily at the horse's leash.

"I should control myself better," he finally said. "I should convert my anger. Not because I am afraid, but because anger and hatred serve no good. But you see, at the beginning of the century the oracle in Nechung has said that this will be the last Dalai Lama. What will happen when he dies?"

Richard said, "I have listened to the Dalai Lama in person twice, he mentioned this oracle too. But he gave himself very positive. He felt that this was the austerity the Tibetans needed in order to open themselves to the world, and that one of his jobs was to spread the Dharma in the West."

Tsultim agreed with this view. "This is one reason why I am walking with you," he said. "I know that you will gain

insight and new awareness from walking through this sacred *beyul*. But who is going to rescue us out of our confusion and relieve the oppression we suffer?"

"Maybe," he added, "we will have to learn how to cooperate with the Chinese politically on a secular level without losing our identity. Until now, any Tibetan man who tries is being judged a traitor by his people, a Chinese 'spy'. But first the Chinese police and the military have to disappear from our land before that will be possible. Mao has to die completely, also in China."

The fog had become dense. The wind from the Indian plains driving the clouds towards the high plateau was heavy, humid, and uncomfortably warm.

Like in Ganden, suddenly the curtain ripped open, and they stood before a ghost village of dilapidated stone houses. "This is Kyetrak" said Tsultim. "It used to be inhabited by traders using the Rongshar route to Nepal. When the Friendship Highway was built, the trade on this route died. The people have moved to Dingri or to the big towns in the east. The land is too barren to support farming."

The village had disappeared again only to reappear a few minutes later when another gust blew the clouds northward. Soon they walked between the ghostly, abandoned houses along the over-grown main street. After Kyetrak Tsultim led them steeply up a series of short-cuts crossing the winding tractor road again and again on its way up to Poze La. It was very hard going, and they had to concentrate on their breathing to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Richard took off his parka to keep himself from sweating. It helped but little.

The clouds became thinner above them, and occasionally the sun became visible as a veiled disk. Then suddenly the curtain was blown away in one sweep. They emerged in brilliant sunlight on a small plateau just below the pass. A stupendous view of the mountains opened, the snow fields blinding their eyes.

The clouds filling the valleys looked like the waves of an immense sea, islands of snow and ice floating above them. The rock-fissured ice cap of Cho Oyu surrounded by a maze of lower peaks, ice fields lapping down between them, the huge Kyetrak glacier on its eastern flank, all very close.

To recover from the climb they sat and had some pre-prepared lunch of boiled potatoes and salt - which tasted unexpectedly good.

Richard lay on his back. Asya was still staring at the view.

"It's sad," he said, "but I really do not care for these alpine views. I always had that problem. These mountains appear inhuman to me, and they are. Not that I don't appreciate this view, but it does not move me. I like the brown, bare stone hills in the north better. Funny, isn't it? You will say, they are also inhuman, desert, no life anywhere. But for me they glow from the inside. I always yearned for this bare landscape. A single palm tree on one of the islands in the blue Aegean Sea is like a thorn in my eye, causing me tears of despair."

He sat up and looked at Asya. "Have you ever been to Greece? I first loved Tibet. When I was eleven I devoured Sven Hedin's Tibetan travel diaries, yearning to follow his steps across the snow wastes of the Chang Tang. A year later I discovered Greece in a book my father gave me for Christmas. A delirious hymn to the Greek light. Excited from reading this book I saw Greece for the first time in 1953 and fell head over heels in love with it. I found everything that Tibet had promised, barren rocks, intensely blue waters, a searing sun, fiercely independent people, only the snow and these icy peaks were missing. Instead, Greece was covered with female stones. The dreams following that first long hike through Greece taught me all I know about woman. Not in any apparent way, deep below my consciousness."

He rubbed his eyes. "And in Greece, like here, there are age-old demons living below the surface of the earth, except there I recognize them as *my* archetypes. To understand the Tibetan demons I had to labor for years, then they taught me many things about myself, which I would have never known otherwise."

He waved his hand at the glistening snowscape. "But do they demand from me that I also *love* these icy mountains beyond having a healthy respect for them? Beyond recognizing the fierce power of their demons? After we have returned from this trek, I shall have to go back to Greece to take a purifying plunge into the clear, heady waters of the Aegean Sea."

He looked anxiously at Asya, but for once she was not frowning at his impassioned speech. "I would like to go to Greece with you." Richard raised his eyebrows and looked down. "I am sorry, Greece is exclusively Andrea's domain. It is filled with memories of so many days, so many years of our life, of some of the most intense

experiences together. I cannot go there without her."

She shrugged. "So I will have to find someone else with whom to go there."

"Yes, you should. You need a young man, one you are in love with. To be alone in Greece is worse than not being there. The place is crowded with sensual, erotic spirits. Good old Pan is the most frightening character you will ever encounter there among the gnarled olive trees and the hot rocks."

The descent was even steeper than the way up. The flora was changing dramatically. An hour below the summit shrub juniper and crippled dwarf rhododendrons were covering the slopes. The first bushes they had seen since the Lhasa valley. Further down, barberries full of blue plums joined them and gooseberry bushes, and then came the first roses dotted with bright red rose-hips.

Between the widely dispersed thorny bushes stood purple flowers on single stalks without any leaves which Richard recognized from the alpine flora of his youth, a crocus, *colchicum autumnale*, he had never seen in the mountains of California. They found a rare silver-green arctic gentian, small, eight-petal dryads, and a few alpine arnica still blooming. Still further down stood bushels of asphodel. With a choked voice he told Asya, "Asphodels, look they also grow after the first rains in the fall among the Greek rocks in October."

The path disappeared into a narrow canyon, a fast running brook at the bottom. For over an hour they were hemmed in between nearly vertical walls growing narrower and higher all the time.

When they emerged at its lower exit they were welcomed by a *lhato* of juniper twigs covered with prayer flags. More prayer flags on strings were spanning the canyon in four arcs high above the river. Tsultim Lama fell on his knees, prostrated himself several times, and then sang a song in praise of the Great Beyul of Milarepa. "Welcome to Drin!" he said hugging Richard, "a refuge for all sentient beings in distress. Drin is the old Tibetan name for this valley."

They set up camp an hour later on a fine meadow where a tributary met the Rongshar river swelling it to twice its size. Before they crawled into their sleeping bags Tsultim Lama said. "Tomorrow we will have a very easy day walking between barley fields and pretty villages. Will you let me take you to some of the places sacred to Milarepa? I would like to visit them myself, and in your company my prayers will be doubly blessed."

The track, much eroded and full of stones wound through harvested barley fields down the narrow upper Drin valley. A wall of *mani* stones rimmed their way. After two hours of easy walking, except for the rocks on the track, they reached Tashang, a small farming village of a few houses. Tsultim left the horse and the baggage with friends at one of the houses, and took them up a very steep trail to *Luma Dzog-Dzog*, one of the Milarepa retreats. They could see the cave, two white chörten, and the retreat nesting high up in a sheer vertical rock wall. They reached a narrow ledge in front of the cave. *Mani* stones marked the spot. The entrance to the cave was ornamented with painted reliefs of a meditating Bodhisattva Shakyamuni on one and Milarepa listening, holding his hand behind his ear on the other side. They were painted in cheerful, primary colors, yellow, red, green, a deep blue, and white for the faces. Inside stood a small white chörten preserving the ashes of a saintly man. The walls were covered with Tibetan mantras in large letters.

Tsultim told them that *Luma Dzog-Dzog*, the "Congregation of Luma," had been inhabited by female water nymphs since time immemorable whom Milarepa converted. Here Milarepa was visited by Zasse Bum the fiancée he had abandoned. He persuaded her with his songs to stop pining for him and follow the Dharma.

Easing themselves along a narrow path in the rock wall they came to the two white chörten they had seen from below, and a short distance further, clamped between the walls of a cleft in the rock a simple retreat inhabited by an hermit who welcomed them with great enthusiasm. They drank tea while Tsultim exchanged the news with the man, the latest Chinese atrocities, messages from emigrant friends in Kathmandu and India, news of the Dalai Lama's travels to Germany and America. Later they found an idyllic camp site under willows and birches on the other side of the Rongshar river.

"This is the day of reckoning," said Tsultim in the morning, "today we have to sneak around Chungmoche Qu, the administrative center of the Rongshar. Two Tibetan cadres live there in a new compound who could make our

lives miserable. If we fail and they catch us, I have some friends in the village who could help. But it will be better to avoid the cadres all together, because I too should have a permit to travel so close to the Chinese border." Richard told Tsultim that he was quite prepared to pay a fine for Tsultim and them, but he was not willing to be sent back to Dingri. "We will closely follow you and hurry as fast as we can walking around the place." The hike in the early morning led through birches and willows along the widening river. They were still walking downhill. There were new flowers in the meadows by the river, but Richard decided not to dawdle. Chungmoche Qu appeared in the distance. Tsultim took them across the river on a rickety, barely 'horse-able' bridge, and they passed the village undetected. Their only problem was how to get back across the river. They had to perform a perilous dance across a sequence of rocks to reach their path again. The tractor track had ended in Chungmoche, and they were now following a simple foot path. At one point Tsultim led them off the path to a hidden waterfall in a ravine. It dropped some twenty-five meters from a cliff into the valley.

Further down they came to a chörten. Tsultim told them that here Milarepa had been attacked by a group of *dre*, wild mountain ghosts. He converted the ghosts and inducted them to become protectors of the Dharma. But one had to be careful to pay proper respect to them, they were only half-tamed.

Above the valley to the south-east Mount Tseringma-Gaurisankar showed *her* snow-capped heights. Against a dramatic backdrop of vertical cliffs, the buildings of Chuwar Potrang could be seen on the other side of the river. According to Tsultim it was, after Lapchi Gompa, the most important Milarepa shrine in the valley. They crossed the river on a bridge and found a campsite near the retreat. They put up the tent, tied the horse down, and climbed up the short, steep trail that led to the monastery.

Richard had noticed that the architecture of the village houses had changed, the gompa confirmed his observations. It was built in the Nepali style, reminiscent of the pagodas in Patan and Kathmandu. The monastery had been recently reconstructed by local artists in the old tradition.

Milarepa had spent many years in the caves surrounding Chuwar Potrang, had subdued demons, converted villagers, and at one point had inducted all the Five Goddesses of Eternal Life, who had come to distract him from meditation and tempt him with their charms. He had simply made love to all five of them, and they had been so pleased that they became his disciples. At eighty-four Milarepa had died in a cave above the monastery. He had been poisoned by a local adversary, who also died from the same poison after the Jetsun had made him see the light of the Dharma.

On the way down they visited Kyung Gong Phuk, the Cave of the Garuda Egg where the conversion of the five goddesses had taken place. An old man now lived in a small house at its entry. Along the path prayer flags marked places where imprints in the rock of the saint's foot, hand, fist, and penis could be seen.

In the afternoon Tsultim Lama had an emotional conversation with Richard. He needed to return home next day. The path to Drintang was short but too steep for the horse to carry their luggage. Would they let him go, and carry their bags? If they wanted to, he could find them porters to carry their belongings up the five-hundred meters to the village, but they would be expensive.

They should not miss staying a day or two at Drintang. It was one of the prettiest villages in Tibet, and on the day after tomorrow there would be a festival in Drintang to which people from all over the valley would come. Asya and Richard decided to carry their own bags, and Richard prepared an sumptuous farewell dinner that night.

In the morning Tsultim changed his mind. He offered to take them as far as Drubten where the steep ascent to Drintang begins. It was not far. They climbed up the left flank of the valley, leaving the Rongshar behind. All three of them were in a sad mood. In Drubten they said their farewell. Tsultim even gave Asya a hug and a kiss, which he had never done before. They shouldered their packs and started walking up the narrow path. There were fall flowers everywhere. They walked very slowly, one foot before the other, breathing heavily despite the low altitude. They took a rest at an exceptionally lovely spot with a great view of Drubten, Chuwar, the river, and the valley below. Very small but quite distinct Asya spotted Tsultim Lama with his horse, but he was not walking down the trail to Chuwar on which they had come. He was going along a different path in a southerly direction. Puzzled, Richard took out his map.

"You know where this track goes?" he said, "To Nepal! Where is he heading? To see some friends before he returns?"

They couldn't figure it out. Strange, Tsultim had never mentioned that he was on his way to Nepal, and he had told them that he did not have the proper papers to enter the border region. After an hour they started up again with a sigh. Ah, for a horse! They really had become spoiled.

Half-way up a young lama came running up the trail. As soon as he was close enough he shouted, "Wait, where are you going in such a hurry. You make it really hard for this old mountain goat to catch up with you!" --in perfect English.

They waited, huffing and puffing. Under the lama's red-brown toga one could guess a strong body. He had an intelligent face with clear features under the usual short-cropped hair of the monks. He stopped and laughed. "Tsultim Lama told me you were from California! I met him over an hour ago. I have not seen or talked to anybody from California for years!"

Richard remained cool to this enthusiastic welcome. Asya talked to the monk. Richard with a poker face watched them. "How come you speak such good English?" He asked.

Quite matter of fact, the lama said, "My Guru, is the head of the Nyingma Center in Berkeley, and I was born and grew up in Ojai and lived for years in Sonoma, where I was involved in the building of the new *ling* up in the valley." Now even Richard became interested. They took-off their backpacks and talked to the lama.

With an ironic smile he said, "I am John Norbu, but everybody calls me Phurbu Lama. You know, a *phurbu* is the magic dagger with which the Ningmapa exorcise demons and cut the Fog of Ignorance that keeps man from awareness."

Richard smiled. "An appropriate name for a strapping, young man like you!"

The lama gave him a curious, not unkind look. Asya blushed.

Richard continued the interrogation. "So, you must be a Ningmapa? What brings you into the Valley of Milarepa?"

"Oh, Tsultim Lama did not tell you?" Phurbu said surprised. "There is going to be a big *Cham Dance* in Drintang tomorrow. It takes place at *Zangdhok Pelri* one of the paradises that Guru Rinpoche established. You do know who Guru Rinpoche is? His Sanskrit name is Padmasambhava, the great Sage and Magician who brought the Buddhist *Vajrayana* to Tibet in the eighth century. He is the spiritual ancestor of all Ningmapa and the founder of our school."

Richard nodded a little embarrassed. But Phurbu just smiled and said, "Tsultim Lama said that you might need a guide to hike over the passes into the Lapchi, and since I will go that way in a couple of days, it would be my pleasure to accompany you there." He must have guessed what went through Richard's mind, because he added, "No, no I do not want any money from you, I really don't need any, but I have been away from California, where I grew up, for so long that being with you would be a genuine pleasure."

He is clever and a histrionic, thought Asya. And why not? To imagine of coming across a Tibetan lama who was born and lived in the same backwaters of California as I did!

Richard, still a little grumpy, admitted that having a guide in crossing the two high passes and the long and lonely stretch between them would in fact be a real godsend. Richard asked Phurbu whether he would help them find a pack animal in Drintang?

"Of course," Phurbu said, "and they should be quite reasonably there. This part of the country has not been

spoiled by tourists yet. I also know some kind people in Drintang who could put you up during the festival. Drintang will be crowded with people from all over these valleys, and it would be good, if you kept a low profile. The Chinese will not show, but there are always Tibetans who work for them. It would not be helpful, if you were 'discovered'."

With a chivalrous gesture, Phurbu shouldered Asya's backpack, and they went back to climbing to Drintang. Asya walked last, so the two men with their loads could determine their progress. Amazing how this 'mountain-goat' negotiated the path. Sure-footed, he never made an unnecessary step, he set no loose stones rolling. Poor Richard had a much harder time.

After another three-quarter of an hour they reached the village. It was indeed exceptionally pretty, two and three story, Nepali-style houses, some of rough stone, some white-washed, all with steep roofs against the snows. A clean street cobbled with large river stones. Fast flowing water runnels everywhere between the houses that served as drainage and for washing laundry, and breathtaking views in every direction.

Phurbu took them to a house at the upper end of the village. A large open area extended from there, rising slightly to the gumpa at Zangdhok Pelri, the Guru Rinpoche cave.

The people were exceptionally friendly despite their unannounced appearance. There were many hugs and much merriment between the family and Phurbu. Especially the two older daughters vied for his attention and hugged and kissed Phurbu as if he was their teddy-bear.

After this display of affection, they looked Asya over, an American lady from California! One spoke a little English and Phurbu teased her to talk to Asya. They took Asya to their room and told her that she would sleep with them, whilst Richard was taken to a room upstairs where the men slept.

Tseringma, the older one was 19 and her sister Jima 16. They were exasperatingly silly, giggling out of control about absolutely everything. Both sisters were quite pretty, and they knew it. Asya took her sleeping bag out and Tseringma immediately took possession of it. Tonight she was going to sleep in it, and Asya would sleep under her three layers of rough, hand-woven, wool blankets. Richard left with Phurbu and the master of the house to take a look at the preparations for the festival. They gave Richard a local overcoat and a huge, black hat to camouflage him. He looked great.

Asya needed a change of clothes, and went back to their room, closely followed by both girls. As she took her things off, Tseringma inspected Asya's underpants feeling their softness and smelling them. Then she picked up Asya's jeans. She was quite tall for her age, and before Asya knew, she had put on her panties and jeans in a hilarious attack of laughter.

"Why don't we change clothes? I wear yours and you wear mine. We will completely surprise Phurbu," she giggled, already taking her long dress off. She wore no bra. Before Asya could stop her, Tseringma had put Asya's bra on. What could she do? She let it happen.

Tseringma ran her fingertips ever so lightly over Asya's shoulders, her breasts and body. "You have such a beautiful skin and you smell so good." She said without the slightest trace of embarrassment. Asya slipped into Tseringma's dress. Looking critically at Asya from an arm's length Tseringma tugged at the dress here and there.

In their newly established intimacy, Tseringma told Asya that they were both going to marry Phurbu, but Phurbu wanted to marry only one. He had told them to decide between themselves which one. They were quite indignant about this demand. A rich American like he should be able to support two wives. Asya concluded that Tseringma had already slept with Phurbu. Tseringma did not say so, but they began discussing sexual matters very freely. Apparently, the woman makes the choice and gives the man a hint when and where to meet her. And he better be there, or she will not speak to him for weeks.

Tseringma, completely matter of fact, told Asya that there were two kinds of making love, with and without ejaculation by the man. The latter was the choice of unmarried girls. Phurbu was an uncertain candidate for love-making, because he was a *Dzogchenpa* to whom everything was permitted. Kargyüpa were not supposed to 'spill their essence'.

The house was very neat especially the kitchen, despite that it had an open fire pit where the cooking was done, the pots resting on a tripod-like fixture. The smoke escaped through a hole in the ceiling above it. The entire room smelled pleasantly for the aromatic pine wood of the area. Along one entire wall were cupboards on which tin plates, dishes, cups, and big Chinese thermos bottles were displayed. On the opposite side of the room carpets were laid out on which stood three low tables painted red. Cushions in behind the tables along the wall served as seats.

Asya was sitting cross-legged at one of the tables writing in her diary while Tseringma peered over her shoulder trying to read what she was writing:

Tseringma looked very slender, very stylish in her jeans. She giggled reading over Asya's shoulder, who without much success tried to shoo her away. Finally Asya asked for another cup of tea, her fourth. This gave Asya some respite for a while, because the water in the thermos was at an end, and Tseringma had to find another one. They only boiled water once in the morning.

"It is really astounding how similar our ways are." Wrote Asya in her diary. "There is nothing exotic about these girls, they are completely open. They may be subject to cultural taboos I do not know, but sexually they are freer than girls of their age would be in California, despite our much touted 'liberation'. Maybe it is their 'natural' attitude towards life that makes them appear so un-exotically contemporary.

"I have not seen Richard or Phurbu for several hours. Am I regressing in this alien outfit? It is true what Richard says, this lovely, tranquil valley, created for all sentient beings in distress, has healing powers? It surely domesticates one! I have not had one memorable dream, good or bad in the last days. How hallucinating and powerful the empty brown hills of the high-plateau were, how haunting their fierce spirits!

"So what is happening to me? I am sitting here in this already familiar kitchen playing at being the cool anthropologist, but in reality I am jittery, my heart is fluttering like a hawk stalled in mid-air. It is the thrill of being suspended entirely free in empty space. Vertigo maybe. A sense of foreboding, of what, I don't know."

The little masquerade was a complete success, at least for Tseringma. Phurbu played his card to the hilt. Overlooking Asya entirely he fell on one knee and made a long speech in English (so Asya would understand!) to Tseringma, ending with a formal proposal kissing her hand. Tseringma blushed furiously. She could not say a clear sentence in English. "Thank you! Thank you!" she blabbered.

Asya's knees turned weak, and Richard, the good man, put his arm around her, and said in German, "How can he be so insensitive!" Phurbu got up laughing and now finally admired Asya's dress-up. "You look so authentic, that for a moment I thought you were a Tibetan woman. Look at Tseringma, I should bring her a pair of jeans from Kathmandu next time instead of the French perfume and the American soap she is craving." Asya could not help herself, with a voice tinged with jealousy, she said venomously, "And a pair of silk panties!" Everybody laughed except Tseringma and Asya.

They settled behind the little tables and Tseringma and Jima brought cups and more tea.

"Richard," said Phurbu, "all afternoon I have been raking my mind. Have you ever been in Ladakh?" "Yes, twice, once in 1986, another time in the winter of 1989. Why?"

"Now I see it again. Were you at the Hemis Festival in June of 1986?"

"Yes?" admitted Richard.

Phurbu got up and excitedly exclaimed first in English than in Tibetan. "Then I did meet you in 1986 on the roof of Hemis Gompa in the afternoon of the second day of the festival! We had a long talk, and I invited you to Traktok where I was then staying for a year."

A light of recognition went over Richard's face, "But of course, I do remember you and our conversation. I visited Traktok on the last day of my stay in Leh, but everybody was asleep on that Sunday morning, and I left without having met you again. God, how small this world is."

Everybody surrounded Phurbu talking at the same time, trying to find out what the excitement was about. The master of the house quietly left the room and returned with a pitcher of *chang* and soon everybody was in high spirits.

Now that the ice was broken, Richard asked Phurbu, "Do you know Tsultim Lama well?" "A little. Occasionally we have some business transactions with each other." Richard exclaimed, "I thought he is a Kagyü Lama, business transactions? You must explain that to me." Phurbu sobered up and said, "It is dangerous to talk about these things, but since we are entirely among friends, yes, we run a little business across the border to Kathmandu buying and selling cosmetics which are hard to find in Tibet, like French perfume, American soap, shampoos, and hair tonics, you know, things the ladies crave and are willing to pay good money for." Looking at Asya he added, "Hasn't Tseringma already shown you all those precious treasures?"

Richard raised his brows. "So that is why Tsultim went towards Nepal and not home as he had told us before we separated! We were puzzled when we saw him ride down in that direction." He shook his head. "But a lama doing business like this beats me."

"Why not?" asked Phurbu. "We are not paid anything by the *Sangha*, you have to provide your own livelihood or sit in a cave and practice at being a hermit, living off the kind donations of pilgrims passing by. I might resort to this lifestyle when I'm sixty-five!"

He continued, "Actually being a lama is an excellent cover. We cannot fool the Chinese, but the locals consider a lama with great reverence, especially in Nepal, and we can always stay at the gompas overnight for a small contribution to their meager kitty. Support your local soap pusher!" He laughed. "How would this do as a bumper sticker? You have the wrong idea about lamas! We are not like your learned, 'celibate' monks, at least not the Ningmapa. But then our life is very different from theirs."

Richard asked. "Tell me, I hear that at Berkeley Ling they teach Dzogchen. Are you a Dzogchenpa?" Phurbu's face changed, he became serious. "What do you know about Dzogchen?" he returned the question. "Very little,"

Richard said. "My son has a friend who spent a long time off-and-on studying Dzogchen at Berkeley Ling, but he was never willing to explain to me what this was all about. Now I read the 'Flight of the Garuda' in an English translation and that made me very curious. I found a lot of things in that text that are very close to me."

"Yes," said Phurbu Lama, "I know Brian Gilman well, who translated the 'Garuda'. He lives in Kathmandu and is a close friend of mine. But there is really very little that one can 'explain' about Dzogchen, one has to practice it. Maybe I shall try to explain some of this on our way across Sobje La."

He changed the subject to a discussion of the *cham* dances, and what Richard and Asya could do to avoid being noticed too easily. With an ambiguous smile he suggested that Asya's present outfit would be excellent for that. Richard, however, would be a little harder to conceal. It was decided that they would try to disguise him in the morning.

The night had been starry, cold and clear, a new-moon, but when they woke the world was shrouded in dense fog. They met in the smoke-filled kitchen. The smoke had difficulty finding the hole in the roof. All windows and the door were open. Tseringma and her mother had baked a special kind of bread for the occasion. They had prepared round balls of dough the night before, which they now flattened and put into the hot ashes of the fire. They popped up like New Mexican sopapillas. Served with wild honey they were a mess to eat! To this Tseringma offered salty Tibetan tea, churned with butter in a long wooden cylinder. Everyone was in great spirits except Asya, who tried to shake off the cobwebs of a night under the heavy blankets. On Tseringma's request she wore her Tibetan dress again.

Suddenly the fog was blown away and a bright sun revealed the crowd who had assembled on the grassy slope above the house. A loud 'Ah!' was heard. The dances could start.

The deep sound of the long horns slowly increasing to an earth-shaking fortissimo opened the proceedings. The cacophony of the orchestra, drums banging, monks chanting, large brass cymbals clashing! To scare the ghosts away.

Very excited Richard ran upstairs and came back with his small instamatic camera.

Everybody left the house.

A group of weirdly dressed Black-Hat-Sorcerers appeared stomping, as if drunk, slowly across the open space waving short daggers against invisible phantoms. Another blast from the horns, a new crescendo of the orchestra, shrieking clarinets, the monotonous rhythm of the drums, and the dinging of bells announced the next group of characters.

"Now comes Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava and his entourage!" said Richard to Asya.

A hush went through the audience. Under an umbrella adorned with swaying, tasseled fringes a man dressed in a colorful, Chinese-silk brocade wearing a huge pink, papier-mâché mask with a grotesque baby-smile walked ponderously onto the dance ground. He held a *phurbu* in one and a scull-cup in the other hand: Guru Rinpoche. He was followed by seven smaller masks, terrifying and peaceful ones, each differently colored. The Guru's seven incarnations. In a whirl of bright colors they danced around the clearing and finally stopped before the abbot of the monastery, who was sitting in splendid regalia on a throne under a canopy. Incongruously he wore sunglasses. The assembled masks bowed before him, and he purified them by waving at them with a whisk of long, white yak hair.

Another blast from the orchestra.

The warm wind blew a cloud over the hill, and the entire colorful assembly became embroiled in the swirling fog. At one moment Asya saw only Padmasambhava's gold and yellow umbrella, at the next a disembodied, huge, fierce red mask stared at her. The masks seemed to fight hopelessly against the white clouds. Defeated, the entire scene vanished.

Richard, beyond himself, ran off shouting "God, the photographic opportunity of a life-time." He disappeared in the cloud.

The chanting and the drums, muffled like under a featherbed, continued humming. When a squall blew the cloud away, the bizarre scene reemerged in blazing colors in bright sunshine, all before the grandiose backdrop of the snow covered mountains. Padmasambhava and his entourage were standing very close to Asya. At the upper end of the field more characters were appearing. A group of yellow-clad, monkish clowns with funny hats. Seven warriors in fantastic chain-mail and medieval iron helmets, with hairy bare legs protruding from ordinary sport-shorts. A group of Indian and Bön deities in wild, deep-blue and black masks. There must have been three dozen characters assembled on the meadow now.

A fantastic scene.

Then the fog closed in once more. Asya could not see her nearest neighbor despite the many people around. She seemed to be entirely alone. Suddenly Phurbu stood next to her. Her heart jumped. His eyes, serious, were full of desire. Asya reached for him. He took her hand. Together they ran uphill through the fog. In a niche behind a rock he simply reefed up Asya's dress and standing, ravished her, urgently, and without mercy.

Richard has many hands, she thought, he has only two, but his *phurbu* sliced her like a dagger.

She must have fainted. All she later could remember was a sensation of floating above the scene. Fierce masks circling below in the fog. Phurbu must have carried her to a nearby brook. When she came to she was lying on the ground and Phurbu, squatting next to her, sprinkled cold water over her face.

She sighed. "I have never had such an experience before."

He blushed. "The French call this *la petite mort*, and the Tibetans *opening a woman's inner mandala....*"

He reached into his toga and produced a round, plastic sachet inscribed '*Yak and Yeti Hotel, Kathmandu*', it contained a small piece of perfumed French soap. "Here, take this. The cold water will restore your spirits."

When she returned, he handed her two foil-encased pills. "Take one tablet now and the other tomorrow." He said.

Asya stared at the pills. "Wow! RU-486 made in India! You do know your business! You could have avoided all this trouble with a simple condom." Phurbu Lama laughed "Yes, and all the pleasures too! Don't fear, there is as yet no HIV on the Roof of the World, and when I left San Francisco I was a certified virgin."

Still rather shaky they sat at the upper-most end of the meadow. The play was still going on. The sun had finally won out and warmed them. The masks had disappeared and two monks were carefully designing a triangle on the ground with colored chalk. They placed a small wooden chopping board into the triangle on which they placed a doll. Finally they covered the entire contraption with a red cloth.

"The *linga*, the figure of evil," said Phurbu. "Not to be confused with the Indian *lingam*, which is a phallic symbol, this one is made from bread dough and female!"

With an edge in her voice she asked. "Why is evil always female?" He shrugged. "Never mind, watch what is going to happen next!" A frightening red mask with a third eye on its forehead appeared in an elaborate green robe with red and white fringes on the sleeves and an apron decorated with skulls. He was waving a large curved saber.

"This is *Dragpo*," said Phurbu. "A fierce, Bön incarnation of Padmasambhava. And here comes his entourage." Eight similar masks followed. They danced around the *linga*. The orchestra went into a frenzied crescendo. One character pulled away the red cloth, and Dragpo with three or four lightening slashes cut up the *linga*. Then they ate the pieces of the cut-up dough figure. "This is pure Bön," Phurbu explained. "A shamanic ritual replacing human sacrifice. They eat evil as an antidote."

Ponderously Dragpo and his following walked off-stage. A large throng of equally ferocious masks appeared. They were decked out in necklaces of skulls and on their high hats carried three colored heads stacked on the spit of a long trident. They danced wildly around the spot where the *linga* had been, obliterating the triangle on the ground with their feet. The orchestra came to a grand, noisy finale.

"These masks are local, pre-Buddhist Bön deities which Padmasambhava subdued and enlisted as protectors. The three-pronged emblems on top of their hats are Guru Rinpoche's magic wand, a male and a female head, and a scull crowned by a Shivaite yogi trident. They are exuberant because of the destruction of evil. You see, there is a second, esoteric meaning to the exoteric, the *linga* also represents a man's *ego* which has to die to make him free. This is the end of today. Tomorrow afternoon comes the second half, which repeats the same message from a different point of view: Yama, the Lord of the Underworld, Death himself, slays the *linga* and loses all power after that."

Laughing and talking animatedly, the crowd dispersed. They saw Richard standing forlorn with his camera in the middle of the field. They waved to him, and he slowly walked over. He smiled and said mysteriously. "Asya, have you found Atsara Sale, Yeshe Tsögyel's husband from Bhutan? Does he have the dark mole on his right breast? When Tsögyel found him in the Bahktapur market, she had to pay Atsara's foster parents in gold for him." Despite all his jaded worldliness Phurbu blushed deeply. He looked very beautiful at this moment.

On their way back to the house Phurbu asked Richard. "So you read Brian Gilman's translation of the 'The Flight of the Garuda'?" Richard nodded.

"You realize," said Phurbu, "that this knowledge makes learning anything about Dzogchen practices exceedingly difficult for you? You already know too much. You see, it is as if a psychotherapist is asked to treat the neurosis of a patient who has read all of Freud and most of Jung. This makes the patient a hard nut for the therapist to crack." Phurbu looked at Richard, who was silent and continued, "To clear the fronts between us allow me to repeat my question of yesterday, what *do* you know about Dzogchen, and what do you want me to teach you?"

Richard became serious. "Look, I am an old man. I don't have enough time to start from scratch as Gilman or, I presume, you could afford in your twenties. I need a *very fast vehicle to awareness* or I will never be able to finish the course. Actually I have almost decided not to dabble with going through the initiation processes of the Dzogchen Path. So I will not achieve Buddha status." Richard shrugged and smiled at Phurbu. "Maybe if I can affect at least a propitious rebirth, I can transfer my good karma and finish the course in my next life."

Phurbu was not amused. "It is never too late to start, but you need a good lama, in fact you would need a *very good lama*." "Nonsense," Richard said sharply. "I have heard the 'not-too-late' phrase from every lama I asked. All they are trying is to sell their old stock-products, underscoring the arduous path by which they had to acquired their knowledge. I dislike gurus, most of them are charlatans."

"But you still have not answered my original question." Phurbu repeated. Richard said sharply, "Have some patience with me, Mr. Psychiatrist, I shall get there eventually. You see, you are not the first lama I ask about Dzogchen and they all say, 'I will introduce you to *mahayoga*, or teach you *bodhicitta*, and then I shall see whether you are worthy to receive higher instructions.' Now I admit, these lamas were Gelugpas who use techniques that I am not interested in any longer. You are the first Nyingmapa whom I ask to provide me with some illumination in this matter."

Phurbu nodded. "The reason that the lamas you asked knew nothing is that only a handful of Gelugpa have ever been initiated into Dzogchen. The Dalai Lama is one of them, and he does not talk about his knowledge. I studied with the Dzogchen teacher of the Dalai Lama before he died in Kathmandu and so did Brian. These are Tibetan disagreements that go back several hundred years. The Gelugpa reject certain Nyingma teachings, because supposedly they are not *pure*, they are not based on traditional Indian Buddhist precepts. Dzogchen is a mixture of Indian tantric yoga, Chinese Ch'an-Zen methods, and a number of other elements. However, for precisely that

reason Dzogchen is very powerful, and specially suited for Western students."

"Exactly," said Richard. "And this is what makes Dzogchen so interesting to me. I have always felt attracted by Zen because it uses mental techniques and has no need for the complex imagery of the Tibetan Vajrayana. But I am repulsed by the Samurai spirit of Zen." He shook his head. "I spent several years to learn meditative visualization techniques, but found that the traditional Tibetan *vidams* are not *my* archetypes. They don't scare me enough, if you wish. They are but products of my mind, not of my subconscious and remain entirely 'unreal'... A good lama could probably help me overcome these problems, but I have not found that exceptional man."

Phurbu had become thoughtful and remained silent for a while. He then tilted his head and said, "Are you asking me to be your lama?" Richard laughed, "No, not really. I am determined to use my own powers to decipher as much Dzogchen as I can in the time left to me. But I am willing to learn whatever you can teach me."

Phurbu was relieved. "In all honesty, I do not think I could teach you much. Your ego is too big for me." "Oh," said Richard smiling, "not at all, you have already taught me a new piece of understanding today. You may not even have been aware of it." Phurbu blushed and bowed to Richard.

8

They were lucky, their hosts offered Phurbu a *dzo*, a cross between a yak and a cow, which is better adapted to the lower altitudes. Free of charge Phurbu would take it to friends in Lapchi and would carry their belongings. In return Richard paid them a liberal amount for their lodging. Phurbu thought that this was a very appropriate gesture and everybody was happy. Asya was relieved, she got her underwear and jeans back; Tseringma had even washed them especially for her.

After many hugs they set out on the trek to Lapchi. The prayer flags on the summit of Sobje La, the first pass, were visible during the entire four hours it took them to climb out of the valley. The views of Drintang and Mount Tseringma were breathtaking. The last fall flowers covered the mountainside in small bushels.

On the other side of the pass they had to descend a steep scree that ended in a desolate alpine valley before the ascent to the next pass, Odungpu La. They passed a glacial lake amidst a jumble of boulders and reached the summit of Odungpu La in another hour.

Skidding down patches of snow hiding in the shade of the ridge they came to a valley that ended in a barrier of rock formations which they traversed by way of a narrow canyon. At its end a small plain opened from which the track began climbing steeply again.

Richard felt giddy from the fast altitude change from Drintang, and Asya was exhausted after six hours of hard walking. Phurbu suggested to camp and to attempt the last two high passes Kangchung and Kangchen La, the Higher and the Lower Snow Pass, early in the morning. Phurbu helped them to unload the *dzo*. Hobbled by a strong rope between her front and a hind leg, the *dzo* went on search for some grass.

They stretched out on a spot they had cleared of rocks. The weather had been exceptional all day, no fog, no heavy clouds. Looking at the blue sky Richard raised the question that was on everyone's mind. "How are we going to arrange this night's accommodations. My tent will accommodate only two, is Phurbu's Tibetan sack large enough for two?" He had raised his voice into half a question.

"Phurbu," said Asya, addressing nobody in particular, "how do the Tibetan nomad women arrange the sleeping order with their four husbands?"

Phurbu mumbled with a red face. "They arrange it such that only one is at home at any one time. There are few jealousies in these mountains comparable to those you have in the West. The woman decides with which man she wants to sleep, and if he is not one of her husbands, her lover has to pay her husband with a sheep, if her husband finds them. It is that simple."

"You hear Asya, you decide!" teased Richard.

Asya was silent.

A pink cloud drifted across the evening sky. The sun was soon to disappear behind the passes in the west.

Richard eased the silence. "I for my part am not very ambitious tonight, I would like a good night's sleep. You two do what you like."

"Ah," sighed Asya, "I would not mind being made love to, but maybe I should also get some good sleep tonight.

Richard and I have worked out a peaceful relationship between the two of us in that small tent. Are you sad Phurbu, if I join Richard?" "Well, that decides it!" Phurbu said unenthusiastically. "I will sleep in my sack, and you sleep in the tent. Notwithstanding my American education I am quite content with this decision."

The night was cold. The flap over the tent was stiffly frozen in the morning when Richard woke. Half-asleep he reached out for Asya and found her place empty. A sharp pang stopped his heart. My God, he said to himself, will I ever get over this silly, cold fear.

He lay perfectly still listening to the sounds from the surroundings. He could not hear any telling noises. Then he heard Asya coming back from the nearby brook singing. She began rattling the pots, lighting the stove, and soon she called out with a cheerful voice, "Breakfast is ready. Get up! It's a beautiful cold day, all is covered with thin ice. I nearly froze my head off in the brook. Come both of you, I am hungry!"

This had never happened before, he had always done all the cooking. Within a few minutes he had joined her and received a charming kiss from her. Together they shook Phurbu out of his sack. This morning both men found a boiled egg for breakfast. Asya had secretly obtained them from Tseringma.

Asya continued to be in exceptionally high spirits. She danced exuberantly on the icy meadow humming a piece by Tchaikovsky.

Yes, thought Richard, the *dakini* is dancing on the thin ice of our relationship. Convert your jealousy into compassionate love, he admonished himself, it would make all of us happy!

He would never find out what had happened during that night.

Phurbu was sullen. Richard asked himself, did I bully him too much with my monologue about Dzogchen and my distrust of gurus that he has lost his spontaneity?.

The *dzo* had wandered along the path and could be seen on a grassy ridge above them. Phurbu and Asya went to collect the beast while Richard packed away the tent and the kitchen. He saw how Asya gave Phurbu a hug and several kisses when they had reached the *dzo*. Richard smiled, maybe he could leave it to Asya-Dakini to charm Phurbu back to himself.

On their return Asya led the *dzo*. She talked animatedly to Phurbu, who was smiling again when they reached their campsite, and the *dzo* produced several deep grunts, expressing its satisfaction of being led by this cheerful yakherdess.

Asya lead Phurbu to Richard with a smile, "I am sure you have known for a while what is happening to me, haven't you dear, old Guru? Phurbu Lama is worried, because you are an American."

Phurbu and Richard rubbed their foreheads together as two enlightened men would do in Tibet, and all three hugged each other laughing.

Asya performed another dance singing,

"Obeisance to my Guru.

Pray, make all sentient beings happy

and bless my new-found love."

She ended her dance with a deep bow to Richard, who thought, my God, she can be irresistible when she is happy. Together they loaded the animal and were soon on their pilgrimage again, Asya pulling the contented *dzo*.

It seemed that they had done most of their hard work on the day before. After an hour they reached the lhato on the summit of Kangchen La.

Before them lay a long amphitheater of moors, rivulets, rock-covered moraines, and several small glacial lakes. Here and there snow patches had survived the short summer.

The going was easy, but in several places they got their feet wet. Between the rocks Phurbu discovered several

gentian colonies and next to a snow field one fabled *primula wollastonia* completely out-of-season. It had spectacular, big, purple-blue, bell-shaped blossoms with delicate, silver-white frosting on their insides. They stood around the rare find and admired it. Phurbu was all smiles.

The ascent to the last pass took, once more, all their concentrated efforts. Downhill they had to cross several snow fields, carefully trying to avoid an uncontrolled skid on the steep slope. It took them almost as long as climbing the ridge to reach a large uninhabited alpine valley covered with short yak grass. They had to wade through several small streams before they reached its flat and marshy bottom and a fast-flowing brook that collected the icy waters of a dozen of rivulets.

A stone cairn marked the end of the well-worn path they had come on. Phurbu told them that from here on they would have to walk cross-country. The brook dropped steeply over the edge of the hanging glacial ledge into the valley of the Lapchi river making a direct descent impossible. They found a dry spot on the other side of the brook where they set up camp. After they had unburdened the *dzo*, it took a fast dip in the freezing brook, grunting with satisfaction and spraying water all over them.

"Phurbu," said Richard, when they sat around at night after supper, "what did you mean when you said that my ego was too big for you? I have been thinking about that remark all day long. Did you mean that I intimidate you?"

That too," Phurbu said hesitatingly, "but I really meant that your strong ego would prevent you from submitting to a guru and possibly from understanding the first important Dzogchen precept, *compassion*. I now see that you have a very clear understanding of compassion and you practice it too. You confuse me."

Richard suggested, "Could it be that we both suffer from a similar problem? Since my childhood people have accused me of being an 'egotist,' you hit a sore spot, but already when I was young I saw that commiseration, pity, altruism, and general meekness were of no use in easing the world's misery. Could it be that you had similar experiences, especially during your studies with your various gurus? Did they accuse you of having too strong a Western ego?"

"Yes," said Phurbu, "they all tried hard to break my 'Western Attachments', all except Khyentse Rinpoche, the Dzogchen teacher of the Dalai Lama. He lived in Kathmandu. If he were still alive I would send you to him. He was a wise and very powerful man who would have taken you on easily."

"You see," said Richard, "It seems that a 'powerful' character, a strong 'self' and Dzogchen are not incompatible. Why are you intimidated by me? There is no reason, and why do people confuse a strong 'self' with 'ego'? You too have a strong self, but it seems you have lost it in my presence. Maybe I have to learn more kindness in order not to scare my best friends. But somehow women do not seem to "fear" me as much as men do." Richard said looking at Asya.

"Only those women who love you." said Asya thoughtfully.

"How did you learn what you know?" asked Phurbu, "much of it seems surprisingly close to the esoteric teachings of the Vajrayana. And you say you never had a guru."

Richard hesitated. "This question is not easy to answer. Only during the past few years, as I dug deeper into the Vajrayana, have I learned that what I found by myself is in fact very close to the understanding the Vajrayana is trying to teach their students. It may sound contentious, but I think my death taught me most of what I know about myself. You do know that the Hevajrayana of the Sakyapa discovered in the eleventh-century that meditation on your death was the fastest way to 'scare' their students into 'seeing'. However, there is a difference, to me death is female, a beautiful, beguiling woman. Death is my most charming friend and my only trustworthy advisor. Maybe it does take a strong self to walk this path without a guru."

Asya was taken aback. "Death has frightened me beyond any other vision."

"But Nelly must have known and tried hard to teach you." Richard reminded her.

Phurbu mused, "I have never thought of death as woman. It is a wonderful metaphor of the unity of life and death that is so hard to grasp and of love-making as the esoteric way of acquiring this knowledge. Make Love to Your Death?"

Richard added with an enigmatic smile. "Ask Asya-Dakini one day when you make love to her. She *knows* but cannot say it. Of course, you have to make love in a way that opens both of you to this paradox, Yeshe Tsögyel

should have taught you that."

They were silent for a while. "So you were born in Ojai?" Richard asked to change the subject. "Among simple Americans, Mexican farm hands, artists, Tibetan refugees, orange groves, and Theosophists? Are you by chance related to Tensing Norgay, the Sherpa who climbed Mt. Everest with Hillary for the first time?"

"Do you know him?" asked Phurbu incredulous, "he is my uncle. My mother is a Sherpa from the Solo-Khumbu." Richard smiled. "Tensing is a close friend of a friend of mine. I have never met him, but I own a small Nepali Garuda which Tensing gave to my friend who in turn left it with me when his Christian wife protested the presence of 'all those idols' in her house! Isn't it funny how small this world is?"

"My father is from Kyirong," continued Phurbu, "the valley west of Mount Shishibangma. He left as a young man when the Chinese invaded Tibet. He met and married my mother in Kathmandu and Tensing Norgay made it possible for them to emigrate to California. Well, the rest of my story I hardly have to tell you: high-school in Ojai, college in Santa Barbara, and then I went to Berkeley to join the Nyingma Center there. My parents had made a vow that I would become a lama. After a few years in Berkeley I was sent to Sonoma, because I was good at architecture and engineering and the Ling needed someone like me to supervise the construction of the monastery. Four years ago I came to Nepal to continue my Buddhist studies. You see what became of me, a first-class lama-brigand smuggling cosmetics and lady's underwear across the Chinese border!" He laughed. "I know every village, every valley and every pass between the Arun and the Kyirong valleys. It is not a bad life among these kind people."

"Do you miss California?" asked Asya.

"Sometimes I do, but what would I do there, a lama? You have more than enough of them in sunny California. They are walking on each other's toes, fighting for students. No, I would have to finish my education in architecture or something else to live there, and besides I do like the Tibetan girls!" He laughed with a provocative look at Asya. But Asya did not take his bait.

It had become dark and cold. It was time to turn in, and then Asya said, "Tonight I will sleep with Phurbu. His bag is quite big enough for the two of us."

Richard smiled sadly. He had anticipated this decision, but Phurbu was embarrassed again.

The two crawled into the big rectangular sheep-skin sack. "You know," Richard said laughing, "this looks like the drawing the Little Prince made of the *boa constrictor* who had swallowed an elephant whole!"

Richard slept dreamlessly and was only awoken once that night by peals of laughter and the tinkle of a bell. "Asya, do you hear them," he whispered, "the *dakini* are dancing under the crescent moon!"

The morning woke them with splendid sunshine but down in the valley fog was rolling. The descent to the monastery would take only three hours, so they decided to walk to the edge of the valley and spend a leisurely couple of hours there until the fog would burn off.

Asya was happy and Phurbu had lost much of his embarrassed silence. Richard, in a melancholic mood was still hearing the tinkling bell and the laughter of the *dakinis*. At a *chörten* with a wide view of the Lapchi valley and the surrounding mountains they stopped. Richard stretched out at full length in the warm sun.

"You see Richard," said Phurbu, "there are three parts to the Dzogchen path. For most people the first consists of regular Vajrayana *mahayoga* exercises: the 'hundred-thousand prostrations,' visualizations of the mandala of their *yidam*, the assignment and repetition of certain mantras. The objectives are to clean the karma of the student, to teach him the necessary absolute devotion to his lama, and the full grasp of the Awareness of Active Compassion in everything he does, every day and every hour of the day. After completing this course the student is ready for his first initiation.

"The details and methods of the next step on the Dzogchen path are not revealed outside the Guru-student relationship. They are known under the name of *anuyoga* and their main objective is *trekcho* which translates to 'Cutting Through'. The student is taught to understand with his entire being that all polarities are but 'figments of his rational, linear mind,' that good and evil, life and death exist solely because we can only define an abstract, concrete concept together with and by its opposite. Among these are also the western concepts of God and Devil, and of course, the inherent polarity between Man and Woman.

"That is where the *dakini* as the exemplary representation of the female Intuitive Knowledge comes in, and yes, making love to your *dakini* either in your imagination or in reality becomes of paramount importance. You could call these sexual exercises the *esoteric* aspect of Active Compassion. The *exoteric* aspect which is the object of *mahayoga* is close to the western understanding of 'compassion', '*Mitleid*' in German, eliminating the miseries of the world by 'suffering-with'. That is what you can read in the songs of Milarepa and in all Bodhisattva stories. In its *esoteric* form the fiery powers and the dynamics of sexual passion and its relative, death are employed to burn away your last illusions, your clinging to polar ratiocinations. This is why almost all Vajrayana images of *yab-yum*, of the sexual union, show fierce manifestations of the psychic forces of man.

"Special to Dzogchen is that meditation at this stage becomes, together with the removal of all dichotomies, entirely unstructured. There is no longer any one-pointed meditation, or concentrated visualizations of specific images or mandalas. However, mantras are still used. The student learns to take the images that he sees during meditation entirely as they come in a state of mental relaxation and simultaneous extraordinary attention that is also taught in Zen. The Zen analogue is a hunting tiger who sits ready to jump at its prey. The student has to learn to sustain this simultaneously hyper-sensitized and hyper-relaxed state of attention at all hours. The mastery of this stage leads to his second initiation.

"The last stage, *atiyoga*, can by its very nature not be described in words, it is a state of '*all spontaneous action*'. The method which effects this state is called *togal*, which appropriately means '*Immediate Crossing*'. It extends *trekcho* and is *the fast method* of attaining 'Awareness' through spontaneity that distinguishes Dzogchen from all other Vajrayana paths.

"You see, the removal of all opposites by the use of the sexual union is dangerous knowledge for an improperly prepared or constituted individual to possess. The same holds true in different ways for a Vajrayana student who practices unstructured meditation before he is ready for it. These are two of the *rational* reasons for the secrecy the lamas observe about Dzogchen teaching.

"In the course of the *anuyoga* exercises the student may also be led to practice a technique called '*Controlled Madness*', which when attempted without the supervision of a lama can land the student in what you call an institution for the insane. He may quite easily and simply 'flip out', as you can imagine, and kill himself or end up a clinical case of schizophrenic delusion."

There was no response from Richard, and when Asya looked closely at him, she found that he was asleep. Phurbu laughed. "There you see, these Western students have no attention span and no respect for their Guru, they fall asleep when their lama is trying to explain his most esoteric knowledge!"

Richard woke with a start and was most embarrassed. "I am terribly sorry, Phurbu, now that you do talk about the things I had wanted to hear, I fall asleep. I just realized how exhausted these three weeks as a pilgrim have left me. The warm sun got the better of me. I am an old man and should vanish from the scene and leave this life to you young people. I heard most of what you said in my half-sleep, you can ask me questions if you don't believe it. But I had a wonderful dreamlike vision of Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsögyelma meeting with Milarepa right here in this place. You did not see them, did you?"

Phurbu was amazed, "You did not know that this is exactly what supposedly happened at this place? That is the reason for the chörten. You really did not know that legend?"

"No," said Richard, "I did not. My son read the *Life of Milarepa*, but I never did."

Phurbu shook his head laughing. "And I was just making fun of you because you had fallen asleep when your lama was trying to teach you his most esoteric knowledge. Well, your proper Lama stole the show from me. I am and will remain only a minor light of the dharma."

The fog in the valley had cleared. Only the wispy cloud layers were still riding the high-altitude inversions that are so characteristic of the Himalayas. They could see Lapchi village, and Phurbu pointed out the pagoda roof of Lapchi Gompa surrounded by prayer flags on a hill a little south of the village.

"Let's go," Phurbu said, "in two hours we will reach the Gompa on wobbly knees, and then Richard can sleep all afternoon dreaming of his singing guru."

They collected their *dzo*, loaded her, and off they scrambled downhill.

The vegetation became denser. They first passed juniper bushes, then rhododendrons that soon became full-grown trees. Here and there were stands of firs, and finally they walked in a dense Nepalese Forest of rhododendrons, several varieties of firs, pines, and deciduous trees. They had left Tibet. Lapchi village looked like the Nepali hill villages with brown and white three-story Newar houses, there were even a few cows and pigs wandering the streets. Gone were the wind-blown awnings, the heavy, inclined walls, and the red and black frames painted around windows and doors. The monastery sat on a wooded spur south of the village overlooking the confluence of two rivers. Having escaped all destruction by the Cultural Revolution, it was in remarkably good condition. The dark, wooden roof-structure of the Nepali-style pagoda and a few out-buildings were surrounded by a high wall covered with Tibetan mantra syllables. A mani wall piled with exceptional mani stones painted in vivid red and white colors led to the entrance. A profusion of colorful prayer flags on poles or strung between the roofs marked this holiest of Nepali-Tibetan sanctuaries.

Phurbu introduced them to the monks and the abbot, who greeted Phurbu like an old friend. They were offered one of the pilgrim's rooms near the entrance, but Richard begged to be allowed to put up their tent near a chörten on a small rise with a splendid view of the village, the valley, and the surrounding mountains. The abbot gave them permission to camp there, saying that he fully understood their choice, this was also his preferred place for his evening circumambulation.

They were invited to the abbot's private meditation room for tea and there Richard found the original of his *thanka* of Milarepa, the deer, the bitch, and the hunter. Overcome by emotion Richard knelt down before the image and offered a prayer of thanks to his Guru for having guided them throughout this long pilgrimage. Phurbu told Richard's story to the abbot who thereafter showed Richard and Asya his particular reverence and goodwill.

After many cups of tea Phurbu took leave of them saying that he had to drive the *dzo* to its new owner. Phurbu did not return that evening nor in the next two days. Asya was inconsolable and Richard greatly disturbed. In the afternoon they went down to the village to look for Phurbu Lama, but did not find a trace of him. The monks smiled, oh, Phurbu Lama was a restless and independent spirit, he came and went entirely as he pleased. They had no idea where he might have gone, to Kathmandu or back to Tibet.

At night Richard, thinking that Phurbu had simply found one of his old loves in the village, pressed the urgency of a decision on Asya. Their visas would run out in a week, they had to set out across Jamgang La towards Phegeling Gumpa, the Nyalam Valley, and Zhangmu, the official border crossing right away, Phurbu or no Phurbu. He suggested that they should hike along the trail to a large nomad camp, a few hours further, rent an animal there and then attempt the one-and-a-half-day crossing of the last high pass to Phegeling. Asya resigned herself to this decision.

That night she cried herself to sleep in her bag.

9

Exhausted and worried as he was, it became Richard's first disastrous decision on their trek, as if he had lost touch with reality.

The morning was clear without the usual fog in the valley. A wet, foreboding wind drove heavy, high clouds from the southern plains into the mountains. They shouldered their backpacks and set out, passed the village, crossed a bridge and from there walked up the slowly rising track towards the pass.

In the later morning the sky became more threatening. Richard tried to sense what would happen to the weather. It all came very fast. Even before he could make a decision, it became suddenly very cold and began to snow. "We

have to find a shelter to weather this disaster," he said to Asya.

It soon snowed heavily.

Truly worried Richard suggested. "Let's turn back. I noticed a cave right near the path on the way up. It cannot be more than fifteen minutes below us." By the time they had reached and scrambled up to the cave the snow came down so heavily that they could not see further than a few meters. They were lucky again. The cave was a huge cavity in the mountain side with plenty of space to put up their tent. They would be safe there whatever happened. The cave had a wide opening towards the valley and the mountains, which were concealed by a gray-white curtain of falling snow.

"Quick," he said, "let's scramble down once more and collect as much firewood as we can to keep us warm and save gas for cooking. We will have to melt a lot of snow for water."

He took a thin climbing rope from his backpack, tied it to a tree by the entrance and with its help they clambered down. The snow was already ankle-deep. He felt much better when they had lugged a pile of pine branches into their haven.

"Look, if we economize, we have enough food to last us a week, and once the storm is over the sun will evaporate the snow at this altitude. I have seen that happen in Ladakh in the winter. Besides the village is close, and there are people above us in the nomad camp. Somehow we shall get out of here in a few days."

Asya visibly worried asked. "But the passes will remain closed. How are we going to get to Kathmandu?" "Oh, we will spend the winter in this Shangri La," said Richard laughing. "It will be the most peaceful haven you have ever been in." Asya was not amused. "But how will we let anybody know that we are still alive? And the business of our expired visas and the flights from Kathmandu?"

Richard tried to calm her fears. "I have just begun to think about all this. There is a path out of the Lapchi through the Kang Chu gorge to Nepal, it leads to Charikot from where a bus goes to Kathmandu. There are no passes on this route, the only problem will be the gorge. The river drops precipitously over a short distance. Below the gorge there will be no snow. We will find porters in Lapchi or in the first Nepalese village. From here on they do not use animals for carrying baggage. The visa problem will be resolved by the snow storm. The Nepalese border is a hundred meters from the Gompa. You have seen for yourself that there are no barbed-wire fences or Chinese guards around, we just walk into Nepal. The Nepalese border guard is in a village two days from Lapchi. We have obviously been cut-off from Zhangmu by the snowstorm. Maybe there will be some bureaucratic grumble, but everybody will understand our predicament."

Asya said uneasily. "So you propose to sit in this cave for a few days until the sun has cleared the path back down to Lapchi?" "Yes," said Richard. "Certainly until the storm stops, and then maybe a few days longer until the avalanches that will follow will have ceased. And if we have to wade for a couple of hours through deep snow to get back down to Lapchi, we will survive that too, if necessary."

They set up the tent in one corner and put their sleeping bags inside and then sat at the mouth of the cave and watched the snow fall. Richard split some dry branches for kindling-wood and with them raised a small fire between two suitable rocks to melt snow for drinking water.

It was not cold, but the hours grew long. Asya asked Richard to tell her of the Tibetan travels of Alexandra David Neel from which he had read to her when she was ill in Lhasa. By the time it got dark there must have been half-a-meter of snow on the ground and the storm was still raging in full force.

It snowed all through the night and the following day. They spent most of the time in their sleeping bags in the tent which was well protected inside the cave. It was not uncomfortably cold. The world outside sunk into white silence. The mountains remained hidden all day long.

During the second night it grew bitterly cold. They kept warm with the help of hot-water bottles.

The early morning sun was glistening on the mountains, the valley was covered by chest-deep powder. Asya woke early and crawled out of the tent. She had emerged from a nightmare in which her mother had been fleeing through a snowed-in landscape from the Soviet armies at the end of the War. She saw the trek of horse-drawn wagons with their meager belongings saved from the vast estate her grandparents had owned. Her German grandmother had appeared in the dream as the *grande dame* whom Asya had known much later, long after the War. Hanna had been 10, the oldest of three children. Asya saw them on the wagon freezing, distressed, fear on

their faces. She had not seen herself among them. It was her mother's nightmare.

As she had extricated herself from this dream the vision had changed. She was sitting between Hanna and Nelly in a concert hall in San Francisco. She had picked up Nelly, who was already ill, and they had met Hanna at the concert. She remembered the evening with great clarity. It was a guest concert by the Los Angeles Symphony with Esa-Pekka Salonen. They were playing Shostakovich's first violin concerto. Midori was the soloist. Midori, diminutive, dressed in a long glittering, white and black dress appeared on stage. Applause greeted her. The house was packed to the last seat. Asya did not clap. She had a prejudice against Oriental *Wunderkinder*, with their perfect, glib technique and poor grasp of the emotional depths of Western music. Midori should first show, how she was going to sail over the forbidding cataclysms of this concerto. How could this young girl sound out this fiery ocean of boiling lava? Asya knew every note, every inflection, it was *her* concerto.

Within a few measures Midori had exceeded all expectations, had surpassed herself, soared through the abstract icy spaces of this music, found depths of sadness and despair, of fear and triumph that Asya had never before heard in the soulful Oistrakh recording she owned. Asya felt transformed into this woman, became her, cried and sung, climbed and fell with the arcs described by her ephemeral playing.

As if again at this unforgettable performance, Asya saw Midori from this dark cave before the shimmering ice fields, the stark mountains brilliantly illuminated by sunlight.

The elegiac, low sound of the bass strings at the beginning of the moderato put Asya back into the snowscape of East Prussia: vast white spaces, menacing black woods, the forlorn tracks of the wagons in the snow. All the despair of her nightmare returned. The violin cried out, soared into the gray sky, colorless, all black and white, desperate, hopeless. The insistent, almost mechanical repetitions of a short formless theme, again and again, fear, death stalking.

Asya shuddered, she was drifting towards the final agony of her dream and this movement, the death of her mother's youngest brother. He had withered away, day by day. They had no milk, no food suitable for the infant. The cold killed him one night. Hanna had to help bury him in a snowdrift, the soil was frozen solid, and fear rode on their backs.

The violin expired in mid flight.

Abandoned, dead.

Asya rose. The Scherzo began with an almost frivolous exchange between a flute and a bass-clarinete. For a while there seemed to be hope. The violin, insisting, in obsessive, near voiceless objections, mocked the wind instruments.

Asya began to dance, tentatively at first, as if reluctant to abandon herself to the rhythm of the violin which had freed itself from the orchestra and was flying into frenzied cascades. Midori fell from extreme heights into seemingly bottomless crevasses in insistent waves, sinking and surging. The orchestra lost all restraint, followed her, echoed her, lowered her falls to ever deeper horrors.

Asya danced, barely herself, driven by the increasingly macabre madness of this music.

As the movement ended, she collected herself sitting with splayed legs, her head prone before her on the floor. The Passacaglia begins its hymn to Russia, full of visceral pain, of guilt, of longing for salvation. She felt Nelly's hand searching for hers. She folded her fingers into hers. All Nelly's longing for her lost motherland flooded into her.

But the violin offered no hope. Russia was submerged in a deeper swamp than ever. The henchman walked over the frozen land. The dead, millions of them, covered the body of mother Russia, stinking to heaven. Those who had escaped his scythe were dying of depravation.

Asya, tears flooding her face, let go of her dying grandmother's hand, rose and began to dance again. Without warning, the orchestra stooped and released the violin into a cadenza of unprecedented scope and intensity. From a slow beginning it climbed, demanding the last virtuosity, to ecstasy, fell down again, rose anew, vibrated at the peak in voluptuous expectation, climbed still higher and erupted in a series of spasms. Still not finished, after a few measures it came again, hovered at its peak in feverish fibrillations to finally fall from a desperate cry.

There was no respite, no break, the orchestra with renewed power broke into a relentless presto that increased in intensity from measure to measure. Was it possible that there were still higher heights to be scaled?

Asya threw off her clothes. She did not feel the cold, did not see the mountains, the sun, she had become one with

the music inside her. Her entire body was filled with molten steel. Obsessed by demons she danced without restraint.

During the cadenza Richard had emerged from the tent. Half-asleep he had been startled awake by her absence. He saw her dancing, naked, a black silhouette before the dazzling, frozen backdrop of the highest mountains in the world. He sat aghast in the tent flap, his first thought, she will come down with hypothermia, but he restrained an impulse to shout and run for her. He realized that she was beside herself. He had seen the oracles of Matho run unseeing, half-naked over roofs and mountains in a snow storm in Ladakh. If he woke her, she would fall and hurt herself, or worse disappear over the edge of the cave's mouth.

He could not hear the music that drove her.

Her distorted face was wet with tears, her sightless eyes open. She looked ugly, fierce, and in a flash he saw the *dakini* in her, she, possessed by *Vajrayogini*.

When the music stopped she collapsed on the cave floor, adrift. He carried her into the tent. With an effort he pushed her into his sleeping back, and climbed in with her to warm her.

He held her close to his body, entwined.

She glowed from the fever inside her.

Her skin was ice-cold.

After an hour his fear about Asya's condition subsided. Her skin had regained a normal temperature, her inner fire quieted. He crawled out of the tent and heated a large pot of water. He coaxed her out of the bag and washed her with the hot water. She would be all-right.

Asya slept for a couple of hours, while Richard prepared some hot soup.

When she finally emerged she was in an almost exuberant mood. He was relieved.

"I exorcised this last trauma of my youth, my mother's nightmare of her flight from the Russian armies in the snows of 1945. I have not told you that she, like you, came from the eastern part of Germany, only they had to leave in that terrible winter on foot and in horse-drawn wagons. The horror-tale of my childhood."

Richard nodded. "I know their stories, I saw these refugees arrive in our town in that winter, and a few months later they were forced to flee again. 6 Million people ethnically cleansed because they spoke German, and nobody in America has ever heard of this tragedy, which took place under the 'protective umbrella' of Allied troops. Almost two million died on those treks or were killed by Allied aircraft fire. But what music did you dance to? You truly frightened me. Only the necklace of human skulls, the *phurbu*, and the scull-cup filled with menstrual blood were missing." Richard smiled.

While eating the spicy Creole black-bean-soup-with-rice Richard had prepared, Asya told him of the Midori concert. He sat listening silently, deeply moved.

In the afternoon, the sun was burning from a cloudless sky on the white land, they were startled by thunder. And then they saw the first avalanche roaring with primordial power over the same mountainside they had skidded down four days ago. The spectacle left a cloud of snow dust hanging over the valley for an hour. Thunder from other avalanches, out of sight, could be heard all afternoon. "We will have to sit here on our private stage for a few days longer, until the world has settled." Asya said, confident resolve in her voice.

They spent another peaceful but cold night in their hideout. The sun returned on the following morning. Richard with the help of the rope climbed down to test the depth of the snow. The powder reached to just below his waist. It would be an arduous task to wade back through the snow to Lapchi.

In the late morning they were surprised by an apparition. A man following a yak very slowly plowed his way up the path from Lapchi. At first the man and the yak were only a couple of tiny dots that left a long wake behind in the pristine whiteness.

"Quick," said Richard, "let's light a really smoky fire. Maybe he will see us."

For a few minutes they worked frantically until they had raised a thin flag of smoke issuing from the cave's mouth. The two-some was slowly coming closer. The man used the yak with like a snowplow, cutting a trail and leaving two high mounds on both sides.

"You know, who that is?" cried Asya, and before he could answer, she cried out, "Phurbu-u-u! Phurbu-u-u!" Asya was completely beside herself. She danced and shouted his name, when an exhausted but laughing Phurbu Lama came to a halt below their cave's entrance.

Richard let the rope down and Phurbu climbed up. They fell around his neck crying and laughing at the same time. Over a cup of hot tea they sat in the cave's mouth listening to him without asking questions.

"I am sorry, I deserted you," said Phurbu. "I panicked. I could not see how our *menage-a-trois* could continue. I love this woman, but she is yours. I belong here. What future could my love have? I simply ran on that afternoon. But then came this ghastly storm entirely out-of season. I was terribly worried about you. Nobody knew where you had gone to. So I put all my intuition together, and told myself that you would have tried to reach Phegeling and Zhangmu because of your visa. That did nothing to alleviate my fears. My only hope hung on exactly this cave. And here you are in better shape than I with my snow plow. Ugh," he finished, "it was hard work, I can tell you!" Richard suggested that they should spend the night together in the cave and make their way to Lapchi in the morning.

"No, no," Phurbu said, "from here it is all down-hill and the path has been plowed as you can see. You don't want to tempt fate again. Unless you feel too weak for an ardent snow-hike of a couple of hours, I am for leaving right-away. The *dzo* will carry your gear, of course."

They agreed and packed their belongings in a hurry, lowered everything with the rope and climbed down. The *dzo* was soon packed and their little caravan on its way again. Asya still had barely collected herself. She fell around Phurbu's neck and kissed him. "Now, that's enough," Phurbu said, "stop hugging me until we have reached our destination." Pouting she pulled a face at him, but both men could see that she was happy!

They stayed in Lapchi village at the house of Phurbu's friends for a few days until the snows in the lower valley had been lapped up by the sun. Phurbu found a young porter from the village who carried Richard's backpack, Phurbu shouldered Asya's, and one early morning they walked south out of Tibet.

The officers at the Nepalese checkpoint in Lamabager, two days later, were surprised to see two Westerners walk alive out of that storm. Without any questions they gave them a reentry visa. Richard and Asya learned only then how lucky they had been. They had only been caught by the storm's western fringes. The center had hit the upper Khumbu south of Everest with three meters of snow followed by avalanches that buried scores of trekkers, a national disaster.

Below Lamabager they walked for two more days through the green Nepalese hill country, which appeared almost tropical to them after the Tibetan deserts. In Charikot Phurbu found them a taxi to Kathmandu. The local buses were overcrowded. He insisted that the bus was too dangerous. Phurbu asked to be allowed to return to Lapchi. After many hugs and tears he waved them off as they left for Kathmandu. Phurbu had given Asya a friend's e-mail address to stay in touch with him. They had exchanged the overloaded bus for the harrowing experience of being taken by a crazy taxi driver back to the Friendship Highway and Kathmandu.

Richard said good-bye to Asya at the chaotic Kathmandu airport. She flew to Munich to stay with an aunt of hers. They had agreed not to write to each other. She had no permanent address. Tears in his eyes Richard waited until the plane took off. For several days he wandered lost among the crowds in town, alone.

Asya

The Unification of Opposites

1

Asya had spent the night in a small hotel near Bangkok airport. Her flight to Kathmandu had left in the late morning. Under her, hidden by heavy monsoon clouds lay Bangladesh. The snow-covered peaks of the Himalayan chain to the north floated above the clouds. Everest marked by its ice flag. She recalled the view from Dingri, her trek with Richard. Many years had passed since. She had seen Richard only a few times. A friendship with him and his wife Andrea was all that remained, no more.

But she had not been able to put Phurbu Lama out of her mind. A year after her trip to Tibet she had flown back to Kathmandu to track him down. After several weeks lying in wait she had one day encountered him on the street. They had spent a couple of turbulent weeks together, and then restless as always he had disappeared again. But she had been more certain than ever that he was her man, that he would return. When winter closed the passes he suddenly resurfaced in Kathmandu. She talked him into coming with her to California, and in an attempt to adapt to a regular life John had studied architecture on a scholarship. She had supported them by giving piano lessons and working as a secretary for a local symphony orchestra.

John reestablished his relationship with his teacher at the Ningma Ling in Berkeley. Reluctant but curious, she occasionally joined him there. With her fierce need for independence, she had not been able to submit to the unconditional devotion to a Guru required of a serious student. The Tibetan imagery remained alien to her. Challenged by her sharp mind John had surpassed himself and the limitations of his Tibetan background. He had tried to teach her the fundamental Dzogchen precepts using Western mental imagery. Occasionally he was assailed by doubts that his approach was frivolous, he had no license to teach, but her strong sexuality had again and again swept away his doubts. She simply was his *khadroma*, the right consort for him. Somewhere during these years they had got married.

Their difficulties began after John graduated with a master's degree. He quickly found a job in an architectural office, but the regular eight-hour routine and the domesticated life had seriously undercut his spontaneity. He longed for the freedom of the mountains. Then his father died and his old mother had moved in with them, as was the custom in Nepal.

Asya had not been able get along with her. At this time John had met Sandy, an New Zealand architect who worked out of Kathmandu. Sandy offered him a position in Nepal. They had agreed to separate for a while, and he had taken his mother with him. This had been two years ago. When his mother died, John persuaded her to join him in Kathmandu.

Her flight swept low over Kathmandu valley. In rapid succession the hills around Dulikhel passed, the white stupa of Bodnath inside its mandala of houses, the golden roofs of Pashupatinath, and the plane bumped down the runway of Kathmandu airport. Asya cast a nostalgic eye at the old airport shack where she had arrived so often. The plane came to a stop in front of a new, two-story structure, which had already taken on the decayed look of the city.

Where was John? She could not see him. There used to be a grandstand for visitors next to the old airport building where people stood stacked in tiers, and one could always find the person one was looking for, it was gone too. But the pandemonium in front of the passport desks had not changed. The low hall was airless, hot, and stuffy. She had to stand in the unruly, pushing and shoving crowd for an hour before she was able to pay for her visa and get her passport stamped.

When she finally saw John, his short-cropped hair shocked her. Gone was the dashing Bangkok hair style he had worn in California. She knew, of course, that he had renewed his connections with his monastery, but she had not realized that this would reduce his hair to what it had been at their first meeting in Tibet. He was not dressed in monk's robes. For her benefit he wore a pair of neat western slacks and a white shirt, sleeves reefed up. He looked serious, and only smiled when she flew into his arms.

"You did come back!" He said into their embrace. "It has been such a long time that I feared you would change your mind at the last minute. Thank you for joining me!"

He was touchingly concerned for her, shouldered her oversized backpack, took her suitcase and pushed his way into the expectant crowd of taxi drivers. They were instantly surrounded by a dozen gesticulating men tugging aggressively at their clothes, offering in rapid-fire Indian-English cheap rates to this or that hotel. Only when John put them down in Nepali did they let go of him. They piled into a taxi. John gave the driver an address and haggled over the price. She did not catch the name of their destination, it was none of the hotels she knew.

She asked, "Where are you taking me?" He smiled at her. "It's a surprise, my present for you." She frowned and said with a laugh. "Not to the Oberoi? Their soap is not forgotten, Phurbu Lama!" He got a read head recalling their first encounter in the fog at Drintang. She could still affect the familiar edge in her voice. It gave him a chill. Was it a mistake to try anew to heal their cultural and personal differences? Defensive, he gave himself a push and recovered his smile. "No, something much better."

The chaotic traffic was unchanged. Well remembered it had been a mild shock every time she had come to Kathmandu. Animals, beaten old cars, bicycles, tuk-tuk-three-wheelers, and pedestrians, the road was bewildering. They passed the bridge across the river and turned into the road to Pashupatinath. A sacred cow lay, contentedly chewing, in the middle of the intersection. A white-gloved policeman directed traffic from behind the animal's back. Both were equally unperturbed by each other's presence. A group of pilgrims crossing the road brought the traffic to a standstill. A barefoot old man, his white *doti* fluttering in the breeze led a throng of women in colorful saris towards the shrine.

Asya sighed and laughed. "Every time the ride from the airport into Kathmandu makes me forget all rigors of my trip past and present. Kathmandu is still one of the most charming places on earth."

Unexpectedly the taxi turned into a narrow dirt road winding its way between small patches of green vegetables alternating with squares of bright yellow mustard seed. Single houses lay strewn throughout the area. Heavy monsoon clouds hung over the valley, it was June.

"I have never been out her." she said. "Where are you taking me?" He smiled pleased. "I found a villa in the country for you!" The taxi pulled up in front of a two-story brick building, roof-lines at several levels, window frames in need of paint, a second-floor balcony, all as rundown as nearly every other place in the valley. Two large paper willows in bloom would give shade on sunnier days. Their white fuzz lazily drifted on the slow breeze into the surrounding fields. A wall with a rusty iron gate encircled the property.

John called in Nepali, and a young man opened the gate and greeted them with a big smile. John introduced him to Asya. "Suresh, your driver and housekeeper. He owns a tuk-tuk which he drives during the day. He will take you into town anytime, and here is Tika, his charming wife."

A shy, very young woman in a spotless, powder-blue sari had emerged from the house, her dark eyes full of curiosity. She walked towards Asya putting her hands together and touching her lips and forehead. "Namaste, Missus Asya!" John explained, "Tika will cook for you and keep the house in order." Asya imitated her gesture and asked whether she had any children. "No, but we very much hope for one." While Suresh carried the luggage into the house, John took Asya on a tour of the garden. It was neglected and unkempt, a stretch of grass, a white, plastic table and four Euro-chairs under an umbrella, a small pond with three goldfish swimming in its murky waters. A shack in the back housed Suresh's three-wheeler: a canvas-covered box, open at the rear, with two wooden benches for the passengers, a bench for the driver, and a motorcycle engine mounted over the front wheel. John pointed at the neglected greenery. "The garden has potential but will require your initiative."

Now that their domestic help had disappeared in the house, Asya, with her most beautiful smile, put her arms around John and kissed him. "I am overwhelmed by this place. How will we manage? I guess I have to recover my Prussian grandmother's talent for running an estate. She presided over two villages and a hundred people. So far the democratic, American kid in me is terrified by the idea of employing two servants. Thank you for making me the mistress of a colonial palace."

"Wait until you see the inside, it is far from that."

On the first floor she found a living room with an upright piano. "So you don't get out of practice or can teach the expats' children." A simple kitchen with a two-flame burner, the gas bottles stood outside, a redone bathroom, and attached to the back of the house, the quarters of the Nepali couple. The living room had a fireplace, a sofa bed and a low table on a Tibetan rug. It was all most simple and Spartan.

Proudly John said, "I have done what I could since I moved in, but the place needs the hand of a woman to make it comfortable and cozy."

Upstairs was their bedroom: a double bed covered with a thick Tibetan blanket and a French door leading to a small roof garden. John pointed at the fireplace which would be invaluable in winter. Adjacent were two smaller rooms, a study for Asya with a computer and a view of the fields and mountains. John's meditation room next door was decorated with his three precious thankas, a *vajra*, the double bell-shaped "diamond scepter" of spiritual power, a bell, its female counterpart, and a sutra on a low table. A heavy rug covered the floor.

Asya laughed. "I brought you a small Pacific sea shell, a *turbinella* to make you hear your inner voice when you meditate." John added. "And to remind me of you. I need that."

Finally across the hall there was a second bathroom with a European-style flash-water heater over a tiled bath still smelling of fresh grout.

All was of the greatest simplicity, bare, white walls, as yet not lived-in, but she could see how she could make this house into a warm and good place for them. The trees and the view of the fields were beguiling.

When they returned to the living room Tika had served tea and cookies. Asya let herself sink into the sofa cushions and closed her eyes. John, sitting across from her, looked at her expectantly, yearning for an appreciative word from her. The house had been his project for the past month. It had been in miserable condition when he had found it. "Do you like it here? It is equally far from Sandy's office in town and the monastery in Bodnath. It is quiet and secluded. The tourist bustle of Thamel is far away. I have fallen in love with this place." She gave him a bright smile. "I can see what I will do, curtains, a desk for me, big cushions on this sofa, some pictures on the walls, and maybe a bigger rug to sit on the floor. We'll go shopping together and find these things. It will be fun to do that. I like it very much, thank you, you must have worked hard."

Grateful he delved into a description of what he had found when he rented the place, and what he and Suresh had done since to make it inhabitable. There had been no hot water or bottled gas. They would buy a couple of gas heaters for the winter to supplement the fireplaces, electricity was expensive and unreliable.

"Maybe you should catch up with your time lag, and then we will have an early supper, and I will tell you what I suggest for you to do to keep yourself occupied after we have fixed the place. Boredom seems to be the most universal problem foreign wives face in this place."

He tucked her into a blanket on the sofa and left. Sleep evaded her, she drifted restlessly through waves of

half-dreams, memories of her life with John. The frightening masks of Drintang. John in the fog. The weeks in Kathmandu. Making love in some forlorn guest-house in Thamel. Her body ached for him. Did they need this domesticated palace? He was so concerned about her getting bored. What about him? Men knew so little about themselves and less about women. Her jetlag finally got the better of her, she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

After John had left for Kathmandu, Asya had found a new challenge: flying. With her quick mind she had soon obtained a pilot's license and a year later had passed the commercial pilot's examination. John found no temptation in flying, but he felt that flying would be an excellent occupation for Asya. Through mutual friends he had met a young German among the expats who owned a plane.

She had slept for two hours. Anxious to tell her of his idea and knowing that she would be completely destroyed if she slept any longer, he woke her.

"Come, join me in a simple Nepalese supper especially prepared to your liking." Over a vegetarian meal of *dal*, potatoes *alu*, and cauliflower, John told her of his grand scheme

"Now that you have a commercial pilot's license how would you like to fly Pilatus Porters for one of the airlines into the remote Nepalese airports? It beats California in color, scenery, and challenge."

She looked at him speechless and then got up and hugged him. "I was resigned to give up flying. But this would be a fabulous idea. Do you know the right people to make connections?"

"I made some inquiries through friends. The people at Royal Nepal Airline were reserved to the idea, but there are several new airlines that are looking for competent, foreign-trained pilots. How about flying for Buddha Air? I also met a young German dare-devil, Christian, who owns his own plane. It's called a "moule" or something. Maybe he will share it with you."

She laughed. "It must be a *Maule*, the name of a well-known American firm which makes short-take-off-and-landing planes." He was pleased by her excitement. "The expat wives are already envious of your skills," John continued, "You will set an example of single-minded determination in Kathmandu! By the way, tomorrow we are invited by Sandy's wife, she is anxious to meet you. Sandy is in Burma for UNESCO and will return only in a couple of weeks. His wife Margaret has invited all my friends for you to meet. She is English, a cool and reserved woman with three children. I admire her for her resourcefulness"

Suresh drove them to Sandy's house. It was already dark and they sat facing each other on the benches under the tarpaulin peering at the road rolling out behind them. It was good they could not see what approached them, Suresh was showing off by running slalom through the obstacles on the road.

When they entered town Suresh had to slow down. There were large crowds milling in the streets pushing and shoving. Suresh stopped, a procession of noisy, shouting people following three drummers was blocking the street. Suresh stuck his head into their compartment. "This is no holiday, it must be a demonstration. It will be better to wait and let them pass."

They crawled out. The drummers banged away as if it was one of the many processions carrying this or that Hindu image from one temple to another. Behind the drums marched two men carrying a large banner in Nepalese and English: "Keep the Hands off the Dalai Lama," and "The Nepalese people demand an international investigation in the assassination attempt on His Holiness the Dalai Lama." A group of young men marched separately, surrounded by armed police, carrying Tibetan flags in their raised fists and demanding "End Appeasement. Freedom for Tibet!"

John became agitated. He had not heard of the incident. A number of soldiers accompanied the marchers, despite that everything was chaotic but peaceful. At the tail of the crowd children and men swept up from the street were having fun, laughing and cheering. Occasionally some slogan came rolling down the column from up front. By the time the chant had reached the end it had become incomprehensible.

Asya felt uneasy, threatened by the chaos and the masses in the dark streets. "I have never seen a political demonstration in Kathmandu." An American tourist approached them. "Did you watch TV today? The President gave a speech denouncing the attempt on the Noble Laureate's life. He was accompanied by Richard Gere and other members of the American Buddhist community." John did not like TV, and they had not seen a newspaper or been out during the day. He hurried Suresh to get them to Margaret's house, to hear the full news.

Margaret's living room was crowded: a number of westerners, a few Lamas in their rust-colored robes, several Nepali, four women. There was no alcohol in evidence, people drank tea and bubble water. John took Asya to introduce her to the hostess, a quiet, graying brunette, very English, restrained, direct, and self-possessed. "What has happened to the Dalai Lama?" John asked immediately. "He is all right." said Margaret unperturbed. "Someone shot at him in Southern India. The would-be assassin missed, and before the police could apprehend him, he set himself on fire. Pretty gruesome. The motives are unclear. CNN will have more news in half an hour."

Asya was not sure she cared for Margaret, despite her friendly and disarming welcome, a few questions about her flight, the new house and Kathmandu. Margaret took her to meet Caroline. Asya took immediately to Caroline, petite, a few years older than herself, a narrow intelligent face, lively blue eyes, and long middle-brown hair. She wore a plain, dark-gray Tibetan skirt down to her ankles. Margaret, seeing the mutual attraction of the two young women, said in leaving. "Caroline, runs a school in town and is the mother of six Tibetan orphans." Asya had not expected anything like that from the lithe woman. Caroline, began to laugh. "This makes me look like a miracle worker, but these children are such a pleasure, and here I can afford help to take care of them. But tell me, John has been looking for a job for you. Is it true that you have a pilot's license?" Asya shrugged. "It is so easy to get a pilot's license in California, all you have to learn is to overcome your vertigo. Flying is probably simpler than driving a car, there is so much space up there, only starting and landing takes some practice. I would love to fly in Nepal." Someone had turned the television on and everybody congregated to watch the latest news. As they went to join the others Asya asked "Who is that dashing, gentleman with the beard and graying hair?" She had been curious about this man from the time she had entered the room, he reminded her of Richard. Caroline raised her eyebrows. "Brian Gilman, translator of esoteric Tibetan Nyingma texts. John must have told you of him. They have been friends for a long time." So this was the famous Gilman, thought Asya, he did not only look like Richard and was close to his age, he had Richard's imposing airs, which had irritated her so much. "Yes," Asya said. "When John and I first met years ago, he and Richard, a friend of mine, talked about Gilman's books as if they were the Buddhist Bible. I did not understand much of their discussions then. Are you too a practicing Buddhist?"

The answer to her question was drowned by the TV. In rapid succession pictures of demonstrations in Southeast Asia and Japan were followed by excerpts from statements by American and European governments. Backed by a film strip showing the burning assassin and a pale, sombre Dalai Lama. The commentator indifferently rattled down the news. According to the latest investigation by the Indian police, the assassin was a member of a radical Tibetan Buddhist group that decried the Dalai Lama's peaceful attempts at regaining Tibetan independence from Chinese rule.

After the news a debate broke out about the rifts in the Tibetan community. John explained to Asya that a large number of the younger Tibetans in exile were unhappy and critical of the Dalai Lamas' nonviolent approach to the political situation in Tibet. After fifty years the Dalai Lama had nothing to show for his approach. People were still imprisoned and occasionally tortured. They wanted to act and with force, demonstrate against the Chinese presence and possibly attack Chinese embassies. None of the people present at the party were subscribing to the radical course, but an attempt on His Holiness' life called for some drastic measures.

The three lamas excused themselves, they were to join a Mahakala vigil during this and the following night in support of the Dalai Lama. Tomorrow would be full moon. "And a lunar eclipse," said Gilman loud enough for all to hear after the monks had left. "A portentous omen, the good men will get hysterical when that happens."

Asya was still standing next to Caroline when a very slender woman of her own age approached them. A serious but lively Tibetan face and long, black hair parted in the middle. She is a dancer thought Asya. Caroline introduced her to the newcomer. "Drölma from Kham. Drölma is the acting abbess of Nagi Gompa in the hills above Budhanilkanth."

Asya shivered, Drölma's intense, dark eyes were burning into hers. Unexpectedly the abbess smiled at her and indicated that she had heard from John that Asya had a degree in music and was interested in Tibet. "Visit us some day at Nagi Gompa. I am trying to train the nuns to sing some of the old Tibetan songs and dance our old

dances. You will be enchanted." Asya thanked her, promised to come, and laughingly complained to Caroline that John had given away all her secrets. "You should really spend a few days with Drölma," said Caroline earnestly. "Nagi Gompa is one of the most tranquil and beautiful places in Kathmandu Valley." Drölma left them to talk to Margaret.

Caroline took up Asya's earlier question. "You asked whether I was a Buddhist, I am. By training I am an anthropologist. I came to Nepal at the same time as Derek O'Connor from Colorado and Leonard Wachs, the two men talking to John. Leonard is the shy, young man with the dark, curly hair. He is one of the most deeply involved Nyingmapa in our group. You wouldn't guess that?"

John waved to Asya to join them. With a teasing smile John said, "Asya meet my closest friends: Caroline, our dakini, skydancer and confidante, Derek the photographer, and Leonard the Dzogchen *naljorpa*."

Leonard protested. "Do I look like a *naljorpa*, a lousy, itinerant voyeur-monk? Vajrayogini intimidates me." John laughed. "In a few years you might. You already have the wisdom. I tried the role of a *naljorpa* for a while even without your enlightened awareness, and I tell you it is not a bad life." Asya with a glance at John laughed. "I can attest to that. I met John during his former life. All the girls north of the border thought he was a dangerous Ningmapa. To please me he has tried hard to become domesticated."

There was laughter all around, only serious Leonard did not find the conversation funny. Attracted by the general mirth Brian Gilman walked over and looking superciliously at Asya quipped. "Who taught you to swing the sacred hatchet with such precision, *Phurbu Khadroma*?" Asya gave him her most beguiling smile, while she destroyed him with one look from her Sephardic eyes. "Would you have the kindness to introduce yourself like a gentleman. You look like a bearded Richard Gere from Hollywood?" Caroline laughed out aloud and Gilman blushed, while an embarrassed John hastened to their rescue. "Brian, this is my wife Asya, Brian Gilman. Asya, you remember Brian is the famous translator we talked about on our way to Lapchi?" Asya nodded. "Oh, yes, of course, very nice to meet you, Mr. Gilman."

Brian Gilman would remember this first meeting with Asya and keep a safe distance from her. But the name *Phurbu Khadroma* stuck to Asya.

A full moon was coming and going from behind fast drifting clouds when Suresh drove them home in his noisy machine. On the spur of the moment John asked him to drive to Bodnath. The large, white dome of the great stupa looked ghostly in this light. Hundreds of prayer flags clattered in the wind. They climbed to the circumambulation tier ringing the austere, white hemisphere. They sat there for a while under the tower with the huge eyes of the Buddha. The monks were chanting in the meditation halls of the gompas surrounding the stupa, a mellifluous, hypnotic sound accompanied by the sonorous pounding of drums.

Asya was listening to the spiritually charged night, musing about the people she had met. "I like Caroline, she lives completely in this world. Is Leonard Jewish? He is her complete opposite." John nodded. "Yes, of course, but Leonard is the most serious member of the 'Kathmandu Dharma Bums,' as outsiders call our group." He laughed. "We all came here in our young years in search of spiritual meaning in life. I was the only one with a Tibetan lama training. Leonard, the lost American kid, was much more timid then he is now. In exchange for his lamas' instructions, Brian and Leonard learned Tibetan. Brian became a translator, Leonard guides western Buddhists through Tibet, Caroline devotes herself to refugee children, and I took off into the mountains."

Asya smiled. "Gilman reminds me of Richard, he has airs." John waved his head. "But Richard only trusted his own inner voice. Brian is a truly learned man in matters of Ningma teaching, and he can write. I admire him." She smirked. "Which has gone to his head. But who is the enigmatic abbess from Nagi Gompa? Her look could frighten one." John's eyes avoided her. "Drölma was the *khadroma*, the consort of a famous Dzogchen teacher in Kham. He took her in when she was sixteen, and he in his sixties. She is a true dakini not only the girlfriend of her lama. She is now teaching and giving empowerments in her own right."

The sound of the long-horns and drums and the deep bass voices of the Mahakala Mass for the Dead drifted over on the wind. Asya's thoughts returned to her visit to Ganden with Richard, the sky burial, the drum.

On the second night of the Mahakala Mass John asked Asya whether she would join him at his gompa. He wanted to spend the last night of their vigil with his fellow monks.

A mass for the dead? She hesitated but eventually agreed.

John put on the rust-red tunic of the Tibetan lamas, which when slung over his shoulder left his right arm free. John's monastery lay outside the mandala of houses around the stupa of Bodnath. A few bare light bulbs and several trays of butter lamps in front of the images were the only illumination of the *dukhang*, the meditation hall of the monks. In the darkness along its back wall glowed the gilded sculptures of Buddhas, teachers, and Bodhisattvas. The painted murals covering the side walls were barely discernible. Thankas and colorful, precious silk brocades hung on the columns that supported the flat ceiling painted with huge mandalas. Two rows of low cushions on the floor led to an empty seat for the absent Dalai Lama.

The sombre setting would have oppressed Asya, had it not been for the overwhelming welcome the monks gave her. Two of John's close friends hugged him and, after a nod and smile from John, Asya. They were all laughing and talking, wanting to know how her trip had been, and how she liked Nepal. What was her name, one inquired, and when John laughed that Brian Gilman had named her Phurbu Khadroma, their mirth knew no limit.

An older monk very kindly showed her to a set of cushions alongside the wall from where she would have a good view of the proceedings. He brought a heavy blanket to keep her warm. "And if you fall asleep during this long night, just stretch out on the cushions, nobody will take offense. We are proud to have you with us."

She was the sole outsider and the only woman.

A monk, who had been on the roof, announced that the full moon was about to rise over the hills. They all seated themselves cross-legged on their cushions, and the orchestra congregated across the hall from Asya. A large drum, two long-horns, several cymbals, a couple of bells. Each monk had one of the loose-paged sutra books on a low table before him.

The well remembered low boom-boom-boom of the big drum began. Asya shivered. The drum would count the hours of this night. A blast of the long-horns and the crash of the cymbals conjured up Drintang. But then a very low, unearthly drone, a sound startled her, which she had not heard before. It hung in the room like a formation of heavy, old-fashioned airplanes. She had to smile about this association. After a while she realized that two of the older monks produced the sound, ventriloquist fashion, by making their body cavity resonate. The bass drone underlay the rising and falling of the rhythmic chant, like in Bach's organ fugues.

Every now and then the drum stopped and the chant would be interrupted by a sudden, noisy burst of horns and cymbals, the men turned the page of their text and continued. She did not understand a word, John would have to explain the text to her later.

Overpowered by jetlag, the mammalian smell of the butter lamps, and the soporific monotony of the chanting Asya fell asleep under the blanket. The bass drone, the drum, and the occasional long-horn blasts conjured up a colorful dream of the Tibet she had seen with Richard.

Later she was awoken by a sudden commotion. The singing had stopped. She looked at her watch, it was shortly before midnight. The monks were talking excitedly. John was laughing, explaining something in Tibetan. Then they all ran outside.

She got up and followed.

"Look," said John, "a total lunar eclipse, just as Brian had predicted. An ominous sign to these men: 'the celestial dog is about to swallow the moon'."

The night had assumed an eerie atmosphere, the moon, reduced to the slimmest sickle, was barely visible off and on behind the drifting clouds. Soon it was reduced to a mere halo of the earth's shadow.

Some suggested to start chanting with greater fervor to save the moon from being swallowed by the evil forces of the night. A great sigh went through the congregation when the moon eventually grew again. John with his two fists, using the light from one of the electric bulbs to simulate the sun, was trying hard to explain how the shadow of the earth passed across the face of the moon producing the phenomenon. The monks listened skeptically. Relieved, laughing and chatting they resumed their mass an hour later when the full moon had recovered its familiar shape.

Towards morning Asya had a strangely beautiful dream of wandering through rain-dripping woods and across

foggy mountain passes into a land of misty lakes and exotic rock formations. She knew it was in Tibet. John was with her. They were sitting in a cave facing each other in the lotus position about to make love when she woke. Where was this land so unlike the Tibet she had seen with Richard? The chanting had ended. A shaft of sunlight from the central skylight made the dust particles dance. John was quietly sitting next to her. She felt rested and at peace with herself. On their way home she told him her dream. He looked at her enigmatically with raised brows. "You have been to Pemakö, the secret sanctuary of Vajrayogini. A very auspicious dream. Pemakö straddles the Indian border in southeastern Tibet below the Tsangpo Gorges."

2

Arms akimbo, Christian watched Asya check out the Maule M5-210 STOL-plane. A wiry young man with a pronounced nose in a haggard, weathered face, a shock of straggly blond hair, he was dressed in tight, perfectly tailored, black leather pants and an equally snazzy flight jacket. The plane was his pride and joy, he had flown the beauty from Germany to Kathmandu. John stood aside with defensively folded arms, bored, and worried.

Asya pulled the last check-flag from the propeller. "Everything looks ok, Christian."

"Then get in and check out the instruments."

Asya kicked the wheel blockings and climbed into the cockpit. She pressed the starter, the engine came alive with a roar sending John running out of reach of the blast. She moved the flaps and rudders, set the altitude gage to 4453 feet and checked the compass setting. Christian cross-waved his arms, ok.

She lowered the engine speed to idle and let her arms hang. For seconds she suffered a jittery attack of vertigo.

Her first flight in three months, and a plane she had never flown before!

John had introduced her to Christian, a flamboyant jack of all trades, who made his living as a computer-jog. They had spent an evening with him at *The Shutters*, the newest fashionable restaurant in Kathmandu, and he, captivated by Asya, had offered his plane for a flight to Pokhara, despite the monsoon weather. To Asya's doubting look, Christian had said, "Oh, this plane is the safest thing aloft, you cannot stall it, and you can land it anywhere."

John clambered into the rear, Christian took the co-pilot seat next to her. "You fly. Show me what you have learned. I can always help you." She nodded.

They buckled up, and after getting clearance from the tower she taxied the plane to the end of the runway. She ran the engine full throttle, her foot on the brakes. When she let the plane go it literally jumped off the runway. What a kick! As she pulled up into the sky the thrill of being freely suspended flooded all her senses. Oh, for the pleasure of flying! She turned a circle over the town slowly gaining altitude. The stupa and towers of Swayambunath lay to her left as she headed west following the Pokhara highway.

She pulled higher to pass over the rim of Kathmandu Valley. Heavy clouds were piled against the high mountains, but it wouldn't rain until late afternoon. A scattering of high clouds lay over the valley and the hills. A sultry southeasterly wind. It was oppressively hot in the cockpit. Christian took off his jacket. "Pull up higher. With this load the most efficient flight altitude is above twelve-thousand feet."

Christian pointed at a lever on her side. "Pull! It kicks in the turbo-compressor." She did, and was rewarded with a dramatic surge in power and the piercing scream of the turbine. The plane now climbed at an alarming rate.

Christian asked, "You are familiar with flying on instruments, aren't you?" She nodded, and he continued, "With the turbo the maximum service altitude is above twenty-thousand feet. Why don't you break through the clouds, it will be beautiful up there."

She raised her eyebrows and checked the altimeter, they were at ten-thousand feet. The upper edge of the clouds would be around fifteen. She had to get through the clouds as fast as possible. She pushed harder, the plane

climbed rapidly.

A wild abandon overcame her. The power in her hands! The steep climb took her breath away. They vanished in the clouds, grayness surrounded her. The sun a veiled ball above her. She watched the gages. Don't lose your horizon! Stay due west, the mountains on your right are twenty-seven thousand feet!

Suddenly she saw the masks dance in the clouds, fierce Drago and his eight companions. Unbound from solid earth they twirled and sailed and gesticulated at her. The roar of the horns, the drums, and the clashes of the cymbals above the whine of the turbo. A cloud closed in. The figures vanished only to reappear in a different place. Drago so close that he could have knocked at her window.

"John!" She screamed over the roar of the engine. "John, do you see the gods of Drintang!" John didn't answer. Maybe he hadn't heard her. She risked a glance back. Her heart stopped. John had slumped in his seat belt. Christian groped for an oxygen bottle.

At this moment the plane broke free of the clouds into brilliant sunshine. The shock of the blinding light. The snow fields of the Ganesh Himal suddenly dangerously close. Involuntarily she steered the plane away from the mountains.

Christian had unbuckled his seat belt and was shaking John. "Asya, stay straight for Christ's sake," shouted Christian, "and reduce the rate of climb until I can put John on the bottle!"

She leveled out, scudding in and out of occasional tufts of clouds. And then she saw Vajrayogini, fierce, stark naked except for her necklace of skulls, dancing in the shafts of light between the clouds. In her right hand the skullcap filled with blood, the hatchet in her left. The plane began to yaw as Asya stared at the queen of the dakinis changing color from red to yellow to green to white, floating ahead of the plane.

Cursing, Christian grabbed the controls on his side and leveled the plane. "You are drifting!" He shouted at Asya. "Watch where you are going. You are the pilot."

He thrust a second oxygen bottle into her free hand.

Asya blushed crimson and shook herself. He was right. Visions! The altitude was clouding her mind. She began greedily sucking oxygen from the plastic tube.

John had regained consciousness. "Sorry, I passed out." He stared at the mountains. "This is the Ganesh Himal over there. My father comes from the Kyirong Valley behind the range. I used to live there. We are not that high, why did I pass out?."

Asya glanced at the altimeter. She laughed. "And I saw the Tibetan Herukas and Vajrayogini dance in the clouds! We are only a little over fifteen-thousand feet. It must have been this turbocharged rocket plane that did it"

Almost straight ahead lay the huge ice mass of the Anapurna massif. Nine peaks above twenty-eight-thousand feet. Pokhara lay at the south-eastern foot of these mountains. "Should I descend now?" asked Asya. "Now that I have you two back among the living, let's take a look at Machhapuchare, the Fishtail Peak from a respectful distance," said Christian. "Turn west-south-west. The hills below us are less than ten-thousand."

The rock walls and snow fields of Machhapuchare, the Matterhorn of the Himalayas, stood separate from the massif to the south-west, clearly visible above the clouds. She flew a wide turn west of the peak searching for a hole in the cloud cover to descend safely.

Christian shouted. "Down there, you see the lake? It's Phewa Tal in Pokhara. You are lucky."

She had just glimpsed the blue surface below a drifting cloud. Very gingerly, sweat on her forehead she headed down. Christian had his hand on the stick, following her every movement. For a few tense minutes they were enveloped by the gray fog, still over ten-thousand feet high. And then she saw the houses of the town through the cloud veil and the lake. In another minute she had ducked under the cloud ceiling

Asya heaved a deep sigh. "I have never done such a foolish thing, just to look at some high mountains!" She wiped her forehead. "We could have let the airport tower talk us down," said Christian. "But these guys are so incompetent in Pokhara that it is decidedly better to fly on-sight." - "As long as you can see something!" she quipped. Christian called the tower and in another few minutes they were rolling down the Pokhara runway. Christian laughed. "You will not see Anapurna or Machhapuchare again until the monsoon ends in October. It was worth the little anxiety. We could always have flown into the Therai at the edge of the Indian plains to safely get

down, an hour detour."

Asya turned around to look at John. She had to laugh, fierce Phurbu Lama looked white and was biting his lip. "John, next time you have to stay awake and watch the dakinis when we fly through the clouds, they are ravishing!"

Over a fiery Indian lunch Asya shook her head. "I never realized that the Tibetan gods are afraid of oxygen. A few whiffs chased them away! Despite all my trying, in California I could never conjure up their images so frighteningly clear. I have to try that experiment again."

Christian frowned. "But not when you are responsible for three people and an airplane!"

"Ah," said Asya, "I am going to establish *Dakini Air* for the sole purpose of taking people up and teach them the fear of the gods, *um ihnen das Fürchten beizubringen*. Will you rent me your plane, Christian? One hundred dollar an hour?"

Christian waved his head. "Not a bad idea. You'll need something bigger though for six or ten people! A lama to lead the chanting and put everyone into a deep *samadhi*. How about you John? We could try to get a foreign development loan."

Later that night at home, Asya could see that John was depressed by her flirtatious attraction to Christian. She liked Christian's easy, deliberate charm, and the possibility of flying his powerful machine made him irresistible. How else could she get that high? Pushing through the clouds of *samsara's* worldly cares into the blinding, exhilarating light of the high mountains?

"John," she teased him, "Why are you jealous? I thought we had passed that state of misery a long time ago with Richard?"

"I don't like flying like you do. It makes me dizzy. I loose my footing. To pass out! Embarrassing! At only fifteen-thousand feet."

Asya giggled, extending her arms she threw her head back and danced a few steps. "Phurbu Lama, I thought you had practiced flying with your Tsögyelma Khadroma in your meditations for years. The man *can* participate in the woman's knowledge! And I found out that an airplane may be a more powerful way than Guru Rimpoche's exercises."

She began taking off her clothes, throwing the pieces at him. Naked, her tongue fluttering, she grabbed the *dorje* from his meditation table and slung a Tibetan necklace of bone skulls around her neck. John stared at her.

Vajrayogini!

"Come, cut your silly hauteur Rimpoche, stop sulking and fly with me!"

They ended on the Tibetan rug, and she finally came with such fierce power that she lost consciousness and hung limp in his arms, spent.

A few weeks later Christian called. "I would like to speak to the director of *Dakini Air*? I need a featherweight co-pilot to fly an eye surgeon into western Nepal with the possibility of a later extension to Tibet." Asya laughed. "The dakinis are out for the day, they are soaring in the high mountains. Let's meet in Thamel for dinner. What eye surgeon?"

"I'll tell you. May I bring a friend?"

Christian appeared with a tall, lively, brunette with a pretty bust and long, even prettier legs. "This is Tina. You will be surprised Asya, Tina comes from West Los Angeles and speaks German! She is an old friend from my YFU-year in LA. She has just finished her MD at UCLA."

Visibly relieved John eyed Tina. Christian's attention would be diverted from Asya. But Christian, without effort or guile easily charmed both women. "*Dakini Air!* Asya, I am more and more convinced that this was an excellent idea of yours. CIWEC, the Belgian medical group on Kanthipath, has asked me to fly medical missions for them. They rent a PC-6 Pilatus from Royal Nepal for medical emergency evacuations and would like to use my plane for smaller missions. The eye doctor is part of that job. They are planning to perform cataract operations *en masse* in the backward high country. You have some inherited medical knowledge and Tina wouldn't mind to stay here for a while. Let's find some sponsors and form *DAKAIR*, it-sounds like a Disney movie, or whatever abbreviation you like! Anyway, Asya, what are dakinis? I couldn't explain that to Tina."

John smiled enigmatically, got out a pen and began drawing a naked woman on his napkin, flying hair, outstretched arms dancing on a lotus throne. Everyone watched fascinated.

"You are a real artist!" bubbled Tina.

"An architect with a degree in esoteric Buddhism!" laughed John. "A dakini is a flying air-spirit, female as you see, who holds a sharp ritual hatchet," he drew a *kartrika*, "in her right hand and a skull-cap in her left. With the hatchet she cuts the man's ignorance. The skull cap contains the blood of the demons she defeated, or for certain esoteric rites, forgive me, menstrual blood. Dakinis are fierce and frightening, they shock the man into higher awareness and for that reason play an important role in Tibetan Buddhism."

John finished by drawing a thin mesh garment over the lower body of the dakini. Christian looked at this addition and laughed disarmingly. "A *lace dress*. . . ! For a while I designed lace dresses for young German ladies who could afford to wear them with only earrings. Nothing under except for some extra tulle here and there." John laughed. "Except a dakini wears a necklace of freshly cut-off human heads instead of earrings!"

"How perfectly revolting!" said Tina.

Asya wrinkled her brows and asked dryly. "Cataract operations in the field?"

Tina explained. "All they need is an ophthalmic microscope, a good light source, and the necessary scalpels. After exchanging the clouded lens against an artificial one under topical anesthesia, they put a few drops of antibiotic into the eye and patch it up. Infections are rare and after three days the patient can take the bandages off and see again. Routinely done, the operation takes fifteen minutes and is a true miracle for the patient."

"I suggested to CIWEC," said Christian, "that they give you some specialized medical training so you could double as the doctor's assistant. But the main advantage is that you are light-weight! There will be some capacity left for the ophthalmologist's equipment."

Still skeptical, Asya asked with a tense frown. "You mentioned flying to Tibet. How would that be possible?"

Christian ignored her furrowed brows. "CIWEC is going to try the eye program in western Nepal. But the Chinese are negotiating with them to extend it to the remote Tibetan plateau. Right now the plan is to take two doctors around by Landcruiser. But everyone thinks that a modified Pilatus Turbo-PC-6 would be a much more convenient transportation in those empty spaces."

Asya shook her head. "You have not been to the Tibetan plateau, it is flatter than Holland but on the average fifteen-thousand feet high, higher than Montblanc. You can drive cross-country without a road for hundreds of miles, but can you land and start an airplane at this altitude?"

Christian smiled. "That is true for piston-engines, its power decreases rapidly with altitude. A turbo-assisted engine is limited by the decreasing efficiency of the compressor to about twenty-three-thousand feet. You saw how mine pulls above twelve-thousand! But you are right, for Tibet one would need a powerful Turbo-Pilatus with a ceiling altitude of thirty-thousand feet and cabin pressurization, so you don't fly away with the dakinis...! And flying across the Himalayas remains an entirely separate problem."

Asya was biting her nails. "In any case, if CIWEC would train me, I could accompany the doctors by car or by plane. Christian, you don't know, John and I met in Tibet, and I have made a vow to return there one day." John nagged her about chewing her nails. Asya glared at him. "I have promised Richard that I would visit the tulku of Chung Riwoche. That vow predates you. Will *you* take me there? The doctors might!"

Christian arranged an interview for Asya with the acting director of CIWEC, a highly competent, no-nonsense lady from India. Asya and she liked each other. The lady promised to discuss Asya's participation with the ophthalmologist. The combination of a pilot license, her knowledge of Tibet, and an arguable medical background were unusual.

Asya came home excited, no signs of the boredom John had foreseen. The improvements on their house and garden remained in limbo. "I don't really need a 'home' to be happy." Asya told John. "And a *naljorpa* is supposed to forswear all worldly attachments."

John scratched his head. "The dance of the dakini is ever-changing! I thought that you needed to 'domesticate' me to be happy, and now you are trying to pull the rug of a comfortable existence from under me. Will I ever understand you?" She laughed. "I have had two years to meditate on what you tried to teach me. The woman is the embodiment of emptiness. I have decided that it is my job to be the unpremeditated source of your spontaneity, your challenge not your mother or complacent wife. That insight empowered me to come back to

you."

He took her into his arms, and she pressed herself onto him with unashamed sensuality. "I want you!" she whispered into his ear. "Two years without you, was too long."

This time he proceeded with the utmost deliberation. Undressing her ever so slowly. Holding back halfway on her ascent he thought of the mystical couplings of Padmasambhava and Tsögyel. With perfect self-control he kept her suspended on the high plateau until she begged him to release her. She was shaking all over when he finally finished full force. But she did not fly off her peak and pass out, she focused all her love and concentration on him. He collapsed depleted from the prolonged exertion.

John mused, she often called him Tsering these days, by his Tibetan name. In the past she had never called him anything but John or occasionally Phurbu Lama to make a point. Where did he belong, was he Tsering? She was right to shake him, ensconced as he was in this comfortable life. Truly he had no other challenge but her. But where did she get the courage from to offer herself as his 'emptiness'? She was no wide-eyed, innocent, sixteen-year-old girl steeped in half-understood Buddhist lore offering her body to the famous lama. She knew far too much to be 'empty' in that simple sense.

It was strange, these western students of Tibetan Buddhism all knew too much, Richard, Asya. But had they experienced these precepts? They had not gone through the meticulous visual exercises of assembling and disassembling Tibetan imagery as he had, and yet she *knew*. Both, Richard and Asya had protested that the Tibetan imagery had no deeper, archetypal meaning to them, did not scare them. What imagery could give her the experiential knowledge, she needed? He realized that the burden was on him to open Asya's 'inner mandala'. But how? The conventional initiation rites held no power for her. Was flying Christian's airplane the answer, Dakini Air? He felt the pangs of jealousy again. If he did not shape up and rid himself of this destructive emotion he would lose her. And then he remembered his long monologue to Richard above Lapchi. Dzogchen had the universal tools! He would have to meditate on Vajra Heruka and his Khadroma Vajrayogini to give him the insight and spontaneity for this difficult undertaking.

3

They were flying over Pokhara towards the narrow entrance of the Kali Gandaki gorge in the Himalayan chain. It was like heading into a wall of snow and rock towering into the azure sky. Christian pulled the plane to eighteen-thousand feet. The floor of the valley was only eight-thousand but the peaks to both sides, Daulaghi and Nilgiri-Anapurna, were over twenty-six-thousand feet high. It looked breathtaking. At their altitude the valley was a mere twelve kilometers wide, seven miles!

Right after the entrance the canyon made a sharp turn around the Anapurna massif barring the view into the upper Kali Gandaki gorge. Asya cracked her knuckles, but Christian was imperturbable, in complete calm he steered into the narrow passage. It seemed that she could have touched the rock flanks and ice slides of Nilgiri Peak with her hand. The other two peaks of Nilgiri became visible and Tukche Peak next to Dalaughi on the other side of the gorge. Their plane appeared tiny as they slipped between these snow giants. And then the view of the valley opened to the north-east. Stupendous!

At the bottom, split into dozens of rivulets, the Kali Gandaki river wound through its boulder-strewn flood plain. Bright green meadows, alternating with terraced squares of harvested fields, climbed the slopes. Not a cloud in the deep blue sky. A burning late October sun. She could see people and animals move along the well-trodden paths between a string of hamlets, and level with her the blinding white crags of the Dalaughi glacier and the ice fields around Tukche Peak. In sharp switch-backs the path from the Dolpo descended into Tukche village.

The village of Jomosom, their first stop came into view, and at the end of the gorge a broad opening in the mountain chain, the pass to the ochre-brown Tibetan Plateau and the Kingdom of Mustang, their destination. She was so spell-bound by the scenery and Christian's flying that she had completely forgotten Tina and Jonathan, the ophthalmologist, who sat in the back seats in tense silence. As they reached the upper valley Tina uttered a deep sigh of relief.

John was not part of their adventure. Sandy needed him at Angkor Wat in Cambodia where he was restoring temples during the winter. John had succeeded to put his mind to rest. Asya had to find her experience by herself. He let Asya go, like Guru Rimpoche had sent Tsögyel away. Asya was well aware of this 'sacrifice' for her sake and loved him for it.

Jonathan, a young, Harvard-trained American idealist dedicated to the alleviation of the wide-spread cataract problem at high altitude, had been delighted to train Asya. Like he, Asya would only get paid for her expenses and a modest salary. Together they had operated on two-dozen patients at a Kathmandu hospital, until they could perform the procedure in their sleep.

Tina was on her way to hold a series of prenatal clinics in Jomosom while Christian, Jonathan, and Asya worked in Lo Manthang, the capital of Mustang. A few months earlier, Tina had been at CIWEC when a highly pregnant, young woman was brought in unconscious, hemorrhaging profusely. Four children trailed their mother, the oldest girl carrying her youngest brother piggy-back. Despite an emergency operation, the woman never regained consciousness. Deeply shocked by this experience, Tina had offered her services. She quickly discovered that prenatal care was seriously lacking in the remote areas of Nepal. A disproportionate number of women died of hemorrhages during pregnancy.

Christian had scouted this flight alone, found a 12'400-ft-landing site in a barley field, empty and drained at this time of year very close to the city wall of Lo Manthang.

The landing strip at Jomosom appeared straight ahead hanging on a hillside above the village. This time even Christian, sweat on his forehead, bit his lip. He turned a loop over the strip to face into the fierce afternoon wind blowing up the valley and eased the plane down. Despite his having reduced their velocity, Asya felt the unimproved runway rush at her with dizzying speed. The wheels touched the ground. They bumped to a stop long before the end of the cleared area. Christian had done an excellent job.

They were greeted by the airport manager and the local chief of police. Foreigners in their own plane were a rare and important event. A special medical mission! The officials had been informed that they were cleared to continue to Lo Manthang. All access to Mustang was strictly controlled and required expensive permits, which had been waved by the Minister of Transportation personally, a major sensation.

The police officer took them into his shack, inspected and stamped their passports and visas and by hand laboriously copied the vital statistics of each of them separately into a thick ledger. Meanwhile the head of the Jomosom medical station had arrived with two local porters. He tipped his Nepali *topi*, a white and red striped 'baker's' hat, and deferentially greeted Tina. He would be personally responsible for her accommodations and welfare.

While Jonathan and Christian took on some additional provisions, Asya admired their Dakini Bird for the n-th time. On John's suggestion Christian had, instead of a dakini, painted a green Tara on the plane as their logo, the Goddess of Mercy who had come from Nepal and married the Tibetan king. Only the Tibetan Buddhists considered dakinis beneficial celestial personages. To the uneducated Hindu a dakini was a kind of low-caste prostitute who cohabited with dubious *saddhus*. The name of their group, *Dakini Medical Services Limited (Kathmandu)* appeared in English, Nepali, and Tibetan. Christian had found that forming a new airline would have been fraught with insurmountable political and practical problems.

Christian was pressing for an early departure. He wanted to reach the Mustang well before noon when the sun would heat the already thin air at Lo Manthang and make landing difficult. They said good-bye to Tina. Christian turned the plane into the wind, kicked in the turbo, and revved the engine to its full power. With a terrific whine they bumped down the runway and lifted off just when they thought the bumping would never stop. They climbed quickly back into the sky.

As they flew north the scenery changed from the green fields of the Kali Gandaki valley to the bare, fantastically eroded, hallucinatory, brown hills of the Tibetan plateau. Asya's heart beat faster. Full of nostalgia she remembered her trek with Richard. A village crowded with stacked, dust-brown houses, firewood stored on their flat roofs. A gumpa bedecked with strings of prayer flags fluttering in the wind. The intense blue of the sky of Tibet! She had finally returned.

They covered the strenuous three-day foot trek from Jomosom to Lo Manthang in half an hour. The walled town lay below them looking like a New Mexico Indian pueblo. And then Christian discovered a large crowd of people milling around on his landing strip. What to do? He flew a loop. The people waved at them but did not move. He finally decided to fly a low-level attack. Turbine screaming he swept a few meters above their heads and then pulled up again. The crowd ran in all directions, the landing strip was finally clear and after another loop Christian set down and rumbled to a stop.

The people closed in to view the flying sensation gesticulating and pointing at the plane. Asya climbed out holding the white shawl John had given her for the King of Lo. Despite the Diamox they had taken to ease the sudden altitude change she was breathing hard. Her head was dizzy and her fingertips tingling. Christian and Jonathan climbed out after her.

Supported by two young assistants an old, dignified man walked towards Asya. She bowed to him. One of the two men translated, King Tradul Gyelbu of Lo welcomed the foreign doctors to Lo Manthang.

As Asya stepped forward she noticed that the eyes of the king were clouded by cataracts. She knew he was practically blind. Her eyes swimming in tears, Asya touched her forehead, throat, and heart and for a second considered prostrating herself. The memory of the abbot of Chung Riwoche in her mind, she bowed very low, touched the ground and presented the scarf on outstretched hands.

The king, staring at her with empty eyes, nodded, consecrated the scarf, and handed it back to her with a short speech calling the blessings of the Buddha on their mission.

Asya wiped the tears from her eyes and looking around realized that the entire crowd of old people surrounding them were cataract victims. She glanced at the stunned faces of her two companions and collected herself, in her mind Richard expounded the virtues of compassion.

She took Jonathan's arm and with a choked voice said. "Look at these people! Pity is not constructive. Active Compassion is what we have to learn. Thank you for giving me the chance to understand this. Let's begin. This is more than humanitarian aid, it is Bodhisattva work."

Accompanied by the crowd of half-blind men the king led them towards the city gate. Behind the massive wall piled the houses, brown, two and three-story adobe buildings surmounted by a large gumpa and the king's palace in the town's center. The city wall was painted gray, a wide black and yellow stripe girded the entire town, a sign that the town was once a part of the Tibetan Sakya dominion. To the right of the gate, in a separate enclosure, rose the blood-red building of a large gumpa complex. On the roofs hundreds of prayer flags flapped in the wind.

They set up their clinic at the king's palace, an unpretentious compound of interconnected adobe buildings. In the morning a large group of patients had assembled at the palace. They set to work, Christian manning the ophthalmological light source fed from an improvised generator. Their first patient was the old king himself. Lying on a field cot, watched by his wide-eyed household from a respectful distance, he heroically submitted to Jonathan's scalpel. Draped in white coats, surgical gloves and hats Jonathan performed the operation and slipped in the new lens, which Asya held at the ready. Before anyone had fully comprehended what was happening, the patient, a patch on his eye, was back on his feet.

Rowing his arms, the king, still as blind as before, exclaimed that he had suffered no pain and felt nothing. A murmur went through the crowd. The news spread like wildfire to the waiting elders outside. A great commotion began to select the next victim.

Half an hour later another nervous voluntary was lying on the cot. Slowed by the haggling for each subsequent patient and the dusty surroundings, work progressed much slower than they had anticipated. Jonathan was meticulously concerned about the cleanliness of the procedure, and the nervousness of the patients did not help. By evening they had operated on only ten eyes. There were more than sixty people waiting outside and many needed operations on both eyes. They finally agreed that Christian should fly back to Kathmandu to get more

sterile replacement lenses and provisions for an extended stay. Fortunately the weather had remained stable. On a cold morning Christian roared off in the empty plane.

On the day when the patches of the first ten patients were to be removed, the king was sitting in a chair. Jonathan had instructed him not to touch his eyes. Carefully Asya peeled the patch off. For a few minutes the old man sat bewildered, then he rose crying "Light! I can see again!" With out-stretched arms he walked towards Asya and embraced her. Tears were running down his cheeks. "You have come from far away to make me see again!" He fell on his knees before her. With folded hands and in a trembling voice he sang.

*"I have seen a living Bodhisattva with my eyes!
On the wings of Garuda you arrived, Dakini of Long Life
And made me old man see again. I who had resigned myself
To contemplative darkness. Now let me rise to the good of my people
To lead them and you, Dakini from the Far Western Land to see the Dharma.
Blessed be all sentient beings."*

He touched her forehead with his hand.

Asya was as embarrassed as she was moved. She extended her hand and led the man to Jonathan. "I have only been the assistant to the master physician."

The king embraced Jonathan, and rubbed Jonathan's forehead with his in the peculiar gesture between enlightened people that Asya had seen in Tibet.

They removed the patches of the remaining nine men who ran out singing and shouting. A large crowd of curious people greeted Jonathan and Asya like miracle workers.

One afternoon the wind changed, clouds drifted up from the Kali Gandaki Valley. Asya frowned. "Jonathan, Christian will not be able to fly as long as this weather persists. We will have to fend for ourselves for a few days." They operated as long as their supply of lenses lasted and then did some preliminary screening of the mounting numbers of sightless who had walked for hours to seek their help. Not all cases were operable cataracts. They did what they could for the unfortunates, it was hard to send them away.

In the evening the king gave a reception for the foreign doctors at his apartments. As Asya walked through the crowd of motley people she suddenly felt someone's eyes on her. A shudder went down her spine. She turned and met with the penetrating eyes of Drölma, the abbess of Nagi Gompa, whom she had briefly met at Margaret's house when she had first arrived.

Drölma smiled and extended her hand to the perplexed Asya. "You are surprised to find me here? Lo Manthang is my home. I fled here from Kham. The King of Lo is an uncle of mine. He gave me refuge in the difficult years after my Guru died, and now I divide my time between Nagi Gompa and Lo Manthang. Ever since I met you in Kathmandu, I knew that our paths would cross again. When I heard that you would come here, I flew to Jomosom and walked up."

Asya stared at her like at an apparition thinking of John's description of her past. Drölma's severely parted, black hair. Her slender, pliable figure in the long gray Tibetan skirt. She moves like a tigress, thought Asya. Her even oval face radiated an exceptional intelligence tempered by kindness.

To her own surprise Asya heard herself say. "John told me that you have been the consort of a famous Nyingma Lama, and now teach in your own right. Would you consider being my teacher?"

Drölma's smile vanished, her eyes looked straight through her. In a whisper Drölma said. "Do you know that you are surrounded by a phenomenal, radiant aura? A few fortunate people have no need of the complicated exercises of the Dharma. They know and live spontaneously."

Drölma's intensity enveloped them like a hermetic shell in the middle of all the people. Bewildered Asya tried to shake the spell. "What do you mean. Nobody ever told me I had an aura. You embarrass me."

Drölma smiled at her, the tension between them eased. "Your radiance has become very strong working on the eyes of these old people. It was faint and hidden when we first met. Remember Gilman calling you Phurbu Khadroma? He must have seen it too, because that is how you appeared on that day, fearless, putting him and the others into place. Now you have turned very open and gentle. Yes, I will teach you."

They did not talk to each other again during that evening, but Asya felt that an invisible bond extended between Drölma and her. An occasional smile, a nod of her head. Asya watched Drölma's every movement.

In the morning a layer of pristine snow under a deep blue sky covered the world. The dusty, brown landscape had been magically transformed into a brilliant fairy land. The wind had subsided. Tracks of footsteps meandered through the snow from house to house. A girl, wrapped in several scarves, was sweeping the steps to her house. The swoosh of her broom was the only sound.

Asya stepped outside and took a deep breath of fresh air. It was not cold, the sun warmed her. And then she saw Drölma lithely striding towards her a radiant smile on her face. "*Tashi delay*, Asya! What a wonderful morning. Would you join me on a walk through this snow land? I want to show you my favorite place."

Asya hugged the laughing Drölma, her fabulously white teeth! Until Christian returned Jonathan and she would be idle, she was free. She put on a scarf and her down jacket, and the two women walked off together. The townspeople they met shouted a cheerful *tashi delay*, bowed deeply, and excitedly discussed the pair after they had passed.

Asya, amazed, realized that she had lost the apprehension that had clouded their previous meetings. Serene and guileless Drölma appeared like an old friend. Asya asked, "John has told me only the merest shreds about you. Tell me about your life with your Lama. Were you married to him?"

Drölma giggled. "Oh no, a consort of a guru is not considered married. She lives freely with him as his partner in the *anu-* and *atiyoga* exercises, the esoteric stages of our meditation system. She is his Dakini or shakti. I was fifteen when, on the urging of his students, he took me as his consort. He was sixty-five and ailing and experienced a miraculous rejuvenation by making love to me."

Asya remembered Richard's comments about the age of Tsögyel, which she had considered offensive at the time. "Fifteen? Were you asked whether you wanted to become the consort of this old man?"

Drölma laughed completely candidly. "Yes, it was a great honor. I know what you think. In the West a man goes to jail, if he takes a fifteen-year-old girl as his companion. Here it is considered most propitious to be initiated by a wise man. I was, what you call, a virgin, he taught me everything I know."

Asya had heard similar explanations of this tradition from Richard and from John and had considered them patriarchal rationalizations. She had never talked to a woman who had gone through this experience. She recalled the afternoon when Tsögyel had pulled up her skirt and proudly shown her pregnant belly. "My first visit to Tibet was a very curious experience. I trekked with Richard, a sixty-year-old German-American student of Buddhism, across the high plateau to the Lapchi. On the way we met a young yakherdess whose mother begged Richard to make a *tulku* with her daughter, which he did. I was revolted and suffered an attack of serious jealousy."

Drölma raised her eyebrows. "To make a *tulku*? That is a slightly different proposition than becoming a consort of a famous guru. Do you know what a tulku is? Tell me this story."

Asya nodded and described how she had accidentally met Richard, how they had met the old abbot in Chung Riwoche, the appearance of Tsögyel, and the afternoon when Tsögyel's mother circumambulated the tent in which Richard made love to the young girl.

Drölma laughed for a long time. "This is a wonderful initiation story. It may not have been so consequential for Richard as for you! How did you overcome your jealousy?"

Asya blushed. Her encounter with Tsögyel *had* given her her first taste of active compassion. "By loving that girl and her growing child. Richard called it active compassion, but he was not able to explain what that means. I have learned since that charity, mercy, and pity are powerless by comparison to active compassion."

"But are all part of it!" interjected Drölma. Asya wrinkled her brows. "Your command of English is amazing, where did you learn it?"

Drölma smiled and bowed her head. "Thank you! Caroline taught me English. You remember the wisp of a woman who runs a school in Kathmandu and has six or seven adopted Tibetan children? She is a very close friend. I also spent three years in Germany studying dance and psychology and taught the Buddhist Tantra."

They had walked through town and passed the gate in the massive city wall. Crossing Christian's landing strip the wide open valley of Lo lay before them bordered in the far distance by the mountains along the Nepal-Tibetan border.

Drölma turned serious. “The word compassion very closely describes Buddhist *bodhicitta*. I even met someone who maintained that Christ had borrowed his message of compassionate love from Buddhism. Maybe the Buddhists are more successful in persuading people to practice active compassion than Christ's followers, but this has many reasons.”

Asya looked at the unbroken snow before her which their feet would soon mark. “I learned compassion from Buddhism, and I am still learning while doing this work here. I am not Christian. We were taught to distrust all religion. My father was Jewish.”

“Oh, like Leonard,” said Drölma without judgment. “He is Jewish and seeks an emotionally and spiritually more satisfying religion.”

Asya glanced at her. “I don't look for formal religion. Maybe I am searching for a method to mobilize my buried emotions and to understand my complicated subconscious knowledge. Do you know what I mean? It would be easier, if Tibetan Buddhism would not use these strange images and shroud its insights in so much secrecy. It seems to me that you do know methods for my need.”

Drölma silently steered them towards a low hill rising from the valley. Breathing hard Asya followed her uphill. From its top a wide view opened across the plain, the walls and the stacked square houses of the town. The strings of colorful prayer flags on top the houses. Here and there people were working on the roofs, cutting thorny brush to firewood or separating grain from chaff by throwing it into the air over a tarpaulin. It was very still, all noises from town were muffled by the snow. The track they had made across the snow.

“I often sit here alone and meditate. ‘At the snow line,’ like Yeshe Tsögyelma,” said Drölma. She scraped the snow aside and sat with crossed legs on the cold ground. “Have you heard of Yeshe Tsögyel? She was the most famous of Padmasambhava's consorts. My great model. She left an autobiography describing her initiations. Brian Gilman translated it into English. I will give you a copy in Kathmandu and explain its meanings to you.”

Asya thought of the afternoon on the mountainside above Lapchi where John had explained all of this to Richard, who had been asleep. If she had only known more then. Later in America John never returned to this subject. Maybe her dislike for things mystical had shut her out from this part of him. Why had she asked Drölma to teach her where John could have done that? No John could not, Asya decided, Drölma had an inner radiance compared to which Phurbu Lama's had been but a frivolous, weak light. Her love for John had been her longing for Tibet, but she had refused to accept the Tibetan knowledge he carried. And then there had been their love making.

“Yes,” Asya said, “Richard knew about Gilman's translation of the ‘Sky Dancer or the Life of Yeshe Tsögyel’ and he and John had a long discussion about it in Lapchi. But I was too ignorant and defensive then to understand John's remarks and later in America we were too busy to make ends meet. I never asked John about it again.”

Drölma scraped a second hole in the snow patted the ground with her hand. “Sit here opposite me. The sun will warm you. Another time I will teach you *tumo*, or how to make your own heat.”

Drölma closed her eyes. “I can see what went wrong between the two of you. John was looking for the dakini that he needs to understand the illusory nature of the world, and you had no idea of what it was he needed. When a guru chooses an exceptional fifteen-year-old girl who admires him boundlessly, she is as ‘empty’ and as formless as the Void, and that is what she formally represents to him. A great guru will make her conscious of her nature, ‘open her inner mandala,’ and teach her the images and words to express it. John was not advanced enough to teach you and you were no longer innocent enough to be completely empty. Nobody has shown you your dakini nature, your aura.”

Asya looked at her with curiosity. “When I first met Richard, I was in a state of total rejection of any man. He helped me out of that bind. And then John appeared in Drintang and practically raped me. Yes, ‘opening my mandala’! Afterwards there was a lot of talk about I being his and Richard's dakini. I love John's love-making. He can be very good at that. If it is perfect love-making he needs, we have got very close to that. But you are right I do not understand what that has to do with his or my spiritual enlightenment.”

Drölma looked at her with her penetrating eyes and then began to laugh. “I am not John's confidante, Caroline is that. I probably scare him. So I have never heard that story. But I can imagine strong, young Phurbu Lama, the Dzogchen *naljorpa*, making the rounds among the girls in the border villages. But he had not reckoned to come upon a true, fierce dakini from California, who would call him bluff! Still it goes to his credit that he has taught you how to give each other pleasure, because *pure* pleasure in making love is an important part of *atiyoga* and is not

easy to achieve. That is why a dakini remains childless. To make a child leads back into *Samsara*, the worldly confusion which we are trying to escape from.”

Asya stared at her bewildered. “You mean that a woman in order to be a man's consort has to deny her most creatively female wish to have a child?”

“As long as she acts as a dakini, seeking an escape from this world, yes. Think of it, the job of being a mother is so all-consuming that there is no room for the time and energy consuming exercises that for example Dzogchen requires. She would cruelly neglect her children.”

Asya became angry. “Then I shall forego ‘salvation’ and be reborn into this world! I do want a child from John!”

Drölma smiled looking into space. “I exchanged that wish against teaching. Of course, my guru was an old man. You are entirely free to decide. A woman can gain other insights when giving birth, which are not available to men. I have known a woman who experienced both anu- and atiyoga initiations at the same time when giving birth, you could call it *trekchöd*, ‘Cutting Through’ followed by *tögal* ‘Immediate Crossing’. But that is rare, and I do not know how to prepare you for such an experience.”

Drölma was still staring south when she jumped up. “There is an airplane coming over the pass! It can only be Christian's.” They ran down from their perch and arrived at the airstrip just as Christian was coming to a stop. Christian only stayed for a night and then left to pick up Tina and take her back to Kathmandu. He had nothing to do in Lo Manthang, they had trained their young interpreter to handle the light source during the operations. By now they had replaced one eye of seventy-two people and were beginning to operate on the second eyes of about forty people. It would take them another two weeks. Christian promised to come back in three weeks, weather permitting, and fly them down. Snow did not discourage him, it would not be deep until early spring. And in fact the snow that had fallen had evaporated before the day was over.

4

Asya saw Drölma daily. In the beginning Drölma would have supper with Jonathan and Asya and spend the evening with them at the house that had been assigned to the doctors. But Drölma felt that she could not discuss the intimate details of Dzogchen in Jonathan's presence, who was very curious, but not interested in the extended meditations she proposed.

When it got colder at night Asya moved in with Drölma, who lived in a simple room in the king's compound, comfortably set up with Tibetan carpets cushions on the bare floors and a minimum of local furniture, a large bed, a low table. A fine thangka of a white Tara hung on the wall over the bed next to a large thangka of a *benevolent* Heruka in yab-yum with an equally benevolent, white Vajrayogini ---an Adhibuddha, four dancing dalinis, and four fierce manifestations of Heruka with their consorts surrounded the pair. The place had no heating, the plateau produced preciously little wood. Yak dung had to serve as fuel for cooking. The juniper bushes on the roofs were mostly incense for special events, they were a sign of the wealth of the house. However, the thick adobe walls kept the temperature constant. The girl who cooked for them brought a bucket of hot water every third night, a great luxury. They stood in the bucket one at a time, in the middle of the room and lovingly gave each other a sponge bath. They shared the bed. As is the custom in Tibet they slept under the thick fluffed-wool bedding naked. It was an idyllic setting. Asya, slightly ashamed, realized that this life with another woman was a regression to the days before Richard and John and men, but it was like balm to her sore psyche. Slowly Asya, by her inherent nature, slipped into the male role, initiating their very tender love-making. In exchange, the fluid and receptive Drölma tried to teach her the elusive ‘pure pleasure’ reached during *anuyoga* exercises.

Drölma laughed, “This is entirely new to me. You *are* Vajrayogini, the fierce one, and I the receptive. I have never come across two women practicing *anuyoga*.”

And Asya answered very seriously, “Finally, without shame or chastisement, I am able to explore my Animus. That is what western psychology calls the male aspect of a woman’s psyche. And you are the eternal Anima. Ours is a marriage of our inner opposites.”

Next day Drölma said pensively. “You talked about a ‘marriage of opposites,’ this is what *anuyoga* is trying to achieve, the unification of all opposites, including man and woman. To define concepts like hot and cold, light and darkness, good and evil we generally need two words, one the negation or opposite of the other. A man is not a woman. Anuyoga tries to make one see that these polarities are constructs of our mind, not an inherent truth. Tibetan Buddhism believes that the misery and strife in this world and all our sufferings are caused by our thinking in these dichotomies.”

Asya frowned. “I understood that when we made love. No male symbols interfered, no male ego, no Augustinian guilt, no subjugation, no capricious penis. Pure, unadulterated pleasure! No show-off or any other purpose. Ours is a *hieros gamos subspeciae*, a sacred conjunction of opposites in one body.”

Drölma laughed. “I don’t understand what you are saying.” Asya caressed Drölma’s hair whispering, “It’s Greek, never mind!”

Drölma kissed her hand. “We *are* making love crosswise between the opposites inside of us! The Dharma also knows of our internal polarities. Our images can easily change from male to female. You asked me to enlighten you, and now you teach me a powerful, new way of understanding.”

Asya said with a smile, “Look Drölma, polarities are illusions created by men. They are not necessary or real, they satisfy a man’s need for rational logic. Women are complete to themselves, they can even produce their ‘opposites,’ a male child, albeit with the help of what you call ‘white, male essence.’ That is why I want to have a child from John.”

Drölma shook her head. “Woman as a Buddha-Field? You are right, that is exactly what the initiated man considers his *khadroma* to be, *nirmankaya*, a vessel of non-dual, primal knowledge, which she is initially supposed to be unaware of, and which she surely cannot put into words. Did John teach you this?”

Asya laughed. “Not really. With the help of some Tibetan meditation, which John did teach me, I found these insights in myself. John was and still is often frustrated that I cut through his complicated imagery using simple, female, intuitive psychology.”

Still shaking her head Drölma said. “Yeshe Tsögyel had to spend many very hard years in serious meditation before she understood these insights herself. I never thought that Western thinking is able to come to the same conclusions without these austere exercises. Although your addition, an empowerment offered by giving birth, and your explanation, that all polarities are male inventions, are definitely not part of Tibetan teaching, and making love to another woman isn’t either. But I see their possible benefits. So what do you want me to teach you?”

“I don’t know. What is there that you know, and I should learn? Maybe how to love a Tibetan lama the way he needs to be loved!”

Drölma giggled. “John? Oh, that is easy!”

“Not for a western woman.” Asya said glumly.

A few nights later Drölma suggested a walk. The moon was almost full casting the valley into an eerie light. Drölma took her on a long route. After walking for a while they came to a field strewn with discarded clothing, sneakers, and other personal garb. It looked like the city dump except that at its far corner gleamed a white chörten.

Drölma carefully skirted the edge of the uninviting place. She suddenly shuddered and whispered in alarm. “Look there!” Asya peered in the direction Drölma pointed. She saw nothing, but was not sure what her companion was pointing at in the dim light. “What do you see?” Drölma put her hand over her mouth, and whispered, “A *preta*, a hungry ghost picking up shoes.”

Asya stared again, but still saw nothing. “Where?”

“Over there, next to that white boulder.”

Asya was sure she saw nobody and leaving her horrified friend behind walked towards the rock to investigate. As she came closer a huge black bird took wings and disappeared into the night. Startled, Asya stood rooted, but then continued to investigate the rock.

“It was a bird. I scared it, and it has left.” Shouted Asya. “There is nothing here! Come and see for yourself.” But Drölma, would not move. Asya found her trembling and took her into her arms and dragged her away from the place.

They stopped at a safe distance. “I told you, it was a preta. They eat the leather parts of shoes when they get really hungry. This is the Lo Manthang cemetery,” whispered Drölma looking over her shoulder.

Asya laughed. “And I thought it was the dump. But I assure you, after the bird had left there was nobody there besides us. I thought that you had overcome such superstitious fears.”

Drölma looked at her. “There are lots of vicious ghost all around us. One has to be cautious and treat them with reverence.” She explained that after the corpse of a dead person had been fed to the vultures, and there was nothing left, the relatives carried the personal belongings of the dead to a propitious place. “This spot is sacred, people come here from all over Lo. Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsögyel landed here when they brought the Dharma to Lo Manthang.”

“Well,” said Asya thoughtfully, “on my third day in Lhasa, Richard took me to Ganden, and there we came across a sky burial. I was horrified, but Richard thought that it was a beautiful way to dispose of the dead form of our earthly existence. Meanwhile I agree with him.”

They had reached their hill and sat next to each other in the still, cold moon light. Somewhere to the south lightening flickered in the Anapurna region. The town was dark, only the white-washed walls were dimly illuminated by the moonlight.

Drölma took a deep breath. “I wanted to teach you *chöd* meditation, but you seem unaffected by cemeteries. In *chöd* one meditates on one’s death until one understands that all fears are but figments of one’s imagination. Most effectively this is done in a cemetery full of ghosts. But if you are afraid of nothing, this method is useless. What are you afraid of?”

Pensively Asya considered her question. “I cannot say whether I am afraid of death. For a long time my mother’s death disturbed me, but I was very young and had suddenly lost my closest friend. I guess I was afraid of being forsaken. It was not death itself. I have not given much thought to my own death. My father holds that death is simply the end, everything is suddenly over. Now after seeing John’s belief in rebirth, I am convinced that father is wrong. I find the idea of rebirth very comforting, especially because it seems, one can learn how to die consciously. My grandmother seems to have know about that.” She brushed her hair out of her eyes and stared into the distance. “What am I afraid of? To be suddenly completely alone. John leaving me, because I cannot find a way to be the woman he longs for.” She glanced at Drölma and blushed. “And maybe of losing you. I do love you.”

One bright morning, after another night’s snow dusting, Christian descended from the sky. They had finished their work. Jonathan was anxious to get back to Kathmandu. To Christian’s and Jonathan’s surprise Asya begged to be allowed to stay behind for a while. Lo Manthang was such a peaceful place, and John would not return until March. She did not mention her affair with Drölma. Christian shook his head. “Have you found your Shangri La?” But then conceded that even if it would snow again and the passes from Jomosom would close, the snow on his landing field would not be deep enough to give him trouble. Experience had shown that he had no difficulty in taking off when it was cold. They agreed that he would try to come back after Lhosar, the Tibetan New Year in February. If she were to get tired of her solitude, she could send him a message, and he would try to come earlier.

A huge crowd had gathered to see the doctors leave. Many of them were people they had operated on. A few, whom Asya would take care of, still wore eye patches. As Jonathan climbed into the plane loud cheering broke out and their patients prostrated themselves. The people still waved when the airplane had become a tiny spot in the southern sky. Asya had tears in her eyes. Drölma linked her arm into hers and took her home.

As the weeks passed their love-making became more intense. When excited, Drölma exuded a strong scent that drove Asya to distraction. It would fill the entire room with the fragrance of some exotic, tropical wood. Asya had also noticed that their periods had become synchronized to within a day.

“Oh,” Drölma said nonchalantly, “it’s the moon. At Nagi Gompa we all have our period on the same day, although we don’t make love to each other.”

Every now and then they would reverse their roles. Slowly and patiently Drölma would tease Asya higher and higher. Asya felt like they were ascending two intertwined spirals, like circling suns until at the peak, in a tremulous explosion of light they flew hand in hand into a colorful double rainbow, and her senses left her.

When she came to, Drölma was sitting next to her, singing. “We passed the *lhato* together,” said Drölma. “Where to did you go? Into the land beyond the high passes?”

“I saw us fly into a double rainbow. What were you singing?” asked Asya.

“One of Yeshe Tsögyel’s songs to Padmasambhava.”

Asya looked thoughtfully at her serene companion. “Once in a while, when John and I are in an exceptional state, I fly off in a swoon. Last time that happened I flew to a place I have never been to, deep tropical forests full of waterfalls and rainbows. Yet I knew it was in Tibet. I asked John whether he had heard of such a place. He became very mysterious and called it Pemakö, but wouldn’t say more. What is Pemakö, and why is there so much secrecy about it?”

Drölma, suddenly became serious and stared at her. “Pemakö is in southern Tibet on the Indian border below the Tsangpo gorges, the most sacred *beyul* in Tibet. Ringed by high snow mountains it is almost impossible to reach. The Khampa guerrillas used it, like they used Lo, to hide there during the uprising against the Chinese. For a while we never mentioned the name Pemakö aloud, despite that everybody knew and thought of it all the time.”

Drölma let her hand wander over the body of her friend. “But that is not the main reason for the secrecy. It is the land of the queen of the dakinis, fierce Vajrayogini, terrifying and revered. In India she is called Kali, the mistress of birth and death. In the mountains and rivers of Pemakö we see the head, breasts, arms and legs of the goddess whom Padmasambhava converted to Buddhism. Her navel is like a *rangdum*, a natural mandala, her vagina a lake in a mysterious jungle valley. Nagi snakes and wild animals wander over her body, and the air is full of rainbows. To go there is a most difficult and meritorious pilgrimage, many never return. People go there to die and be reborn.”

Asya shuddered. “How could I know about this place, and why do I fly there when making love?”

Drölma, resting her gently roving hand on Asya’s abdomen, smiled and gazed into space. “Because of your dakini nature, which is still hidden to your waking eyes. Inside yourself you know about all this. How did you call your male aspect, ‘animus’? When your animus is stilled, your *shadow-soul* can fly guided by your female intuition, your dakini nature, to meet Vajrayogini in the beyul of Pemakö. Your *breath-soul* remains attached to your body. If it were to leave too, you would die. You can learn how to let your shadow-soul fly in meditation. This is a dangerous undertaking, because Pemakö is so beautiful, but you will learn.”

The people of Lo Manthang treated the two women with cheerful friendliness and occasionally with awe. With their light skin and graceful movements the two women stood out like two Taras among the dark-skinned, weather-beaten Lopa. The highly respected *khadroma* teaching the foreign doctor the tenets of the Dharma.

To keep Asya warm Drölma ordered a Tibetan *chuba* made for her. A black, wrap-around coat, cut several times bigger than any comparable garment in the West, with sleeves to below her knees, and a collar that she could stand up to keep her head warm. It was lined with dark-blue Chinese silk. Drölma showed Asya how to wrap the long flaps around herself, gather them in two pleats on her back, and tie them with a wide, red belt. “You look splendid, and it will keep you warm all day long. To the locals a chuba serves many purposes. They don’t wear underpants, so they can easily relieve themselves under a chuba in full public view, which they are wont to do completely unconcerned.”

Accompanied by much mirth Asya told her of the masquerade in Tseringma’s clothes in Drintang, and of John’s wild, spontaneous love-making in the fog above the Cham-dances. “He practically raped me the first time—and then offered me a French abortion pill he was peddling to the young women of Drin.”

Drölma stopped arranging the coat. She raised her eyebrows. “This is a highly unprofessional performance for a young lama, even if he played the Dzogchen naljorpa.”

Asya smiled. “Oh, well, it was what I needed then to breach my anti-male defenses. Richard’s love-making was much too gentle and considerate for that purpose.” She blushed. “As you see, I am still following Phurbu Lama.

Maybe I have even tamed him too much in our years together in America. He is not only Tsering, the Tibetan Sherpa, he is also John, the boy who grew up in the repressed environment of an American small-town high school. Our stay in America was bad for him, he lost all his wild spontaneity."

Drölma took Asya to the Jampa Lakhang, the oldest gumpa in Manthang. A tall square building near the main city gate only surpassed in height by the royal palace. The building was no longer in use. A member of the king's household opened the building for them. The feet of a huge, dusty, gilded Buddha greeted them from the entrance hall, his head was lost in the darkness of the third floor. On steep ladders they clambered to the roof from where the man lead them down into the second floor.

After their eyes had become adjusted to the darkness, they saw themselves surrounded by two tiers of huge mandalas. Asya stared at this gallery. What would Richard have given to see these exquisitely preserved images! She counted twenty in the lowest row. Drölma told her that according to the royal history these mandalas had been painted by Newar artist from Nepal working for the Sakyapa in the fifteenth century.

The images, mostly in dark red and green showed benign divinities, no sacred couplings. Each central Buddha was surrounded by an entourage of eight related divinities. The man told Drölma that they had been used for initiations into the *Sarva-tathagata-tattva-samgraha* Tantra of the Buddha Vairocana.

"The student sat before these mandalas," explained Drölma, "and had to visually memorize the mandala in all its details. Each of the outer divinities represents an aspect of Vairocana *and* of the student's subconscious. Then he would recall their assembly from memory with closed eyes, rebuilding the mandala circle by circle in all details, wandering through the various layers inward until he arrived at the center image of Vairocana and his own psyche. He would hold the complete image admiring its splendor for a while and completely identify himself with the Buddha. Eventually he had to dissolve his vision back into the great void."

Staring at one of the mandalas Asya tried this and found that she had trouble of concentrating long enough to memorize it. Drölma laughed. "Dear Asya, this takes many months and many sessions to accomplish, and this extended meditation work is half the exercise. And you associate no meanings with these figures."

However, Asya made a curious discovery. As they groped through the darkness back to the roof, the mandala she had first seen, when they had come down, kept turning before her mind's eye in all its details, despite that she had looked at it only for a few seconds. She told Drölma of this experience, who said pensively, "Some of my Western students told me of a similar effect. Maybe I should surprise you like that by showing you other images in a flash. It would be a great progress if you would retain at least the image in this way, never mind understanding its meaning. That can always come later."

Tibetan Gyalpo Lhosar, the King's New Year, was early this year. The holy twelfth Tibetan month began already in December. This was the time for celebrations. Only the few Moslem yak slaughterers worked, the Buddhists took life easy, had a good time, visited neighbors, talked a lot, and drank more *chang* than was good for them. And as Drölma said with a smile, made babies.

Horse races took place before a large crowd on Christian's landing strip. The rich traders of Lo showed off their best horses and competed in an archery contest on horse-back before the king.

In the week before Gyalpo Lhosar a large Cham dance would take place at Namgyal Gumpa an hour north of Lo Manthang. At this occasion an oracle would appear and predict the fortunes and disasters of the new year. Everybody in Lo Manthang who could walk made their way to Namgyal in the morning, Drölma and Asya in her chuba among them. The young men pursued the nubile girls, and the married women had put on their family silver jewelry and the precious *peraks* inherited from mother to daughter, a headgear with a long stiff neck flap heavily encrusted with turquoise, silver coins, and coral. An army of beggars and the less fortunate followed in dusty ragged clothes.

The courtyard of the Gumpa was so overcrowded that Asya and Drölma could not squeeze in. Finally a lama, who recognized Drölma and the woman doctor, took them through a back door to the roof of the Dukhang from where they had an excellent bird's eye view of the crowd and the proceedings below.

It was much like in Drintang, four Black-Hat Sorcerers purified the dance circle that had been cleared by huge, wild-looking lamas who cracked long horse whips over the heads of the woolly masses of beggars and peasants.

The orchestra thundered their long-horns, banged on the drums, and the clarinets screeched, and then Padmasambhava emerged under a colorful umbrella and trudged with his entourage of frightening masks around the circle. The head lama of Lo sat across from the King and his court of ministers under the galleries surrounding the courtyard. As the procession bowed before the lama a half-naked man wielding a sword suddenly appeared right behind the startled Asya followed by a lama shouting at her to clear the way.

They fled to a far corner. The man staggered to the edge of the roof, gesticulated with his sword and bellowed at the crowd below. Drölma whispered. "The oracle is in trance. He is shouting obscenities. Stay out of his way!" Perilously close to the four-story high precipice, the man ran back and forth, grunting and yelling incoherently. They continued fleeing from the path of the erratically running oracle. Having arrived at the corner of the roof he shook himself and attempted to cut his stuck-out tongue with his sword. No blood flowed, a sign of the depth of his trance. Skeptical Asya was sure that the act was simulated. The monkish attendant prevented a second demonstration.

Screaming wildly and trembling like an asp the oracle ran past them and jumped over the edge onto a neighboring, six feet lower roof. The masses below guffawed loudly. With difficulty the handler followed him. Eventually the oracle vanished into a roof access only to reappear in the courtyard scattering the dense crowd in all directions. Whoever was not fast enough was hit with the broad side of the sword. Dust rose in clouds from the clothing. At this point Padmasambhava raised the *kharvanga*, his Shivaite magic wand and lowered it at the entranced madman. The oracle sank to his knees and prostrated himself to the cheers of the audience. The handler led the man into the dukhang.

"This first appearance is symbolically reenacting the conversion of the Bön oracle to Buddhism. Now he will come back and make his prophesies for the new year," said Drölma.

Padmasambhava disappeared and was replaced by a collection of masks Asya had not seen in Drintang, among them a stag with antlers on his head clad in precious blue and red Chinese silk robes. The stag cut up the *linga* the monks had laid out. The accompanying masks ate the pieces of the bread-dough woman. A great hush went through the crowd. Everyone was staring at the highest roof where the oracle had reappeared. Shaking and trembling, supported by his handler, the man shouted bursts of sentences which an attendant lama repeated in coherent words.

Drölma only translated pieces of it, floods and pestilence were predicted, hunger and poor crops followed.

Suddenly Drölma, holding her hand over her mouth, went ashen pale. Asya grabbed her arm. "What is it? What did he say?"

The silence in courtyard suddenly turned into a ominous murmur. The oracle uttered another sentence. Some people rose. Shouting broke out.

"He predicts that the *Kundun*, the Dalai Lama, would disappear." Drölma clutched Asya's arm hard enough to hurt her. "And now he just said that the Chinese had abducted the Kundun! How terrible!"

While the oracle tottered exhausted across the roof followed by the attending lama, tumult broke out in the courtyard. Everyone pushed towards the exits. The dance masks ran for cover in the dukhang. In vain the orchestra tried to make enough noise to drown the shouts. The people were crying and screaming. Some unfortunates were already being trampled. The police lamas began mercilessly whipping into the surging crowd. The old King and the head lama shouted for calmness.

Asya and Drölma were lucky to be on the roof. A young lama offered to take them down. He told them that an hour ago a man had arrived from Jomosom who had confirmed what the oracle had been talking about for days. The Dalai Lama had vanished overnight on a visit to his monasteries in Sikkim. He had not been found since. The Indian army was mobilizing in Sikkim, and a troop of Ghurkas was on their way to Lo Manthang.

Avoiding the aroused crowds, Asya and Drölma reached Lo Manthang late at night. Asya had to exert all her powers to calm her deeply disturbed friend. What would happen to Tibet without this man? Drölma groaned. Asya reminded her of the old oracle pronouncement, which already in the twenties had predicted that the fourteenth Dalai Lama would be the last one. "Yes, of course, I am constantly thinking of that. We all do, but we never really believed that it could happen one day," said Drölma. "He is not dead, or the oracle would have predicted that. But just imagine the Chinese did abduct him and imprisoned him! There would be a terrible uprising in Kham and thousands would be killed by the Chinese!" She began to cry. "Please pray with me that this will not happen, that

the Kundun suddenly reappears in Dharamsala, and that the Chinese have had nothing to do with his disappearance.”

Very early on the following morning Christian's plane appeared. The Ghurka soldiers had to clear the landing strip by force. Christian was immediately mobbed by people asking for news of the Dalai Lama.

When Asya had been found, Christian told her that he had to leave immediately with her. The Kathmandu officials wanted her out of Lo Manthang at once. Asya begged him to take Drölma along.

An hour later the three roared off into the sky.

Tina waited for them at Kathmandu airport. Asya invited all three to her 'country house,' but Drölma insisted to take a taxi to Nagi Gompa to be with her nuns. At home Asya found a message from John. He would arrive from Phnom Phen in the late morning.

Christian and Tina spent the night with Asya, and Tina brought them up to date on the missing Dalai Lama. The western world was in uproar, accusing the Chinese of having abducted the Nobel laureate across the hazily defined border of Sikkim and Tibet. CNN had devoted the entire day to news about the developments. India had sent a large contingent of troops to Sikkim irrationally claiming that the Chinese might invade India from the *Chumbi* valley. More likely was that the Indians wanted to prevent Buddhist unrest in this sensitive area. Neither the Indian troops nor a delegation of exile Tibetans using search dogs had found any trace of the missing man. He had vanished from the monastery he was visiting during the night, unseen by anybody. No signs of an across-the-border abduction had been found. China vociferously denied any foul play. The abduction theory looked less and less tenable.

In the spirit of the oracle of 1924 a rumor began to spread in the Buddhist community that the Kundun had taken his rainbow-body, disappeared into the sky, and would not return. More sober western supporters of His Holiness argued that the unassuming man had walked across the border to die in his homeland unobserved by the world and unimpeded by protocol.

Throughout the last decades of his life, the Dalai Lama had predicted that, if he was to be reborn, his tulku would be found in the West. But a search for that child would only be possible in four or five years and only after positive proof of the Dalai Lama's death had been obtained. The Buddhist world hung in limbo. H. E. Jampal Namdrö Chökye Gyaltzen, head of the Mongolian Buddhist community and a very close friend of the Dalai Lama, was called to Dharamsala to act as an interim regent.

As Asya waited for John in the commotion of the airport, she let the events of these three months pass before her mind. Miraculously the cataract operations had also opened *her* eyes, and Drölma had given her a new understanding of herself and renewed her love for the man she was waiting for. She now knew that she could give John her unselfish love and a child.

5

John did not notice the changes in Asya until the day that Caroline visited them and stared at her. Confused, Asya shook herself. "What is wrong with me? You look at me as if I was a visitor from another planet?"

Caroline lowered her eyes. "You are! You radiate a serenity you did not have before. What happened to you in Lo Manthang?"

Asya blushed. "I finally learned to see! Helping to give new sight to so many miserable people opened my own eyes. It was an overwhelming experience. I finally understand *bodhicitta*, active compassion. Drölma helped me in many ways, she called my awakening an example of *trekchöd*."

Caroline nodded. "This can change one's life. Did Drölma fly with you to Lo Manthang?"

"She walked up from Jomosom, when she heard that Jonathan and I were operating on cataract patients.

Because our work went much slower than we had anticipated, we had to stay into November, and it got really cold at night. Drölma took me into her room at the king's palace and had a chuba made for me. You want to see it?"

Asya vanished upstairs. John shook his head, he had not known of her chuba.

"Have you not noticed?" said Caroline frowning at John when Asya had left. "Asya is surrounded by an aura that would do honor to a Bodhisattva. She has changed profoundly. Lucky man, she has learned much more than just *bodhicitta!*"

John got a red face. "She has been very sweet since I came back. Preoccupied as I was with the unsettling disappearance of the Dalai Lama, I attributed this change to our long separation.... Caroline, some day I need to talk to you, how can I revive my deteriorated relationship with this unusual woman?"

Diminutive Caroline looked at the tall, strapping John Tsering with mocking eyes. "My friend, you have lost your spontaneity. It's that simple. Go and spend a week at a retreat and meditate on your inadequacy. Take her along, she can teach you more than I can. How about Nagi Gompa? Drölma knows a lot about problems between men and women."

John pulled a face, and Caroline became angry. "Do you still have a hang-up with Drölma? She is a very knowledgeable woman from whom you could learn much about women, and especially about your present one. Come off your frustrated naljorpa pose, take on some responsible awareness and most important, recover your spontaneity."

When after a considerable time Asya came down the stairs, John dutifully looked at her and said uncertainly. "You look splendid, even more authentic than in Drintang!"

Caroline gazed at the imposing figure in the elegant coat. "Did you wind the chuba on by yourself?"

Asya turned around. "I did, that is why it took so long. Are the pleats where they should be?"

With a reproachful look at John, Caroline gave her a spontaneous hug. "You don't only look magnificent!"

Caroline made Asya talk about her adventures, the staggering flight up the Kali Gandaki gorge, the reception at Lo Manthang, the cheering patients, and the dramatic appearance of the oracle at Namyang. Asya mentioned Drölma only in passing.

When she was leaving Caroline brought up Drölma. "Drölma will hold a teaching retreat at Nagi Gompa. It would do John a lot of good to refresh what he knows, and you, Asya, now that you have got her as a friend, might take the opportunity to meditate on what she taught you in Lo Manthang. Go there together!"

Asya met Drölma by chance in the streets of Kathmandu. She flew into her arms. Drölma smiled. "Your enthusiasm is overflowing, we rarely show our emotions so openly in public. How are you and John getting along?" They took a rickshaw to the Indigo Gallery and had tea in a quiet corner. Asya was bubbling over. "I have started to furnish our house and make it more comfortable. It is such a charming place to come back to, especially after Lo Manthang. I put in some rugs and a gas heater to keep us warm. John? He seems preoccupied with the Dalai Lama. Caroline visited us, admired my chuba and then suggested that John and I participate in your retreat. Will you have us both?"

Drölma turned pensive and considered her request. "Have you told John about us?"

Asya shook her head. "I think he is afraid of your clairvoyant powers. He realizes that something serious happened to me in Lo Manthang, but cannot figure out what. Caroline suggested that he meditate on his lost spontaneity."

Drölma, still very serious, said, "We cannot continue our affair under the prying eyes of his and my friends here. Could you agree that our common experiences remain our memory of the time together in Lo Manthang? Still John needs to know something about this encounter, it is written all over you, and he is very close to you. You cannot hide our closeness from him. Can you find a way to include him in our secret without deepening his reservations towards me? Then I would have you both at Nagi Gompa and try to help you resolve your problems."

Asya quietly considered her relationships with John and with Drölma. Drölma, looking at her full of loving concern, waited patiently.

Asya raised her head and looked into Drölma's warm eyes. "I feel your prayers. Your affection will remain with me. I will need it. This will be a difficult test of my new-found understanding of myself." She touched her forehead, her throat, her heart, and her abdomen. "I am no longer afraid of losing you, you have become part of me. I do agree

with Caroline, I have to give John his spontaneity back. This will require my transferring my joy onto him. Let me try.”

Drölma said with a smile. “There is a meditation that you can practice. It is called *tangelo*. When you are very close to each other, first quiet your mind, then inhale all of John’s worries, problems, and irritations, purify them in your open, joyous heart, and exhale them. You will see that this will make you very strong and happy. Let your power flow into him on your breath and you will be able to lift him with you. It is similar to giving your cataract patients their sight back.”

And so every night when John and she lay in bed together, Asya practiced tonglen. At first John was irritated by her seemingly self-centered breathing exercises. She explained to him what Drölma had taught her, and, of course, he knew very well of the power of tonglen. After three days of stubborn blindness, he joined her in the breathing exercises. It was like she was taking his eye-patch off. She finally felt able to tell him of her affair with Drölma, and John laughed. “Two women practicing anuyoga, a revolutionary approach. Drölma does have an enviable female intuition!”

Asya looked at him amused. “I was the one who initiated our love-making. Drölma was completely surprised by its possibilities.” John sat up in bed and looked at her and for the first time saw the radiance that surrounded her.

Nagi Gompa, a complex of small houses sits on top a spur of the eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley. A rugged dirt road led up there. They walked from the village where Suresh had dropped them off. It was steeper than Asya had expected, and she arrived out of breath on the grassy knoll before a white chörten. Prayer flags on high poles surrounded the site. A wide view across the verdant valley spread at their feet. A shy nun, shorn head, barely nineteen, brought them a cup of tea and inquired after their wishes. When Asya told her that they had reservations for the retreat, the nun took them to a very basic room with two beds and a window onto the valley. Most of the other participants would arrive only tomorrow. They gave the girl their name and went for a walk.

When they returned, Asya saw a tall western man vanish into the dukhang. A strange premonition overcame her. She had seen him only for a moment and from the back. Was he Brian Gilman? But Brian had no need of such a basic retreat and Dzogchen teachings. They followed him and ran into Richard!

Asya, completely flustered, flooded purple and fell into Richard’s open arms. John stood by smiling sheepishly. “Why, it’s very simple,” said Richard. “After I fell asleep in Lapchi when Phurbu Lama made his valiant attempt at enlightening me, I resolved that I would one day attend a suitable teaching retreat. And here I am! It has taken me a long time to fulfill this promise. I brought Andrea along. She went on a short trek out of Pokhara. She will arrive tomorrow.” Richard shook John’s hand. “But with the two of you, I had not reckoned. How are you? It’s been four years since I last heard from you.” He shook his shaggy head. “To meet you here entirely by chance?”

One of the nuns brought Drölma. Willowy in her ankle-long, gray Tibetan dress, her whole body one smooth sinuous movement, she looked ravishingly beautiful. Asya blushed and caught herself. With a teasing undertone she said, “Drölma, may I introduce you to the two most important men in my Tibetan life. Entirely unexpected, this is Richard who took me to Lapchi, and here I bring you my well-known husband John Tsering Norbu.”

Asya kissed her friend and Drölma offered her hand to Richard. “Welcome Richard, Asya told me that you met in Lhasa. And John Lama, welcome to Nagi Gompa. You have never been up here? Look how beautiful and tranquil it is so high above Kathmandu and Bodnath!”

Richard, his eyes on Drölma’s figure, smiled. “I would never have expected to sit at the feet of such a beguiling Dzogchen teacher!” He kissed Drölma’s hand. Drölma said. “Thank you! Fortunately I am not a famous lama, otherwise you would have been expected to prostrate yourself before me.” Richard put his palms together and bowing demonstratively touched his forehead. “The yogi should serve and honor woman. She alone is undivided wisdom and the path to a man’s highest perfection, said Goethe.”

Asya raised her eyebrows thinking, here goes Richard, he has not changed a bit! But no man she knew loved women as much as Richard did. His compliment to Drölma was not an empty flourish. She looked him over, his hair was still a mixture of white and gray, but he had acquired a paunch. “Did you walk up?” She said with the familiar challenging undertone of their days in Tibet. She noticed Drölma frowning imperceptibly.

Richard touched his protruding belly and smiled sadly. “No more treks to the Rongshar and Lapchi, dear old friend. I now go on pilgrimages in my mind, and sometimes you are with me. Supposedly this earns the same merits. You guessed right, I came here by taxi.”

Drölma excused herself and Richard proposed to spend the afternoon together to catch up with the news and their old friendship. A nun brought chairs and a table. They ordered tea from the kitchen and sat on the grassy knoll overlooking the valley until dusk settled and the lights in the villages came on.

Richard was moved by their tales. Mindful of Richard's vulnerability and Drölma's frown, Asya tried hard to control her sharp tongue.

As it became dark and the breeze from the valley made the prayer flags clatter, Asya thought of Lhasa. "Do you remember the night on the roof of the Banak Shöl, your birthday?" asked Asya and without warning recited,

"... Vremya, ty menya predash!"

Bludnoyu zhenoi – obnovu

Vyronish... – "Khot chas da nash!"

– Poezdá c toboi' inogo

Sledovanniya!... –

Ibo mimo rodilas'

Vremeni! Votschche i vsue

Ratuesh'! Kalif na chas:

Vremya! Ya tebya minuyu.

She spoke the last line with emphasis. Thinking of the poem to Pasternak, which Richard had known by heart, she softened. "Nobody ever liked Tsvetaeva's poems as much as you did! Do you know this one? It fits us." He did not. Together they translated the poem line by line

Time, you will betray me!

Like a loose woman you will

Drop the new acquisition...

– "If only an hour, but that belongs to us!"

– Trains with you have different

Destinations!...--

Because I am born outside of

Time! Useless and in vain

You fight! Caliph for an hour:

Time! I will circumvent you!

Richard looked pensively at her and with an ironic smile said. "A bold statement. Would you teach me how, Dakini?"

She blushed. "Richard, I am sorry to have I teased you earlier. I have to learn not to regress into my old role in your presence. The thought of transcending time just came to me reciting the poem for you. I do not know what this spontaneous idea implies. I shall tell you when I have figured it out."

Next morning Andrea arrived on foot. Asya had met her only briefly years ago. Asya was completely taken in by the slender, agile woman. In contrast to Richard's heaviness, despite her gray hair, she seemed to float. The two women hugged each other. If there was any uneasiness it was on Asya's side.

One after another the other participants arrived, all were couples and most of them Europeans. John was the only "native." Among them was Caroline and Derek O'Connor and another surprise, Christian and Tina, who claimed to have sat at Drölma's feet already in Germany. Caroline smiled, "May I introduce my fiancé Derek. Drölma had asked that everyone bring a partner to this retreat, and we just got engaged."

Asya and John had known nothing of Drölma's request, she had invited them separately.

"Well, apparently you never received an announcement," said Caroline. "It is a special retreat for couples. Drölma wants to try some new, unorthodox teaching methods she developed in Europe."

John shook his head. "What is wrong with the time-honored visualization techniques?"

Caroline looked at him. "You of all people should know from experience, how difficult and unusual the Tibetan teaching methods are for Europeans. The images are exotic and alien, it took me years to become sufficiently familiar with them that they became useful and effective. And the slavish adherence to every word of the ancient texts is equally mystifying."

John nodded. "But what will she offer instead?"

In the evening Drölma welcomed the twelve couples and explained her approach. She was going to teach them *anuyoga*, the inner Tantra by way of hearing and body language, both were legitimate methods of Buddhism, which had long been neglected in Tibetan teaching in favor of visualizations and recitations of mantras.

She smiled. "Music and dance are excellent ways of experiencing spontaneity and the playful nature of the emptiness of all things directly, without words. Mine is the way of the yogini. The dance of the Dakinis expresses the Inner Tantra effortlessly and bodily, no need for complicated Sanskrit names."

She noticed John's surprised face and grew serious. "The Tantra was invented and first taught by women, the consorts of the male sages of Uddiyana, who then formalized and carried the Tantra to Tibet. Some of these women were extraordinary teachers like Lakshminkara, or Niguma who taught Tilopa the Chakra-samvara Tantra. Padmasambhava, Naropa, Milarepa all learned the secrets of the Inner Tantra from women. Since that time the fluid spontaneity of women has continued to shape the deepest insights of the Tibetan Tantrayana. To this day no man can fathom the Inner Tantra, *anuyoga* and *atiyoga*, without the indispensable physical help of a female consort. I am trying to go back to these early female visions. This is the reason why I asked that everyone bring a companion of the opposite sex along. Only together will you grasp the knowledge of the Inner Tantra."

John could be heard grumbling under his breath. Caroline and Asya turned towards him, he got a red face and fell silent.

"John," said Drölma. "This is an open teaching session. I am not your Lama and you owe me no obeisance, but give me a chance. Some afternoon we can get together between the three of us and discuss my methods." Drölma distributed a set of printed sheets. "This is a song by Prajnaparamita to her Supreme Lord from an eleventh-century Tantra manuscript attributed to Lakshminkara. Let your woman partner read it to you tonight and meditate on it before you go to sleep. See you at six in the morning."

They began the new day with an hour-long meditation session, sitting cross-legged in the main dukhang of the gumpa. Drölma unrolled two thangkas for them, explaining that the first was an image of Prajnaparamita, the earliest Buddhist representation of female Transcendental Wisdom. The second was a mandala, Prajnaparamita as the female embodiment of the Buddha Vairocana surrounded by Buddhas, all in their female forms. Drölma suggested that those who had been trained to do so, should try to visualize these images in their meditation, building them up and then dissolving them again. "These images are copies of those in Alchi in Ladakh, some of the oldest surviving Tibetan murals, contemporary with the song I gave you last night. And look, they are entirely populated by female divinities!"

Drölma shot an inquisitive glance at Asya. Asya closed her eyes. Their visit to the Jampa Lakhang in Lo Manthang rose before her mind. She returned an intimate smile of complicity to Drölma, who lowered her eyes and blushed. Asya watched spellbound as Prajnaparamita slowly emerged from the view of the mountains and the bright light of her first flight to Pokhara. Her tilted, elegant head on a red mandorla, her four hands holding her implements, full breasts squeezed in the décolleté of her bodice, her strangely quadripartite belly, flowers, and an intricate lotus throne, all protected inside a jeweled circle. Asya kept her eyes shut, letting the vision evolve, and equally slowly the image dissolved again in the blue sky. It had happened again! And she knew she would never lose this vision. She opened her eyes and looked closely at the thanka. Her mental image of gentle Prajnaparamita had been much more brilliant! With ease she was able to make the vision reappear a second time. Asya got very excited and with that she lost her concentration. The visions stopped. Disappointed she quietly looked at the mandala. Its central square was divided into eight, small images surrounding a white, four-headed goddess on a lion throne. In an ambulatory around this square circled another twenty-four female divinities. Their multitude confused her, but the mandala emanated a serene peace, no fierce divinities embracing their partners.

After a simple breakfast served by the nuns, Drölma opened her first “teaching” session with the laconic remark that they would spend the next two hours without words, listening to music and their bodies. “I will play some recordings for you, to which you are encouraged to dance. Everyone to his best ability, free-style, as you please. Tonight we can discuss the results. This approach will shock the participants of conventional Tibetan retreats, but not the newcomers. Think of it as ‘a meeting of yoginis—the dance of the dakinis,’ which you happened upon in secluded Nagi Gompa, the Temple of the Sacred Snake Goddesses.”

She turned on a cassette-player from which issued the plaintive voice of Joana Zimmer accompanied by a highly inventive Jazz combo of a piano, saxophone, drums, and bass.

There was utter silence at this surprise. The gilded Buddha images in the dark background seemed to tremble in the flickering light of the butter lamps. And then Andrea rose and began to dance entirely for herself, her right hand placed loosely on her heart, her head tilted, lost in her body and her feet. Asya glanced at Richard with a smile and joined her, Caroline and Tina followed. The men, not daring to let go, watched the women each playing out her own secret knowledge. Tina true to her bubbling self emphasized the funny aspects of the music, petite Caroline displayed her fragility with short abrupt movements of her hands. Asya, although this was entirely different music from what she had heard then, recalled her dancing in the Milarepa cave before the snowed-in mountains of Lapchi. She knew that Richard was seeing the same scene. The remaining women of the group joined, and finally Drölma, in sweeping, wild, completely spontaneous figures sailed and floated between her students.

John sat at the sidelines with a dogged expression on his face. Asya felt sorry for him, and yet she knew that her pity would not help him. And then she saw Drölma hold her hand out to him. Drölma said something in Tibetan. John’s face turned purple, but he rose and let Drölma pull him into the middle of the dancing women. At first he awkwardly stomped around like a black-hat sorcerer in a Cham-dance, but slowly, teased by the supreme dakini before him, he loosened up trying to emulate Drölma, as if she were a reincarnation of the Yeshe Tsögyel of the meditation visions of his years as a Dzogchen lama.

Encouraged, Asya drew a light-footed circle around Richard. “Richard, you look like Padmasambhava before he took his rainbow body.” She whispered. “Do you remember the snowdancer of Lapchi? Come, dance with your long-lost dakini!”

Following Drölma’s example the couples danced apart, no one clutched the other possessively. Asya, followed by Richard steered towards Andrea, and for a while the two women danced around Richard until he broke free and sprightly cut across the entire floor space towards Drölma in fleeting free-style movements. Andrea and Asya circled each other until Richard returned from his excursion.

Towards the end of the recording the band picked up in spirit and tempo. The dancing ended in exhilaration and chaos, everybody collapsed, Nagi Gompa is at sixteen-hundred meters altitude, exhausted and laughing on the floor cushions.

How did Drölma get this idea and where did she find this recording? everybody asked. Gasping for breath Drölma laughed. “I spent a month with Pina Bausch in Wuppertal, and Joana Zimmer I heard at her first public appearance in Berlin. A haggard, intense girl, barely twenty. She is blind....”

She shook her limbs and spread her arms. “Now that you opened all your energy channels and removed the knots in your system, meditate for another half-hour listening to the wind blowing through you. Just do simple breath counting. You will see how easy it will be.”

“A week of this and I will fly!” said John as he and Asya went for a walk along the ridge after lunch. “Amazing how Drölma can get everyone so high in one hour! To reach this state of liberation would take months of hard meditation. I have not felt so good for a long time.” Asya looked at him sideways. “Have you ever danced? Not with me, I know that.” “No,” he said shaking his head. “This was the first time. Ballroom dancing at the proms of my high-school days horrified me. I was scared of the girls, and my parents did not push me.”

She mused about this experience. “What does this exhilaration, this euphoria have to do with anuyoga and Buddhist awareness?”

John raised his brows. “I am sure Drölma will explain that tonight. It is very close. You float on exhaustion and joy. To recognize the playfulness of all phenomena and emotional experiences is the first step to seeing their ‘emptiness’. She is right, that is the meaning of the Tantric dance of the dakini. Complete spontaneity and pure pleasure! We should go back and make love in this spirit....”

"The goal of Tibetan-Buddhist exercises is to reach a state similar to the one you experienced this morning," said Drölma to her assembled group in the afternoon. "An exhilarating bliss, the wind of awareness making your body shiver, a feeling of love towards all sentient beings, and the knowledge that all adversities in our lives, all feelings, all phenomena are the ephemeral play of our senses, virtual products of our imagination. Nothing is exempted from this awareness of transience, not your intoxicated high, not the Gods, not even death." She looked at Richard. "This insight is antonymous to the workings of the normal mind. Our rationalized experiences tell us that every bliss is followed by a depression, that good and evil appear in pairs, that there must be a hell for every heaven. To remove the psychological power, which these verbal opposites hold on our mind, to show us that these dichotomies are only products of our imagination, the women of the early Tantra employed the most fundamental polarity in our lives that of Man and Woman. They replaced the ignorance produced by words with the natural completeness of their bodies. This is how the act of love-making became the most powerful weapon against our apparent need for dualism, Vajra Love, the Sacred Union, Jung's *hieros gamos*. *Phurba Khadro*, the Supreme Dakini," she smiled at Asya, "swings her *kartrika*, her sacred hatchet, to cut off the flow of the man's words."

Richard asked, what then was the difference between love-making in the Western context and "Vajra Love". "What distinguishes a Tantric union from an ordinary *conjunctio*?"

Drölma spread her arms. "The mental attitude of the partners! The man, the yogi sees his female partner, the yogini, as a dakini in flesh-and-blood, and to her the man has a specific Buddha nature. The King and Queen in Jung's alchemical *hieros gamos* express a similar *conjunctio* of opposites. However the Tantra goes further, beyond Jung's metaphor lies the highest insight the Vajrayana offers: all phenomena are but virtual figments of our imagination. This insight is not part of the Western paradigm, as you know."

Richard nodded, thinking of his dilemma when making love to Tsögyel, the yakherdess. "So the Tantra shifts the emphasis from the act of creation to that of active compassion, of helping the other to realize his or her Buddha nature?"

"Yes, exactly," said Drölma. "strictly, Buddhism knows of no divine creator, it does not sanctify creation. In fact creation of new life is one of the acts that binds us to *Samsara* and the wheel of recurring rebirths. For this reason Indian yoga, from which Buddhism inherited its basic paradigms, is strongly life-denying. The historical Buddha offered a way out of this negation: man can escape from the wheel of life by realizing his Buddha Nature, from which the Tantric yoginis created the power of the sexual path."

"Drölma," said Caroline, "you said that the highest Tantric insights required sexual exercises with a *physical* partner of the opposite sex. My experience is that a woman can very well reach the Great Perfection, without the help of a male consort."

Drölma cupped her hands. "To a woman the insights of *trekchöd*, 'Cutting Through' and *tögal*, 'Immediate Crossing', which are normally bestowed on the student by initiations, are indigenous knowledge, properties of our inner mandala. If you wish, they are part of the psycho-physiology of our sexual make-up. This is one reason why the sexual path was invented by women. Women simply *know*. And for a woman perfect active compassion includes the man who does not have the inner knowledge required. *He* needs the active help of the dakini to empty the man-woman polarity. And in return *he* gives us the voice to make our knowledge 'conscious', to make us aware of our *inner mandala*, of our *dakini nature*. This is my experience." She smiled. "Quite recently I have learned that certain women can also experience both *trekchöd* and *tögal* initiations when giving birth to a child. But she too needs a man for that 'initiation.'"

During the next dance session, Drölma taught them a concentration exercise. They had to stand on the heel of one foot, stretch their arms, and by pedaling with the other foot turn on the spot like a top. At first with open eyes trying to keep their balance like ballet dancers by focusing on one distant spot. Then she asked them to close their eyes and keep their balance by simple concentration. The result was a hopeless confusion, they fell in all directions. Richard and Andrea were the only people who could do it.

"Why," exclaimed Richard, "this is the Dervish Turn! Where did you learn this exercise?" "In Tibet!" said Drölma. "It is the first of five Tibetan meditation exercises, the other four are fierce exercises done on the floor."

Richard became very excited. "I have been searching for the origin of the Dervish Turn for years, and now it appears that the Tibetan and the Sufi turn may derive from the same source! In Uddiyana? Rumi, who introduced

this exercise in Turkey, came from Herat in what is today Afghanistan!" Drölma did not know the answer. After coaching her students one by one, they could at least remain upright and stay in one spot while turning. She dismissed them with the advice to practice in their free time.

John became so excited by Drölma's unorthodox approach to teaching Dzogchen that he offered his help. They appeared together at an evening session. John explained Dzogchen as the method to reach the highest awareness of Tibetan teaching that lay beyond the Tantra and all other methods, kept secret for centuries, because it could only be grasped by the exceptional student. Similar to Zen it was capable of producing immediate insights which removed man's clinging to intellectual polarities and opened the vision of the *emptiness* of all perceptions and concepts. Dzogchen had the power to destroy in an instant the illusion that normal reality, our bodies, time, fate, sin, redemption, God, and death were absolutes which existed independently of our imagination. The removal of these misconceptions and especially of the last two would set us free already in this life.

Woman *knew* this truth, and she holds the key for the man to understand the emptiness of his constructions. Drölma's methods of teaching her knowledge through physical exercises that avoided words were indeed most effective and most unorthodox. He had never danced in his life until he came here. Usually his teachers had insisted on lengthy meditation exercises and empowerments by initiation, transferring their awareness to their students by the use of mystical rituals. Yet dancing as meditation appeared to be very effective in grasping the need for complete spontaneity in all our actions. The key to understanding.

"I would like to contribute one technique that *is* taught within the orthodox Dzogchen teaching, *Controlled Madness*. A dangerous path that has been practiced by such "holy madmen" as Drukpa Kunley in Tibet, the Sufi Hadji Nasreddin in Islam, and by Till Eulenspiegel in Northern Germany and Holland. It involves the complete denial of the practitioners respectability and seriousness of acting in contradiction to all common expectations, including behavior close to true insanity, but remaining in full control of oneself."

Drölma began to laugh. "Would you give us a practical example?"

John blushed. "Right now I am supposed to be serious before these serious students. But I will think of a suitable opportunity."

"John," Drölma said one afternoon when Asya and he were alone with her in her private room. "Just like all of you I need a consort and you are the only initiated Dzogchenpa in this group. Would you be my consort for a day?"

John began pacing the room between the two women. Then he began to laugh, a deep crazy laugh. He stopped before Drölma bowed deeply and with a savage expression recited the beginning of the song Drölma had given them. Drölma answered by repeating Paramita's instructions in a singsong voice.

Asya watched them speechless. John seemed to be fully deranged stomping his feet ferociously. "John, this is magnificent, the *Divine Madman!*" cried Drölma, got up and danced in wild abandon around him. She retrieved an antique *kartrika* and a beautiful, old *skull cup* covered in silver, filled it with red wine, and holding the cup in her left, the hatchet in her right continued her sinuous dance of enchantment

Asya closed her eyes. With all her mental power she pushed her possessiveness aside and completely identified with Drölma. Slowly swaying back and forth on her cushion she held this vision for a time. When she opened her eyes again, Drölma had vanished.

John sat in the lotus position before her, the skull cup and the *kartrika* lay on the floor between them. Without a word, holding her with his gaze, he undressed her and lifted her onto his lap.

With his arms hanging by his side, he set her free. Asya retrieved the skull cup, offered him of the wine and drank herself. Concentrating all her powers in her center, she made her excited tension ebb away. A great clarity came to her head, her delirious desire burned deep inside her in great waves. With a spontaneous movement of her hips she made his tip touch her again. A shiver raced up her spine. She relaxed and let it subside. John's hands grabbed her, lifted her and let her drop hard. "No!" she exclaimed. "Slow, I don't want to pass out!"

John held still, letting Asya control their ascent. Completely conscious she willed her path out of the dark passionate embrace into a blinding light of clear joy. She let herself float suspended in the blue void. Now John

took over. Moving very gently he raised himself to her level and then relaxed his urge, again let her lead them on. She locked her eyes with his and let her wave return, relaxing herself just before she was going to explode. Several contraction passed, but she relaxed completely and let John slowly raise her once more. Without separating they moved on these waves of physical desire like on an ocean, back and forth. They were now one in a way they had never achieved before. Nor had they ever been able to hold this pleasurable tension for so long. After what seemed like an hour she smiled at him. He nodded and with a single movement of her hips she triggered John and her overextended climax to yield to a most gentle all consuming release. John sighed deeply. Without separating they sat quietly in the lotus position. For a fleeting moment Asya thought of Drintang---how far back was this experience!.The world around them receded. They had experienced the promised Buddha Land where their bodies and all polarities become one and all experiences are recognized as transitory illusions of the imagination. But she would learn later that she had not conceived as she had hoped.

6

Low tables, cushions on the floor, candles, white-washed walls, black-stained, open beams, the painstakingly restored attic of an old house in Kathmandu, the *Thamel House Restaurant* where to Richard had invited Asya and John and their close friends to a farewell dinner.

Drölma arrived late in the company of a tall, relaxed man. Worldly and gregarious, he became the center of attention immediately: Quite obviously he was *the man* for their beloved teacher. He is a Khampa, thought Asya, but an uncommonly civilized one, usually an air of the Tibetan Wild West surrounded Khampas, great horsemen, fierce fighters.

Drölma introduced him. "This is Wangchuk, a friend from the days of the Tibetan uprising. I am late, because I just picked him up at the airport. Wangchuk spent three years in Germany studying modern dance and choreography. He provided the original inspiration for my dance exercises."

A pleasant smile passed over Wangchuk's large, handsomely rugged face. He instantly won everyone's sympathy. "Wangchuk," said Richard who came to sit next to him. "You should set up a Tantric Dance Institute in Kathmandu, so Drölma's friends could continue their exercises. Her teaching proved as successful as it was unorthodox."

In his deep, slow voice Wangchuk said. "I have been talking with Drölma about that. Maybe Drölma and I can devise some true modern dance pieces combining the European style with Tantric ideas."

With a laugh John offered his help as a Dzogchen madman. Asya observed Drölma and Wangchuk. How close were Drölma's relations with Wangchuk? His easy, male, yet flowing body language complimented hers perfectly. She would no longer have to worry about John's newly discovered affection for Drölma. John was no match to this man.

As they left the restaurant, walking strung out in small groups through the dark lanes of Thamel full of treacherous potholes, picking their way among throngs of tourists and salesmen aggressively offering their odd souvenirs, Drölma sidled up to John and Asya. "Would you join Wangchuk and me on a trek to the Pemakö? He spent many months hiding in that area during the uprising. He would be the perfect guide. I have never been there. It will be a strenuous pilgrimage, but good for you two and Wangchuk and me." She glanced at Asya. "Remember, Asya, I told you about this *beyul* and its rainbows after you dreamt of it?" John raised his eyebrows and nodded, he needed to think about that.

Later, on the long ride home in the back of a noisy three-wheeler, John asked Asya what Drölma had actually told her about the Pemakö, carefully avoiding its name. Asya laughed. "Poisonous snakes and strange, dangerous tribes living in a subtropical rain forests of rare rhododendrons, faraway, behind the Brahmaputra gorges. A scary,

wet place, not very attractive. The domain of fierce Vajrayogini. People go there to die amid visions of a thousand rainbows. The Last World."

John looked at her seriously. "To face Vajrayogini there would be a severe test of our love and endurance. Drölma's was not a casual suggestion. To her it must be an attempt to explore her relationship with Wangchuk and his previous life. You realize, I am sure, that Wangchuk is her destined man." "Yes," said Asya pensively, "I am very much aware of that. I am moved by her offer to ask us to partake in this very personal search."

They talked much about the pilgrimage to Pemakö during the following weeks. John described the dangers of the trek. A tribal border area sparsely populated by Lopa, a hostile, non-Tibetan tribe of hunters reputed for its witches, who were said to steal the souls and karma of meritorious pilgrims by poisoning them in their sleep. Cut off from the rest of Tibet by a high mountain chain subject to enormous, late snow falls in spring and fog and tropical rainstorms in the early fall, it was only accessible on foot. A place not for the fainthearted. They would have to carry all their provisions for the entire trip, and they had to bring their own porters, the Chinese considered portaging feudal slavery.

Asya's thoughts circled more around her friend's emotional engagement with Wangchuk. Would she be able to control her jealousy of Drölma? She expected a complicated emotional quadrangle played out under extreme conditions. But she agreed with Drölma that this trip would be a challenge of their relationships, and a powerful force to propel their lives forward --- if they survived the test. In her newly found spiritual certainty she decided to push for this test and invited Drölma and Wangchuk to discuss Pemakö.

Drölma could hardly hide her joy to see Asya's tempered enthusiasm. To visit the Pemakö was the dream of her life, and to go in the company of Asya and John would exceed all her secret wishes. "Imagine a secluded area of lakes, surrounded by *rangdum*, natural caves nestling in deeply wooded mountains. And rainbows everywhere. A most sacred and propitious land, *the* vision of paradise for the Tibetans living in the desolate spaces of the High Plateau." She proposed to take Asya to some of the Vajrayogini shrines in the Kathmandu valley to introduce her to the darker aspects of the queen of the dakinis

Wangchuk, faced by John's skepticism, showed himself confident. The physical difficulties of the trek were all true, but the stories about the *dugma*, the poison-crazy Lopa witches were ancient Tibetan folklore. One would have to make oneself independent of the locals anyway, too few people lived in the area to provision oneself off the land. The only larger village was Metok, to where the Chinese ferried food and necessities by helicopter down the Brahmaputra valley. He saw no problem in finding and bringing along Sherpa porters from Nepal. All Tibetan Buddhists had heard of Pemakö, but most had never been there. They would be eager to accompany them to gain spiritual merit, and John was half a Sherpa, a great help.

He would start from a village called Pe on the river above the gorges. This track crossed a high pass, but was well-traveled and the shortest. He laughed. "As for food, I know all about trapping animals, that's how we survived." Drölma protested that killing animals was sacrilegious and expressly forbidden in a beyul. "Not when you starve and need them for survival," objected Wangchuk. "Besides there live a certain kind of pigs in the area, which one is specifically allowed to hunt. -- Buddha Gautama died of meat poisoning after eating of one of those wild pigs!" They agreed to plan the trek for late September after the Assam monsoon would have blown over. John and Wangchuk would organize the logistics, the porters, Chinese visas, their flight to Lhasa and back, and a truck that would take them the long way to Pe and pick them up four weeks later.

Once again Asya had Drölma to herself on their exploration of the Tantric shrines of Kathmandu Valley. Drölma took her to Sankhu, a small, unspoiled Newar town northeast of Kathmandu, old, gray stone houses, three and four stories high, stacked closely together in terraces up the side of a verdant valley. From there a flight of stairs led up a steep, densely wooded hillside. They had spied the gilded roof of the temple among the trees from afar, now as they climbed they only had the steps before their eyes. Steps that seemed unending. Half-way up they came upon a triangular stone altar under a canopy where a blood-splattered priest was chopping off the heads of roosters a group of villagers had brought. He killed the birds with a single stroke of a ritual machete, spraying the blood in a wide arc over the stone and its surroundings. Asya watched horrified from the distance. "Look, how easy it is to die!" said Drölma. "Buddhists?!" asked Asya with a nauseated look in her eyes. Drölma shook her head. "Originally this shrine was dedicated to Bhairava, the

Nepali god of death who is represented by the triangular stone. He demands blood-sacrifices. The shrine is ancient and has changed back and forth between Hindus and Buddhists. These people are old-fashioned Newari Hindus. Vajrayogini in her Hindu form also received blood-sacrifices. Now that her shrine up the hill is Buddhist, the Hindus sacrifice down here in the seclusion of the woods. In Nepal the two religions are still very much intermingled."

They stumbled on for another half-hour. All the old dread of religious sites and ceremonies had been rekindled in Asya by the rooster ritual. When the three storied pagoda of the shrine came in sight they paused on a stone by the stairs.

Asya looked at Drölma. "At the cemetery in Lo Manthang at night, when you were scared, and I chased the dark bird away, I told you that I was not afraid of death. I guess this was an inaccurate remark. When death is being ritually enacted as down there, all my old aversions against the dark aspects of religion come back. Dying is natural and maybe easy as you said, but why blood sacrifices and all that religious hocus-pocus around it?"

Drölma looked baffled. "Death is frightening, and the gods who control it and preside over dying appear fierce and frightening to people. That is why they have to be propitiated, and in the old religions this was done by shedding blood. Buddhism abolished these sacrifices, but to me they appear quite natural. To sacrifice an animal is already a step forward. I guess at one time humans were sacrificed."

Asya shook herself. "So what about Vajrayogini? What sacrifices does she demand?"

Drölma avoided looking at Asya. "Vajrayogini takes several forms. Some are very close to her Hindu origin where she is related to Kali the goddess of creating and destroying. You have seen the image of Kali in Durbar Square in Kathmandu, she is an ogre, really. Buddhism stresses the creative aspects of this fierce manifestation. She became Ekajati, the *yidam* and protectress of the Dzogchenpa. When you understand death in the Tantric way, Vajrayogini symbolizes all the ultimate, indivisible knowledge woman has of the identity of birth and life and death. And death loses its frightening aspect. Vajrayogini does look fierce because all knowledge of the limits of our existence is frightening."

They reached the sanctuary. The large shrine, topped by three gilded copper roofs, sat on a raised plinth of stone. Its door opened to the south. Drölma convinced the hermit who guarded the shrine that they were *bona fide* Buddhists and should be allowed to visit the inner sanctum of the pagoda. They took off their shoes and climbed the plinth. Beyond the high threshold of the door lay a dark room crammed with very ancient looking statues. Asya, overcome by physical disgust, the floor under her bare feet was slippery with grime, leftovers of flowers, spilled food sacrifices, and red tikka powder, followed Drölma on her toes. The main image was completely obscured, encrusted with red tikka paint and clothed in a motley array of scarves and rags. Drölma pointed at one of its four arms holding a sword. A lion- and a tiger-headed yogini stood by its side.

This was as much as Asya could take. As soon as she emerged from the oppressing cave of the sanctum, she put her shoes back on and ran to a free-standing balustrade where she waited, her back to the shrine, looking at the peaceful valley and Sankhu. Drölma hugged her laughing. "Was this too much for you? You haven't even looked at the marvelous gilded images on the outside. They are among the finest Nepalese sculptures." Asya said nothing. She had tears of frustration in her eyes.

"Love," said Drölma, "how can I open your eyes to the dark mysteries that lie at the bottom of our souls. Only when you have experienced them and seen and overcome their horror can you hope to love fully, yourself, John, even me. That is the reason why I brought you here and why I want to lead you through Pemakö. Only those truly fearless of death can love fully, without reservation."

Through her tears Asya looked at her. "I know that, and I trust you. But what about Wangchuk?" Drölma silently looked at the serene landscape. Slowly a smile passed over her features. "Wangchuk is a man who has seen death. He may not be a good Buddhist yet, but he is truly fearless. A challenge for me and a guide for us."

The Vajrayogini shrine in Pharping, the conjugation of Sankhu on the southern side of the mandala of hills encircling Katmandu, lay just outside the small village. The *bahal*, its monastic enclosure, is probably older than Sankhu, but because the dark woods have all been chopped down, it is much less secretive and terrifying.

They had taken the bus from Kathmandu. Hand in hand Drölma and Asya walked from the road stop. "Don't be apprehensive," said Drölma, "this place is purely Buddhist. The all-powerful, blood-thirsty goddess is venerated in Dakshin Kali, a separate Hindu shrine a few miles further up the road. Twice a week the Hindu old-believers

sacrifice goats and roosters there in large numbers. We will not visit that place. The dark mystery of Pharping lies hidden in an inaccessible cave where Padmasambhava, practicing with a young girl he met in Sankhu, attained his final enlightenment."

A wide view of the valley opened from the *bahal*. A checkerboard of green and yellow fields covered the undulating hills, small villages, the Bagmati river meandering at the bottom of the valley before it vanished into a deep gorge to the south, only the smoke trail from the stacks of a cement factory, hiding Patan to the north, spoiled the tranquil landscape.

Drölma led Asya into the two-level, Buddhist temple pagoda on its high plinth. A large, gilded *torana* above the entrance showed Vajrayogini flanked by her two lion-headed companions, inside stood an image of Buddha Akshobhya between Prajnaparamita and Padmapani Lokeshvara his two emanations. Steep stairs led to a balcony on the second floor which circumambulated the small main image, a gilded Vajrayogini in Tantric dance pose, one leg raised, the *karrika* in one, the skull-cup in her other outstretched hand. Her features and the details of her nude body modeled in exquisite detail. This was how Asya had seen her depicted in Kathmandu, how she imagined this *dakini*, dancing exuberantly, triumphantly, ready to cut the ignorance of man.

Relieved they walked up the hill to Padmasambhava's cave, a narrow, vaginal cut in the rock, white scarves and a curtain hid its dark interior. "Say a wish!" said Drölma, "it will answer you." "Do you love me?" whispered Asya into the crevice and back came, "I love you..." They smiled at each other, and Drölma gave her an affectionate kiss.

7

Rain poured from a gray sky as they bumped along the track to Pe. They were lucky, their Chinese truck had a tarpaulin cover which gave them some shelter. Still the hold was crowded, John and Wangchuk, Asya and Drölma shared the cab in front, had brought eight Sherpa porters from Kathmandu who had been augmented by the Chinese authorities in Lhasa with a Tibetan cook and a "liaison officer." They sat and lay on the sacks containing their gear and provisions. Three oil barrels filled with gasoline spilled their odorous contents whenever they hit a particularly bad hole in the road. Asya remembered standing on the pilgrim's truck with Richard on the road from Lhasa towards Mount Kailash. Occasionally their porters sang like the pilgrims had then, but their spirited women were missing. Whenever Drölma sang a Khampa song with Wangchuk everyone listened in silent reverence.

Richard and Asya had traveled into ever more open spaces, this journey down the valley of the Tsangpo was an entirely different experience. They had driven close to the river for four days through numerous small villages. At first, between the Lhasa airport and the town of Tsetang, the river had been like a big lake and the road good. Now the road dwindled to a mere track. Ever higher mountains on both sides closed in on them, and the river had turned into a dangerously raging torrent. The peaks were hidden in dense monsoon clouds. Somewhere in front of them was Mount Namche Barwa and on the other side of the river Mount Pelri, both eight-thousand-meter high. The valley, a six-thousand-meter deep chasm between the two, was getting narrower and deeper than the Kali Gandakhi gorge. Trees grew on the valley floor, a lush vegetation for Tibet. They had forded the third tributary stream today, which was swelled by the rain. They would have been much too deep and rapid to wade on foot or cross riding an animal.

As they entered Pe the western horizon suddenly cleared. A low sun broke from under the black clouds and bathed the wild country in warm light. With a cry Drölma grabbed Asya's arm, a huge double-rainbow floated over the entry to the Tsangpo gorges. Asya was reminded of her dream of the Pemakö. Drölma put her hands together and touched her head, throat, and heart. "Look Asya, the Buddhas' gate to Pemakö. A most propitious sign." But

the steep northwestern approaches to Doshong La, the pass they were to cross next morning, would have fresh snow on its ice fields.

The morning dawned clear and cold. They set out very early through dense pine forest following a jeep track for a while. After several hours the pines changed to rhododendrons, their colorful fall foliage here and there buried under snow patches. The noon sun warmed them. Slowly the vegetation changed to wide, grassy meadows. A few horses, watched by a pair of young boys, grazed in a shallow depression. Above them the majestic ice peaks of Namche Barwa drifted in and out of the clouds. The pass was now discernible as a narrow cleft between two rocky promontories. They hiked uphill for six hours, then Wangchuk decided to camp. "Tomorrow morning we will have to cross a snow patch and two ice fields before we reach the pass. It will be better to attempt that in the morning when we are fresh and the snow is hard."

The porters set up the tents and busied themselves preparing supper. All day they had not seen anybody besides the two boys minding the horses, but within an hour five people had congregated at their campsite. How well Asya remembered the gawking locals every time Richard and she had camped. These turned out to be traders who had come across the pass from the Pemakö, strange Mönpa, as Drölma pointed out. They had wound their legs tightly with colorful wool strips, put on in spiral fashion, to ward against the snow and against snakes and leeches. Asya remembered vaguely having seen dakinis on an old thangka wearing this kind of leggings. Despite Wangchuk's laughing reassurance that there were no evil women among them, the porters chased the traders away. They would not take any risks having the dubious characters close at night.

The place was not exceptionally high, but the night was bitter cold. Like on her trip with Richard Asya had a series of vivid dreams she could not remember in the morning. The cook woke them with a cup of hot Tibetan tea, a true luxury compared to Asya's trek with Richard! The Sherpas wore only the customary sneakers that Wangchuk had bought for them in Kathmandu. In anticipation of the snow traverse they now wound thick rags around their feet and legs, and despite their hiking boots Wangchuk insisted that Asya and Drölma do the same.

The first snow field was only knee-deep, but a brook ran through its middle which they had to jump across. Asya slipped on landing on the far side, under much laughter she had to be rescued from the snow. The porters plowed the track, Asya and Drölma followed last.

The following two snow patches were steep ice fields. There the frozen snow helped. By traversing the field at an angle they got away without having to cut steps in the ice as Wangchuk reported he had been forced to do on another occasion. They were exhausted as they reached the cairn at the narrow defile of the pass proper in the late morning. Wangchuk pressed on, they were not out of the worst yet. They would have to cross two more snow fields on the way down, before they would reach a suitable place for camping and hiking downhill was more difficult than uphill on slippery ground.

A strong, warm wind blew from the Pemakö through the pass. Wangchuk remarked, "We are lucky, it's clear today, usually this wind is loaded with fog and driving rain." They struggled on. Emboldened and in high spirits one of the porters skidded down the next snow patch using the basket as a brake, in which he carried his load on a head band. Wangchuk angrily scolded the man, because of the danger this posed for all. As if to prove him right, Asya suddenly lost her footing and skidded helplessly down the remainder of the icy slope. Except for the shock she was all right.

Dense rhododendron forest received them further down. The going became much easier. Asya, still clouded by the shreds of her dreams that had entangled her during the night, was withdrawn. Drölma was trying to ease Wangchuk out of his angry mood. They had reached a clearing in the dense forest, and John decided to wait for Asya who walked at the end of their caravan. He smiled tenderly at her when she reached him, and at that moment her befuddled mind cleared. She stopped and kissed him. "I just realized that I dreamt last night I was pregnant." And quite abruptly she blurted out, "John, I want a child from you. A child conceived in Vajrayogini's sacred realm."

John was taken by surprise. His eyes wandered over the snow-capped mountains that towered behind Asya and the gray clouds drifting around them. Vajrayogini's paradise, how his Tibetan ancestors on the dry, treeless wastelands of the high-plateau must have longed for this rain-dripping, tropical greenery to consider it a paradise! Serious, still looking past her he said. "Do you really want to give up your freedom in exchange for having a child?"

What about flying and the trip with the ophthalmologist to Tibet? Despite its female protectress this is not a sensuous place. Shouldn't we go back to warm, colorful California to have children?"

She put her arms around him and looked up at him smiling. "Phurbu Lama, having this child would be my salvation, my fulfillment in the center of my innermost mandala." He shook his head. "It will tie down your powers, bind you to the lowest level of Samsara, divert your mind from the emptiness and clarity of the final goal on the path." She shook herself free of their embrace. "I discussed this wish with Drölma in Lo Manthang, and she said the same thing: 'Tibetan Buddhism is originated with Indian Yoga, which negates life as the most dangerous illusion of Mara.' I believe that a woman can cut through all of your male fog, your obstacles to understanding the unity of life and death and obtain the freedom you search for by giving birth to new life. Finally Drölma reluctantly admitted that she had known a woman who passed all initiations in one *trekchöd* when giving birth."

John in deep thought took a few uncertain steps along the path, but then halted again. "Then why did Drölma remain childless, if it is that simple?" Asya saw a flicker of hope that she might convince him. "She decided to teach, to help others gain awareness, Bodhisattva fashion. I have no such ambition, but I need to shake you out of your bind, Dzogchen fashion, remember, the laws and methods of the Tantra too are only illusions."

Their companions had long vanished. John took her by the hand, and they began to follow the trail the others had taken. "You *are* a western woman unfettered by our traditions. Maybe you are right to throw our cherished beliefs over your left shoulder." With a short laugh he added, "Watch out, this is Vajrayogini's land. She is a jealous Dakini." Asya glanced at him mockingly and said with a lowered voice, holding her finger to her lips. "I will show you that her powers too are only a product of your fantasies."

Late in the afternoon they camped near a clear, fast-flowing brook under the first firs. As they sat in the kitchen tent eating their supper, they heard the tinkling of bells from the outside darkness. Wangchuk smiled. "The Dakinis have come to inspect us!" John peered through the door flap, and with peals of giggling the charming ghosts took flight. Drölma finally lured two shy, young girls into their tent. They were from Kham, on a pilgrimage with their parents through the Pemakö. The tell-tale bells decorated the fringes of their long skirts. Reluctantly they ate the food Drölma offered them. Their parents remained invisible until in the morning their mother brought a bowl of yak milk for Drölma.

The night had been much warmer, and they were surrounded by dense fog next morning. The trail was well trodden. In the late morning they overtook a single, old man in shabby clothes, the customary sunglasses, his face half-hidden by an unkempt beard. He carried his possessions on a walking stick over his shoulder. From his looks he appeared to be a *naljorpa*, an itinerant monk on pilgrimage. He must have been in his seventies. When the man heard them speak English, he trailed Asya and Drölma entertaining them in a soft-spoken voice with tales of his travels. Ever skeptical, Wangchuk and John avoided him. As they began the steep descent into the lower Tsangpo valley, nearing more populated areas, the old man abruptly said good-bye and vanished along a side track. "You know," said Drölma, "he was no ordinary, itinerant pilgrim. His English was better than what you would expect from those. I am sure he was a learned Dzogchenpa on his last voyage."

To avoid Metok Xian, the Chinese district village, they turned south. Passing a few scattered settlements on the high ledge of the Tsangpo canyon they reached the river in another hour. The noise from the raging water was so loud that they had to shout to communicate with each other. Wangchuk took the lead along the dangerously narrow path, and then came the hanging bridges! Ricketty wooden planks suspended from wound-up liana ropes skirting along the precipitous rock sides several hundred feet above the torrent. Worse, a light drizzle made the planks slippery and treacherous. Asya held hands with Drölma and John was fighting an attack of vertigo. They crawled along the rocks, ducked under waterfalls dripping from up high that left them drenched and wet. Fortunately it was not cold and after a particularly exposed stretch they stopped for a rest.

The vegetation in the gorge was fantastic, trees clung to its sheer walls in most improbable places, arm-thick creepers dangled from ledges and rocks, dense, man-high bush covered every patch of soil, and everywhere waterfalls. Suddenly the mist dispersed, and the emerging sun conjured up three separate rainbows fading into the river. Everyone gasped, and the porters knelt and touched their foreheads to the wet soil of the sacred beyul. Asya thought of Richard who had once explained to her the physics of rainbows. The sun had to be behind one. The

rainbow always formed a semicircle with the viewer at its center. She had seen two, one above the other, but three? The second arc was washed out, but the third above it was, though faint, clearly defined. For the first time the rainbows appeared auspicious to her, a triple blessing? John, she, and the hoped for child? But I don't count, she said to herself, I am being blessed standing at the center. What then is the meaning of the third arc? It is very distinct!

Wangchuk pointed to a few houses on the opposite side of the river, Drepung, their goal for the day. Asya looked at him uncertainly. "But how are we going to get across the river?" Wangchuk smiled condescendingly. "By way of a bridge. You will see it around the next bend."

The bridge turned out to be a bizarre contraption, a long sausage-shaped, flexible cage woven from intertwined creepers loosely hung by its ends from four wooden poles. Boards, a few feet wide, were placed at the bottom to walk on. It looked absolutely frightening. "Oh, well," said Wangchuk, "this one is well maintained. Often enough there is only a rusty steel cable and a karabiner hook from which hang a few leather straps in which you get tied up. You have to pull yourself across the water." Asya shuddered.

One of the rainbows still hung, faintly visible over the river when they gingerly walked across, one at a time, first the porters, then John and Drölma followed by Asya and finally Wangchuk. Asya had to pull all of herself together. She could see that the contraption was less dangerous than it looked, it was only her fear of vertigo. She thought of the queasiness during her first flying lesson. The difficulty here was to adjust one's walking rhythm such that it would not excite the cage to wild, swinging oscillations, and looking down was absolutely forbidden. Bathed in sweat she reached the opposite bank and collapsed by the wayside.

"Bravo!" said Wangchuk with a mocking undertone. "I might yet make a jungle warrior out of you." Asya, lying exhausted in the dirt, flinched. Wangchuk's sharp, pointed humor had been getting on her nerves ever since Lhasa, and John had watched the rising emotions between her and Wangchuk silently without coming to her help. Asya looked at John reproachfully and decided, as she had done so often in the past days, to swallow Wangchuk's needling in order to keep peace and harmony between them.

Two days later they reached Rinchenpuk Gompa, the center of the beyul and the "navel" of the sacred topography of Vajrayogini. Two nearby mountains represented her breasts, her milk fed the river, and her vagina was a spring that emptied into Lake Gongdu Dorsem Podrang on the Indian border. The mystical center, a mandala of lakes surrounded by wooded hills was, according to Wangchuk, another two days further south. They would spend a day there and then head back.

In the afternoon Asya explored the monastery alone. A large, two-story wood and stone building weathered black. In the unusually clean main dukhang banks of oil lamps created dim puddles of light near the images of Buddhas and venerated teachers. In the dark recess of the room danced a large gilded image of Vajrayogini, half-covered under white prayer shawls. Asya avoided her.

She slowly drifted into an adjacent room, where she became aware of a soft, very low humming sound. It made her queasy, and then she noticed an older monk in the darkness. He was slowly moving towards her. She found that she couldn't move. The monk was very close. He stretched his hand out and first touched one of her breasts then the other. She was completely paralyzed. At the very moment that the monk was moving his hand to touch her mouth, the *naljorpa* of a few days ago walked into the room. He had taken his sunglasses off, and Asya saw how he shot the monk a very peculiar glance. The monk pulled his hand back as if it had struck fire. The humming sound stopped, and Asya regained her control over herself and was able to walk out of the room.

She was shaking and sat down outside the gompa to recover. How had that monk succeeded to completely immobilize her? With this low humming sound? And the *naljorpa*, where had he materialized from at just that very moment? Why should he have come to her rescue? She told nobody about her experience, but it clouded her mind all day.

Everyone except Wangchuk and Asya attended the night service in the Lakhang. As an excuse Wangchuk said that he was going to guard their tents, and Asya felt no desire to return to the place of the happening in the afternoon.

Suddenly the *naljorpa* emerged from the Gompa. He smiled and approached Wangchuk asking whether he could join their group for the next two days on the way to the inner sanctuary. Wangchuk sneered at the old man in

Tibetan. Asya watched them. She could not understand what was said, but saw the *naljorpa* wince. Slowly her anger rose. To needle her, was one thing, but to ridicule this old man was inexcusable. Eventually Wangchuk, well aware of her incensed, black eyes, gave his permission. The *naljorpa* made a deep, mocking bow before Wangchuk and turned to Asya. He addressed her in English. "I am so happy to find you again. I remember our conversations of a few days ago." He made no reference to their odd meeting in the afternoon. Asya took a deep breath to calm herself, and Wangchuk shrugged and walked away.

Next morning the *naljorpa* trailed a short distance behind them. After a while Asya, still curious about the events in the gompa, waited and joined him. He smiled and thanked her for her company. "Can you also hum like that monk?" she asked. He took his sunglasses off and looked at her sideways with a mischievous smile. "Oh yes." He started humming. "I had seen you in the lakhang, and when I looked again you had vanished. And then I heard that low hum and knew you were in trouble. It's an old Ningmapa trick to lure an unsuspecting woman and make her succumb. I knew you would not know how to free yourself. Well, I came just at the right moment, that rogue!" He made a dismissive gesture and smiled at her. "You see all too often Ningmapa are a corrupted lot, very different from your Western monks." Asya sighed, thinking of Drintang. "I should know, I am married to a Ningma Dzogchenpa, but he never hummed at me like that."

The *naljorpa* became serious, he put his glasses back on again and after a while asked, "You are married to the young man called John, aren't you?" Asya nodded. "He a Dzogchenpa? I thought he was an American?" She looked at the old man. "John is that too, he was born in California, but his parents were Tibetan. I met him in the Lapchi." The *naljorpa* chuckled. "I am getting old. This world has become a strange place. Actually I should be happy to meet a woman who married a Tibetan-American Dzogchenpa. Now I understand how you got to this remote corner of Tibet. Tell me more about you and your John, what is his Tibetan name? Are you a Buddhist?" "No," she said. "I still have trouble accepting this side of John Tsering Norbu with my whole heart, which is one reason why we are on this pilgrimage to fierce Vajrayogini's sanctuary."

For a while they walked in silence. Asya weighed how much she could tell this stranger about John's and her life. The old man looked kind and full of understanding. He had helped her out of a tight situation. When he did not wear his sunglasses a good-natured cunning flickered in his eyes. She admitted that she liked the man, the calm trustworthiness he was surrounded by.

Looking straight ahead she broke their silence. "My friend Drölma suggested this pilgrimage to bring John and me closer together. John is a very loving man who grew up in my world, and I have an inner skepticism that keeps me from exploring his. Can you believe that my exploration of the dukhang yesterday was the first time that I have visited a gompa on my own?" The old man shook his head. "And you immediately ran into an unconscionable lama. Too bad. How long have you known John Norbu?" With a laugh she said. "No, it was not my first encounter with an unconscionable lama, but I fell in love with the first one. I met John eight years ago in Drintang. We have had a turbulent, often troubled life."

The *naljorpa* took off his glasses, and she saw his astonishment. "Oh," she said blushing, "I discovered that I was not that fragile, besides my Lama taught me a lot about myself."

Deep in thought the old man suggested. "Maybe that was all a little too fast for you, and now the two of you are stranded on a high plateau, for which he knows the name, and you cannot make out what it means for you." He nodded and smiled at her. "You see, *you* are supposed to teach him what it is you see." She shook her head imperceptibly. "John doesn't know its name, and I just begin to recognize it with trepidation." Surprised by her own words. why did she tell him? How could this old monk know the answer? She said, "Can a woman have a child and reach enlightenment in one lifetime?"

The *naljorpa* put his sunglasses back on and trotted on in silence. When Asya had already given up hope that he would ever answer her question, the old man said, "Yes, if the child she bears were the reincarnation of a Buddha she could experience instant enlightenment at his birth." "And if the child is a girl?" asked Asya. "Could a girl also be a reincarnation of a Buddha?" "Oh yes!" exclaimed the man with emphasis. "It happens rarely, but common belief to the contrary, there exists a female reincarnation of Dorje Phagmo, whom you know as Vajrayogini." Asya shook herself and laughed. "I wouldn't want to give birth to a duplicate of this frightening Dakini." The *naljorpa* suppressed a smile and glanced at her. "Why, are you pregnant?" She shook her head, "I

had hoped to be, but I am not. I want a child from my Phurbu Lama!" The naljorpa took his sunglasses off and with a mischievous smile in his intelligent eyes chuckled. "Phurbu Lama? Is that John Norbu's nickname? Then you better watch out that Vajrayogini plays no trick on you and becomes part of your dream!" They had a good laugh together.

Asya felt tempted to find out more about this unconventional man, but she realized, as he apparently did too, that this would destroy their delicate relationship, and she refrained from questioning him about his life outside Vajrayogini's magic realm.

They circumambulated the still invisible sanctuary twice, during the first day along an outer, and on the next day around an inner *khorkham*. Somewhere on the second circle the naljorpa beckoned Asya to wait for him. When everyone had disappeared along the path he touched her forehead, throat, and heart. His hand was trembling. "I must leave you now, we will not meet again on this earth." Involuntarily Asya knelt down, and the old man put his hand on her head and blessed her. "You will have a child and reach enlightenment in your life time. Don't search for me, one day you will understand our karmic relation." She got up and kissed his hand. He walked away without looking back and vanished on a path into the woods.

They could smell the center of Vajrayogini's *rangdum*, "spontaneous" mandala long before they emerged in its volcanic wasteland : an assembly of fantastic red and white rocks, small lakes, bubbling hot springs, and infernal sulfur vents in a secluded clearing in the woods. The rock formations were dotted with caves.

It had been oppressively hot all day. Huge towering clouds piled against the high mountains. Wangchuk examined the sky and predicted a heavy thunderstorm in the evening. He made the porters carry all their belongings into a large cavern. John and Asya had moved into a secluded cave for themselves when Wangchuk called from below that he had found the perfect place for a bath, a small lake fed by a hot spring and a fast-running, cold brook. Everyone undressed and carefully waded into the water. Asya reveled in sensuous delight. Sometimes her legs were fanned by cold streams while her breasts rested in hot water, a few feet over she nearly burned her butt when she sat down on a sand bank from which percolated hot water. She felt she could spend the whole night in this pool.

Tibetans are not particularly fond of water, their rivers are very cold, the air is dry, and one does not sweat much, and dust is thought to be a gift of the gods. They only take a bath on Buddha's birthday when everybody runs naked into the nearest river for a communal splash. Soon Asya and John, the children from California found themselves alone in the hot pool. The thunderclouds were closing in, it was getting dark, still Asya would not budge. John made a last attempt to evade what he knew was coming by trying to scare her with the impending downpour. She laughed. "I am already wet, and the water is warm. In this place I could weather a snowstorm." Limpid and pliable from the heat she languidly wound herself around her reluctant man. How could he resist? "Vajrayogini will become jealous!" he ventured. But she laughed at him and then added seriously, "The naljorpa blessed me, he will protect me." John looked puzzled. "What happened to him? I did not see him since this morning." "He went his own way after saying good-bye to me."

As if on cue, a frightening flash followed by deafening thunder opened the heavenly gates. John startled, "You see!" "Oh," said she, "I counted to ten between the lightening and the thunder. It hit three kilometers from us." Floating on a warm current she drew him in. The next flash came down from the opposite direction, and its thunder occurred much sooner. They were encircled. "Let's run for our cave," she suggested suddenly. She disengaged herself and began, naked as she was, to run through the pelting rain, steam rising from her body. John mightily aroused behind her. Another flash. They looked like black ghosts chasing each other through the blinding light. Fortunately the cave was close and easily reached. She shook the water out of her hair and John sitting cross-legged on the floor pulled her into his lap. The next flash hit a tree on the other side of the hot pool. Trembling she dug her fingernails into his wet back. The tree exploded and burnt like an immense torch. To calm her, John resumed his work. And then Asya heard the music. A low rumble of drums followed by a fortissimo cascade of notes from a piano. Another flash of lightening from behind. The music drowned in its thunder. She again heard the music. The piano hacked away in syncopated measures with passionate force. And then she recognized the piece, Bartok's first piano concerto! She bade John to hold still, tuning herself to the concerto's rhythm she moved on. Blinded by lightening strokes and punctuated by thunder clasps she sailed in the flickering light of the burning tree on the wings of Bartok's wild music.

A new flash. "John!" she screamed, "the heavens split open! I saw dozens of Dakini, the orchestra, and between them the old naljorpa flying to heaven." "Where?" shouted John through the thunder. She held still and pointed. Tears were running down her face. He renewed his slow thrusts. She was hallucinating. "Look, Vajrayogini is dancing on the piano!" she shouted pointing into the white light of the next flash. "And the naljorpa is throwing sparks like a Christmas candle." She began to sing, her body was shaking. The whole sky lit up, but he couldn't see anything. With an ecstatic scream she burst into a horrendous climax. John let himself go with a deep sigh. "It is accomplished!" he mumbled. Holding her wet body in close embrace he peered at the unleashed powers of Dorje Phagmo.

Asya delivered a strong girl in May. They named her Leah. Compared to Leah's conception her birth was uneventful. During the last hard phase Asya floated over her body, painless, watching the child appear. "You passed out during delivery!" said the attending Indian woman doctor.---On Asya's wish they named her Leah.

When the passes opened in June, pilgrims returning from the Pemakö brought back the news that the uncorrupted body of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama had been discovered in meditation position in one of the caves of the inner Vajrayogini Sanctuary. A note had been found on his body saying that his reincarnation would be a girl born to a Western woman. Asya never told anyone of her conversation with the naljorpa, and nobody who had been on their trek ever guessed the identity of the old man.

Leah

All Perceptions are but Delusions of your Mind

1

Leah threw her coat on the crowded rack and stopped before the nearest mirror. She looked at her dark eyes. They were John's eyes not her mother's intensely skeptical look. She shuddered. How she had been afraid of Asya's eyes when she was small. Her glance could undo you. How boring to have dark eyes and black hair! She had to do something about her hair, die it brown, a lighter color. She let her long hair down. That was already better, more mysterious. She was tall and slender with bigger breasts than Asya's. She smiled at herself. So vain? Looking ravishing was usually not her concern and nobody was expecting her. She shrugged, her mind had always been more important to her than her looks. She let her eyes pass over her costume: a simple white bra, bare shoulders, a scanty skirt, her midriff and her well-shaped legs exposed. Though minimal, it would do. On her head she wore a paper crown she had made herself. It was supposed to transform her into a "White Tara." At home she had tried to paint an elaborate Third Eye on her forehead. It had struck her as too obvious. Only a smudge remained. But she carried a lotus stalk, a paper flower. She frowned and tentatively made the appropriate teaching mudra with her right hand.

Her friend Jeremy had persuaded her to go to this Fasching ball at the International Student House. For a year she and Jeremy had lived together. Their relationship was over, but they had remained close friends and shared an apartment. She had been reluctant to go, but Jeremy was nearly blind and needed an escort he could rely on. Wanting her own freedom during that night, she had invited a mutual friend, Stephanie, for him. As sarcastic as Jeremy could be, he loved women.

Leah pushed through the heavy door to the foyer and was immediately sucked into the maelstrom of crazy, singing and dancing people. She loved to dance, to feel her body move to the music, the rhythm. Blind Jeremy had been an excellent dancer, as long as she guided him.

For a few seconds she saw an apparition float past in the milling crowd, a Tibetan Lama! A Tibetan costume would not have been unusual, this was polyglot Munich, there were monks and nuns among the hordes of half-dressed or overdressed cowboys, Indian fakirs, maharadshas, princes, and fairies. But the Lama had appeared strikingly authentic with his rust-red toga, short cropped hair, and a bare left shoulder.

She looked for Jeremy and his companion, but couldn't find them. Jeremy possessed an acute inner topological sense. If she stopped searching for him, he would surely find her. Where had the Lama disappeared? An American Tyrolian asked her to dance. He lived in the House. She had met him before, but could not remember where. And

then she spied the Lama again. "Oh," said the American, "this is Fritz, he is the only Tibetan in the House." She steered the Tyrolian close to the Lama and called. "Fritz Lama, may I dance with you?" The startled Lama disengaged himself, and she took him in her arms and slowly led him into the crowd. Fritz recovered. "A Fairy from the Bavarian woods? Have we met before?" Leah questioned him, "You are a genuine Lama, but Fritz? I admire your courage, to delve fearlessly into a Bavarian Fasching ball takes guts!" Fritz had to watch his feet, he was not used to dancing to this wild, Western music. Leah thought of John, he had stomped like Fritz. Only Drölma had taught him to move gracefully. While she gently guided Fritz, she took a look at him.

On closer inspection Fritz was odd. Not only did he have unmistakably dark brown hair, he had blue eyes! A Tibetan with blue eyes? Only the Buddha had blue eyes! He might be four or five years older than she. A most serious Lama. Usually they were a humorous lot, open like children, cunning at worst. "I arrived in Munich only a month ago," sighed Fritz. "I was recruited by the Fasching committee of the Student House to decorate a Tibetan room. How could I escape the ball?" She laughed. "What are you doing in Munich?" "Oh, I am teaching Tibetan Buddhism at the Faculty of Comparative Religion. A Dalai Lama fellowship. My name is Geshe Sonam Tulku Rinpoche. To shorten this long epithet I adopted Friedrich as my Western name. Everybody calls me Fritz Rinpoche." He smiled, an absent look on his face. His English was fluent, he spoke German with an accent.

She considered: Geshe was a title, something like a Doctorate in Divinity, Rinpoche his elevated position as a Lama. The Tulku defined his origin, a reincarnation of some famous Lama. A rare, impressive catch! She smiled back at him, and with a bow of her head asked teasingly. "Fritz Rinpoche, would you accept me as your student?" Fritz frowned. "I am afraid I have no time for personal students. There are numerous competent Lamas in Munich who teach the dharma. I can give you a few names, if you like." But then he reconsidered. "I am rude. What could *you* contribute to such an arrangement?"

Well, she thought, he is not only a serious man, he stands on his values as well as any of his German colleagues. Someone should help him to loosen up and adjust to the easy Munich life. "I studied Chinese in Berkeley and lived a year in Nanjing. I speak and read Chinese well. I am now working on a doctorate in political science. I am interested in Tibet. After my stay in Nanjing I spent a month in Lhasa, but my Tibetan is poor." She smiled at him flippantly. "Would this make me acceptable and reward your efforts on my behalf?"

Staring at her in surprise, Fritz stepped on her toes. He apologized profusely and with a pained smile said, "Tonight, I should be *your* student. I am not used to being so clumsy, but modern dance was not taught at Dharamsala. What is your name?" She hesitated for a second. Should she reveal the name of her father or explain her costume? This was Fasching where she had a right to remain elusive, "Leah," she said, "an old Biblical Hebrew name, as you may know." She changed the subject. "I know a Tibetan couple, Drölma and Wangchuk from Kathmandu, who come to Munich twice a year to teach the *dharma* with the help of modern Western dance." Fritz looked at her and said, "They are well known, but only a few high Lamas in Dharamsala think much of their approach. I have never met them. Maybe you could introduce me to them."

Leah decided to teach Fritz Tulku how to dance. She disengaged herself. "You don't have to hold onto me. Just freely move to the music in your own way. Look, like this." Imitating her movements he quickly warmed to her. They moved apart and returned to each other. Soon he dared a larger excursion, and she pursued him. Flushed he admitted, "This exercise is truly liberating. Maybe Drölma does know how to teach spontaneity!" Leah applauded and laughed. "Yes, she does and especially to stodgy German intellectuals. How come you are so German?" His face clouded over, but he remained silent.

Jeremy and his woman friend drifted by, and Leah called to them. "Jeremy, I want to introduce you to a Tibetan Geshe who is taking dance lessons from me." She led them out of the crowd. "Geshe Fritz Rinpoche, this is my friend Jeremy Morbout who spent two years in a Zen monastery in Japan and has become so Japanese that he bows to the telephone, when he talks to his superior." From behind his dark glasses Jeremy stared disconcertingly at Fritz Lama, obliged with a deep Japanese bow, and said with an Oxford accent. "The smell of rancid yak butter! A verifiable Lama!" Leah, raised her hands. "Morby, you are impossible! Fritz please understand, to compensate for his being blind Jeremy has acquired an acute sense of the absurd. He is writing a fantasy about life in Munich. It is so sarcastic that the book will be banned by the Bavarian Ministry of Culture and

Religion.”

Morby mimed contrition. “Leah, I did not mean to disparage your latest discovery. He certainly wears a genuine Tibetan costume. My sincere apology, Fritz? Everyone is turning out his or her alter-ego today. Look at Leah, she is dressed as White Tara, the Chinese wife of Songtsen Gyampo the Tibetan king!” He bowed to Leah and in a maudlin tone exclaimed. “Oh, what would I give to be able to see this charming Bodhisattva!”

Leah said angrily: “Morby, this Rinpoche is genuine! Fritz is his assumed Western name. You shouldn't reveal my disguise!” Jeremy mumbled, “The time will come when the Seeing become sightless and the Blind see.” Fritz nodded. “You are right, Jeremy, the time has already come. Now I understand what Leah wears on her head, a Bodhisattva crown! Where are your five eyes Leah Tara and your Lotus stalk?” Leah repeated the teaching mudra and laughed. “On this worldly occasion my spiritual eyes are internalized, and the lotus was in my way while teaching you to dance.”

Fritz smiled and relaxed. He put his palms together. “Will you continue teaching me the fast path to awareness, Leah *khadroma*?” She took him by the hand and pulled him back among the dancers. Leah danced faster and faster. Fritz wound the loose end of his toga around his midriff. He had reached a high quite novel to him.

Exhausted they sat down at a table. They got two beers, pretzels, and sausages with sauerkraut. Fritz wolfed down the sausage and raising his beer he said, “Prosit! To your health! May I show you my Tibetan room upstairs. But tell me, what do you know about Tibetan Buddhist teachings?” Leah decided to reveal part of her story. “My father is an architect who restores temples in South East Asia. He taught me about sacred Buddhist art and architecture. But my knowledge of Buddhist teachings is woefully inadequate.”

Fritz looked at her pensively. “Earlier when you spoke of your Chinese studies the thought passed my mind that we badly need people who are trained in political science, speak Chinese, and are interested in Tibet, its history, and our present political quandary. Would you consider such a career and help us?” Leah said with a smile. “Yes, I would like to help you.”

They danced a little longer and then went upstairs. Fritz's setup looked like her father's meditation room in Kathmandu: a Tibetan rug, a low table with a vajra and a bell, a large thanka, a fierce blue Heruka and his white consort in yab-yum. An unusual thangka of a very graceful, four-armed female Bodhisattva, whom she did not recognize hung on the wall.

Fritz observed her. She turned to him. “My father owns a similar wild yab-yum thanka, of which I was much afraid when I was a small child. Because of my fright he kept it covered, which only increased my curiosity. But who is this elegant lady? I have never seen her before.”

Fritz smiled. “In Sanskrit she is called Prajnaparamita, an early image of the Supreme Lady. She no longer appears in today's tangkas. I had her painted by a Lama in Ladakh from a mural in the monastery of Alchi.” He looked at Leah silently for a while. “You know what a Dakini is? Prajnaparamita is an early form of the Queen of the Dakinis, before she became fierce Vajrayogini.”

Leah blushed under his gaze and nodded. “I grew up in California and in Kathmandu. My mother is a pilot. She flies rescue missions for a Western medical service in Kathmandu. You know, pick up stranded mountain climbers and sick or pregnant women in remote villages. She has become known as Nepal's Flying Dakini.”

Fritz listened absentmindedly. Leah fearing that he might return to his serious mood startled him with the question. “May I ask you to come home with me? On this day the Dakinis have free reign, even in Munich.”

Fritz closed his eyes and said. “Like a true Dakini you are a sorceress and are not even aware of it! You dance like they do. As a woman, you may know more about the Tantra than I could as a man. Prajnaparamita says, the yogi should kiss and embrace his shakti and uniting lotus and vajra in consummation should serve and honor her. When I left for Munich, I was released from my monastic vows, but I have no practical experience. My knowledge of woman consists of visualizations of Vajrayogini and Yeshe Tsogyel. Yet as Prajnaparamita warns, no man can achieve the goal of the path alone without the help of woman. If you will teach me how to love you, I will come home with you tonight” Leah shook her head and laughed happily. “It is already morning! Come, let's find Jeremy and his friend and leave.”

They found that a deep fog had descended on Munich. The new day had barely summoned a gray shimmer. Eddies of clouds swirled around the street lanterns. The houses seemed to have vanished. Silence, no cars, no

taxis, the streetcars had stopped running. The muffled wail of a woman from the void, "Max, help me, I am lost in the fog. I cannot find my way." There was no echo and no answer, and then a desperate outcry: "Maxerl, if you leave me with that woman I'll jump into the Isar." Jeremy laughed. "She has already lost him." He shouted into the whirling clouds. "Hey there, sweetheart! Maxerl has already jumped. Wait for me, I'll take you home!" There was no answer. Jeremy mumbled. "Foolish woman! One more wouldn't have made any difference. Now, you all hold on to me and to each other. I will lead you home. This is the day when the blind are seeing." He tapped his cane along the curb. "This is Franz-Joseph-Strasse. If we turn right, we can catch the U-3 at the subway station on Gisela-Strasse."

They followed him like the man with the Golden Goose, single-file. Leah holding onto Fritz Lama concluded the tail. "Left, two, three, four!" counted Jeremy, "Let's sing to keep in step," he commanded and intoned, "*Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust.*" Marching songs are a uniquely German invention!" Leah protested, "Morby, you insult my German ancestors. Can't we just walk in peace and quiet?" He demurred. "We have to make some noise, so we don't collide with some hapless drunk in these clouds." He clicked his way along the house walls, then led them back to the curb. "Morby," teased Leah. "How much did you have to drink? You swerve a great deal. I am getting dizzy at the tail end." Jeremy interrupted his singing. "Since you cannot see, you'll have to leave the choice of our path to me. In the next block there are many rotted trap doors to the coal cellars of the houses. You don't want to fall into one of those, do you?"

After weaving along Franz-Joseph-Strasse for a while Jeremy announced that they had reached Leopold Strasse, the subway should be a few houses to the right. They saw nothing, but muffled voices could be heard from a distance, and suddenly they hit upon a dense crowd of people at the entrance to the subway escalator. A large sign at the stairs. Leah read aloud. "Achtung! Because of fog in the tunnels all subway traffic has been suspended."

She had never seen Jeremy at a loss before. He stared in the direction of the entrance and sighed "Oh God, an hour to walk home! Are you prepared for that?" Fritz inquired where they lived. "We share an apartment in the Olympic Village," explained Leah, "to the north, across all of Schwabing and the Petuel Ring. A long way!" Sensing that the crowd was watching them, Jeremy called out: "Taxi? Anyone wants to join this eight-wheeler north?" A woman next to him let out a hollow laugh. "You look funny, three dummies following a blind man!" And to Jeremy. "A blind leading the Burghers of Schilda? Do you know where you are going? *Nee*, I don't want to be misled by you.!"

To stop any further discussion Leah ordered. "Enough, come on Morby, lets go!" Jeremy called, "Starting up the engine, one, two, three, go!" Soon the restive crowd had vanished in the clouds.

"Too boring to go back to where we came from!" muttered Jeremy. "Let's take Ainmiller-Strasse to Hohenzollern Platz." No longer in the mood of singing, he started to announce every side street by name. "Kurfürsten Platz!" he called finally and with a lowered voice. "All this beer! I feel bloated. Anyone needs to pee? The last chance before the Autobahn!" Fritz took Jeremy by the arm and made for the public toilets. After a while they came back laughing. They had been unable to locate the urinals in the smelly dense fog that boiled from the place. "Oh," said Jeremy, "nobody will see you," and peed at the nearest lamp post. Fritz vanished in the fog. Only much back-and-forth shouting brought him back.

Jeremy took them up Belgrad Strasse: "Six side streets on the left, or seven on the right, in either case the last one is Karl-Theodor-Strasse where we turn left." He began to cross the street, which was like crossing an ocean in search of a lost continent. Halfway across Belgrad Strasse, they were startled by the fast approaching wail of a police car. Running in confusion for the sidewalk they nearly lost each other. A ghostly, disembodied flashing blue light sped through the milky brew where they had just stood. "The bloody German Kriminalpolizei out chasing harmless revelers!" foamed Jeremy.

The day had become lighter, occasionally Leah could read the street signs from up close. "Clemens-Strasse," she announced at the next intersection, which made Jeremy change his plan. "Let's take Clemens Strasse, I dislike Karl-Theodor Strasse intensely." "And I hate Clemens-Strasse," Leah laughed, "because my first Munich boyfriend lived there." Jeremy muttered aggressively, "What difference does that make in this fog?"

It would make a difference. They had just turned off Belgrad Strasse when the yahee-yahoo of the police car resounded again. Jeremy let out a foul curse, "They are after us!" Desperately Jeremy dragged his friends as

close to the houses as he could. When the car had caught up with them, it stopped wailing. Eventually a grinning police officer emerged from the clouds and addressed the frightened citizen in best Bavarian. "Ha, noi, where are you going on this awful morning? Home? Can the Police your friend and helper give you a ride?" Jeremy was about to make an abusive comment, but Leah shut him up. They all piled into the van.

"Testing our new fog-and-night gear." Said the officer pointing proudly at a video screen. "We saw you run on Belgrad Strasse. Your leader is blind? Very funny!" "Look," said Leah irritated. "Jeremy knows this neighborhood by heart. He was the only one who could 'see' where we were going." The officer shook his head. "Never thought of that! Your friend could make handsome money guiding people through this fog." Jeremy growled in English, "And be run over by the vice squad!"

They were home in ten minutes, delivered at the door of their apartment block on Strassberger-Strasse. Leah took some food from the refrigerator and all dropped into bed.

Leah woke around noon and quietly slipped out of bed. She was ravenously hungry and went to the kitchen to prepare some lunch. When Fritz woke, he reached for her but found the bed empty. The goddess had vanished! She must have been a dream, he told himself, there never was a Leah Dakini. When he opened his eyes his glance fell on a photograph on the low table by the bedside: a Tibetan Lama! He woke fully. Did Leah specialize in picking up Lamas? He angrily dismissed the thought and studied the picture closer. The man on the photo was about his age, dark hair, a handsome face, a smile for the photographer. Who was he? On the backside was written 'Phurbu Lama, Kathmandu 1994' The mystery was deepening. He threw off the warm blanket and released a cloud of her perfume. He drew in a deep breath and consulted his watch. One-thirty in the afternoon! "Leah," he said when he found her in the kitchen. "Who is Phurbu Lama?" Leah gave him a kiss. "Never ask a woman this kind of question unless you are sure of the answer. His name is John Tsering Norbu, a Ningma Dzogchenpa born in California of a Tibetan father and a Sherpa mother." She paused and smiled mysteriously. "My father!"

He stared at her, stunned, and stuttered in confusion. "You said your father was an architect?" Unperturbed, Leah said, "He is. You know that the Ningmapa are not as strict and celibate as the reformed orders. Phurbu Lama met my mother in the Lapchi in his naljorpa days. She fell in love with him and lured him out of the wild Himalayas back to California. She worked for his education. There were more than enough Lamas in California. He decided, he should do something more productive. But father never completely severed his connections with his friends in the Sangha. Listening to you yesterday I concluded that you had never been to Kathmandu, otherwise you would surely have met John and Asya Norbu, they are well-known in Kathmandu." Fritz shook his head. "So your full name is Leah Norbu?" "Yes," she said, "Leah Hanna Norbu, Hanna is my German grandmother. My mother took this photo of my father before I was born."

Fritz Tulku sat down and silently connected two water puddles on the table with his index finger. He thought of her laughter and the shake of her head, when she had asked him to come home with her. Leah laughed and then sweetly needled him. "And you, my new-found Rinpoche?" She took his face between her hands. "Who bequeathed your brown hair and blue eyes to you? The Buddha?"

Fritz evaded her look and sighed deeply. "The mystery of my birth! It's complicated. I never had a father, or if you wish I had two. My mother was the local beauty of a small village in Tsang. She gave herself to a foreigner who sired me. My other 'father,' you know how a tulku comes about, the 'soul' of the dying man slips into the womb of a woman who is being made love to, was the reincarnate abbot of the local Kagyü gumpa. From my fourth year on its Lamas raised me. My blue eyes!" He groaned and held up his hands. "To the Lamas my eyes were the sure sign of my past and coming Buddha-hood. Can you imagine? The tulku of their revered reincarnate Lama? But I should not make fun of these good people, I owe everything to them. When I turned eighteen, the Chinese became suspicious of me. I was too active and visible. It was then that the Lamas spirited me across the border to India. At Dharamsala, Namdrö Chökgye Gyaltsen, the regent successor to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama 'discovered' me and spared no effort to give me an exceptional education. His Highness is a modern man, who sees the need for a more worldly education of the high Lamas in the Tibetan exile government. I was given an English and a German tutor, sent to the university in Bangalore and later to Cambridge, England. He is paying for my stay here. But His Highness was short-sighted on one subject, he intensely disliked the Chinese. He missed finding me a

Chinese teacher. I learned Chinese in Tibet when I was young, but it is lamentably inadequate for political negotiations." He smiled at her. "That is why you have been admitted as my student. You could be immensely useful to us."

She put a mug of coffee, bread, and scrambled eggs before him, and said, "You must be starving. But you have not really answered my question. What do you know about your foreign father?" Despondent, he said. "Nothing. The Lamas, to whom my looks were a sign of my divine origin, would not discuss my natural father, and my mother, who depended on them, remained silent. I was sure he had been German. Why I can no longer remember, maybe Mother had said something to that effect before I was taken to the monastery. The only foreigner I later found who is known to have visited the area was an Italian art historian, Roberto Vitali, a student of Tucci's. He worked there in the early 1980s, long before my time." He let his arms hang in resignation. "That's all I know about my worldly origins."

"Well," she laughed, "I'm sure your father was German. You are so German, serious, deeply philosophical, ambitious, hard working beyond the call of duty, aware of your status and knowledge. Look at you, over all these theoretical speculations you forgot to eat!" He got a red face. "In memory of my father I called myself Friedrich. Sometimes I am convinced this was his name."

Jeremy and Stephanie burst into the kitchen. "Good afternoon," cried Jeremy. "How is the Lama after his initiation into the esoteric secrets of the higher Tantra?" "Morby," said Leah sharply, "you of all people should know that esoteric means, the information is solely between the teacher and his student and most decidedly none of your business!" Unperturbed Jeremy gave her a kiss. "I only wanted to congratulate you two. It is higher karma when a Tibetan Lama meets a German Dakini! Sometimes the ways of the world are much more bizarre than the best novelist can imagine. May I include you two into today's news report? 'Using High-Tech Spy Equipment Bavarian Kriminalpolizei Rescues Jewish Princess from the Amorous Advances of Tibetan Lama in Munich Fog.'" Leah protested. "No, you will not!" He searched for a chair and sat down. "I'll change your names, of course. Give me something to eat, I am famished!"

The two women got busy scrambling more eggs. Jeremy turned to Fritz. "Never mind my ramblings. I am a paper dragon in the true meaning of the word. I am the sightless reporter for the all-seeing Evening Herald. I ferry out stories the rest of the staff cannot see. Very entertaining at times." Leah put a plate of scrambled eggs before him. "Eat and shut up!"

They ate in silence for a while. Jeremy, chewing a slice of bread, interrupted the peace. "Has anyone looked outside? Did the sun burn through?" Leah went to the window. She could not see the nearest houses, no wind, the same dense fog. Jeremy groaned. "How am I going to get to work?" He dialed his office. "Listen to this!" He switched to the speakerphone. A whoosh came from the line, then the steady tick-tock of a clock. After a few seconds a deep voice. "This is the boiler room. Deep fog fills the place. We are waiting for the ship to sink." And then again the tick-tock of the clock. Jeremy hung up. "This was Sebastian's voice, the drama critic. He has drunk more than he normally drinks. He is way over the top." He turned to Fritz. "Can you imagine working with such characters? You go nuts."

After lunch Jeremy became restless. He dialed the number of his secretary. "Hello Maggy, this is Jerry. I want to submit a news item. Can you take it down over the phone? 'Last night using high-tech equipment designed to pursue criminals in the fog the Münchener Kriminalpolizei....'" Leah grabbed the phone from him. "You will not, Jeremy!" She held the receiver to her ear. "Hallo!" she shouted, "Hallo!" The line was dead. "Why are you so violent?" complained Jeremy. "Someone took Maggy's phone off the hook when it rang. Besides I was going to report the police chasing hapless Fasching revelers through Schwabing! Do you really believe I would reveal your private love life to the paper? We are getting on each other's nerves."

Leah rose. "We need something to eat for tonight. I am going shopping. Fritz will you accompany me?" When they returned Jeremy had left a typed message. "The subway is running again. We are moving to Stephanie's apartment, this place is too small for four while the fog lasts. Have fun!"

Leah heaved a sigh of relief and turned to Fritz. "Jeremy and I lived together for a year. He is an intelligent man, sharp, articulate, and insecure. His sarcasm becomes abrasive, if one doesn't concentrate all one's love and

attention on him. Our relationship has long been over, but we have remained friends and share this apartment, which I love for its abstract beauty and he for its anonymity. It is owned by the city, and there is no well-meaning Münchener landlady around, who brings you coffee and cookies and watches over every of your comings and goings. Please don't mind, he is jealous of your presence." Fritz looked at her. "Among Tibetans jealousy is rare. I am watching with curiosity." With a short laugh she reminded him. "Do you have any experience with love and jealousy?" He shook his head.

Leah went to the kitchen to prepare dinner. Fritz wrapped in thoughts walked around inspecting the apartment, which with its bare concrete walls was still bewildering to him. The layout was beautiful, even on this foggy day there was light everywhere. A glass door opened to a large terrace where Leah had set up a small potted tree and green plants. He went out and stared into the impenetrable fog. On his return he spotted a strange object hanging on the wall in Leah's room, a bronze-cast circular disk framed by oriental arabesques. At one time the disk must have been polished. An antique mirror? Its surface still produced a mottled reflection of him. He moved a step sideways. The image followed him. He stared closer and suddenly saw something move in the cloudy interstices. When he tried to focus on this second image he could only see specks of verdigris between the reflective fragments. Puzzled he stepped back. As he let his broken reflection converge, the image again loomed in the background. Holding his gaze and squinting at the background peripherally, he uncannily saw a Tibetan goddess in full regalia superimposed on the reflection of his eye. Was it Prajnaparamita from Alchi? His thought made the goddess vanish. He was sure, she was not the Paramita of his thangka, its dress-up resembled that of the Tibetan state oracle in Nechung, of which he had seen a rare, blurred photo from before 1950. Prajnaparamita in the garb of the Nechung oracle? The oracle had been a *man* who went into trance to foresee the future of Tibet every new year! Bewildered he walked back onto the terrace and tried to penetrate the vague gray of the clouds, as if he would find an explanation out there. It was beginning to get dark. From somewhere the thought reached him that this day was Lhosar, Tibetan New Year. He looked at his watch, the twenty-first of February. Of course! He thought. With all these happenings he had completely forgotten about that. Prajnaparamita as the Nechung oracle in the Olympic Village in Munich? What did she want to tell him? He went back before the mirror, but as hard as he tried to recover the experience, the dull, dappled surface of the mirror remained as impenetrable as the fog outside.

He went to the kitchen and asked as naturally as he could, "Leah, what is this strange bronze disk on your wall?" Leah squinted at him curiously. "It is an antique Han divination mirror which I smuggled out of China. A valuable museum piece. I found it in an antique shop in Nanjing." She giggled. "Did you see your future?" Apprehensively he described his vision: a Tibetan goddess in the garb of the old Nechung state oracle. "Today is Lhosar, Tibetan New Year. On this day the oracle used to predict the future for the new year." Leah said innocently. "Father once described this custom to me. Did she talk to you?" He said tentatively, "Not really, she vanished when I realized who she was: Prajnaparamita! Imagine, a woman as oracle!? In Nechung the oracle was an old man muttering in a trance!" He shook his head. Leah stirred her soup and smiled. "You will have to find out by yourself what the meaning of this vision is. You must have practiced meditative visualizations for years! I have not looked into the mirror for a long time. These days everything happens to me in the present tense. What good is precognition? It robs you of the ability to act freely!" She turned and kissed her perplexed Lama.

2

All weekend fog covered Munich like a shroud. The city came to a standstill. The days passed in a depressingly gray semi-darkness. After dancing all night people walked the streets like sleepwalkers with

outstretched arms and groped along the houses as if drugged. The two lovers spent the days in bed. But at night Fritz rose asking Leah to dance with him at a small cafe they had discovered in the Olympic Village. Like an addict he craved the newly discovered exertion. Later, in the small hours of the new day, they fell asleep in each other's arms, exhausted.

On Shrove Monday it suddenly turned cold and began to snow. To escape the sloth of their life, Leah dragged Fritz into the *Englische Garten* for a walk in the densely falling snow. Giggling like children they threw snowballs at each other. Fritz told Leah of the pleasures of his childhood at the gompa when, on such days the Lamas would forget their solemn services, roll in the new snow and build Buddhas. "It was a good omen, if one's Buddha lasted the longest."

Tuesday dawned cold under a brilliant sun. Leah called Jeremy for permission to use his car, of which she anyway was the only driver, for a communal outing. Yes, but Jeremy did not want to join them, he had work to do.

As Leah carefully drove south, she described how she had discovered Bavaria under Jeremy's guidance. Fritz looked confused, how could he? Leah smiled. "He would ask me to describe the landscape and churches so he could see them too. He is a walking architectural encyclopedia who never rested until I had discovered the details he knew existed. This is how I learned to see and love Bavarian Baroque churches." Fritz had never been outside of Munich and knew nothing about Baroque architecture.

Thick hoarfrost hung from the trees and power lines, the frozen remains of the fog. "Before coming to Munich," said Leah, "I had never seen this rare phenomenon. Look how beautiful the crystals are in the morning sun!" Fritz nodded. "We don't have hoarfrost in dry Tibet, but I saw it many times in the cold, wet English winters of Cambridge." He told her of Peterhouse, where he had lived, and its ebullient Master who had goaded him into an extra load of courses in science. "The old man had spent many years in China and spoke Chinese fluently. He spent the last years of his life writing an encyclopedic collection of books on Chinese science and engineering. A crusty character given to the driest English humor and obsessed with an outdated Maoist philosophy. He never accepted that I did not care to speak Chinese. Jeremy's acerbic nature is no novelty to me." "*Women ying gai shuo zhongwen!*" laughed Leah, we should speak Chinese.

They drove through rolling countryside, fields and meadows blanketed by snow, dark pine woods, an occasional farm house. "Look," said Leah, "how the glistening road curves into the low sun!. They have spared the old trees that line it. My Chinese friends would cherish this monochrome landscape, black and white like their calligraphy and entirely man-made. Every stone has been turned by man. The soil is drenched with the sweat and tears of uncounted generations. Do you realize how much the Chinese detest and abhor raw nature? The deserts of Tibet, its breathtaking altitude, and the religiosity of its inhabitants are the reasons why the Chinese feel so deeply uncomfortable in Tibet."

Leah slowly steered the car down a steep ravine. A simple square tower and the high roof of a church appeared among the trees. "Dietramszell," she announced. She parked the car under the church's overhang. When Fritz slammed the car door the bang released a minor avalanche from the roof onto their heads. Snorting with laughter Leah shook the snow out of the collar of her coat.

"This unpretentious church was my discovery," explained Leah. "Jeremy knew nothing of it." She pushed the heavy door open. "Close your eyes!" Just as she had done with Jeremy, she took Fritz Tulku by the arm and led him inside. Their breath formed small clouds in the chilly space.

She described the architectural details like she had to Jeremy. "You are in a colorful nave. Light streams in through large windows on the right, rows of simple larch-wood benches.. A series of unusual monochrome-blue medallions high on both walls. The *trompe-l'œil* ceiling opens to the heavens. An apotheosis of the Benedictine Order. Three pairs of side altars accompany the visitor on his way towards the main altar. Exquisite wooden sculptures in their original coloring. Could they be by Schmädler, and the stucco, the frescoes, and the main altar by Johann Baptist Zimmermann?"

She touched Fritz's face with her fingertips and blew a warm kiss on his closed eyelids. "This *is* magic. Open your eyes!"

Spell-bound Fritz looked at this wonder of stucco, color, and space. "You didn't mention the deep blue drapery behind the altar." He rubbed his eyes. "The blue fills my entire vision." She laughed. "A surprise! I had to describe the altar to blind Jeremy, but you *can see*. From now on it will appear in your dreams, like in mine." Fritz followed the ceiling with his eyes. "The church is much larger than I had imagined, it's like a ballroom." "Yes," said Leah happily, "a ballroom for the Bavarian angels, the relatives of the Chinese *fei-tian* and your Dakinis. Look at the two splendidly gilded angels on both sides of the main altar, female grace in male bodies, androgynous? The unity of opposites!" She took him along the side altars. An exquisitely elegant princess on the first, on the next, in a glass box a skeleton in the yellowed garb of an abbot whose bone-hands were intertwined in prayer. "Memories of the Potala!" she laughed. "These skeletons are special to the Bavarian Baroque. In this climate even a Lama would decay, or is it because the abbots were no yogis?"

Forgetting the cold they sat for a while in one of the pews. "Seeing this colorful, sensuous splendor," mused Fritz Lama, "I begin to understand the Bavarian mentality, their Fasching, their down-to-earth love of beer, good life, and religion." "But as the skeleton shows," Leah added, "death is no terrifying stranger to them." Leah asked. "May I take you on a walk through the woods to a magic lake? One Spring day, a long time ago, when I first discovered this church, I hiked there alone. With Jeremy this was not possible." In leaving, Leah dipped her finger into the holy water by the door and touched his forehead. "Make a wish. It will come true, if you don't tell anybody." He gave her a kiss.

The track, lined by bare, old trees curved across a sun-glistening meadow and eventually disappeared into the woods. In the middle of the meadow Fritz took her hand, stopped and asked, "Leah, would you be my consort? You have already taught me so much that I cannot imagine how I would live without you." Leah looked at his kind face and blushed. "Was this your wish?" He recovered his poise. "I wouldn't tell you." "Then", she said, "your wish shall be granted!" and kissed him.

They walked on in silence, Leah trying to remember the scene in her heart: Her Lama and she walking under the outstretched black arms of the trees in the winter sun across a snow covered meadow. Fritz Tulku was still holding her hand.

In a low voice Leah talked of her childhood. "Asya, my mother and John did not get married until she was pregnant with me. Their differing background often made their life difficult. They were not a happy couple. Father was frequently absent at his gumpa in Bodnath or on extended restoration trips to Southeast Asia. There is not much one can do for diversion in Kathmandu. A few times my mother escaped with me to California. When we were in Nepal, Mother devoted herself to me and to flying. Asya came from a determinedly agnostic family. I guess she learned her deep Buddhist understanding from John and her friends, but they rarely spoke of that. Her pregnancy and my birth must have been an important spiritual experience for her. How strange that I too should fall in love with a Lama!" She smiled at him and shook her head. He asked uncertainly, "Would you like to get married?" "No," she said, "at least not now. To learn how to love one another, to give you the love you need, and to work together seems more important."

The track climbed a steep ravine. On top of the hill stood a wayside cross, a *Marterln*, carrying a naïve painting showing a man who had died there in an accident ferrying wood on his sleigh in winter. A ghost-like skeleton death hovered near the scene. "We are on the right path," said Leah. "The Bavarians have a way to remind one that death points the way." Fritz frowned and looked at her puzzled. She continued, "However, I imagine death as being female, an older sister, a trusted friend." Fritz asked, "Where from do you get this image?" She smiled. "I don't know. But in French and Italian death is female. This has always appeared very natural to me. How about Vajrayogini, she is female!" Fritz's voice became excited. "You as Vajrayogini! Sometimes I see you in this form. You surprise me. This vision of death is part of the Chöd-insights of the *esoteric* Tantra." He shook his head.

They trudged through dark woods which appeared even darker because of the snow on the ground. Each

hung on to his own thoughts. Downhill, walking became easier, and they soon arrived at the open shores of the Kirchsee. Several dozen villagers skated and danced in silent circles, black against the low winter sun and the glistening ice. Women were pushing small children in antique high-chairs on runners. A group of men played *Stockschiessen* near the far shore, the ubiquitous Bavarian version of curling. The only sound was the low, thunderous rumble of the ice whenever the men pitched the heavy disk across the ice.

That night Fritz had a vivid dream. Leah and he stood at the shore of the Kirchsee. A man in flying rust-colored robes came skating towards them in great loops. Fritz suddenly recognized him as His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. When the Dalai Lama had reached them he said, "This is Lhamo Latso, the Oracle Lake. From here there will be no return for you." His Holiness then rubbed his forehead with his and kissed Leah. Fritz now realized that the people on the lake were Tibetans. His dream changed. Leah and he were standing before the altar and the blue curtain of Dietramszell held up by the two androgynous angels. His Holiness was officiating at their wedding. It was all very solemn. The Dalai Lama spoke to Leah of which Fritz only remembered that he addressed her as his daughter. Finally His Holiness asked, "Fritz Tulku will you be a faithful husband to Leah Norbu?" Fritz answered 'Yes, I will. When the Dalai Lama asked Leah, she also said 'Yes.' They exchanged rings.

Fritz woke much confused. Part of the dream was obvious. Despite of what she had said, Leah would love to get married, if only he would ask her, but the sudden appearance of the long-dead Dalai Lama at the Kirchsee remained a mystery. And His Holiness had kissed Leah and addressed her as his daughter! He lay half-awake for a long time. Towards morning he had a startling revelation: Leah is the reincarnation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama! He sat up and in the dim light looked at the sleeping shape next to him. Leah, the long sought reincarnation of the Dalai Lama? He woke completely and recalled what she had told him about herself. The time of her birth twenty-four years ago fit exactly. A note had been found on the body of His Holiness predicting that his reincarnation would be a female, Western child. The lamas had searched for that girl for nine years. No credible candidate had ever been found. Finally the search committee had given up, and here this woman lay next to him!

He became agitated, but then berated himself. He was getting deranged after the emotional excitement of the past week. He forced himself to be calm and lay down. But his thoughts continued to run circles in his mind. Was this the reason for her undeniable Dakini nature, for her unexplainable knowledge of esoteric, well-hidden Tantric insights? Phurbu Lama's Dzogchen education could not be the source of her understanding. John, as her father, would surely never have mentioned this esoteric knowledge to his daughter. How could a Western woman know these things?

He got out of bed and stood before Leah's Chinese mirror thinking that it must know her secrets. But all he saw were his own restless, blue eyes mottled with spots of green verdigris. You are suffering from a form of arrogant megalomania, said these eyes. If I discover the Dalai Lama's reincarnation my career would be made, he said to the mirror. A dangerous temptation. There was no turning back.

He heard the tapping of Leah's bare feet behind him and turned to face her. She had found him red-handed. Guiltily he said, "I tried to ask the mirror for an explanation of a strange dream I had, but I got no answer." Leah stretched herself and yawned. "What did you dream?" He told her all except his last brainstorm and asked, "What do you remember about the last Dalai Lama?" "Really nothing," she said. "He died before I was born. My mother later told me that my father went to his funeral when I was not yet one. The monks never found the tulku of the dead man, and wasn't there a prophesy that the Fourteenth would be the last Dalai Lama? Anyway, Chinese-Tibetan affairs seem to run much smoother without a Dalai Lama." She glanced at Fritz questioningly. "Why do you attach so much meaning to this dream? A very long time ago the Kirchsee may well have had oracular powers, and getting married in Dietramszell has always been one of my secret wishes." Self-conscious, Fritz kept silent, apparently she knew nothing about her spiritual origins.

This dream, which did not recur, made Fritz double his efforts. He took intensive Chinese at the university, and twice a week they spoke only Chinese. Leah's attempts at learning Tibetan were more frustrating. Fritz suggested that she simply learn everyday conversation by rote. She complained that this approach was an insult.

In March Drölma and Wangchuk arrived from Kathmandu and announced their annual Tibetan-Buddhist dance-workshop. Leah was happy to be close again to her godmother Drölma, who had reached her late fifties, lithe and active as ever. However, the easy, playful frivolity of her younger years had given way to a palpable aura. Her dark eyes made people shiver. She was quite unimpressed by Fritz's position, titles, and blue eyes, but she accepted him as Leah's consort without question.

As promised, Leah took Fritz, in Western clothes, to one of Drölma's lectures. Her emphasis on the female aspects of the Tantra irked Fritz, but Leah had meanwhile fully won him over to the liberating powers of free-style dance. He enjoyed himself greatly.

After the class the four went to the Augustiner Garden and over a *Mass* of beer got into a heated discussion about the origins of the inner Tantra and the role of dance in its beginnings. Drölma had become used to have to fight the prejudices of the male Lama establishment and cited a number of early Tantric texts to show that the entire system had been invented by women, who then taught their famous male consorts. Fritz claimed to have never seen any of these texts. Drölma, with a smile, recited the beginning of Prajnaparamita's long poem to her Supreme Lord. Fritz got a red face, and Drölma had a good laugh. "This was written by Princess Lakshinkara, in Orgyen" said Drölma, "who taught it to Niguma, who in turn, as you as a Kargyüpa should know, became Tilopa's consort. You also know 'no man can achieve complete insight without the help of a woman!' it is also a quotation from Lakshinkara." Fritz had the grace to admit defeat and kissed Leah. Drölma sent him to the Munich university library, her source of these texts. It took Fritz some time to accept the female invasion of his well-rehearsed male interpretation of the Tantric Buddhist canon.

The question of the source of Leah's knowledge and the imagined connection between her and the Dalai Lama was still the puzzle to Fritz's mind. On a hike in the hills south of Munich, he sidled up to Drölma and asked her about her knowledge of the events surrounding the death of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Drölma told him of the expedition with Wangchuk, John, and Asya into the Pemakö. "On the way we met an old, unusually-learned naljorpa. John and Wangchuk objected to his presence. We eventually lost sight of him near Vajrayogini's sanctuary, and six month later pilgrims found the body of His Holiness in one of the caves there. I swear this man was the Dalai Lama in disguise. But there is no way of knowing this with any certainty. Asya talked to him at length. Maybe she knows more, but she never spoke of their conversations or mentioned the man later."

Fritz carefully hid his interest in this information. To change the subject he asked her, how much a woman could know about the fundamental truths of the inner Tantra. "I mean, by herself without having been taught these precepts." Drölma laughed. "Everything! Look, someone must have first had these insights of the unity of all opposites and the illusory nature of all our experiences. It wasn't the historical Buddha. The Tantra was conceived by the yogini consorts of the great teachers from Orgyen. Read the texts I recommended to you, and you will see with your own eyes." She looked at him with her knowledgeable, penetrating eyes. "Are you talking about Leah?" Fritz nodded, embarrassed. "Leah," said Drölma with a warning look at Fritz, "is no innocent adoring fifteen-year-old as I was when I became the consort of my Lama. She is intelligent, sensitive, *and* knows, despite that she has never had any formal instructions. Such people exist, and all of those I met were women. Asya was one of them, she taught me many things my teacher could not have known as a Tibetan man. You are lucky to have convinced Leah to be your consort. Pay homage to her!" Fritz nodded, abashed.

Asya sent word that she longed for Leah. "She misses you terribly," said Drölma. "John is working for three months in Angkor Wat, and your mother is flying one crazy rescue mission after another, which no one else but she would dare to undertake. She is constantly challenging her fate. Not even she, who is so strongly convinced of the illusory nature of death, should do that. She has become reckless."

Leah promised to fly to Kathmandu, and Fritz asked to join her. He wanted to meet John and Asya, besides he had never been to Kathmandu. He did not say so, but Drölma's description of their meeting with the mysterious naljorpa twenty-five years ago had greatly increased his preoccupation with Leah's potential tulkama nature.

3

Asya waited for them in the chaos of Kathmandu airport, the flight was late and the passport control as slow as ever. Leah spied Asya first and ran ahead to hug her. When Fritz appeared behind her. Asya stared transfixed at the smiling Lama. "Mother, this is Fritz whom I wrote you about." said Leah in confusion. Asya seemed completely absentminded. Tears began to run down her cheeks. Finally she said confused, "Please, forgive me, Fritz, I also married a Lama, and seeing you suddenly brought back those memories in a flash." She hugged Fritz. "I welcome you with all my heart." She held him at arms length, looked at him, and, her voice failing her, whispered, "Where did she find you. Blond hair, blue eyes! Leah should live outside my karma." Asya pulled herself together and asked, "When were you born?" Bewildered Fritz said dryly, "Thirty-one years ago." Asya nodded. "Give me some time. I'll explain myself to you. This is all too much, too fast." Leah, still angry at her mother's tearful scene, looked at the two. She had no clue as to what had overcome Asya. Mother had aged. Her short hair had turned gray, but she was still slender and for her fifty-six years as limber as ever. She appeared exhausted and tired. Leah thought, it must be her mad flying schedule. We should take her away from Kathmandu to some quiet place where she can recover and we could talk. "Mother," she said, "Can you take time off? Would you come with us to Haaniban for a few days? There is so much to talk about." Asya smiled at her. "Let's go home. I first have to get over my surprise about this unusual Lama you brought home."

People began looking at them. Asya took Fritz by the arm. "Let's go outside where we are unobserved. Suresh will collect your luggage." They forced their way through the throngs of taxi drivers to a desolate field that served as auxiliary parking lot. Asya said. "I will explain everything to you when we get home." Suresh had parked the car a distance away and was honking. They began to walk. Asya looked at Fritz sideways. In a low, tense voice she said, "Who was your father?" Fritz stared at her. "I have never known him. My mother said he was a German tourist." A few paces further he suddenly stopped and asked, "Do you know my father?" Asya looked up at him, "I think so. But this is no place to discuss him." Suresh, was proudly sitting at the wheel of a Japanese four-wheel-drive. He jumped out. "Hallo, Miss Leah." He said. Leah introduced him to Fritz, "Suresh, this is Geshe Sonam Rinpoche, we call him by his German name Fritz." Suresh bowed formally. "Welcome to Kathmandu, Your Highness." Fritz smiled. "Do call me Fritz Rinpoche."

On the way Asya asked about their journey, the news from Drölma. "You must be tired!" "No," said Fritz. "I am wide awake. Who could have guessed that you know more about me than I do!" Leah blinked in surprise, and Asya motioned her to remain quiet.

They refreshed themselves and settled in the living room. Tika brought tea and cookies. Asya closed the door. "Fritz, is your mother's name Tsögyel?" Fritz nodded. Asya let herself sink into a chair, her arms dropped by her side. "You are the most unexpected surprise." She shook her head and stared at him, incredulous. "Leah, how did you find this man? You, who knows nothing about the events at the beginning of my Buddhist path? Fritz, you look so much like your father. His name was Richard. I had promised Richard that I would visit you in Chung Riwoche, but I never was able to arrange a trip there. Five years ago Richard died in California, before I could fulfill this promise to him. He was 85." She rose and kissed him.

Asya said, "John arrives in a few days. Yes, Leah, let's go to Haaniban. It's a good place." Asya looked intensely at Fritz, "John and Drölma are the only people who know this story." She described how she had met Richard in Lhasa, their visit with the old abbot of Chung Riwoche, the trek to Dingri with Tsögyel and her mother, their drive and the sheep. And in colorful detail her recollections of the dramatic scene in the emptiness of the High Plateau that led to Fritz's existence. Fritz listened in silence. Leah asked with large eyes, "And what did you do while Richard

and Tsögyel made love in the tent?" Asya smiled. "I was overcome by jealousy, which I only conquered on the following day when I decided to become Tsögyel's friend. On that day I understood *bodhicitta* for the first time. It was a wonderful experience. Giggling, Tsögyel and I hugged each other, we even milked the sheep together. Richard was happy." Asya interrupted her story. "Wait, I have two photos of us three. It will take a few minutes to find them." She disappeared upstairs.

Fritz rose and took Leah in his arms. "Your mother is a wonderful woman." He kissed her. "Thank you for bringing me here."

Asya returned with Ali's old photos. "In the morning after the sheep died, Tsögyel took us to a photographer in Dingri who made these photos of the three of us." She handed the first picture to Fritz. Leah peered over his shoulder. Fritz stared at the photo and said. "I had forgotten, but now remember that Mother used to have the same photo when I was very small. Leah, I told you, I had the vague notion that my father had been German. These photos must have been the reason. Mother must later have hidden or destroyed them to protect my status with the Lamas, who had started the rumor that I was, because of my blue eyes, a descendant of the Buddha." "Yes," said Asya, "your mother did have another set."

Leah and Fritz examined the photo: Tsögyel, her hand on her abdomen, Asya in Chinese disguise, and Richard in the attire of a Tibetan noble sitting in front of Everest at sunrise. "Where did you get these clothes from?" asked Leah. Asya described the commotion, the dust in the old garments, Ali, and the magnesium flash that blinded them all. Fritz looked closely at Richard, and rubbed his chin. "My father looks like King Songtsen Gyampo with his two wives, but the beard gives him away, Tibetans don't have such magnificent beards."

Asya handed him the second picture. "A White Tara as background!" cried Fritz. Asya smiled. "It was Richard's yidam!" He shook his head. "I have not told you how I first met Leah at the Fasching ball. She was 'disguised' as White Tara, and I first thought she was a Bavarian fairy queen." Still holding on to the photo of his father, Fritz recounted the surprises at the ball.

At Leah's request Suresh drove them to Haaniban Resort, the former Royal Elephant Preserve high above Patan and the Pharping Vajrayogini sanctuary. The tourist season was over, the bungalows were empty. They had the place to themselves.

During the day they went on a hike to a neighboring hill. Fritz told Asya of their walk in the snow to Kirchsee. On the way back, while Leah talked about Drölma, Fritz mulled over how to approach the question of the potential role of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Leah's conception.

From a gazebo on Haaniban Hill one has, on a clear evening, a spectacular panoramic view of the highest peaks of the Himalayas. They were having tea there after dinner when Fritz mentioned that Drölma had told him that she, Asya, John, and Wangchuk had been to the Pemakö. "This is the sanctuary I always wanted to see. Is it as beautiful as everyone says?" Asya raised her hands. "I prefer the stark emptiness of the desert around Chung Riwoche to the overgrown, dripping jungles of the Pemakö. But I did not grow up on the High Plateau longing for trees and grass. And, of course, the paradise of Vajrayogini is much more auspicious than the hallucinatory rocks above Chung Riwoche." She sighed. "Drölma had suggested this pilgrimage to help John and me find a new beginning."

"And did you?" Fritz asked expectantly. Asya looked across the smoggy Kathmandu Valley. The wall of the high mountains were turning a silky mauve. "There," she pointed at the notch where the Friendship Highway comes down from the plateau. "Behind those mountains is Drintang where I met John, where he rescued Richard and me from being snowed-in in one of Padmasambhava's caves. Fritz, our life has been a long up and down. I don't know whether Vajrayogini had her hand in it, but Leah was conceived in a tremendous thunderstorm in Vajrayogini's inner sanctuary. Ever since, Leah has been my *raison d'être*. She saved our marriage at that time."

"Mother," begged Leah, "I have never heard this story. You told Fritz about the unusual circumstances that led to his existence, will you tell us about mine and about you and John?"

They watched the light on the mountains slowly wane, it was not a spectacular sunset. "It's so beautiful and quiet here," said Asya, "maybe this is a good time to tell you about my life before your arrival. Yes, you two should know."

A servant brought a storm light and asked whether he could bring them anything else. Asya laughed. "Bring me an ice cream. I used to love ice cream when I was young. Haven't had one for years." The waiter bowed, "Madam, would you like a liqueur with it." Asya glanced at Leah and said to Fritz, "We never drink alcohol." She almost frivolously raised her chin and addressed the waiter. "Yes, I'll have a *creme de menthe*, please." Leah laughed happily. "Mother you are being reckless!"

Asya smiled looking at the mauve mountains behind which lay the Tibet that she had never seen again. "That is how I used to be, reckless, when I agreed to join Richard on his trek, but I was also frightened of the powers that lurked everywhere in Tibet. I met Richard at the restaurant on top the Banak Shöl guest house in Lhasa. There were candles on our table, and the wind kept blowing them out. We had to light them several times." Her voice trailed off, "It was Richard's sixtieth birthday."

It got cold and Leah went to get a blanket for her mother. "Could you order me a glass of red wine from the main lodge?" asked Asya. Leah lovingly wrapped up Asya, and the waiter brought three glasses of wine and a generous bowl of nuts. Leah raised her glass. "Let's drink to you, to Fritz's father, and to this unusual evening."

Asya continued her tale. "The trek to the Pemakö was not as reckless as the one with Richard. Wangchuk had hired Sherpas to carry our gear, and he knew the area well from the days of the Khampa uprising. He was an excellent guide, but resented my presence. Drölma prevented a serious collision between us. Somewhere on our way down from the high pass to the Tsangpo we met an old naljorpa whom Wangchuk and John ignored. The man spoke English astonishingly well. He talked to me walking at the end of our group. Somewhere he vanished only to reappear suddenly and mysteriously at Rinchenpuk Gompa two days later, when one of the monks there tried to hypnotize me."

With a laugh Fritz asked, "How in the world did he do that and what for?" Asya looked at him mischievously and drank a sip of her wine. "You mean, Fritz Geshe, you don't know how to ensnare an unsuspecting woman?" Fritz got a red face. "It was not I who ensnared your daughter. I really wouldn't know how." Asya giggled. "Of course not, you are a half-reformed Kargyüpa. The Nyingmapa are very good at that."

"The mysterious naljorpa prevented the worst and then browbeat Wangchuk to allow him to join us on the last three days of our trek into the inner sanctuary. There he vanished without a trace for the second time."

Fritz took a swig of the wine and nervously stuffed himself with a handful of nuts. His hands trembled when he picked up the glass. However, not he but Leah asked the critical question. "Any idea who he was? Did he tell you his name?" Asya looked into the night. "He did not tell me his name nor titles. I really don't know who he was, the Dalai Lama on his last trip? I can see Fritz is thinking of that." She looked at Fritz's face etched against sinking light in the sky. "Fritz is older than you, Leah. He remembers the commotion that ensued when, months later, the dead body of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was found in one of the caves of the inner sanctuary. But none of the good Buddhists in our group suspected at the time. that this rundown naljorpa could be the most famous man in Asia. Remember Fritz, everybody knew him. Pictures of His Holiness had a higher value than hard currency in Tibet. Who knows who this naljorpa was."

Asya fell silent. "That night we took a bath in one of the hot springs when two thunderstorms converged on us simultaneously. We ran for the nearest cave just in time. Lightning struck a tree right next to the pool we had been sitting in minutes earlier. As the tree burnt like a torch, the heavens opened. John and I made love. Every few seconds a flash of lightening came down. I saw the naljorpa surrounded by singing Dakinis fly in fiery sky. Overwhelmed, I lost consciousness. John had to revive me."

She dropped her hands and whispered. "That was the night you were conceived." Leah looked shaken. Fritz stared at Asya with burning eyes. In a whisper that echoed Asya's he asked, "Do you believe Leah is the reincarnation of His Holiness for whom we have been searching for the past twenty years?"

Asya did not answer. She stared stone-faced into the storm light. Tears began to run down her drawn cheeks. Leah suddenly spoke in a barely restrained whisper. "Fritz, I want to be my own person not the reincarnation of a dead Lama."

Fritz continued in a voice tense with excitement. "Some events in our lives are products of our karma which are beyond our control." He took a deep breath and continued calmer. "Asya, dear woman, you are the only one who can solve this puzzle, did you then think that Leah was the tulkama of the naljorpa?"

Asya covered her face with her hands. "You force me to confess. At the time of her conception I thought she was

the naljorpa's reincarnation. And foreseeing that *they* would take her away from me, I never told anybody of this fear, except John. The turmoil after the dead Dalai Lama was discovered only stiffened my resolve. Leah was *my* precious child, *my* hope, and *my* deliverance."

Leah said vehemently. "This is foolish superstition. I don't care what the Lamas think, want, or teach. Their rules only serve to prolong their power and control. Look at yourself, Fritz Tulku! Karma or not, I will never submit to being forced into this role." She rose and walked off into the night.

Fritz, surprised by Leah's violent reaction, stared baffled at Asya and said. "Leah cannot imagine what this could mean. Together we could rescue Tibet from its quandary. The spiritual power would be hers!"

Asya shook her head. "Fritz, you don't know how to handle a woman. Go and find her, be nice to her and calm her down, and don't breathe a word about your ambitions."

They met for a late breakfast in the gazebo. Fritz was his most charming. He brought Leah and Asya coffee and fresh croissants. In the valley below a cement factory spewed clouds of gray dust, smoke, and steam into the air which slowly enveloped Kathmandu. John would arrive in the late afternoon. Asya had asked Suresh to pick him up and bring him to their hideaway. They would not have to go down into smoggy Kathmandu. Leah had recovered her composure, and Fritz began to explain the historical origins of the reincarnation system. In the early days the position of head lama passed from uncle to nephew. By the 15th century the Tibetan monasteries had sunk into such a state of nepotism and corruption that the great Tsongkapa decided to "reform" the monastic system and founded the Gelug order. Celibacy became the rule among the Gelugpa, and the question arose on how to secure a successor to their Great Lama. Tsongkapa solved this problem by a doctrine which declared the Gelugpa Great Lamas reincarnations of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. By the 16th century the Gelugpa had assumed the power in Tibet, and the Chinese Emperor Altan Khan bestowed the title *Dalai Lama*, "Great Ocean," a Mongolian word, on their Great Lama. When a Dalai Lama died, a young boy was found by complicated rules, extensive tests, and the help of the State Oracle, who would be declared the reincarnation of the dead Dalai Lama. Tulkus of lower Lamas or heads of monasteries were selected and endorsed by the Dalai Lama."

He eyed Leah. "This is the history of this institution. As you have said, this system was, however ingenious, indeed an arbitrary convention to conserve the power of the Great Lamas and the Gelug order."

Fritz rose and wandered about with his hands clasped behind his back. Asya smiled. "Richard holding forth! How I resented Richard's lecturing! Yet, I learned so much from his discourses. You are very dear, Fritz."

Fritz frowned. "Please let me finish this story. Because then came the great debacle. In 1923 the Thirteenth Dalai Lama made the prophesy that after his death terrible times would befall Tibet. His successor would be the last Dalai Lama. These terrible times, which the bickering Lama hierarchy brought upon their own heads, nearly wiped out Tibetan culture. Yet, His Holiness the exiled Fourteenth performed a miracle of safeguarding the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism by spreading it in the West. All during his lifetime he maintained that *his* successor, if there ever would be one, would be born in the West. He finally disappeared without a trace. The note found on his body, predicting that his reincarnation would be a girl, only added consternation to the confusion of the High Lamas in Dharamsala."

He turned to Leah. "I agree with you that we do no longer need the tulku system to conserve the power of the orders or of Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism is spreading on its own like wildfire. But there is still the quandary of Tibet. How to save my motherland and its people from being wiped out, from becoming extinguished by persecution and from being overpowered by hordes of imported Chinese immigrants?"

Fritz swept his arms and let them drop in mid-air like two dead birds. In Asya's mind his gesture evoked Tsvetaeva's poem to Pasternak, which she and Richard had recited to each other on the roof of the Banak Shöl.

*"Rassoili... Stena da rov.
Rasselili, nas, kak orlov—..."*

*"...Divided... by wall and ditch.
Ripped asunder, us, like eagles—..."*

Fritz tilted his head and looked at her uncomprehending, while Leah exclaimed exasperated. "Mother, not one of your creepy Russian poems!"

Asya's eyes were far away. "Richard translated this one for me in Lhasa. You are the two eagles, separated by wall and ditch, like Marina and Pasternak" She turned to Fritz. "Never mind, Fritz, continue your impassioned speech!"

Fritz, deep in thought, resumed his pacing. "Asya's revelation last night inspired a dream." He stopped before Leah. "I saw us, you and me, rescuing Tibet from the Chinese yoke. Tibet will never be saved by liberal Western fantasies nor by the High Lamas in Dharamsala. We need a shocking, new, secular approach to the Tibetan-Chinese problem. A spiritual 'theocracy,' which is so suspect to the a-religious Chinese, is of no use." He looked expectantly at Leah. "We need a practical approach, not tainted by religion, which assures the Chinese that they will not lose Tibet to the Western powers."

Leah caught by Fritz's intensity asked. "So you are neither suggesting an uprising nor a 'Free Tibet'?" Fritz suddenly seeing hope doubled his efforts. "Exactly. Tibet can no longer exist by itself. Everything except tsampa and yak butter is trucked into Lhasa from China over three-thousand kilometers of terrible roads, grain, rice, meat, cars, and all the consumer goods Tibetans are craving today." Leah nodded. "I have seen that with my own eyes. But how will you achieve any kind of autonomy in Tibet, if it remains part of China?" He raised his shoulders and made a begging gesture with his hands. "Form a secular, Chinese-speaking, moderate Tibetan government who can negotiate an end to Chinese immigration into Lhasa and replace the Chinese police! That will be the beginning." He stopped pacing, stared at her fanatically, and threw all rational precaution to the winds. "This is where you come in."

Leah saw his burning eyes. He has gone crazy, she thought, how can I be instrumental in this plan. Fritz seemed to guess her doubts. "You could have a totally novel effect on the Chinese. You should be the leader of that Tibetan government." She shook her head. "I am neither Tibetan nor a politician, how can I be a candidate for such a position? I am a woman, and the Tibetans are religious and conservative traditionalist!"

His voice became urgent. "If you were declared the reincarnation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the Tibetans would carry you on their shoulders. You would have to do almost nothing. I am being groomed for a high position in Dharamsala, but I don't have the charisma to win the people of Tibet like you could. Yet that is not what is on my mind. Before you use your female charm on the Tibetans, I need your intellectual abilities, your training in political science, your understanding of the Chinese mentality, and your linguistic capabilities to persuade the Chinese. Together we would be invincible."

Leah stared at him. "Invincible? Are you power-hungry? I am resolved to be your female consort, but your idea that I should become the head of the Tibetan government is lunacy and hubris."

Fritz dropped into a chair, clasped his head between his hands, and mumbled. "Maybe I have to modify my ideas." Asya who had been watching their argument with rising fascination, suggested, "You are much closer to an agreement than you might realize. Let us present the case to John, he will arrive tonight. Could you go for a long walk? I have to talk to him first. Too much has happened of which he knows nothing as yet."

As they got up to leave Leah said, "Mother, would you let Fritz and me present our ideas, Please!" On their walk Fritz tried to once more explain his vision to Leah.

When they met John that night, there was no time to discuss the rescue of Tibet or Leah's reincarnation. Unraveling Fritz's past for John took up the evening. Asya watched the two so entirely different men slowly reaching out for each other. Fritz the astute and sharp Kagyü High-Lama tried awkwardly to cross the hierarchical barriers between John and himself. It was John the older, by now the elegantly long-haired, graying Ningmapa who finally took Fritz by surprise. He simply put his arms around him, rubbed Fritz's forehead, and exclaimed, "I would be honored to receive you learned man in this family! But are you ready to leave an assured career in the Sangha, the community of monks? I did that, but my stakes were not nearly as high as yours." Fritz smiled shyly. "That and our future, Leah's and mine, are part of the question which we want to present to you. Leah and I have tried to work out a plan since yesterday. I need your experience and judgment. Leah has agreed to be my consort. One day we want to get married. I am considering to leave the Sangha, which poses no intrinsic problem as a Kargyüpa. Still, as you say, I would have to forego a promising career in Dharamsala's Gelugpa hierarchy. Leah's is more important to me."

Asya, foreseeing a passionate debate, intervened. Quietly she begged, "I am tired after the excitement of these three days. It's late. Let us all have a good night's sleep and postpone this discussion until tomorrow."

"The time is right," began Fritz on the following morning. "His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and his Gandhian philosophy have passed away. Think about the question, why the Tibetans since his death have not revolted against the Chinese presence! The monks are dispirited and headless, and the general population has adapted to the advantages of the Chinese presence. And "Communist" China has eased its pressure and is approaching a turning point. The Olympics will be held in Beijing in a few years. This show will be the beginning of the end of the old hard-core Communist regime!"

He waved his hand. "The time is right to think of forming a secular Tibetan government, independent of the suspect religious Lama establishment. I am not the only one in Dharamsala who sees this need. Leah and I have worked out an ambitious plan. Leah's conception in the Pemakö on the day on which the Fourteenth died will be sufficient to have her declared the long-sought-after *tulkama* of His Holiness. Do we agree that according to Tibetan doctrine she is his reincarnation?"

He made a pause and glanced at John who, expressionless, was waiting for Fritz's next move. Fritz opened his palms. "Leah objects vehemently to this idea." He paused to look at Asya and continued patiently. "I have tried to convince her. She would not have to shoulder the responsibilities of that entitlement. She has not been properly educated for that position and is too old to go through the necessary religious training." He looked reproachfully at John, shrugged and chuckled. "Not to mention her strong aversion against the Gelugpa establishment!"

Asya looked questioningly at her daughter, to her surprise Leah sided with Fritz. "Fritz's plan is so ingenious that he won me over last night. In fact, his ideas are sufficiently subversive that one should be careful talking about them. After I have been 'inaugurated' in Dharamsala, Fritz, my 'discoverer,' mentor, and Lama will resign from the Sangha, to become a presidential candidate for the new secular government."

Fritz explained. "The idea of a secular Tibetan government is not new. In fact, His Holiness the Fourteenth mentioned twice during his last years that he would resign as head of the exile government in Dharamsala. I expect that I can rally the younger, progressive members of the Dharamsala establishment behind me. I know them well. The important, new aspect is that we are now two people: Leah will provide the charisma, which I don't have, and the spiritual power for my election campaign as the head of the Tibetan government. Yet she will be politically inoffensive as far as the Sangha *and* the Chinese are concerned."

Leah interrupted Fritz and declared triumphantly, "I plan to be pregnant by then!" Fritz blushed embarrassed. "I am afraid we may have to postpone that for a while."

"Wow," grinned John, "Leah, the Dakini of the Future, campaigning pregnant!" He began to laugh, "Carrying your own tulku!?" but immediately turned serious again. "Fritz, I admire your daring to believe that you can handle the Lamas in Dharamsala. Will it be that easy? However, I could imagine that Leah might seduce the Tibetans. Assuming this works according to your ambitious dreams, how are you going to sway the Chinese to accept you and give you the freedom to act? Tibet, despite the recent slackening of Chinese rule, is neither an independent free democracy at present, nor is it truly autonomous."

Fritz looked pleadingly at John and, putting his clasped hands to his lips, elaborated. "Tibet can never be independent from China, this would be economic suicide. We have seven years before the Olympics. During that time Leah and I will try to take advantage of the softening ideological situation in China, go to Beijing and negotiate an agreement. We will attempt to reduce the Chinese police presence in Tibet and stop Beijing's support of Chinese immigration to Lhasa, in exchange for guarantees that the new Tibetan civilian government would work to keep Tibet an autonomous province of China. These negotiations will rely heavily on Leah's experience and her understanding of the Chinese. She will have to carry a large burden, but as a Western woman with a knowledge of Chinese, she might shock the Chinese off-guard!"

Leah added, "During the next few years the Chinese will further relax their hold on Tibet, if only as a show of goodwill before the world descends on Beijing."

Asya shook her head. "Your father, Fritz, was a great demagogue. Burnt by his experiences during World War II, he resented this trait in others, but he was unable to suppress it in himself. Who could have predicted that his German genes would see its reincarnation in you, Fritz!"

Fritz stared at her. "I know, as a young Lama I have been berated many times for my 'over-sized ego', but a

difficult task calls for decisive action. We will never resolve the Tibetan dilemma by the soft Gandian approach of the Fourteenth. Tibet is not placid India, and the Chinese are decidedly not British.”

John laughed. “Not with the same words, but in the same spirit Richard defended his ego. It is a pity that the great Dzogchen teachers in Nepal are dead, they helped me over this hurdle.” Fritz protested. “But don’t you see, a certain demagoguery is required to save my and your Motherland. John, please remember that the Fourteenth spent over fifty years trying to ‘civilize’, in the English sense, the Chinese and neutralize their distrust of the religious mentality of the Tibetans. His people adored him like a Bodhisattva, and he got a Western Nobel Prize for his efforts, neither of which improved his rapport with the Chinese. The Tibetan question is still unresolved. My ‘demagoguery’ serves a good purpose!”

John relented. “Forgive me, I see and agree with this part of your argument. When I was your age, a group of young, radical Lamas tried to stage an uprising against the Fourteenth. He nearly got shot once. Although I am not a friend of the Chinese I would now rather subscribe to your approach, if you can make it work.” Fritz exclaimed impassioned, “Please, John, do hear me, I am asking for the hand of your daughter, without her this plan is naught.”

John lowered his eyes. “You two decide this matter among yourselves. I have no objections, and you have my blessing for your daring plan.” John thought for a while and then said, “However, I still have two possibly decisive questions. Will the Chinese let you campaign in Tibet, and will you be recognized as candidate by the Tibetan government in Lhasa. You fled Chung Riwoche. This may be held against you. You are an exile representative, not a native Tibetan. Your ties to Tibet are purely religious. If the Chinese allow elections, I am sure there will be several local contenders for the position. Leah will remain your only trump card, and she too will have to be recognized by the secular Lhasa establishment. They have never recognized the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama chosen by the exile government.”

Fritz sat down and hung his head. “I know of some of the potential Lhasa competitors, but not personally. I had assumed that I would be able to outmaneuver them, but I have to discuss that with Leah, she has connections in Lhasa.”

Back in Munich they had a series of arguments. Encouraged by her father's objections Leah remained skeptical of Fritz's ambitious constructs. On the other hand she genuinely wanted to help him. She had agreed to be his consort. He was her Lama to whom she traditionally owed complete obeisance. Fritz never verbally insisted that she subjugate herself to him, times had changed, but subconsciously, with his emotional forcefulness he tried again and again to put her into such a place. He wanted her to ferry out potential collaborators when she would go to Lhasa and Beijing to work on her doctoral thesis. She had the conciliatory smoothness which he lacked. But her female instincts told her that he pursued unreal goals. She tried to remind him of the illusory nature of all rational constructions.

“What about your elaborate plans,” she had asked in a discussion about *atiyoga*. “Are they unreal too?” Fritz smiled as cunningly as the Dalai Lama used to. “Nominally they are, but you see, the great challenge is, how to act once you have understood this rather theoretical concept. Unless you die at the moment you become ‘enlightened’, you have to find some reason to continue living with this knowledge. A complete denial of the world has been the traditional Indian solution. My German genes have taught me another, to act full force with all my being in complete spontaneity. That is what I am trying to learn.” She reminded him that this might be possible in the West, but not in China.

Leah was flying high. She was glued to the window of the South China Airlines flight from Kathmandu to Lhasa. A mere thousand meters below her the icy peaks of the Himalayas rushed by. She had never flown this spectacular route before. They had just passed over the valleys of the Lapchi and the Rongshar, where her mother had met John. To the left behind the broad heights of Mt. Shishibangma hid the Kyirong Valley, her grandfather's homeland. Cho Oyu, Mt. Tseringma, Lhotse, and triangular Makalu followed each other so closely that she could only identify Chomolungma-Everest. The deep cut of the gorge of the Arun, which to the north got lost in the brown hills of the High Plateau. Somewhere there was Chung Riwoche, Fritz's monastery. For a few minutes she could see simultaneously the dark wooded mountains of the Nepalese Khumbu and three-thousand meter higher the brown desert of the Tibetan Plateau. Then the spectacle was over. She was sailing over Tibet's barren vastness, less than a half-an-hour to Lhasa airport.

The past year had been turbulent. Fritz and she had worked as never before, leaving little time for deeper explorations. Leah now spoke a passable Tibetan. She had won a generous German doctoral fellowship at the Institute of Nationalities in Beijing. She would research the history of Tibetan-Chinese relations during the last 30 years. The visa in her pocket was for one year with special permission to spend two months collecting material for her thesis in Lhasa.

They had just spent two weeks in Kathmandu. In the evenings Asya had continued to tell them the story of her life, of her first flight in Christian's airplane, the curing of the blind in Lo Manthang and Drölma's first dance retreat with Richard and John. The pictures of Asya's tales, past and present, mingled with Fritz's descriptions of his life in Chung Riwoche and her own memories of Nepal and Lhasa to produce a kaleidoscopic vision of Tibet and the future.

While in Kathmandu Asya had taken them on a flight up the Kali Gandakhi gorge to Lo Manthang, where Fritz, to his embarrassment, had been received with all the honors due his position in Dharamsala. A timely warning that he had to divest himself of his official position in the Tibetan exile government before he could operate as his own representative in Tibet.

Fritz would spend the time in Dharamsala. She would not see him for months. A snag had developed in their planning. Fritz was still considered a Chinese citizen, he would need a special dispensation to visit China or Tibet. Much to his chagrin he had found out that he would not be allowed to visit Chung Riwoche.

Leah sighed. Once again skeptical, she was doubting that she would receive much encouragement for Fritz's plan.

The plane had gone into a deep banking turn over the Tsangpo valley. She could see the widely spread-out river near Samye monastery. They were rapidly losing altitude. The shallow river arms and sand banks below formed abstract designs of fantastic organic shapes, eyes, and animals. The plane hit the concrete runway rather hard: Lhasa Airport.

The Lhasa she had known had turned into a Chinese city, windy, temporary, dusty avenues lined by crippled plane trees, which refused to grow at this altitude. Chinese policemen directing traffic at the intersections. A profusion of Sichuan restaurants. On the way from the airport they had passed the new railway station at the Western fringe of town a large, open construction site. Many more of the old Tibetan houses had been razed and been replaced by Chinese apartment buildings. The newest ones were functional and Western style, but the corrugated sheet-metal roofs of the loveless, gray, and ugly older buildings had rusted, they looked like warehouses. The vast "Freedom Square" facing the Jokhang, Lhasa's cathedral, had deteriorated in the last ten years, the Potala overlooking the city, reduced to a tourist attraction. Only the Barkhor, the circumambulation route, was still the Tibetan marketplace she remembered, chaotic, full of pilgrims from every corner of Tibet in felt boots, thick, dusty coats and jaunty hats, men and women, their children trailing behind. Pilgrims prostrated themselves before the Jokhang, the smoke from juniper offerings drifted across the square. She took a deep breath of the acrid smoke to restore her sense of place.

Out of curiosity she took one of the 'better' rooms at the Banak Shöl where Asya and Richard had stayed. She could have easily afforded an upscale hotel. The Banak Shöl appeared like Asya had described it, run down but not quite ready to fall apart. If one knew when, there was hot water in her bathroom for an hour. On the verandah, under much shouting and surrounded by empty beer bottles a group of Khampa traders played the age-old betting

game with three dice in a leather cup and cowry shells as counters. That too hadn't changed. And then she discovered the 'restaurant' under the awnings on the roof where Asya and Richard must have met one night thirty-five years ago. Prayer flags flapped noisily in the wind. She shook her head, the old Lhasa was still alive, hidden in the nooks and crannies of town.

Towards morning Leah was awakened by the fierce howling of the stray dogs of town. During the day they slept only to chase each other in packs through the streets all night. She shuddered, glad not to be out there. She followed one high voice moving in circles for half an hour until the animal could only more yowl hoarsely.

She knew one family from her previous visit in Lhasa. Seeing the ubiquitous cell phones everybody carried, she tried hers, and to her amazement the voice of her friend Lhamo came through clear and loud, *wei*—hallo? Leah began to explain herself in Chinese, but hearing the excitement in her friend's voice tried her Tibetan. "Leah, how come you speak Tibetan?" Leah switched to English. "My Tibetan is still so clumsy. Will you have patience with me?" They quickly agreed to meet at her friends' apartment at night.

Lhamo, several years older than Leah, had been an English student at the university in Nanjing, Leah's first authentic Tibetan friend. Not to arouse the attention of the university officials, fraternization between Chinese and foreign students was not encouraged, they met clandestinely. In a park, at an outing on bicycles, or in one of the small restaurants, never in their dormitory rooms, or when other students were present. This secrecy had only brought them closer together. As so often in China Lhamo's two children had remained in Lhasa with Tenzin, Lhamo's husband, while she studied in Nanjing, silent hostages to guarantee that she would not defect. Tenzin had been educated in China and occupied an elevated position in the Tibetan administration, which had made Lhamo's studies possible. When Leah came to Lhasa after her year in Nanjing, they had received her with open arms.

A head smaller than Leah, Lhamo's round, down-to-earth figure belied her quick mind and intelligence. Standing on her toes she hugged Leah and kissed her. How well Leah remembered her lively cheerfulness in comparison to their cool, inhibited Han-Chinese co-students in Nanjing. Lhamo lived in one of the drab, new Chinese apartment buildings. It even had an elevator! "Oh," said Lhamo, "we moved here from our old place when Tenzin was promoted. It's a building for government employees, and much more comfortable. Did the elevator work? It often doesn't." Leah nodded and looked around. The apartment was spotless and comfortably furnished with a mixture of Tibetan and Western style pieces, from Hong Kong she guessed. "No, no," said Lhamo, "we had the furniture made here. Imported furniture is very expensive. But you are right, we are much better off than on your last visit. Tenzin had just returned from Beijing then. We had many problems." Leah looked at her questioning. "You didn't notice?" asked Lhamo. "We thought it better not to talk about the fact that Tenzin had been demoted to a post in Beijing because of his advocacy of greater autonomy for Tibet. While I was in Nanjing he spent five years in Beijing before he was rehabilitated and had just returned when you came."

Tenzin Nicheng had been a man of few words, a good match to his vivacious wife. On her first visit Leah had attributed his silence to his lack of English, now she found out that he had been concealing a troubled past: Believing that Tibet's future lay in cooperation with China, Tenzin had joined the Communist party. Gifted as he was, he had been sent to Shanghai's Fudan University and afterwards was given an important job in the Tibetan regional administration. But he was no conformist and openly voiced his critique of the irregularities in the administration and the infringements of the police on the constitutional rights and freedoms of his countrymen. His Chinese boss had voiced his displeasure, then there were public reprimands, and finally, just as Lhamo was to leave for Nanjing, he had been transferred to a minor administrative position in Beijing.

"Who cared for the children?" asked Leah. "You were always so cheerful in Nanjing. I would have never guessed the stress you must have been under." Lhamo looked down. "I left the children with my mother. I was often tempted to speak my mind to you, but that would have been dangerous. My relationship with you was risky enough. Tenzin was not allowed to visit me in Nanjing during that time." She smiled at Leah. "Like the Chinese we have learned to hide our emotions and especially our troubles. But now everything is fine. They could not find a man to replace him here, and after several of the old, hard-core bosses here and in Beijing had died, politics eased up, and Tenzin was rehabilitated and called back. He is now deputy secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and might become its secretary next year." "And you," asked Leah, "what do you do?" "Oh, I teach English at Lhasa University. I am the chairman of the English department. With so many tourists visiting Tibet, there is a

growing interest in speaking English and making money."

"Do you still like Tibetan tea?" asked Lhamo, as they settled on cushions at a low table. Leah nodded, and their daughter, a bright, slender girl of eighteen with long, black braids and fabulous white teeth poured the salty milk tea.

Leah quietly mulled over this information. She suddenly guessed that Tenzin would be the man against whom Fritz would have to compete in his bid for leadership in Tibet. She liked Lhamo's spontaneity, and now she would have to be uncharacteristically cautious with her words.

"You are much quieter than I remember you," said Lhamo promptly. Leah tried to hide her painful vacillations. "I have a German stipend to collect material at the Beijing Institute of Nationalities for a doctoral dissertation on the past and present relation between China and Tibet. I had no idea that Tenzin could be the ideal person to help me understand the recent developments and the near future of that relationship." She checked herself, don't say any more, let him tell you what he thinks.

Tenzin had appeared and looking at her inquisitively said laconically. "The relationship between Tibet and China is a long and delicate subject. The West has not been too helpful. Maybe we can discuss this matter on your way back, when you have done your work in Beijing." Lhamo tried to smooth over Tenzin's rebuke. "You are coming back to Lhasa, aren't you?"

Leah took the straw. "Yes, for a few weeks next fall." She was relieved, she needed to think about how better to broach her questions. This was China where you did not attack a sensitive problem directly. Tenzin remained taciturn, and Lhamo did all the talking. She asked Leah about her parents in Kathmandu, her studies, and finally made her describe life in Munich.

Thinking of Fritz, she decided to introduce him as her Tibetan teacher. "I have to tell you a strange story. Like my mother I fell in love with a Lama, whom I met on a Munich Fasching ball. He is the professor in Munich who taught me Tibetan. His adopted German name is Fritz. When he was six, he was a child Lama at Chung Riwoche. Later the Lamas smuggled him to India." Lhamo greatly enjoyed her description of the ball and their trek home in the fog. Leah described Fritz's awkwardness, and how Western dance had become a true craze with him, a 'fast vehicle to gain Buddhist insights.' Lhamo showed genuine surprise, and Leah had to give a detailed explanation how that worked. Tenzin smiled for the first time. He had to ask his daughter whether she had already discovered this path. Fritz was hoping to be able to visit his old Tibetan monastery in Chung Riwoche, as soon as the entry regulations for exile Tibetans would relax.

On her way back to the guest house, letting the events of the evening pass, she was besieged by her old misgivings, enlarged by new doubts. Here was a well-educated, worldly man, who had worked his way up through the Chinese administration. The sober future secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region! Although Tenzin had not described his philosophy, he was probably as critical of the circumstances as Fritz but more realistic than he. Tenzin's past difficulties with the Chinese attested to that. Fritz would not only be suspected of his affiliation with the exile government, even though he represented the opposition, but, as her father had pointed out, he would always be an outsider in Tibet. He had not suffered with them. To her bewilderment she found herself supporting Tenzin. Fritz's plans were unreal, her 'karmic relationship' with the Fourteenth was nonsense.

Laoshi Liu, the Tibetan specialist and professor at the Institute of Nationalities she had been assigned to, and Leah sat in chairs, placed Chinese style next to each other. On a small table between them covered with a crocheted doily stood two cups, a thermos of hot water, and a box of loose green tea. Her first audience with her new professor. She breathed a sigh of relief. At first sight Laoshi Liu appeared a kind, older man with wisps of white hair and twinkling eyes.

"*Ni hao*, how are you?" said Liu, "Welcome to China. I understand you want to study the history of the political relations between China and Tibet, a complex and treacherous subject. You are the daughter of a Lama who emigrated to America?" He paused, looked at her pensively, shook his head, and before she could correct this misinformation about her father he said. "Did you know that in Tibet the Lamas use the blood of children to fill the skull cups they use in their religious rituals?"

Leah stiffened and with a stony face rebuked him. "This is an infamous lie, they do no such thing!" Laoshi Liu shrugged. "Relax, don't judge too quickly. This I was told in all seriousness by a scientist from Stanford University, a third-generation Chinese-American." A smile moved across his face. "Obviously this is easily recognized as libelous nonsense, but sometimes this is not so easily detected. I am telling you this story to show you that the

territory between China and Tibet is mined with prejudices, fabrications, hyperbole, and fantasies, some very old. Imagine this tale was passed on unquestioned by an intelligent, young man from his Cantonese great-grandmother. You will have to guard against Chinese, Tibetan, and Western misinformation."

Leah reminded herself that in China one must never show one's anger. She said in a conciliatory tone, "Yes, that's also why I am here." Liu nodded. "The history of cooperation between Tibet and China goes back to the friendship treaty which concluded the Tibetan military expansion into China in the eighth and ninth century. It acknowledged Tibet as an independent kingdom. When in 1271 Khublai Khan became emperor of China he converted to Tibetan Buddhism to be able to assume the kingship in Tibet, which had fallen apart into several small kingdoms. The Great Lamas of the Sakyapa became Khublai Khan's regional representatives in Tibet, setting a precedence for the Lamas to act as secular rulers. This was the first administrative union between the two countries. After Tsongkapa's reforms the Gelugpa Great Lamas inherited that position, and Khublai's grandson bestowed the Mongol name *Dalai Lama* on them. You have seen the Great White Dagoba on the island in the Northern Sea in town? Prior to all these new high-rise buildings the *Bai Ta* was the landmark of Beijing. A Tibetan-Buddhist stupa, erected in the seventeenth century to commemorate the visit of the fifth Dalai Lama!"

He spread his arms, palms up, asking for Leah's indulgence. "This amicable relationship between China and Tibet lasted for more than four-hundred years until the Russians and the British, vying for influence in Tibet, derailed it in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, fearing the loss of Tibet and to affirm Chinese sovereignty, the Qing Dynasty chased the Thirteenth Dalai Lama out of Lhasa. The age of national independence had arrived in Asia. China was weak and Tibet far from Beijing. Tibet aspired autonomy from China, but the *Lamas*, fearful of Western influence, hermetically closed the country. After the Thirteenth died, rivalries among the High Lamas broke out. The pro-Chinese regent, the secular authority, had his adversary the personal Lama of the young Fourteenth imprisoned and finally poisoned. When in 1950 Tibet came close to civil war between the militant Lamas and the secular administration, the regent asked the Chinese for help. This is, in a nutshell, the history of Chinese-Tibetan relations. What followed you must have heard in many versions, and it will, I assume, become the main subject of your research. It was and still is a sorry story."

He smiled apologetically at Leah. "For many years I was advisor to the Chinese administration in Tibet. I am a Buddhist at heart and a scholar. I often disapproved of the way Beijing handled Tibet, there was too much force, too many violations of the most basic Confucian principles we Chinese hold sacred. But in the name of party discipline I was forced to remain silent and could only occasionally avert the worst in individual cases."

Fritz had spoken highly of Liu, he was one of the most knowledgeable Chinese Tibet experts, who spoke Tibetan well and had a balanced, sympathetic understanding of its history and people. Leah asked, "Why has the chasm between China and Tibet grown so deep recently, if they once were on such amicable terms?"

Avoiding her eyes Liu stared at the dead green-gray wall of his office. After a considerable time he combed his few hairs back with his hand and looked at her. "This question has troubled me all my life. There are Chinese official answers, a Tibetan explanation, and the West has still another view, which is mostly superficial and impractical. I could offer you my own ideas, but they are of little consequence or value. Maybe we should discuss this problem at another time, or can you express what you think is the reason?"

Leah realized that voicing her opinion was by Chinese etiquette tactless. If old, experienced Liu considered his personal view to be inconsequential, how could she, the young foreign student, voice hers? In China one was not encouraged to have private opinions on political subjects, and psychology was an unknown discipline. Was Laoshi Liu testing her mettle? But she had to start somewhere, and Liu had exposed his own thinking by admitting that the question troubled him. She decided to try to draw him out.

In her best Chinese she said, "Laoshi Liu, how can I, an inexperienced student, voice my view of this complex question, if you consider your own apprehensions insignificant?" Liu, again avoiding looking at her, said in a low voice. "But you are a Western woman who speaks surprisingly excellent Chinese. Maybe we can learn from each other." He turned and looked at her almost guiltily. "You must have grown up with this question."

She suppressed a smile, he was more candid than she had expected. "Often my Chinese is woefully inadequate for subtle conversations. Will you excuse me if I take resort to English? Your comprehension of English is probably better than my Chinese." He smiled and waved his hand. "Let us put Chinese politeness aside for the moment. What did your Lama father tell you?"

This conversation is taking an unexpected turn, she thought and said, "My father was born of emigrant Tibetan

parents in California. He graduated from Berkeley, but his parents had vowed that he should become a Lama. He entered the Berkeley Ningma Ling. Eventually he went to Nepal to study Dzogchen and then roamed the border area of Tibet. There he met my German-American mother, who took him back to California to study architecture. They live in Kathmandu. It happens that my father is a moderate and, because of his Ningma connection, neither a fanatical Dalai Lama follower nor blindly pro-Tibetan independence. He is more American than Tibetan."

Liu raised his brows. "So you grew up quite unaffected by this controversy? Is your father still a Ningmapa?" He must have been misinformed about me, she thought. "Father is still loosely affiliated with his Dzogchen friends, but he left the Sangha, when he married my mother, and I was born. My skeptical mother, who never became a practicing Buddhist, had a greater influence on me than father. This is why I decided to study Chinese."

"This is very interesting," said Liu. "Where did you learn Tibetan if not from your father?"

"Very recently, in Munich from a German-Tibetan professor.."

Liu looked straight at her. "What is his name." Leah gave Fritz's Tibetan name without his titles. "Oh," said Liu, "I know him. A very sensible man. I met him at a conference in India. Isn't he the leader of the opposition in Dharamsala?"

He was better informed than she had thought. Fritz had mentioned this meeting and had given Liu high grades for his moderation and imaginative thinking. "Yes," she said, "so you remember meeting him. Sonam Rinpoche had only good things to say about you."

Liu lowered his eyes. "Who would not remember a liberal Tibetan High-Lama with blue eyes!"

She put all cautions aside. "Well, when I left Munich Sonam Rinpoche asked me to be his *péi'yu*, his consort." Liu smiled and said in English, "My congratulations. In many ways Geshe Sonam Rinpoche shares my hope for the future of Tibet, unofficially, of course. Neither of us can afford to voice our views in public as yet. You understand?" She nodded relieved that her risky openness had worked. "Yes I do understand, and my relationship with Sonam Rinpoche is not official either."

"You can trust me," said Liu. "I admire your honesty. I now know what I can learn from you. Let us continue this conversation at a later time." He continued in English. "Feel free to ask me any question you want."

Leah had been given a room with a private bath at *Beijing Da Xue*, Beijing University usually reserved for foreign scholars. By comparison with the student dormitories it was luxurious, but to get to the center of town took an hour by bus. She worked at the library of the university except for one day a week, which she spent at the Institute of Nationalities. On these days she often invited Liu for lunch, his salary was so low that he couldn't afford to eat out.

They had found a small place where, braving the cold they could sit outside, the public dining area was too noisy to talk and so crowded that people waited in the isles to grab the chair when someone left. Not to be listened to they spoke English.

Liu teased her, "You still have not told me why Tibetans should be so different from us. You see, this question is difficult for a me to analyze, you have an outsider's view." She shrugged extending her hand towards him. "But this is simple to see. On the grassroots level it is Tibetan religiosity the Chinese are horrified by. I once visited the Jokhang with a widely traveled Chinese scientist. We watched a group of young girls prostrating themselves at the entry. The man commented on them: 'Isn't this submissive religiosity disgusting? There may still be superstition in China, but two-thousand years before Marx, Confucius already recognized that religion was bad for the people and refused to discuss God and Death.' Later the scientist passed out from the smell of the butter lamps."

Liu nodded. "Throughout history we have rejected all religious and ideological imports from the West as un-Chinese, or transformed them to our liking, like we changed Buddhism into Ch'an-Zen, a most Chinese version, precise, abstract, and immediate, no wordy, befuddled philosophical constructs."

"But you see," said Leah spreading her hands, "the Tibetans live in most terrifyingly empty spaces, not in the overpopulated low-lands of China. They are threatened by fierce spirits who need to be propitiated. They have a strong and vibrant imagination, which in China has been suppressed by the same two-thousand years of Confucianism, which makes living in such crowded quarters possible." Defending himself Liu crossed his arms before his chest. "I am still frightened by the open spaces of Tibet and the emotional aggressiveness of its people."

He gave a short laugh and looked around. "You would not live long in China, every time you act out what you say you would kill ten Chinese, it's so crowded here."

Leah blushed and apologized. "No, no," said Liu, "don't worry about me, it is exactly your open show of emotions, your sharp reactions which fascinate me. You are like a Tibetan horse, fast, full of energy, and with a hard-to-tame will all of your own." He made a pause and then asked timidly, "How can Sonam Rinpoche deal with you?"

It was Leah's turn to laugh. "Fritz Rinpoche is half-Tibetan and half-German, still it took me a while to learn how not to scare him." Liu looked at her surprised. "So that is the origin of his blue eyes. He told me they were a sign of his being descendent from the Buddha! His blue eyes can truly frighten a Chinese." "Well," she said with a laugh. "He was not putting you on, before he came to Munich, he half-believed that fable himself. The Lamas told him so."

Liu shook his head. "There you see, the Lamas will do anything to gain advantage. They are well organized and militant. Their large numbers have been a real threat to stability in Tibet since the fifties, especially when the Dalai Lama was still alive. You are right, the Chinese-Tibetan problem is all a consequence of our different attitudes towards religion. Our government made serious errors in trying to eradicate religion in Tibet."

"But the Dalai Lama is long gone," said Leah with some restraint. "The Lamas have never found his reincarnation. Why should it prove so difficult to resolve the Chinese-Tibetan dilemma?" Liu leaned back in his chair. "Things have improved in Tibet since the death of the Dalai Lama. Maybe a way to live with one another can be found. Of course, Tibet has to remain a part of China." Leah smiled at him and carefully said, "This is what my father, Fritz Rinpoche, and I think. How to approach this difficult problem? Can the Chinese police presence and the immigration be lessened?"

Liu remained silent for a while and looking at her, doubts in his eyes, finally said, "I told you, my opinion is of no practical consequence. The Chinese government will never accept a foreign-born Dalai Lama chosen by the exile High Lamas. You know what happened in the case of the Panchen Lama. First the Dharamsala exile government has to dissolve. It still makes unreasonable claims on Tibetan autonomous independence. Sonam Rinpoche's opposition has too little weight and influence. If he were to take over in Dharamsala everything would become much easier. This might make it possible to convene a conference to work out a viable Tibetan government which includes the Tibetan exile diaspora."

Leah tried to smile. "The suspicion and the past experiences of the Tibetan refugees will make such a radical change in Dharamsala difficult. There are a number of young people in the *kasha*, the exile-parliament, who support a rapprochement with Beijing. They are tired of the time-worn Fourteenth's pacifist approach. But many of them are no moderates, and the old memories will take years to die. What would Beijing be willing to offer as a compromise?"

Liu raised his eyes. "Do these people really want to return? The powerful incarnate Lamas maybe, the others will never adapt to today's Tibet. I am afraid these are illusions. I really don't know what will happen in the future. But it appears possible that our government might relax the military hold on Tibet during the next two years and allow younger, more liberal Tibetan people to form an administration in Lhasa. Sometimes I think Tenzin Nienchog would be the right man to head such a government." Leah nodded, "I have met Tenzin, a taciturn, honest and capable man. He is the husband of a friend of mine, the chair-woman of the English Department at Lhasa University."

So this was the Chinese view, mused Leah. It increased her sense of unreality. If ever, it would take years to convince the Chinese to accept Fritz and his followers and permit them to participate in free elections in Lhasa. Fritz's ambitious ideas were *Void*, empty illusions, speculations. Fritz with his passion and male eloquence had carried her away, against her better knowledge. She caught herself feeling relieved. No, she was not letting him down. If anyone could teach him this understanding, it would be she. She had to try, gently but firmly. A trivial experience drove this realization home. She had met a German sinologist who was pursuing his thesis research in Chinese literature. He spoke Chinese fluently, much better than she. To escape the stale food at the University cafeteria, he had invited her for dinner at one of the fashionable hotels. The place was immaculately run, modern Western decor, the personnel well trained and friendly. They found a table with a spectacular view of the growing city. A young girl brought them the extensive Western and Chinese menu. She was very shy, and then they noticed that the girls were all under twenty, children who stood in the shadows, holding their hands before their mouths, giggling. When the girl returned, Leah's companion read the dishes from the menu in English. She did not understand. Looking at her he repeated his order in Chinese. The girl lost her speech and froze. He got angry and

when he repeated the order for the third time she fled. "Strange," he said, "this happens to me often." Leah suddenly remembered Liu's remark about the frightening blue eyes. "It is your blue eyes," she said. "Look out the window. Let me handle this." Leah waved her hand and another girl appeared. She ordered in Chinese and was understood without further problems. "Well," said Leah. "A demonstration of the fear of the Chinese of the dreadful blue eyes. My fiancée has blue eyes. He is Tibetan. There, blue eyes are a sign of the Buddha. Fritz would have real problems in China proper."

The illusory nature of all things, Leah told herself. A pair of blue eyes could empty an entire construct of reality, blow it away like so many other constructs of the mind. Fritz would never be able to sway the Chinese. His Tibetan background, his emotional fervor, and his German blue eyes would scare them into complete irrationality.

Leah finished her thesis research and flew to Lhasa for another four weeks. She never saw Tenzin again. He either avoided her, or he was indeed in Beijing as Lhamo insisted. She would meet Fritz in Munich a few weeks after her return. A difficult mission lay before her, to persuade him that his plan to take over Tibet was unreal. His insistence that she was the reincarnation of the Fourteenth would hopefully fade away together with this fantasy.

5

Fritz arrived from India in dampened spirits. His attempts at rallying the younger members of the *kasha* behind him had failed. The majority had turned out to be militants who demanded demonstrations instead of negotiations. They pointed the developments in Eastern Europe as successful examples for how that should be done: Infiltrate Tibet and arouse the masses against the Chinese. In response the Dharamsala High Lamas, fearing for their own position, were stonewalling, despite positive signals from Lhasa and Beijing for a negotiated rapprochement. He had found his explorations most frustrating. During the following weeks Leah tried, mobilizing all her female charms, to convince him, that his high-flying plans had been illusionary from the very beginning. She related Liu's comments in detail and added, "If all of this weren't so, your emotional power and your blue eyes in the guise of a Tibetan Lama would terrify the Chinese. Liu considered even me a Tibetan race horse with too much energy and with a will of its own. Don't you agree?" He smiled at her and said, "My love, that is what I admire in you." She said, "Liu said something similar, and asked me, how Sonam Rinpoche was able to handle me." Fritz laughed, he had no trouble with her. Eventually Fritz acquiesced. He had reached too high. "My Supreme Lady, maybe that is the deeper reason why a man cannot gain full insight without actually living with a woman." In a low but serious voice Leah said, "Will you marry me, sometime soon?" Fritz raised his brows, and laughed, "Now that our future looks brighter, I would. I inquired, as Kargyüpa I wouldn't even have to leave the Sangha." Leah hugged him. "Can't you just simply say, yes I will?"

On Leah's wish they got married in Dietramszell. Asya and John flew in from Kathmandu. Drölma and Wangchuk were there and a few close friends, Jeremy and Stephanie, a couple of friends of Leah's and a student of Fritz's. Asya produced a surprise, a 90-year-old friend of Richard's. A tibetologist who lived in the former monastery next to the Dietramszell church! The local priest had agreed to let him assist in this unusual, ecumenical service. The bearded sage gave a speech invoking Fritz's father. He cleverly mixed German and Tibetan. Later he repeated the vows in Tibetan. Everyone was moved. Asya cried a few tears, and Fritz throughout expected the Fourteenth to suddenly appear and address Leah as his daughter. Afterwards they walked to the

Kirchsee, and had dinner at Kloster Reutberg. Leah was immensely happy.

As if this "spontaneous" act of *bodhicitta* had unknotted their karma a letter from Tenzin Nicheng arrived officially inviting Fritz and Leah for late September to Tenzin's inauguration as chairman of the new Tibetan government. A visit to Chung Riwoche could also be arranged. Fritz was baffled. An e-mail from Lhamo cleared up the mystery. The note was written in "shadow-speak." Apparently she had induced Tenzin to issue the invitation. They could stay with them, if they liked. She was full of expectations.

"The persuasive powers of the Dakinis!" said Fritz. "Maybe a new approach will come of this." A little later a message from Dharamsala confirmed the invitation. He was the only invited member of the exile government. Could he and his wife pass by in Dharamsala to discuss the matter? Fritz weighed this veiled order for a while. He couldn't very well refuse, if he didn't want openly to break with the High Lamas. Leah convinced him to go. "You know," he said. "They want to take a look at you!" She shrugged. "They have a right to that, and now that we are married, I am no longer afraid of them."

Leah finished her thesis and in June received her doctorate. She was elated and Fritz immensely proud of her. The summer flew by. They had decided to first visit Dharamsala for a few days and then her parents. Maybe they could persuade Asya to come along and see Chung Riwoche with them.

At the beginning of July Leah surprised Fritz with the news that she was pregnant. To Leah's surprise he took it with equanimity. He hummed and hawed for a while and then said that he would now have to seriously consider his future. "Why not stay here?" said Leah. "I am sure they would offer you a position at the university, and I have already been tentatively offered a lectureship."

During the next few days Leah noticed that Fritz was distracted. She assumed it had to do with the baby and asked him. "Well," Fritz said hesitantly, "I have to make a confession." She looked at him puzzled. He scratched his head and said, "When I was in Dharamsala, I discussed you with a close friend, the only woman in the administration. In our conversation I mentioned your potential karmic relation to the Fourteenth. I cannot rid myself of the thought, that despite her vows of secrecy, she may have leaked this information. I was stupid."

Leah was dismayed. Since his return from Dharamsala he had not mentioned this subject, and she had tacitly assumed that it had been buried with his Tibetan project. She shook her head and said reproachfully, "This is very unfortunate. What can we do? Do you have a suggestion?" Fritz looked at her full of remorse. "If this story has in fact reached the Regent, he has not told anybody, or we would have read it in the newspapers. I could also imagine that they will simply sweep the story under the rug as rumor. Who can know? But I am afraid this subject could come up in Dharamsala. We should devise answers. You could simply deny everything. It depends what information they have gathered meanwhile. There are other people, practicing Buddhists, who went with Asya to the Pemakö. In any case, your pregnancy will protect you from unreasonable demands."

Leah thought about it. Certainly Asya, Drölma, or John had not been questioned. She would have heard from them. After she had successfully cut Fritz's delusions, *Mara* was now tempting the Lama establishment. But Fritz was right, until they were faced with this story in Dharamsala, there was nothing they could do but remain silent, and maybe silence would be her best defense.

6

The aircon-bus from New Delhi to Dharamsala was filled with Western Buddhists traveling to one or another teaching retreat. As the driver raced recklessly along the dangerously crowded road through the night, Fritz and Leah once again reviewed their strategy. Leah was adamant. For his sake, she would be friendly and conciliatory

to the Lamas, but she would deny any connection with the Fourteenth. Fritz considered again leaving the Sangha and resigning his official position in the exile government. Leah advised against such a drastic measure until they would come back from Lhasa. Unforeseeable opportunities for him could still happen there. She argued, "Besides, you cannot let down your monks at Chung Riwoche by leaving the Sangha."

When they arrived in Dharamsala before daybreak they changed to the bus up the steep road to *Sukhavati*, the Western Paradise, as everyone now called McLeod-Ganj, the upper, Tibetan part of Dharamsala. Weary-eyed, they dropped into bed in the comfortable room, which had been reserved for them at the Tibet Hotel.

At noon Fritz went to the Foreign Office, and she set out to explore the town. A motley mixture of run-down houses from the time when it had been a British hill-resort, new hotels, and a string of tacky Indian souvenir shops. A Kashmiri rug dealer pursued her for half a block with his rapid-fire sales talk. Young boys offered anything from Tiger Balm to Gurkha knives. The place reminded her of Thamel, the tourist part of Kathmandu. The difference was that Thamel catered to fun, hashish, and trekkers, while this place had, deserted by its *genius loci* the Dalai Lama, deteriorated into a haven for the Western Dharma Crowd: recorded Tibetan music came from the trinket shops, veggi-restaurants, the retreats of "famous" Lamas and the representative but neglected buildings of the Tibetan government in exile in the background. Both places were similarly shabby, if possible Thamel appeared more honest.

There wasn't much to see in the village, that she had not seen at other tourist spots in Asia. "Where is Tsuglakhang, the Dalai Lama temple?" she asked a woman, who directed her down Temple Road.

Already from far away she saw the shimmering chörten rise above the houses. As she came closer the structure grew more amazing. Sheathed in glass and multi-hued, irregularly curved panels, it looked like an ethereal, budding flower. Its metal leaves were tinted in the colors of the five Buddhas: white, blue, green, yellow, and red. Out of their open top sprouted the gilded Tantric symbols for the unification of opposites: the seven horizontal circles of consciousness, the umbrella offering protection, the female half-moon embracing the male sun, and at the very top the flame of universal awareness. Leah wandered around this glistening, most poetic chörten. If only John could be here, he would have loved this sculpture!

After a brief hesitation she walked into the light-flooded interior and unexpectedly stood face to face with a life-like effigy of His Holiness the cross-legged, meditating Fourteenth Dalai Lama. My God, she thought, is he for real? His smile, cunning and ironic, seemed directed at her personally. She shuddered, overcome by the absurdity of the idea that she should be related to this man. She noticed that his right hand was extended in the *abhaya mudra*, the gesture of fearlessness and protection. She lowered her head, and the denial of her karma changed into compassion: he had tried to escape from this "Western Paradise" to the solitude of Tibet, and his corpse had been smuggled out of China, expatriated a second time, for political purposes.

She sat on the carpeted floor and watched him. He was truly uncanny. She closed her eyes, and he spoke to her. "Dear child, don't fear me. I chose you because of the fierce independence you would inherit from your skeptical mother. Don't worry about the monks, go your own way as it will develop. I bless you." She sat quietly, and the scenes from the Pemakö, which Asya had described so vividly, passed by her inner eye.

At night Fritz showed her his empty palms. "So far nothing," he said. "Except for an invitation by the foreign secretary for both for us tomorrow. Nobody said a word about the reincarnation issue. I was given a briefing on Lhasa, the latest diplomatic developments, and a half-hearted reminder to toe the 'Lama-line'. He congratulated me, equally half-heartedly, to the unusual invitation. I didn't tell him of Lhamo's letter."

When Fritz asked her about her adventures, she described her impressions of the commercialized "Little Lhasa", crowding around the beautiful, otherworldly chörten of the Dalai Lama. "Apart from this building the place appears devoid of any spirituality, and I had, as you can imagine, my own personal problems facing the effigy of the dead man."

Fritz laughed, "Our perceptions, thoughts, symbols, and constructs are illusions. Your impressions and mine, this tinsel capital, the exile government are all unreal products of our imagination. Maybe that is what Gehry wanted to show in his chörten. Even beauty is an illusion, and so is the Fourteenth and your relationship with him." "What," Leah said, "The chörten is by Frank Gehry? I should have guessed that. How my father would have liked to see this building!" "Yes," Fritz smiled, "Gehry's last building. Were you inside?" Leah frowned. "I had a private audience with my *Father Incarnate*. He smiled at me ironically and extended his hand in the *abhaya mudra*!" Leah shrugged.

"Quite uncanny. He blessed me and told me to persist in what I was doing, to follow my own path." Over dinner Fritz described the foreign secretary, an older Lama who was, if not a trustworthy friend, a moderate liberal with an American education from Berkeley. "The two of you should get along well and have a number of memories in common." The Foreign Office, which had served as an information office during the time of the Fourteenth, had been converted into a regular department of the *Kashag*, the Tibetan cabinet.

His Highness the wordly Secretary welcomed her in style, "Doctor Norbu, my congratulations and best wishes to your recent marriage! I hear we went to the same excellent university." It turned out that he had met her father at the Berkeley Ningma Ling. How had she ended up in Munich? "Oh," she said laughing. "Obviously it was my Karma, which compelled me to meet my Lama there." The jovial man inquired after her command of Tibetan and then offered her a job. Much like Fritz had at their first meeting, he said, "We desperately need young people with your education who speak Chinese. The salary would be competitive with any in Germany."

Leah suppressed a yawn and smiled at him. She would consider his offer. It would make it feasible for both of them to move back to Dharamsala. On leaving he said, "This conversation should remain between the three of us."

Not a word about the Fourteenth! Outside on the street she hugged Fritz and gave him a kiss, "Another illusory fear removed!" One of the Kashmiri shopkeepers gave a loud whistle, and Fritz blushed.

Asya and John awaited them at Kathmandu airport. Asya touched Leah's belly and asked smiling, "You are pregnant! Are you happy?" Leah kissed her, "Yes, nearly foolishly so! So many good things have happened in the months since our wedding. I got my degree, Fritz has given up his crazy plans, and now this unexpected invitation."

They tried to persuade Asya to come with them to Lhasa and to Chung Riwoche. She declined, this was their trip. She didn't need to see Tibet again. She had fulfilled her promise to Richard. She said, "You have accomplished my mission better than I could ever have done. What a strange story." Asya had promised to take Drölma to Lo Manthang on the day they would fly to Lhasa. From Lo they could watch Tibetan TV and would be able to see everything better than if they were present in their company.

On Sunday morning they waved Asya and Drölma off at the airport. Her *Maule* roared into the sky. Their own flight was waiting.

7

At Lhasa airport a jovial Tenzin awaited them with an official, chauffeured Mercedes. In the first village along their way people stood waving. When they saw their car they threw themselves on the ground in prostration. When this happened again in the next village Tenzin raised his brows. No such reception had been ordered. What was going on? At the outskirts of the city a crowd milled about. A television crew was filming further back. The chauffeur stopped the car looking at Tenzin for instructions. An old man approached them with a horse in tow. He addressed Tenzin with the offer to have Her Holiness ride into town on his horse. The cheering crowd was moving towards their car. In anger Tenzin told the old man to back off, this was an official government car. He asked the driver to reverse and ordered the curtains in the back seat drawn.

Leah, terribly embarrassed, blurted out, "They think I am the long expected reincarnation of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Please Tenzin, I will explain later. I don't understand what is happening." Confused, Tenzin stared at Leah. She the reincarnation of the Fourteenth?! A nice surprise! Fritz was speech-bound.

Tenzin called Lhamo, who told him that the Panchen Lama had visited the Oracle Lake yesterday where he had a had a vision of the promised female reincarnation arriving today on a flight from Kathmandu. The news had spread like wildfire. The entire town was on its feet waiting for a miracle to happen. Tenzin growled. He didn't need this publicity, not just before all of Beijing would descend upon Lhasa. He told Lhamo, that they would try to skirt the center of town and drive, as surreptitiously as they could, directly home. She should expect them at the back entrance.

Leah apologized. She should not have panicked and told him of her fears. Using all her charm she tried to make him see the Buddhist *emptiness* of the event, with little success. At any other time such an uprising could have been contained, but not now where all the world was watching Lhasa. The driver managed to shake off the crowd and reached the back entrance of the Nicheng apartment compound unnoticed. Lhamo whisked them inside. Tenzin excused himself. He put in a call to the Panchen Lama, and when the man had finally been found, told him that he wanted the crowd dispersed by Tuesday night, or he would have Freedom Square cleared by the police. What kind of unwelcome visions did he have anyway? The Panchen Lama defended himself. A man had come forward with a somewhat hazy story. Twenty-five years ago he had been the liaison officer on a trek of two foreign women and two men to the Pemakö. He swore that on the way they had met the disguised Fourteenth on his last pilgrimage. One of the women had had intercourse in the Pemakö sanctuary, but he didn't remember which one, or with whom, nor her name, or where she was from. Tenzin shook his head, how could he stir up trouble on such a vague piece of folklore?

A frowning Tenzin returned and said to Leah, "Now you tell me how you got involved in this story."

Leah told him that she had heard of this portentous possibility from her mother only a year ago. She briefly described her mother's trek to the Pemakö and her meeting with the unidentified naljorpa. "I was born nine months later. After the Fourteenth's body had been found, my mother became afraid that the Lamas would take me away. For all the intervening years she had not told anybody of this meeting." Tenzin asked, "Did the naljorpa tell her who he was?" "No," said Leah. "She still isn't certain whether he was the Fourteenth. And I am appalled by the idea." Tenzin grumbled, "The Panchen Lama has found the liaison officer from that trek, but the man cannot remember any details. Twenty-five years is a long time." "Look," said Leah with a laugh, "Even if all these hazy details would fit me, I would be a politically harmless reincarnation, too old, uninitiated, and four months pregnant. A funny candidate for a fifteenth Dalai Lama." She finally elicited a smile from him.

Lhamo brought tea. Slowly Tenzin's practical mind cleared. A little more cheerful he said, "A typical Tibetan story, full of wild fantasies. I tell you what we'll do. You wanted to visit Chung Riwoche. This is fine. Originally I had intended to fly you there after the inauguration. Let me fly you there this week. Nobody has seen you except the man with the horse, this will get you out of town and allow me to deal with the situation here. Chung Riwoche is far from Lhasa. I will get you there with an army helicopter, which will also pick you up by the end of the week. O.K.?" For the first time Fritz found his speech again. He thanked Tenzin for his thoughtfulness. This would be an excellent solution.

Tenzin rose and walking out said, "Lhamo will take care of you. Don't leave the house. I will have to call Beijing. Meanwhile everybody will have seen the excited, chaotic masses on TV." A few minutes later he returned with a question, "You just came from Dharamsala, does anyone there suspect Leah of being the Fourteenth's reincarnation?" "No," said Fritz. "We had an audience with the foreign secretary. If he did, he gave no indication of it, neither verbally nor in his behavior towards Leah." Tenzin nodded and said enigmatically, "Good. If he does now, it will be too late."

At dinner time Tenzin looked relieved and with an ironic smile said, "Listen to this. Beijing is delighted by your appearance here. They consent that you descend on Chung Riwoche as the living reincarnation of the Fourteenth's." Leah stiffened. Tenzin smiled at her and said, "We all, including Beijing, agree that the Lamas can no longer prepare you for such a position. As you said, you have not been initiated and are too old for the required lengthy exercises. You will never wield *political* power in the Gelug or any other order. This would finally reverse the mistake the Chinese Yüan emperors made when they created this secular position. But you could, if you like be the spiritual symbol of Tibetan Buddhism to its many believers." Leah closed her eyes. She saw the old man with the horse before herself and the excited crowd surging towards the car. These people were lost and longing for spiritual leadership. But how could she fill that void? She shook her head, "How can I? I am essentially an irreligious intellectual and a true foreigner in Tibet."

Tenzin became serious and asked the startling question, Would she consider to allow her child to be designated the Dalai Lama's reincarnation? Leah stared at him with fierce eyes, "No!" She almost shouted, "I will absolutely not sacrifice my child to any such forced predestination." She checked herself. "I apologize, Tenzin, for this vehement demonstration of my Western temperament. Fortunately I am not in Confucian China, where this would cost me your attention and respect." Tenzin looked at her admiringly and bemused. "I am not a devout Buddhist, but in Tibet such a promise would be considered a great honor." She said quietly, "Remember, I am the daughter of a father and the wife of a husband who were both promised to the Lamas by their parents. Mine is not an easy lot."

Tenzin nodded and sat down next to her. "Let me try to explain myself better. In the car you reminded me that I should consider these happenings as Buddhist *emptiness*. They are that too, but in the present world you should *act out of compassion*, which is less esoteric and more real in everyday life. With the death of the Dalai Lama Tibet has lost its bearings. The people have become disoriented. By your mere existence you could provide them with a spiritual symbol. It would cost you little in real terms, an appearance every now and then. The Lamas will perform the necessary rituals and guide the Sangha."

Leah again saw the old man and the cheering crowd before her eyes and softened. "Fritz has argued like that before. What do you have in mind?" Tenzin relaxed and said, "Let them celebrate you in Chung Riwoche. Sonam Rinpoche is their incarnate Lama to whom they vowed obeisance. They will accept and love you alone for that reason. Let Sonam inaugurate you there. As a reincarnation himself and a learned High Lama he has the power to do so. There will be no television and no outside interference. You will save the Panchen Lama's face, and Beijing will give its blessing."

Leah tried to visualize the service. Fritz presiding. It would be a like a second marriage to him. A small place like Dietramszell, surrounded by friends. Her mother and Richard present in spirit. She turned to Tenzin and asked, "What will happen after we return?"

Tenzin looked imploringly at her. "Please, don't fly off again into another rage! You could help me find a closer relationship between my people and the diaspora if you would honor my inauguration with your presence as the *Dalai Lama of the Future*. I know it is all *Samsara*, but to the simple Tibetans you would be the tangible sign of their identity. I see you riding into Freedom Square on a white horse at the peak of the celebration. There will be no unruly crowds. You would not be required to say anything, unless you wanted to. You speak enough Tibetan and Chinese. A few words could do miracles. I trust you. I want peace between the Tibetan people, the Western diaspora, and the Chinese. You could be a most effective messenger from the West."

Leah looked briefly at Fritz and turned to Tenzin. "I am impressed by your sense of reality. Let me discuss this with Fritz. I'll tell you tomorrow. I think you have won me over."

At night, in a low voice Fritz analyzed what he called the "small print" of Tenzin's proposal, his unvoiced assumptions. He argued, "Tenzin has convinced the Chinese that, because Dharamsala did not know about you or had not claimed you, you could be considered their candidate. A clever move. He also convinced them that you are harmless, politically. When he says he trusts you, he means that he believes he can handle you. He may not be able to control the religious fervor of the Tibetans, but right now you would certainly help him to bring them behind his program." He looked at Leah, expecting her to object. But she remained silent, listening intensely. Fritz continued, "He is working for himself, but I am willing to believe that his intentions towards the Tibetans and the Diaspora are sincere." Fritz waved his hand, "Tenzin's solution of the Chinese-Tibetan problem is based on ruthless Chinese-style *Realpolitik*. You were right, I could not have pulled this off with my religious and ethical scruples. My upbringing and vows still tie me to the Lamas in Dharamsala. But accepting his proposal could burden *you* with a serious moral dilemma. You are not tied to Buddhist doctrine, but you would feel that you betray the Tibetan people." After a pause he said, "That is, unless you can come up with a plan to actively help them in the future, which would be as clever *and* practical as Tenzin's maneuver."

Leah looked at him seriously. "I have given this problem some thought. I agree with you. I have no 'plan' for the future but a very female suggestion: I propose to 'muddle through.' In the future I will adjust my actions to the realities, supporting Tenzin or in subtle ways trying to divert him, always leaving the political decisions in Tibet to him. For the moment I am inclined to support him and go through with his inauguration scheme. He is the only man who can 'free' Tibet within the present political constraints. He deserves my help and yours too." She looked

at Fritz who was neither enthusiastic nor prepared to argue against her. She suggested that they move to Berkeley and establish a foundation in memory of the Fourteenth. It would be much easier to find money and support there than in Europe. She asked, "Will you join me as my Lama and 'discoverer'? I will consider myself the '*tulkama*', the female reincarnation of Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth and not pretentiously as the *Dalai Lama of the Future*. The historical Chinese-Mongolian position of 'Dalai Lama' will, as the Thirteenth had prophesied, in due time disappear." Fritz nodded and said, "I'll join you and rely on your female instincts."

Tenzin met them for breakfast and faced them with the direct question, "What have you decided?" Leah told him that she would participate in his plan under one condition that he introduce her as Leah Norbu, the Tulkama of Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the deceased Fourteenth Dalai Lama. "The Thirteenth has prophesied that Tenzin Gyatso would be the last Dalai Lama. It should remain that way. Hopefully the Chinese designation 'Dalai Lama' will one day be forgotten." Tenzin looked at her, "An excellent idea. This will help me greatly, thank you! Let me make another proposal. Would Fritz accept a position in my Lhasa government as liaison officer to the diaspora and the West?"

Fritz, taken by surprise, took some time to answer. He asked, "Can you get the consent of Beijing?" Tenzin said, "I think so. Not today, but in a few months. It is all a matter of how it is broached. After the Chinese have accepted Leah and seen that I can keep the situation in balance here, they very well may invite you themselves. They are ready for such a move." Fritz said, "Trying to heal the wounds between the Diaspora and Lhasa has been my greatest concern for a long time. I would like to accept your offer. I would have to discuss any such political role with the Lamas in Dharamsala. They will need some time to adjust to your elegant, preemptive coup." Tenzin was content, they could explore this possibility during the coming year.

Leah asked Tenzin to give her an idea how he thought her appearance in Lhasa would be staged. Tenzin gave her a vague sketch, but said, that now she had agreed, he would discuss the details with the Panchen Lama. Would they agree to an audience with the man? He would discuss his plans with him before that and also call Chung Riwoche. Fritz was prepared to talk to the Panchen, but asked to be allowed to make the call to Chung Riwoche himself.

Tenzin acted with unusual speed. He arranged a meeting with the Panchen next morning. Tenzin laughed, "The Panchen was completely taken by surprise that the Tulkama of the Fourteenth should be staying at my house! I'll meet him this afternoon."

Their meeting with the Panchen Lama, Beijing's choice in 1995 for the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen, became a test of restraint for Fritz. The Fourteenth had, at the time, nominated another young boy for the position, whom the Chinese had let vanish. They had replaced him with this now barely twenty-three-year old youngster. It was immediately obvious that the young man acted under the control of Tenzin. Staring at Leah with uncomprehending eyes he prostrated himself before her stuttering in English that he was delighted to meet her. Tenzin suppressed a smile, and Fritz was close to venting his anger at the insipidness of this Chinese puppet. Leah was the only one who kept her composure, treating him simply as the young adult he was.

The Panchen indicated that Geshe Sonam Rimpoche would be entitled to inaugurate Leah at Chung Riwoche. A second, separate ceremony at the Jokhang was not needed. Leah felt that the young man feared such a procedure even more than she did. She smiled at Tenzin.

The audience was over quickly. Tenzin pressed that they fly to Chung Riwoche after lunch. Fritz called his monks who had, of course, already heard the rumors from Lhasa. They were in complete confusion that they had been selected to meet the new Dalai Lama before night fall. Fritz told them that he would inaugurate Leah Norbu as the reincarnation of the Fourteenth, not as Dalai Lama. He was not empowered to do that. He gave them instructions on how to prepare for this surprise appearance as simply as possible.

They would never forget their flight in the huge, gray Chinook-type army helicopter across Tibet in the late afternoon light. Because of the noise of the machine, conversation was impossible. Following the silvery filament of the Tsangpo River west they had the entire chain of the Himalayas to their left and the brown hills of the Chang Tang Plateau to their right. Here and there appeared small settlements surrounded by barley fields, forlorn in the immense spaces. Fritz wept when the chörten of Chung Riwoche came into sight. After twelve years he was finally coming home.

For a few minutes the dust whirled up by the copter hid the small cheering crowd of people who waited for them. Leah emerged followed by Fritz. Cheers erupted. Everyone wanted to get close to them. The monks had spread a red carpet on which Fritz and Leah stood. Seeing her in reality close up, the older Lamas, fell on their knees until Fritz lifted them up and rubbed foreheads with them, one by one. Tears were running over his face. The head Lama kissed him. Addressing his monks in Tibetan, Fritz introduced Leah as his consort and wife. Slowly the Lamas walked up to her and kissed her hand. A crowd of villagers stood spellbound in the background, among them the two tall Chinese helicopter pilots, grinning. A great happening, emotional but without pomp. Standing all by herself, apart from the monks, Leah had noticed an old stooped woman. On a sudden intuition she walked over and found her crying. "Are you Tsögyel?" she asked in Tibetan. The woman, trying hard to control her sobbing, nodded and said, "I am Sonam's mother. Are you his wife?" A flash of recognition passed across her features, "You speak Tibetan?" Tsögyel looked ten years older than she was. Leah had to bend down to embrace and kiss her. The monks had stopped besieging Fritz and were watching Leah and Tsögyel. Finally, Fritz walked over and embraced his two women. "Sonam, you have come back!" Mumbled Tsögyel between sobs. Embarrassed by all the people, Tsögyel freed herself from Fritz's embrace and asked, a twinkle of suspicion in her eyes, "Are you Richard's daughter?" Leah bewildered, straightened herself and laughed, "I have never thought of this possibility. No, I would not have married Sonam." But she realized that in the beginning she had known nothing of Fritz's father and he neither. "But I am Asya's daughter! Do you remember her?" Tsögyel heaved a deep sigh of relief and said, "Will you stay with me and tell me everything about you." During that night Leah became Tsögyel's friend. From the bottom of her treasure chest Tsögyel retrieved Ali's photos. They talked deep into the night, while Fritz celebrated a chanting service with his monks and later told them about Leah and her inauguration proceedings. Leah fell asleep at Tsögyel's apartment, happy that all had, unexpectedly, turned out so uncomplicated. Somewhere the monks had found a once precious, gold-embroidered overcoat, a Bodhisattva crown made of gold paper, a *kartrika* and an empty skull cap, the emblems of Vajrayogini. They dressed Leah in these requisites. The crown was put aside. She had to hold the two sacred implements in her hands. On every of her moves dust rose in clouds from the coat. She had to laugh. She finally had been transformed into the Queen of the Dakinis, which she had not succeeded to do on that Fasching night years ago. Fritz had instructed that she would sit on the abbot's chair which was normally reserved for him. They would recite a lengthy initiation sutra. She would not have to do or say anything. The service wound on for a good hour accompanied by the alternately monotonous and shrill noises produced by a big drum, several bells, a long-horn, and two clarinets. At the end of the chanting Fritz put the crown on her head, and the monks prostrated themselves. Two monks helped her off the throne. She was escorted from the Dukhang into the open where a large crowd had congregated. God only knew from where the people had come in this empty country. A communal vegetarian feast among the monks with Tsögyel and Fritz at her side concluded the day. Leah dreamt of their wedding in Dietramszell.

Tenzin called. The helicopter would pick them up at about noon on Saturday. His chauffeur would wait for them in Lhasa and drive them to his house. Leah's appearance in front of the Jokhang was to take place around eleven in the morning on Sunday. Everything was prepared for her entry into Lhasa. "Oh, yes," he said, "a congratulatory telegram arrived addressed to Her Holiness Dr. Leah Norbu from the regents in Dharamsala!" Tenzin was in the best of spirits.

Half of Tibet seemed to have descended on Lhasa. People in most outlandish garb wandered the streets. A dashing escort of three policemen on motorcycles plowed ahead of Leah on her white horse. To show her Nepali origin Leah had been dressed in the authentic costume of a Green Tara, the Nepalese wife of King Songtsen Gyampo. She carried a real Lotus stem flown in from China. It was like the Munich Fasching. She was cheered and applauded. The older people bowed deeply when she passed. Freedom Square had been cordoned off for the official delegations from Tibet and China. Everyone got up when she arrived. The Chinese clapped and the Tibetans bowed. With a charming smile she alternately put her palms together and waved blessings with her lotus stalk. Unfortunately she did not have four arms like Tara Dakini. In front of the Jokhang she was seated in a chair on a raised platform next to Tenzin. The cheers rose. Leah

searched for Fritz's tall figure, and discovered Asya and John next to him. A great happiness swept over her. She bent to Tenzin and thanked him. He smiled, "I flew them in two days ago as a surprise for you."

A Chinese and a Tibetan delegate spoke. Tenzin, with a gesture towards the West, announced greatly relaxed immigration procedures for members of the diaspora. The ceremony concluded with a circumambulation along the Barkhor. Led by two drums, Leah on her horse was followed by Tenzin, Fritz, her parents and a large crowd of Tibetans on foot. When the procession returned to the Jokhang she was finally free to embrace Asya and John.

The people of Lhasa celebrated for two days and nights with dancing and firecrackers. At three in the morning Leah was awakened by the familiar howl of the stray dogs. The moon was full. She stood at the window and looked at the town of her karma.

The End

Glossary

(S) Sanskrit, (T) Tibetan, (C) Chinese

Active Compassion, *bodhicitta* (S), goal of *mahamudra* meditation
Aksai Chin, remote area at the far West-Tibetan border with India
Alchi, early Tibetan-Buddhist sanctuary in Ladakh with murals from 1064 - 16th century
anuyoga, (S) second, esoteric level of Dzogchen teaching (goal: removal of opposites, non-dual vision)
apsara (S) flying wind-spirit, *dakini*, *khadroma*
Arun, river crossing from Tibet into Nepal east of Everest
atiyoga (S) third and highest level of Dzogchen teaching (goal: awareness of the illusory, empty nature of all things)
Bardo Tödol, (T) Ningma instructions for the dying, "The Tibetan Book of the Dead."
Barkhor (T) circumambulation route around the Jokhang in Lhasa
beyul (T), Buddhist paradise, areas consecrated by Tibetan sages
Bhaktapur, Newar town near Kathmandu in Nepal
Black-Hat Sorcerers, *Bön* magicians converted by *Padmasambhava*, they ritually cleanse the grounds before the *Cham* Dances
Blavatsky, Helena, Petrovna, *nee* von Hahn zu Hahn (1831- 1891), Russian founder of the Theosophical Society
bodhicitta (S), *Active Compassion*, goal of *mahamudra* meditation exercises
Bodhisattva (S), a saint, man or woman, who gave up nirvana to be reborn and help other people.
Bön, (T) shamanic predecessor to Buddhism in Tibet, still extant today but largely indistinguishable from Tibetan Buddhism
Budha, Buddhist village near Kathmandu, Nepal, built in form of a *mandala*
Chakrasamvara, (S) an early Tibetan teaching system taught by the consort Niguma (~1025)
Ch'an (C), the original Chinese version of Zen
Cham Dances, masked dances in Tibet and Ladakh celebrating *Padmasambhava* and the victory of Buddhism
chang (T), light beer made from barley
chi (C), 'fluid' that transports 'energy' along the channels between acupuncture points in Chinese medicine
chöd (T) meditation system employing visualizations of one's death invented by *Tibetan* yogini Machig Labdron (1055-1153)
chörten (T), stupa (S), a pyramidal or conical building, sacred representation of the levels of insight, symbol of the Tibetan Buddhist cosmos, repository for ashes of great saints
chuba (T) a wrap-around coat with arms to the knees and a high collar worn in Tibet
Chung Riwoche, a large stupa only recently discovered on the Tsangpo river north of Dingri
circumambulation, ritual walk around a sacred object
dakini (S), *khadroma* (T) fierce air-spirit, their dance is a symbol of the transitory nature of experience, important role in the *Tantrayana* (*Vajrayogini*)
David-Neel, Alexandra, (1868-969) French opera singer, Buddhist nun, anthropologist, and explorer of Tibet
dharma (S), The Buddhist Faith
dharmakaya (S) primal, non-dual state of pure pleasure reached during *anuyoga* exercises
Dingri, village on the Friendship Highway on the Tibetan Plateau north of Everest
dorje (T), *vajra* (S), thunderbolt, 'diamond scepter', ritual object representing the power of the absolute
Dragpo (T), fierce incarnation of *Padmasambhava*
dri (T), female yak
Drukpa Kunley, the "Divine Madman", beloved *naljorpa* of Butan, Nepal, and Tibet
dukhang (T), meditation hall of the monks in a *gompa*
dzo (T), a cross between a cow and a yak
Dzogchen (T), a "fast" meditation teaching-system of the Nyingma. It encompasses three levels: *mahayoga*,

anuyoga, *atiyoga*, of which the last two are highly *esoteric*.

Dzogchenpa (T), a person practicing Dzogchen

dzong (T), castle, stronghold

Ekajati (S) Tibetan Goddess of the graveyards, she rides on a horse

esoteric, secret teachings passed from teacher to student

exoteric, teachings open to all

Farsi, Persian language

fei-tian (C), *apsara* (S), *dakini* (S), *khadroma* (T) flying air- or wind-spirits

Friendship Highway, Chinese-built road between Lhasa and Kathmandu

Ganden Ling, one of three major Gelug monasteries near Lhasa

Garuda (S), fabulous sacred bird common to India and Tibet

Gautama (S), the historical Buddha

Gelug (T), reformed Yellow-Hat monastic order, the Dalai Lamas are their reincarnated head lamas, last major Tibetan school, sixteenth-century

Gelugpa (T) monk of the Yellow-Hat School

Geshe, (T) equivalent to doctor of divinity

gompa (T), Tibetan sanctuary or monastic center

Guru from Orgyen, one of the names of *Padmasambhava*

Guru Rinpoche (T) one of the names of *Padmasambhava*

Gwumbo Dorje (T), great teacher

halal restaurant, Moslem restaurant

hamam (Arabic), Moslem bathhouse

Heruka, also **Demchog**, manifestation of Shakyamuni in the *Chakvasamvara* Tantra (Sakya, Gelug and Kargü Orders)

Hevajrayana (S), Hevajra, great vajrayana, 13th century meditation system used by Sakya order

hieros gamos (Greek) the sacred union of opposites (C. G. Jung)

Jetsun (T), esteemed teacher

Jokhang (T), largest and oldest Tibetan Buddhist sanctuary, "Cathedral" of Lhasa

karrika (S) ritual hatchet used by the *dakinis* to cut man's ignorance

Kagyü (T), semi-reformed Red-Hat monastic order founded by Naropa, (14th century)

Kagyüpa (T), monk belonging to the Kagyü order

karma (S), 'fate' accumulated over many rebirth cycles

Kashgar, large Moslem city in western *Sinkiang* (China)

khadroma (T), 'skydancer', *dakini*, powerful air spirits, often personal *yidams* in *anuyoga*

Kham, Eastern Tibet, not part of Autonomous *Xizang*, Tibet

Khampa, Tibetan people of *Kham*

kartriga (S) **khavanga** (T) ritual knife used by *Vajrayogini* to cut the male ego

Koktebel, a hamlet of three houses on the southeastern coast of the Crimean (Russia)

korlam (T), circumambulation route around a sacred mountain or monastery

Kundun (T) Dali Lama

L'Histoire d'O, novel by Pauline Reage, French high-class pornography (1970s)

Ladakh, western-most Tibet, part of India

Lakshminkara (S) Princess, one of the early inventors of the Indian Tantra, in *Orgyen*

lama (T), teacher, guru, fully ordained Tibetan monk

Laoshi (C) lit. "Old one," great teacher, honorable address for a professor

Lhamo Latso (T), Tibetan Oracle Lake north-east of Tsetang

Lapchi, *beyul* and *gompa* in a valley at the border to Nepal

lhato (T), 'soul-place', a stone cairn decorated with prayer flags

Ling (T), large monastic community

linga (T), small female figure made from bread dough used in Cham dances to represent evil and the ego

lingam (S), phallus, representation of Shiva in Hinduism

Lhosar (T), Tibetan New Year, a variable lunar date in February, coincides with Chinese New Year

luma (T) water spirits half snake, half woman, nymphs

mahayoga (S), first stage of all Tibetan teaching systems

mandala (S) a square or circular arrangement of Buddhas and their manifestations, used for meditation exercises

mani stones, stones carved with the inscription 'Om mani padme Hum' deposited at sacred places

mantra (S), sacred syllables used in meditation, e. g., "*Om, mani padme, Hum*"

Mara (S), ruler of desire and death who tempted the Buddha, source of karmic confusion

Mei Guo (C), 'Beautiful Land,' the USA,

Milarepa, Tibetan poet and saint, student of *Naropa*

Mt. Athos, sacred mountain of Orthodoxy in Northern Greece

Mt. Kailash, arguably the most sacred place on earth which some 1.8 Billion Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists consider the center of the universe. In Western Tibet

Mt. Shishibangma, 8000-m mountain west of Everest

muezzin, Moslem singer who calls the hours of the five prayers a day

nagpa (T), *yoga* master

naljorpa (T) *yogin* (female: *yogini* or *naljorma*) an itinerant Dzogchen practitioner, suspected of occult powers and sexual propensities

Naropa, Indian sage and teacher of Milarepa, founder of Kagyü order

Niguma, female *yogini* consort and teacher of *Naropa* (11th cent)

nirmankaya (S) a "Buddha-Field," primal, non-dualistic concept experienced in *dharmakaya* exercises

Nyingma, Red-Hat, oldest Tibetan Buddhist order, unreformed, founded by *Padmasambhava* in the 10th-century

Nyingmapa, (T) monk belonging to *Nyingma* order

Ojai, small town in Southern California founded by Annie Besant as an ashram of the Theosophical Society

Om mani padme Hum, (T) sacred mantra, has several meanings: "The jewel in the lotus flower," in shadow-speak: "the precious phallus is in the lotus' chalice" i.e. the conjunction is completed. *Om* and *Hum* are "seed syllables" with no explicit meaning (inhalation-exhalation during meditation)

Orgyen, *Udhyana*, Swat, part of Northern Pakistan, origin of *Padmasambhava*

Padmasambhava (S), 9th-cent. Indian missionary of Tibet, combined *Bön* shaman magic, Indian *Tantrayoga*, *Ch'an*, *Manichean*, and *Nestorian* Christian concepts to form syncretic *Vajrayana* Buddhism

perak (T) turquoise studded head-gear worn by Tibetan women

phurbu (T), sacred magic dagger in *Tantrayana*

Prajnaparamita (S), female representation of transcendental Wisdom

preta (S), hungry bird-ghosts that populate the stages the dying experience (*Bardo Thödol*)

puja (S), personal prayer service

rangdum, (T), natural landmark, 'spontaneously' created manifestation of a great saint, foot- or hand-prints, etc.

rinpoche (T), "great teacher", title similar to professor or *laoshi* in Chinese

Rongphuk, (T) gumpa in the valley leading to the north-face of Everest

Rongshar, 'Valley of Roses' also Drin Valley, a valley in the Himalayas south of Dingri

RU-486, French morning-after abortion pill

saddhu, Hindu holy man

Sakya (T), unreformed monastic order founded in the 12th cent.,

Sakyapa (T), monks belonging to the Sakya order, ruled Tibet from the 12th to the 15th cent. as viceroys of the Chinese emperors. Converted Mongolia to Buddhism. Sakyapa practiced hereditary succession (from uncle to nephew).

samadhi (S), ultimate state of deep meditation

samsara (S), the multiply fragmented illusion of ordinary reality

sangha (S), the community of Buddhist monks

Sephardic, Jewish people practicing the Mid-Eastern- and Spanish ritual

shadow-speak, mystic language used to describe esoteric teachings

Sherpa, Tibetan ethnic group living in the Solo-Khumbu

Shigatse, second largest city in central Tibet

Shivaite yogi trident, emblem of the Shivaite sect of Hinduism, also used by *Padmasambhava*

Sichuan, Chinese province bordering on Eastern Tibet (Kham)

Six Yogas of Naropa, the codified teachings of (female) consort *Niguma* formulized by *Naropa*

Sky Burial, deposition of a corpse by hacking it into pieces and feeding it to the vultures

Solo-Khumbu, area in Nepal south and east of Everest, populated by Sherpa

stupa (S), *chörten* (T), the oldest representation of the Buddha

Shivaite, Indian Yogi, followers of Shiva

skull cup, cup made from a human skull filled with menstrual blood presented by *Vajrayogini* to her consort

Sufi, plural Sufiya (Arabic), mystic Moslem brotherhoods or orders, originated in Samarkand

Suni, oldest Moslem sect deriving itself directly from Mohammed

Swat, *Orgyen*, *Uddhiyana*, area in northern Pakistan where the Indian Tantrayoga originated in the 9th and 10th centuries

Taklamakan, large desert area in Sinkiang (Chinese Turkestan) bordering on Tibet in the north

Tantrayoga (S), Indian Shivaite yogic discipline taught by female *yoginis* in *Uddhiyana* after the 11th century

Tantrayana (S), Syncretist Tibetan discipline mixing Indian *Tantrayoga*, Buddhism, shamanism, and Chinese influences, introduced into Tibet by *Padmasambhava*, *Naropa* and others

thanka (S), scroll-painting depicting mandalas, Buddhas or other sacred Tibetan images

The Flight of the Garuda, important Dzogchen teachings (early twentieth century)

The Secret Life and Songs of Lady Yeshe Tsögyel, "autobiography" of the consort and *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava* written in mystic Tibetan shadow-speak

Therai, tropical, southern part of Nepal along the Indian border

tögal (T), 'Immediate Crossing', third level (atiyoga) Dzogchen meditation insight

toglen (T) meditation technique employed by Dzogchen

trekchöd (T) 'Cutting Through,' (anuyoga) Dzogchen meditation insight similar to Zen satori

tsampa (T), roasted barley flour, staple food of the Tibetan nomads

Tsangpo (T), The River, the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra in Tibet

Tseringma, one of the "5 sisters of long life," ancient mountain goddesses pacified and celebrated by *Milarepa*

Tsögyelma, or Yeshe Tsögyel, female companion and *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava*

Tsongkapa, (1357-1419) Tibetan religious reformer, founder of the Gelug sect.

Tsvetaeva, Anastasia (As'ya), sister of Marina Tsvetaeva

Tsvetaeva, Marina, (1892-1941) Russian poetess

tulku, tulkama (T), male respectively female reincarnation of a *yogi* or *yogini*

tumo (T), heat generated in meditation

Uddiyana (S), Area in today's Pakistan where the Tibetan Tantra originated

vajra (S), *dordje* (T) thunderbolt, 'diamond' scepter, ritual dumbbell, symbol of spiritual power and the absolute

Vajrayana (S), radical, highly syncretic Tibetan meditation system going back to *Padmasambhava*

Vajrayogini, Vajravahini (S), Tantric Indian-Tibetan queen of the dakini revered in Nepal and Tibet

Voloshin, Maksimilian, Russian poet and philosopher, son of Yelena Ottobaldovna Voloshina

Voloshina, Elena Ottobaldovna, owner of a guest-house in Koktebel where young Russian poets and painters congregated at the beginning of the 20th cent

White Tara, female representation of transcendental insight, in China: "Goddess of Mercy", "guanjin"

Xizang (C) Chinese name for the the "Autonomous Region Tibet"

yab-yum (T), 'mother-father', sexual union, symbol of the unification of opposites, used in Tibetan *Vajrayana* imagery after the 13th-century

yak(T), female: *dri*, long-haired, primeval-looking, grunting ox of many uses, somewhat smaller than cattle

yama (T), bull-headed representation of death, of Iranian origin (after 12th century)

Yeshe Tsögyel, (9th cent.) at age 16 partner, consort, and wisdom *khadroma* of *Padmasambhava*, later eminent teacher in her own rights

vidam (T), personal, protective deity with which the meditator identifies

yogin, yogini (S) *naljorpa*, *naljorma* (T) male respectively female master of yoga

Yüan, Chinese dynasty of Mongolian origin (Kublai Khan and successors, 12th to 14th century)

