

Kazat Akmatov

ARHAT

Of all the powerful forces in Nature, the most powerful is human reason and the swiftest is the human dream.

These are the two pillars that keep us from falling on our path to the Great Destiny of the Universe.

Author

Annotation to the Moscow Edition:

Kyrgyz author Kazat Akmatov's novel *Arhat* was presented in 2007 in Moscow at the Bibliobraz festival, and this edition, in Kyrgyz, Russian and Bulgarian, is also part of the festival. The entire print run was distributed free of charge to schools and universities around Russia as a gift from the author and the publisher, the Center for Development of the Russian Language. The novel is presently being translated into English, Turkish and other languages.

At home, *Arhat* was well received and awarded a number of national and international prizes, in addition to being named National Bestseller of the Year for 2007.

The novel concerns the fate of a modern Kyrgyz boy who is the reincarnation of a great Tibetan yogi and poet who lived a thousand years ago...

Instead of a Foreword

Chingiz Aitmatov on *Arhat*:

I am happy to see the increasing thematic breadth and aesthetic-philosophical depth of thought in contemporary Kyrgyz literature. When I say this, I am referring to Kyrgyz writer Kazat Akmatov's book *Arhat*, which I had the pleasure of reading recently. A number of authoritative literary critics and writers have expressed their opinions on the book before me, calling it "an advance in Kyrgyz writing." *Arhat* really is a new word in Kyrgyz literature – this can be seen in the very issues the author put at the heart of his work. Even if we ignore the author's mastery, his expressive use of language and the power of the images in his novel, his deep study of the multifaceted ego alone, that "I" hiding in the soul of each human, is beyond all doubt something completely new and unheard-of in the world of literature.

Of course there can be no person without an ego. Likewise, there can be no literary protagonist without a sense of egoism. However, I consider it a great tribute to the power of Akmatov's pen that he was able to analyze this issue by creating such living characters, using their complicated lives and thrilling turns of events to focus the reader's attention on the thorny psychological landscape. That is what sets *Arhat* apart.

At the outset I mentioned the growing breadth of themes addressed in Kyrgyz literature in recent years. I arrived at that insight after reading *Arhat*, for one of its key ideas is the new and unpleasant realization that the planet Earth is approaching environmental catastrophe. Akmatov's book sounds the alarm, as do the facts we are confronted with in everyday life.

This would be a good moment to remember that all of the many historical teachings, religions and prophets agree on one thing: our planet is drawing near to a "Great Flood." There will be a "Day of Judgment," and the culprit in the global tragedy is none other than humankind.

If we believe the information issued by the organizers of the global Kyoto Protocol, then the question of environmental apocalypse is already relevant and a threat to Earth's civilization in the 21st century. The greenhouse effect, resulting from humans' use of technology on the Earth, has reached the point of being irreversible. Nature is providing us with further proof, in the form of rapidly melting ice in ancient glaciers and the Kyrgyz Alatau Mountains, which creates problems of finding drinking water.

For these reasons, modern man's thoughts and dreams center on avoiding these real threats and avoiding the unavoidable catastrophe. Time does not stop. All people, no matter what their profession, must search for answers to these questions and announce their findings to the world.

It just so happens that science fiction writers, scholars and philosophers are laying the first paths to a new way of thinking. Science and technology must take up the race to bring their ideas to life. However, both groups are taking desperate steps in different directions at the same time. The novel *Arhat* is an example of this.

Foreseeing what awaits our round Mother Earth, the great Russian thinker Nikolai Roerich wrote the following: "Humanity must focus its eyes and its plans on other worlds. Human evolution can only continue if we strive toward inter-planetary travel." In

other words, humans will never conquer their egos on Earth. Humanity can change everything on the Earth and under it, but it cannot change itself or improve its arrogant ego. I want to emphasize that *Arhat* is an innovative creation embodying the ancient mystical and metaphysical thinking of many peoples, but at the same time it dazzles us with its contemporary philosophical thought.

Even though he works in the realm of the fantastic, Akmatov lights a flame of hope in the reader's heart that there can be a real, optimistic future for humanity."

From Kyrgyz press reviews of Kazat Akmat's novel *Arhat*.

"This book is completely original in terms of its topic, its contents and its style. Kyrgyz fiction has seen nothing like it. It brings together real life, magic and metaphysics, as well as contemporary global trends in philosophy. This is the mysterious, secretive story of the fate of a young Kyrgyz boy in Tibet. Born into injustice and therefore named Adilet (justice), he dedicates his life to bringing about justice on Earth.

"The story is fast-paced and takes unexpected turns. The author's style is precise and clear, making the intense story easy to read.

"To put it another way, the author put enormous effort into presenting the book's philosophical and artistic core in a light, free manner. I imagine this is the only way we can once again cross the threshold of world fiction."

Keneshbek Asanaliev, Ph.D.

People's Author of Kyrgyzstan, Professor

A Man of the Universe

"Kazat Akmat has surprised the world of Kyrgyz literature with his new novel, Arhat, which tells the story of the maturation and realization of an unusual Kyrgyz boy named Adilet, who lives in a Buddhist temple in Tibet. The boy has the gift of prophecy and understands his calling. Tibetan astrologists announce that he is the reincarnation of the Tibetan Buddhist yogi Milarepa, considered a man-god.

"The path of such people as Mani Yaso (Adilet's Tibetan name) is never easy, for it is the path of an individual who chooses goodness and justice in an evil, unjust and contradictory world.

"The boy's mentor, the wise Lama Tsu, tells him 'Your path in life will be a hard one.' "

Ilimkan Lailieva, Ph.D.

Professor of Philology

Totally Unexpected

"We always expected that new, young talents and new names would arise in Kyrgyz literature, bringing new works very different from the ones we have known. We knew that.

“But nobody expected a man of my own age like Kazat Akmat to break out with this deep, philosophically original, engaging and well written novel.

“The book is not complete, but in terms of its theme, calorie content, lifelike heroes and masterful storytelling, it leaves us waiting eagerly for the rest of this wonderful story.”

Kenesh Zhusupov
People’s Author of Kyrgyzstan
Winner of the State Toktogul Prize

New Wave in Kyrgyz Literature

“The first part of Kazat Akmat’s novel Arhat is a creative beginning to the search for an artistic representation of the philosophical and moral problems endemic to our epoch and to man in the Wheel of Time.

“The reader is drawn in by the simplicity with which the suspense-filled story is told, even though Akmat is presenting a subtext of complicated issues and deep thoughts.”

Melis Abakirov
Writer

Prologue

“Do you think that a little man, a bureaucrat without much in the way of brains or spirit can turn a whole capital city upside down?”

“Of course not.”

“But why not? He just might do it.”

“I say he can’t! Not if he’s a timid mouse.”

“Then listen... It seems that in this world anything is possible. The bureaucrat we’re talking about is a junior research assistant in the municipal statistics committee’s population department. In other words, he has a position of the lowliest sort. And judging by his meek temperament and cowed expression, he lives by the rule “keep your head down and your mouth shut.” That’s our man Zamorish.

Zamorish has already tried to open his supervisor’s door three times this morning, each time meaning to go in, but each time losing his nerve. His supervisor was talking on the phone the first two times, and the third time he was taking a nap.

So once again Zamorish is positioned outside the massive door. His heart is fluttering like swallow caught in a cage, just fluttering... “I’m duty-bound to go in. I absolutely must tell him! I can’t delay any further!” He prods himself with logic. He even kicks himself for his timidity: “I must do something!” And he did. He walked in.

“Ahem,” he coughed quietly as he lowered himself onto the edge of the chair.

“Spit it out. Don’t waste time like a drowsy fly. Let’s hear it.

“Ahem. It won’t be long before the city’s one millionth resident is born. Probably within the next two or three days...

“What?!” his supervisor yelped in fright, causing Zamorish’s heart to nearly jump out of his chest. “You should have told me before! Why did you wait to the last minute? Run write me up a letter to the mayor’s office, you goddamn idiot!” The supervisor thumped his fist angrily on the table. Zamorish scurried into the corridor.

Less than an hour later, first the mayor’s office and then the parliament building came alive with commotion. Anxious civil servants ran around preparing press releases for the papers, television and radio, organizing committees at each maternity hospital and confirming emergency telephone numbers. The Health Department was declared the center of operations. Then they turned their undivided attention to monitoring all the pregnant women whose contractions might start at any moment.

It turned out that the bigwigs had actually been expecting the big event and were even preparing for it. But someone was supposed to have let them know ahead of time what day it would be. That someone was none other than Zamorish.

So that’s how a junior researcher at the municipal statistics committee shook up the whole capital. Not that it did him any good. His timidity caused him to wait a little too long to perform his duty, and that delay got him a serious kick in the pants. The poor kid barely held on to his job.

The very next evening, the operations center received its first precious call from Maternity Hospital No. 3. All over the city people sat glued to their television screens as a tiny, red baby boy announced his arrival in the world with a high-pitched wail. A committee member examined a tag on the baby’s arm and shouted his last name into the phone for the committee. Nearby, people were congratulating the glowing young mother.

That's how the one millionth resident was born in Bishkek, the capital of the newly independent Kyrgyz state. He was the carrot-topped firstborn son of a plain Kyrgyz *dzhigit* who lived in a small makeshift hut on Semetei Street in the Bakai Ata neighborhood, which until recently had been called "Squatter's Camp."

Sitting in front of their televisions, viewers thrilled at the sight of the throaty baby who, on the very day of his birth, was already singled out for good fortune from among all the other babies born that day. People even remembered the name of the happy mother.

But the next day, when the television announced the names of the millionth resident's parents, the names were different. Although plenty of people were mystified by the official announcement from the mayor's office, nobody bothered to satisfy the general curiosity by calling the mayor to find out what had happened. And that was not surprising.

The only protest to be heard was in Zamorish's humble heart, which caused him sharp pain in his chest. Unable to restrain himself, he determined to see his supervisor.

"Who do you think you are to go questioning the mayor's decisions? Get your ass out of here!" the department head yelled, thunder and lightning shooting from his eyes. Zamorish flew out of the office. In the same split second, his resolve to be a champion of justice evaporated.

When mother and baby arrived home, their relatives, friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate the firstborn son's birth and bestow on him a suitable name. Since all of them were furious at the underhanded officials who had stripped their baby of his title as "one millionth resident of the capital," they soon reached a unanimous decision: the boy, who had been subjected to injustice at the very moment of his birth, would bear the name Adilet (*justice*). No other name was even suggested. Offhandedly, a neighbor woman told the young mother a strange thing.

"This sounds strange, but that night when you were screaming over there at the hospital trying to push out your boy, a ray of silver light fell down from the sky and lit up your yard."

If only the gods, demons and humans would live by the same rules!
The Kalachakra

Chapter One

Before the sun was up on Wednesday morning, several residents of an elite high-rise apartment complex that regular people called *Uch Kuduk*¹ finally caught the strange boy. He looked to be about eight or nine. His large, deep-set eyes avoided their faces. He sniffled and kept scratching at a birthmark on his forehead the size of a millet seed.

The boy had a cold; that was obvious. The autumn morning's icy air had chilled him. All he wore was a track suit and sneakers, with no hat. One look showed that he didn't live in that neighborhood. He was from the city's outskirts. He stubbornly refused to answer the adults' questions, and only glowered at them. Most of the time, he just stared at his shoes.

"Is he deaf, or something? We should hand him over to the police. Why does he come prowling around someone else's neighborhood in the middle of the night?" asked a woman who was shivering in the cold.

"Listen, kid, what are you doing out here at this hour?"

"Why do you swing on that creaky swing set when everyone's asleep? You're waking up the whole building. Are you aware that it's only six o'clock?"

"You ought to know better. You're big enough..."

"Don't you hear the noise you're making? It's worse than a dog howling. Sounds like you're feeding a dog a paving stone..."

"What's your name, son?" an old woman interrupted. She shifted her weight to her good leg.

"He's a wandering fool. He's crazy in the head," one resident sneered. He looked the boy in the eye, hoping to deliver a blow to his pride.

The boy answered the taunt with a glance that was full of fire.

"Say something. Don't just stand there like a riled-up badger."

Another man from the building walked up. "We couldn't catch him yesterday or the day before. How did you nab the little devil?" he asked.

A young man in a track suit sniggered. "He's a fat turkey with short legs and he can't run," he said, doing his best to be hurtful. The boy glared at him and opened his mouth to say something. But nothing came out.

"He's so tubby he really does look like a turkey."

"Ha-ha-ha..." It was a phony laugh.

The boy's eyes were tearing up as he looked at each of them. Then he turned to the runner: "If I wasn't running against the earth's rotation you'd never be able to catch me."

"What's that he said?" yelled the old woman who still held him by the elbow.

The runner knelt down to face him. "What did you say? I didn't get it. Say it again." Astonished, the others also stared at the strange boy.

"Repeat what you said, son," the other old woman peered at the boy's face through her thick glasses. It was these two, a pair of elderly women, who had finally caught the troublemaker. They fully expected the gratitude of everyone whose precious

¹ "Three wells"

early morning sleep had been disturbed by the loud creaking coming from the swing. After all, they were the only ones who had bothered to come out of their apartments and give the source of the disturbance a talking-to. Everyone else just looked out their windows into the pre-dawn darkness, hoping to catch sight of the unidentified hooligan.

Some people said “drug addict”; others said “deviant” or “psycho.” In the end, the two old women suffering from insomnia realized that no one else intended to do anything. Two dark mornings in a row they failed to catch the troublemaker. Then, to their surprise, they discovered that it was just a little boy who showed up at their building’s playground from who knows where.

On the third day, they appealed to a runner at the track.

“Sweetheart, go catch the little devil!”

“That naughty little boy swings the creaky swing in the middle of the night. He’s killing us!”

A few minutes later, the runner returned with the boy. Now all three of them, filled with a sense of duty done and even a bit of pride, waited to hear sensible proposals from the other residents on what to do with the troublemaker. But the residents only wanted to let off steam and scold the little hooligan. They’d caught him fair enough, but they couldn’t get a word out of him. Who was he? Where was he from, and why did he have to swing on their creaky swing?

Some of the residents looked at the boy with a mixture of surprise and pity. Others looked hard at him and didn’t know what to say, censuring him with a shake of the head and an *ai-ai-ai*!

None of the people in the crowd that had gathered and none of the other residents hurrying past had any words of gratitude for the elderly women who had managed to catch the boy. That’s human nature for you: they had already forgotten how they had been ready to boil alive the person who tortured their nerves and robbed them of sleep. Only one skinny, shivering woman expressed utter exasperation, repeating what someone had already said: “We should take him to the police!” It was obvious by her face that if it was up to her, the boy would get no mercy. Finally she threw her arms up in vexation and went back to the building.

When people started drifting away, the old women (who were still holding the boy’s arms) began to fret.

“What are we going to do with the dimwit now?”

“We should take him to the police.”

“They won’t take him unless we pay them. There are too many stray kids around as it is. Just look at what the world’s come to,” sighed the soft-hearted man who lived next door to one of the old women.

The boy was now completely frozen. His face was blue and the fine little hairs on his cheeks stood erect. The poor thing’s constant sniffing did nothing to stop his runny nose, so he alternated using his sleeves.

The old woman in thick glasses leaned down to him with what seemed like an offer of amnesty. “Do you promise not to swing on our swing anymore in the middle of the night?”

The boy dropped his head and stared down at his feet. His heart was thumping. He wanted to break away from the tight circle of people and race off in unison with the

earth's rotation, so fast that no one in this whole world could catch him, not even the stupid runner in his shiny sneakers. If he had to, he would even take off and fly!

* * *

On the fifth day, Adilet's fever finally broke and he lifted his head. Grandmother Nurjamal helped him sit up with two pillows behind his back so he could see life going on outside the window.

"I'm bigger now, Grandmother," Adilet said out of the blue. His grandmother looked at him hard. She wasn't sure what to say. She had been preparing for a serious talk with her grandson if, of course, he seemed inclined to candor.

The boy needed his grandmother. He didn't know that she had sat by his bed day and night while he was delirious, then while he was racked by a thick, hacking cough, and in the moments when he had slept briefly between fits of coughing. He was glad to snuggle up to her breast and seemed to have something to tell her. Sensing it, his grandmother stroked his head and buried her face in his hair, breathing deeply his dear, familiar scent. Hot tears welled up in her eyes from the wave of tenderness that surged over her.

"Of course you're taller! You're already a big boy and you'll keep getting bigger, Grandmother's helper."

"People grow when they're sick, don't they, Grandmother? I'm bigger now, right?"

"Do you mean your height?"

"No, I mean me. I'm all grown up."

"Keep growing, Grandmother's own darling. You're already a big *dzhigit*. God willing, you'll finish fifth grade this year. It used to be that *dzhigits* who finished third grade became activists on the big farms, always up on their horses commanding everyone. You'll be just like them. Your grandfather was a respected leader in his day. He was head of the farm. I guess you could say he managed the cows and commanded the herders. I was a milkmaid and I always got a lot of milk. My older sister was a famous milkmaid, and so was my mother. I remember when I was tiny she would sit me under one of the gentler cows and do her milking. Lots of times a cow would kick one of us milkmaids and you'd go rolling across the floor with your pail of milk...that's right, we milked the cows in the middle of the night and before the sun came up. Thanks to God, they called me a third-generation milkmaid and appreciated my hard work. They elected me to be a representative and even decorated me with a medal ..."

Grandmother laughed merrily, covering her toothless mouth with one hand.

"Were you able to talk with the cows?"

"Sweetheart, when did you ever hear of a person talking with a cow? Those are just stories you make up about talking with a cow or a dog."

"I can talk to ants and bees and wasps, Grandmother. You've seen it! Wasps never sting me. They just fly around me."

"Stop fooling, sweetheart. You need to spend more time on the school books you've been neglecting. Your mother and father are going to kill each other over your schooling. They fight every day!"

"I'm sick of school, Grandmother. Don't make me go. I'd rather help Mama milk the cow."

"Do you plan to shovel manure out of the cow's stall you're whole life? You filthy urchin!" His grandmother's voice trembled with anger. "I've had enough! And your father and mother have had enough of working in pig shit! Get an education!"

Grandmother Nurjamal's irritation grew into a rage that shook her thin frame. Adilet's eyes widened in fear, but the protest inside of him won over the pity he felt for his grandmother. He spoke stubbornly, firmly: "I won't go to school, Grandmother."

"You won't? Well you'd be better off dead than living life as an idiot! Get up! Get out of here!" Grandmother Nurjamal was screaming, almost hysterical, as if all the anger and stormy emotions she had stored in her heart for so long had finally broken through the surface.

Fear seized the boy. He didn't dare oppose her further. Cringing, he slowly started climbing out of bed.

"Why do we give you food and drink? Why do we indulge you in everything? If only we had known what you really are. May you be the last of your breed! You're all of our troubles rolled together into one little clump! You've heaped more misfortune on the head of my misfortunate daughter, you damned whelp!"

"Grandmother!"

She didn't hear her grandson's pleading voice. "You were born with the stamp of failure on you! You were born to amount to nothing. On the very day you were born the city bosses disdained you and lashed out at you. They made you a nothing. And they were right. You just wait! So you won't go to school? I'll—"

Nurjamal-baibiche lost all control over herself. Her feet bare, her eyes bulging and red and her hair tangled and snarled like a witch's, she pushed her grandson into the corner.

"Grandmother, listen!"

Nurjamal-baibiche was shaking in fury, ready to destroy her grandson. Her bony hands struck his face, head and shoulders.

"Grandmother, listen! Grandmother," the boy cried out in pain. Finally his grandmother realized what she was doing. Instantly her body went slack. Her knees buckled under her as she went to him. Almost falling, she braced herself against the wall and squatted down.

"Will you go to school or not?"

Grandmother seemed not to hear the words that were ripped out of her, but Adilet felt the anger and bitterness in them very clearly.

"I will, Grandmother!" he promised. Pressing close to the wall, he began to make his way out of the room. He suddenly thought that his grandmother's gaunt, folded body looked lifeless. The thought chilled him.

At that moment Adilet's mother, Aisada, was on her way into the yard. She was pale and angry after a morning meeting with the school principal. She grabbed a stick and threw it at a dog that came whining and rubbing up to her. She crossed the yard, went into the barn, grabbed an old broken shovel handle and started whacking the cows left and right. The poor animals had never been treated that way. They made sputtering, unhappy noises

as they shuffled and bumped each other. Soon the whole barn was a chaos of moving bodies.

“I hope you all rot and die! I’ll kill you and then I’ll rot!”

In a fit of fury, Aisada broke the shovel handle and threw it in the corner. She grabbed her head with both hands. She was ready to weep, but the tears stuck in her throat. Only her lips were trembling.

“Hey, daughter, what have you done?” She heard her mother’s distress.

Aisada looked up. Her mother was there, tiny and scared. Nurjamal-baibiche knelt down beside her grown daughter.

“Your son gave me his word that he will go to school. Don’t torment yourself. Don’t be so upset,” she said consolingly, sympathizing with her daughter. “That boy doesn’t often give a promise, but when he does he always keeps his word. You know he does.”

“Sure. He’s really up and running now. But it doesn’t matter. They kicked him out of school!”

“What do you mean? How?”

“Just like that. They said, ‘Your son brings shame on our school.’ I argued with the principal and she told me, ‘Your son smokes hashish.’”

“Damnation! What can we do now? The little fool said he’d go to school! May his idiot legs drop off!”

Aisada looked at her mother wearily, with a subconscious objection to the last thing she’d said. She sat in silence for a moment to catch her breath. Then she said, “He’s a stupid little smarty-pants. He filed a complaint about the principal with the school board. Over the internet, no more no less. I wondered why he was so meek and quiet lately.”

“What else did they say?”

“His teacher Jildiz, the one who’s taught him from the first through the fourth grade, helped him send whatever it was. A letter, I guess. Anyway, Solovyova the principal jumped on me like a German shepherd. She said, ‘Jildiz Karabayevna has filled your son’s head with heresy. It is clear you never pay any attention to him. Otherwise you’d know about his disgusting behavior!’ Oh, she was really shooting fire and lightning. Turns out Karabayevna had a falling out with her.”

“With who?”

“With the principal. The Kyrgyz teacher whispered to me about it. Turns out that last week Adilet dragged a couple of puppies into class, and instead of throwing them out, the teacher did a demonstration for the other students of how Adilet talks with dogs. Can you just imagine it, Mama?”

“I don’t believe it! And then what?”

“As soon as the principal heard about it, she ran in and yelled at Adilet for bringing stray dogs to class, and the dogs almost attacked her. Then our smarty pants let go of his tongue. Do you know what he said to Solovyova? He said, ‘There’s no help for you. You have a bad aura.’ He said it right to her face. That’s his terrible habit of telling every person exactly what he thinks of him, especially if it isn’t flattering. Well his teacher stood up for him, and then those two went at it. I bet they chewed each other up worse than the dogs.”

“Which two?”

"The principal and his teacher, Jildiz. The next day, the teachers got together and gave her a reprimand for being out of line. They told her to quit before she got fired."

"Who?"

"Adilet's teacher. But it looks like she did more than just leave. She helped Adilet file a complaint about the principal. Why did she have to use a kid to try to get herself out of trouble?"

"My God, where would a little boy get the idea to file a complaint?"

"That's what I was explaining to you, Mama!"

"Then what?"

"That's it. They kicked our hothead out of school. The principal said, 'Your son skips class and smokes hashish. And he's weird in the head. Put him in another school or we'll send him to reform school.'"

"Lord help us. How's he weird in the head? He had all A's."

"They said Jildiz just gave him those A's."

"But why on earth would a teacher just hand out A's?"

"Maybe she's special, too. His dad always went to parent meetings, sometimes Tashtan went. They always spoke so highly about this Jildiz woman."

"Is she a woman or a girl? I thought she was pretty young."

"To hell with her. She's ruined my boy. He's impossible to manage now. He never listens to me. If I had a stick, I'd beat him with it right now. I already broke that one, Goddamn..."

"Your son is angry at both of you. It's obvious."

"Who do you mean, both of us?"

"You. His mother and father. You're pulling his heart in two different directions and the child's hurting. It's enough to make him go crazy. If he's already smoking cannabis then he will definitely become a fool."

"I'm telling his father. He can do whatever he wants with him."

"No! You can't!" the old woman leaped up. "He'll beat my baby and throw him out of the house."

"He can kick him all the way to the end of the world for all I care. Let the little bugger die. I've had enough. He's no son to me anymore!"

"Don't say that!" Nurjamal was afraid.

That night Aisada suddenly awoke to a vague feeling of alarm. She glanced at the clock. It was half past three. She slipped on her robe and looked over at Adilet's corner. His bed was empty. She ran outside, where it was still pitch black. For an instant she hesitated at the gate not knowing which was to go. She remembered that the first time she had caught her son he was walking confidently in his sleep in the direction of town. Another time the police had brought him home, freezing cold and terrified, from all the way downtown. Heeding her intuition, Aisada ran towards town. Her mind raced ahead to the Uch Kuduk towers by the stadium.

By the time Aisada reached the towers it was almost light. She finally made out her son's silhouette on the edge of the empty lot by the Uch Kuduk towers. She froze in amazement: Adilet was bathed in silvery rays of light that radiated from him. She started

to run to her son, but stopped and walked on slowly, not believing her eyes. Then she began to walk faster. The closer she got to him, the weaker the rays of light got. Finally they blinked and disappeared. Aisada decided that she had been dreaming. She went over to her son but decided not to embrace him right away, knowing you should never jostle a sleepwalking child.

“Adilet, Adile-et, my little boy,” she said softly, standing right next to him.

Still asleep, the boy mumbled something. He started to stumble. Aisada caught her son before he could fall.

“Adilet, sweetheart, wake up. It’s me. Mama”

Half-dreaming, the boy mumbled “My legs are broken. My arms are broken. Oh, my arms are broken...I won’t die...won’t die...I won’t ever die...”

“Adilet, my angel, open your eyes,” Aisada prompted him gently. The boy finally awoke, but he was in a strange, semi-conscious state. The first words that came out of his mouth were about the swing: “The swing is calling me!” he said, rubbing his eyes and pointing toward the Uch Kuduk playground.

“What swing, angel?”

“Sirius is calling me...”

His mother wisely said nothing. She wanted to take him by the hand, but she couldn’t let him walk barefoot over the early morning frost and the ground was rocky with sharp weeds. Aisada put her son on her back and trotted off in search of a taxi.

Aisada’s joy at finding her son unharmed melted away with each step she took, his body weighing heavily on her back. Her feeling of peace began to give way to bitter resentment on behalf of her son and herself. The bitterness she had felt at her son’s birth, bitterness born of injustice, was hard to fight off. Sometimes it pricked her mercilessly. And now, with every step the resentment in Aisada’s heart grew. She couldn’t refrain from reproaching herself out loud:

“I gave birth to my own misfortune, that’s for sure. Why the hell did I have to have the one millionth baby? We didn’t need any of that. Why did I have to give birth at just that moment? A minute sooner or a minute later and my boy would be normal, like everyone else. I went and handed him a big bag of trouble. I should have strangled those bastards at the hospital. My baby started his life out being lied to and put down. They even hid his birth certificate. They destroyed it on purpose. But we found out. We heard that the bosses upstairs told them to destroy our birth certificate to keep us from fighting. They picked another baby to be the one millionth, gave his family a two-bedroom apartment and gave him the key to the city. What about us? We still can’t get them to issue a birth certificate. And what made us think we were so special we could name our son Adilet? I’d like to see some of that justice!”

“Mama, put me down. Why are you carrying me?”

“Are you awake now, sweetie? You’re barefoot and it’s cold. You’ll catch another cold. Let’s sit down on that bench over there. Just two steps left. We’ll catch a taxi,” Aisada said, trying to disguise how heavily she was breathing.

The first rays of sun were already peeking like a cat’s whiskers over the mountains into the valley when mother and son, cold and miserable, finally arrived home.

Sometimes when you are beating your head against a seemingly unanswerable question life unexpectedly reveals the solution. But even then you still don't know what twists of fate it has prepared for you.

When the storm in Aisada's soul quieted, she found herself filled with mother-love mingled with pity and a feeling of bitterness. She told Adilet just how bad things were: neither the principal nor the teachers wanted to see him at school because he supposedly ignored his schoolwork, asked foolish questions and was probably even smoking weed, of which the school administrators were certain. Nobody in the family knew for sure what to do next. And they didn't know what to do with him.

"Everything I told you went in one ear and out the other," Aisada's voice trembled with resentment. "Now they've kicked you out of school. I don't want to hear anything more out of you. Your Uncle Tashtan means more to you than I do. You always go to him for advice and share your secrets with him. He's smarter than me, so go talk to him." She stood up and made a demonstrative exit.

Grandmother Nurjamal didn't dare look her grandson in the eye after the beating she had given him the day before. She was low and ashamed, her face exhausted. Tashtan-baike was in a bad mood, too. He took Adilet for a drive in his father's Mazda. They stopped outside town, near the Flamingo summer camp for Korean children. Because it was late autumn, the camp was empty.

"If you're having problems, it's because you're an adult now. Both of us are men. I've always helped you out because you're family, but also because we're good friends. Now I'm thinking it was just words to you. You never told me you were in trouble. You just don't trust me. I didn't expect that."

Adilet obviously took the accusation hard, but he didn't break.

Tashtan-baike continued his reproach: "I know you filed a complaint with the school board. Your mother told me yesterday. I was absolutely stunned, and not because you wrote it and sent it off. You can do whatever you want. But because you didn't say a word about it to me. That really hurt, do you understand? Do you think a friend would act the way you did?"

Adilet flushed red as if caught sinning. He started kicking the toe of his sneaker even harder against the curb.

"Now tell me what the complaint was about. Did somebody at school do something to you?"

"It wasn't a complaint. It was just a question," Adilet finally said, scowling up at Tashtan.

"So what was the dangerous question? Or can you not talk about it? Fine, don't talk."

Adilet threw his chin up and spoke more bravely: "It wasn't a dangerous question. I just asked why the Russian classes got new heaters and the Kyrgyz classes didn't get any heaters at all."

"That's it?"

Adilet nodded. Tashtan started laughing. "I see. They say you were talking about nationalism. Do you even know the word nationalism?"

Adilet shook his head.

"That's okay. You don't need to know yet. But when you see injustice or discrimination, don't be afraid to tell it like it is. Don't ever be a coward."

"I'm not a coward," Adilet bristled.

"But the fact that they're kicking your important ass out of school, that doesn't worry you at all, does it?"

"I won't go to school anymore. They kicked me out. So what?"

"You don't have the right to decide that on your own. You don't have hair on your face yet."

Adilet said nothing, looking for of a way to turn the unpleasant conversation away from the topic of school.

"You promised you'd take me with you to Shambhala. I already read all the books you gave me," he said, his face lighting up with an earnest smile.

"Yeah, but those were just popular science books and children's encyclopedias. That's not enough. You have to finish the fifth grade and work on your English. Then you can go to Shambhala."

"Are you going to leave without me?"

"I won't leave without you. I don't have my invitation yet."

"Who's inviting you?"

"There's a theological research center in Tibet. I sent off to ask them for permission to access their materials for my dissertation. God willing, I'll get the invitation."

"What if you don't?"

"I will. I already consulted and got approval for my dissertation topic."

"Can you tell me about the topic?"

Looking troubled and a little perplexed, Tashtan answered "Don't bust your brain over it. I can tell you don't care about studying. That's why you were skipping classes. 'Woe from Wit!'"

"Can I study with Jildiz-ezhe?"

"Ha! You like your populist schoolteacher, don't you? She quit her job. Your Jildiz-ezhe might not be teaching anywhere anymore. She might be selling vegetables or socks down at the market."

"She wouldn't do that!" Adilet shuddered.

"Fine. Tell me one thing, brother. You keep running off to that swing set on the playground by Uch Kuduk. Should we put you in the elite school that's next door?"

"Who told you that?" Adilet was blushing.

"Your mother told me. You were roaming around out there again last night. She found you at sunup. Don't hide it. I don't care where you finish fifth grade. What matters is that you go with me to Tibet. If you want to. But I wish you'd explain to me why you're drawn to that swing."

Adilet turned his back on his kinsman and dug his sneaker under the Mazda's tire. Without turning around, he said: "The squeaky swing sounds like the signals coming from the planet Sirius. That's why..."

Tashtan waited for his nephew – his little friend – to pull back the curtain hiding the secrets of his soul. He sensed that there was mystery in his nephew's inner life. Sometimes he was pulled by strange thoughts and visions that he himself didn't yet understand. They drew him away from the real world and made him look odd to others. At such moments Adilet might look right at a friend and fail to recognize him, giving no greeting and walking by with a scowl on his face.

Tashtan knew that one time a Tajik fortuneteller told Aisada: “I believe your son can sometimes see a person’s aura. In the future he will be a great shaman. Guard this child closely.”

Adilet’s parents had been raised in the spirit of Soviet atheism, so they paid the prophecy no heed. Tashtan had a degree in philosophy and was interested in theology, but only in the academic sense. He had read much about the great mysteries of Tibet and was researching the surprising similarities between the Tengerism of the ancient Kyrgyz and the Bön faith of pre-Buddhist Tibet. This was the topic of his dissertation. Tashtan’s research was not focused on explaining mystical occurrences, but rather on the real, human world of spiritual life, worldviews and perceptions. He hoped that his research would lead to a discovery in the spiritual history of Kyrgyzstan and its past connections with Tibet.

On the face of it, Adilet’s inner world, his interests and dreams, didn’t seem to have anything to do with Tashtan’s scholarly studies. Nonetheless, he felt a growing resolve to take his nephew away from Bishkek, where the boy seemed to feel less at ease than his cohorts. The most fitting plan, the ideal, would be to take Adilet to Tibet, to the roof of the world. He was already planning on going, but he didn’t have enough money for the trip. Tashtan hoped that if he took Adilet with him Aisada would pay for both of their travel expenses, so he worked on her ahead of time, trying to convince her to let her son go with him to further his studies.

“Kyrgyz children are leaving to study in America and Europe, not to mention the ones that go to school in Turkey, Mecca and Medina. That second group of students faces limited prospects. They’ll never amount to anything but mullahs, imams or madrasah teachers. But in Tibet, it’s a completely different style of learning and a different world. Tibet hides the secrets of the universe and the mysteries of all the planets. Great thoughts are collected there. In Tibet, they teach knowledge that foretells the future of humanity. Adilet will be the first. Let him attain Shambhala, the holy city wrapped in the embrace of the Himalayas. Let him reach the pinnacle of human morals. Only Allah knows who your son will become, what kind of man he will be. Let me take him. He’s not of this world. At the very least he will be a teacher, a professor of Tibetan medicine. He will heal people...” His arguments easily swayed Adilet’s mother.

It would be more difficult talking with his Salamat, his older brother and Adilet’s father. Salamat would refuse immediately right from the outset, even without listening to the facts. And since Tashtan didn’t really have any facts about education in Tibet, he wouldn’t be able to build a strong case. Aisada, on the other hand, was pleased by the prospects Tashtan had described as being available for her son. And Adilet was attracted to the mysteries of Tibet. His mother had always been disappointed that Adilet, who did very well in school, just shook his head stubbornly when people mentioned the professions that were currently in fashion: lawyer, market researcher, manager. He wouldn’t hear a word of it. Now Aisada was filling out Tashtan’s promises with ideas of her own: “There are so many Tibetan medical centers in Bishkek. Why couldn’t my Adilet open one? Of course he could!”

“Adik,” Tashtan broke the brief silence, “Let’s decide what you’re going to do about school.”

“Okay. Can I study with Jildiz-ezhe?”

“If that’s what you really want.”

“How will we find her?”
“That’s doable. But first we have to talk with your mother and father. Now hold on, Adik. Do you know what *lyap* is?”
“*Lyap*?”
“Yes.”
“That’s opium, right?”
“Do you smoke it?”
“I never smoked *lyap*. I just tried cannabis once.”
“Did you like it?”
“Me and another boy tried it. We laughed ourselves sick. He was bugging his eyes out at me, and I was bugging my eyes out at him, and neither one of us could stop laughing. The more we laughed, the sillier our faces got, and we just kept laughing. It was crazy.”
“Then what?”
“We told the other kids in our class about and they laughed at us.”
“Why? Did they tell you it was wrong?”
“Of course not. They were talking big. They were like, ‘Everybody else is shooting up and you two sissies are still smoking stinkweed.’”
“Keep going.”
“That was it. We tried it again after that, and then we gave it up.”
“Why?”
“I don’t know. We just stopped smoking it.”
“What’s the other boy’s name?”
“When he tried it the second time, his dad caught him and beat him up. Ever since that he’s been too afraid to even think about it.”
“So he doesn’t smoke anymore? Do you believe him?”
“Yeah. He’s forgotten about it.”
“How about you?”
“Me, too.”
Adilet looked at his kinsman out of the corner of his eye and smiled.

The private Jewish academy in the Vostok-5 neighborhood was located on the first floor of what used to be a day care center. Tashtan and Adilet found the Kyrgyz language class right away, where Jildiz was teaching a lesson. They waited for the bell outside her classroom.

Adilet was mystified. “I don’t even know Hebrew,” he said, tugging on Tashtan’s sleeve.

“If you don’t want to learn in Kyrgyz, you’ll have to learn in Hebrew,” Tashtan put on a formidable frown and shrugged his shoulders. Adilet shivered.

Just then the bell rang and the door flew open. Students streamed out of the room, pushing each other as they went. Adilet was so shy under the curious glances of the boys and girls that he broke out in a sweat. Lots of the boys had headphones in their ears or around their necks. Almost all of them were wearing the latest fashions. “Rich kids,” Adilet thought.

Jildiz Karabaevna followed the students out of her classroom. Adilet didn't even recognize her at first: she was so slim and elegant, much lovelier than she had been at his old school. When the teacher saw two familiar faces, she stopped and raised her black eyebrows in surprise.

"Adilet, is that you?" There was a friendly light in her dark grey eyes.

"Hello, ezhe," he greeted her joyously. Then he hung his head in shame.

"Hello Adilet. I'm very glad to see you. What brings you two here?" She turned to Tashtan for an answer.

The human soul is a mystery. You can run into a person you have seen many times before and suddenly see this person in a completely new light.

Tashtan had not expected to be nervous. Adilet's teacher seemed utterly different than she had on the two previous occasions he had met with her. Everything about her seemed to radiate something charmingly feminine and appealing. For a second, Tashtan even found himself getting embarrassed under her attentive and somewhat surprised gaze. Her cheeks reddened. An image of this well-built, attractive *dzhigit* had shone somewhere in a dark corner of her soul ever since she had first seen him at school.

Jildiz hugged Adilet and asked him laughingly, "Adik, can you tell me who this is?"

"He's my friend," the boy said, smiling up at his favorite teacher.

"That's right. He's my little friend and I'm his big friend. Tashtan-baike," he held out his hand. He wasn't sure if he should just greet her or if he needed to introduce himself. Jildiz put her hand in his open palm. She was noticeably blushing. As their eyes met, there was a spark of something bewitching that thrilled them. They both felt a sweet tremor run through their bodies. Their hands parted reluctantly.

"Let's go in my room. My classes are over." She gestured for her unexpected guests to go in.

As she listened to her student's story, the young woman's face darkened. When it was finished she hugged Adilet and her eyes filled with tears.

"You are my best student, Adilet. How did all this happen, sweetheart?"

"He doesn't want to go to his old school because you aren't there. So we had to hunt for his favorite teacher," Tashtan smiled in gratitude.

"I see," Jildiz wiped her forehead, watching her young troublemaker closely.

"Well then, leave Adilet with me until tomorrow. We'll go home and do some serious thinking. Okay, Adik?"

Adilet nodded in agreement. Tashtan excused himself, stepping out to call Aisada on his cell phone.

"His mother gives her permission," he said when he returned to Jildiz. She looked away quickly, unable to bear the penetrating, euphoric look in Tashtan's eyes.

"In the beginning, chaos ruled in the infinite universe. To bring order to the chaos, God came into the seventh layer of heaven. He came out of nothing, or rather out of air and light. Then he created a number of very different helpers. They were Uluk (the most important angel), other angels, a devil and Satan.

“Then God created the earth and all that lived on it – peaceful animals and predators. On the seventh day, after some thought he created in his own image Adam, our forefather: his body was made from clay and his soul was made from the air of the planet Sirius. The Almighty gave his creation the gift of immortality because he was delighted by his mind and his beauty. So that Adam would not be alone, he took his rib and created Eve, who became our foremother. She was ninety-nine times more beautiful than Adam, and one-hundred times more gentle and kind. They would have lived with God in heaven for eternity if they hadn’t broken one rule.

“In paradise, where they lived in pleasure, there was an apple tree that bore bitter fruits. Whoever should eat an apple from the tree would know black and white and would sin much and become wretched. God warned Adam and Eve about this and forbade them to even go near the tree.

“Of all his helpers, God was closest to Adam. He always had long talks with him and asked him for advice. This provoked the vain and wicked Satan. He made every effort and used every ruse to get Eve to trust him. If she ate the apple, he said, she and Adam would have many children. Eve gave in to the temptation.

“That is how God’s ban was violated. When he found out, God was enraged and banished Adam and Eve from paradise. He put them on the Earth, which had been created only for beasts and other creatures.

“‘Although you will have many children, your lives will be short. You have brought this punishment on yourselves. Now sin and injustice will always be with you,’ God warned them. Then he called for the Devil and instructed him: ‘Upon my word, you will take man’s soul.’ The Devil was very pleased.

“The angels and Uluk stood up for Father Adam and Mother Eve, but God forbade them to defend the sinners. Uluk raised Adam and Eve up into heaven again to give them a chance at eternal life. Then God punished Uluk for his disobedience by chaining him to Mount Kailash that rose up about the Earth and took Uluk’s name for his own, calling himself God Uluk. At the same time, he banished Adam and Eve from paradise again and closed the gravitational paths connecting the Earth and heaven.

“That is how Uluk suffered the wrath of God. He will remain a prisoner until the end of the world. Not even the angels can go to Adam, because they fear God’s retribution. They just help him from a distance. Angels always assist and protect people, and Satan always does evil.

“Living on the Earth with the beasts and other small animals, Father Adam and Mother Eve multiplied into a large family. One day they all got together and decided: ‘Why aren’t we immortal? Why don’t we live forever? We will ask God. We will go to him and tell him our demand.’

“They began building a tall tower on a high place near the city of Babel. The tower of Babel grew day and night. When the tower came close to the gates of paradise, God came up with a trick: he changed people’s faces and gave them different languages so they couldn’t understand each other. The building halted. That is how humans were left to live on Earth in the land of the beasts after they were dishonestly deprived of their immortality.

“The first crime was committed by Adam and Eve’s children. Why did Qabil kill his brother Habil²? Because he was stingy and jealous.

² *Qabil and Habil are the Arabic names of Cain and Abel.*

Mother Eve warned her younger son, Habil: ‘Satan is tempting your brother. Be careful and do not tell him about your good fortune or your deepest secrets.’

But Habil had already told his brother that their father had given him a special mission. He had boasted: ‘Our father Adam gave me power over all the animals, so I took a sheep to God as an offering. He accepted my offering and has shown me his love.’ On the next day, Cain, who called himself master of the fields, filled a bag with grain and took it as a gift to God, but God did not accept his gift. Then, filled with envy, he killed his younger brother by striking him on the head with a stone. Qabil and Habil left many children. All of them have grains of evil and envy in their blood, and these grains multiply in each generation...”

When Tashtan finished reading his fourth-grade nephew’s essay, he patted the notebook and smiled. He was pleasantly surprised by Adilet’s intelligence and his lucid thinking. How did the boy take everything he had heard and read in the books Tashtan had given him], unify it as a whole and use it to describe his own vision and insight?

“How interesting. He calls Babylon by its Sumerian name, Babel, and retold the Sumerian tale in perfect Kyrgyz. Sure, perhaps both came from the same source. The boy’s going to be someone. But...” The ringing telephone interrupted his thoughts. He picked it up and heard Jildiz’ excited voice.

“Adilet says he will attend the academy.”

“Will he really? Even though it’s a Jewish academy?”

“We mainly teach classes in Russian and English. Instead of Hebrew, Adilet will take advanced English courses. I already talked to the director.”

“Okay, but let his mother make the final decision. We can’t do anything without her.”

“Of course. But I think you should talk to her. Or do you want me to do it?”

“How about I bring his mother to the school? We still have to come to an agreement about the tuition.”

“Right. It’s an expensive academy. Bring Aisada-ezhe over. Did you read Adilet’s essay? He wrote it in the fourth grade.”

“It’s amazing.”

“It really is. Adilet’s very bright. Don’t forget to return the essay. I want to keep it.”

“Jildiz, has he told you anything about his deepest secrets?”

“I think he’s told me basically the same things he’s told you.”

“About the gravitational paths?”

“I’m afraid I didn’t understand that part. Something about paths between the planets?”

“The little devil’s looking for them everywhere. He’s let his schoolwork slide. But he’ll obey you. We’re sure of it. We’ll discuss everything else when we come by, okay?”

Three days later, Adilet Narbayev entered the fifth grade at the Isabel Jewish academy.

Before he accepted Adilet, the academy’s director called Jildiz to his office.

“You know that we don’t usually accept children from Kyrgyz schools. It’s only out of respect for you that I’m willing to let this boy, who you say is so extraordinary, into our academy. It will be your responsibility,” he said, and his smile was full of meaning as he looked the young, pretty teacher in the eye.

“I have confidence in him. He’ll manage fine,” Jildiz answered. “You’ll have to excuse me, I have a class.” She quickly stood up and reached for the door. She felt the director’s eyes drilling holes in her back. The door slammed shut behind her. The director shook his head. Oh, how attracted he was to that proud young woman.

When Adilet came home from school every day, he ate and then sat down at his desk. He adapted to the new discipline without much trouble. Only on occasion would he allow himself to play a computer game. He also liked watching videos about space travel in hopes of finding the universe’s gravitational pathways.

On this particular day, his shoulder ached as he sat at his desk. There were tears in his eyes. His classmates had been giving him a hard time. They hid his folder and tried to trip him. He got punched in the nose a few times and, of course, answered in kind. But more importantly, he was getting good grades. His classmates gave him the nickname Kyrgyz. They called him Cherkess at first, since he had curly hair, a ruddy complexion and a hawk nose. Then they called him Pippi. Finally, when they noticed that he was a favorite with the Kyrgyz language teacher Jildiz Karabaevna, they decided on the name Kyrgyz.

His class was made up of Jews, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Hui. Lots of them had nicknames like “Bigshot,” “Bull” or “Oligarch.” “They’re the children of the *nouveaux riches*,” Tashtan explained. These were the ones who started tormenting Adilet.

There was an unwritten rule among the boys in his class, and it may have applied to the whole school. Without any provocation, they would go off to a spot behind the fence of a nearby construction site and fight. This morning, boys had gathered in groups of two and three and shared a secret in whispers. After class, they all headed out to the fight spot.

The tall boy called Bull told Adilet, “You come with us and watch. Tomorrow’s your turn.”

Two boys, a Uighur and a Russian, were going to fight. They both tossed their backpacks down. With bellicose bearing, they walked into the center of a circle of boys and a few girls. To Adilet’s surprise, the girls were acting as referees.

The opponents grabbed each other’s arms and started fighting like mad. They fell and got back up with varying degrees of success. Each blow and kick was counted loudly by the referees. Finally, blood spurted out of the Uighur’s nose. Everyone was clapping and shouting “Go Russky!” Motivated by the encouragement, the Russian boy began pummeling his weakening opponent. When the other boy fell down, the Russian even started kicking him. The Uighur couldn’t defend himself, but no one showed any signs of stopping the carnage. Adilet could no longer hide his growing revulsion at the senseless violence and jumped in to save the loser. He pushed the winner as hard as he could, so hard that the boy almost fell down.

There were cries of “Get out of there asshole! Kyrgyz!” Adilet was helping the defeated boy get up when the Russian ran up and kicked him in the shoulder. Adilet wanted to hit him back, but the other boys dragged them apart.

The Uighur was covered in blood and breathing heavily. He sat down on a pile of bricks by the fence.

“Somebody hose down Goshka! Hose him off! A little water does a body good!”

One of the boys warned Adilet, “Don’t jump the line, Kyrgyz. Wait your turn.”

Less than a week later, Adilet was notified that his turn had come. A Hui boy named Shalkhar had called Adilet out, claiming that “Kyrgyz shoved me in the hallway.” The class leader gave him permission to use brass knuckles.

“You can use them too,” they told Adilet.

Adilet was upset. He didn’t have a set of brass knuckles. He didn’t even know what one looked like. The only weapon he owned was a pocket canister of pepper spray. Finding himself at an impasse, all he could do was turn to Tashtan-baike. He asked his uncle for brass knuckles. When Tashtan heard his nephew’s story about the senseless fight, he was indignant. His first thought was to tell Jildiz and inform the academy’s administrators. They would put a stop to the violence.

But Adilet objected: “They’ll just ‘put me on my knees’ anyway.”

Tashtan realized that he shouldn’t shame his nephew in the other boys’ eyes. At the same time, he couldn’t allow him to fight. He thought hard and came up with a solution.

Just as Adilet and Shalkhar were facing off like two beat up roosters, a man came around the corner.

“Hey guys, can I watch the fight?”

“Get out of here. Don’t bother them. They’re just playing!” The girls were the first to protest.

Adilet was upset when he caught sight of Tashtan-baike.

“Fine. I’ll leave.”

The man left. But when the boys began to fight the man reappeared and grabbed both of them by their shoulders. “I’ll take you somewhere where they’ll finish you off!” he said, dragging them toward the academy.

The girls complained, “You don’t have any right to mess with them! They were playing!”

“Sure they were! Brass knuckles are a weapon. You can go to jail for that. I’m a police captain.”

“That’s not true! If they had knives, then that would be different.”

“Get any closer and you’ll see my knife.”

“You’re no cop. You’re just an asshole,” one boy challenged him. Others followed his lead.

Tashtan brought both boys to the director of the academy.

Even though the fight had barely started, the other boy had managed to hit Adilet’s collarbone with his brass knuckles. But most importantly, Adilet hadn’t chickened out. He showed up for the fight. No one could call him a coward.

They were in the car. Jildiz-ehze was with them.

"You have six more months to study at the academy. Don't get in any more fights," Tashtan told his nephew. "I want to you learn and expand your horizons."

"Do we have to tell my parents?" Adilet asked his teacher when they stopped in front of his house.

"About what? The fight?"

Adilet nodded.

"I don't know what to say," Jildiz answered.

Tashtan looked at his nephew, "I don't think we have to tell them. I stopped the fight when I happened across them by accident."

Just then the gate opened and Salamat came out. The three people in the car stared at him and said nothing.

"Adilet!" his father sounded suspicious, as if he'd already heard about the fight.

He greeted Jildiz, expecting her to get out of the car. Adilet got out alone. Tashtan wheeled the car around and shouted to his brother, "I'll be right back after I take Jildiz home." It was Salamat's car.

The sun sunk below the horizon in a blaze of purple fire. Adilet was sitting at his desk feeling miserable.

"Jildiz-ehze, I think you gave me the wrong topic," he mentally addressed his teacher. "That's why I can't write. I don't want to write about the prophets Noah and Nuh. I want to write about Yaiswudu. In ancient Sumerian, the name Yaiswudu means 'slowly flowing river.' I'd rather write about Yaiswudu. You won't mind, will you Jildiz-ehze?"

Hesitantly, Adilet picked up his pen.

"After the death of Abel, the youngest son of Father Adam and Mother Eve, chaos entered people's hearts. They began suspecting each other of various sins. Even family members no longer trusted each other. In the end, deceit and injustice ruled the world. In all places good was forced out by evil. There were very few people left who were saddened by this. Only one person, a man named Yaiswudu, wept day and night. People laughed at him and mocked him, calling him a crybaby. This crybaby had three children. Thankfully, they were kind and honest like their father.

Yaiswudu turned to God in tears: 'Oh Allah, your weak servants have left the path of righteousness. I cannot even begin to count all their transgressions. If you are truly almighty, then leave none of these wicked souls on the Earth, for they breed new creatures just as wicked as they are! Do not allow their wild offspring to multiply!'

"Yaiswudu cried for seven days and nights, and God heard his voice. He fulfilled the crybaby's wish. An order came down from heaven: 'My servant Yaiswudu, stop your outpouring of tears. The wicked will drown and be lost in a great flood. You and your children must plant and grow a papyrus tree. Out of it you will build an ark. That ark will come in handy.'

"Yaiswudu did just that. He built a large, three-deck boat using the wood of the trees he and his children had planted. At the same time, Yaiswudu warned all honest,

conscientious people that they should also plant trees and build boats because there would be a great flood.

They did not believe him and even laughed at him, saying, 'It's been many years since a drop of rain has fallen. The ground has dried up. What is this flood you speak of, fool?'

"Then Yaiswudu asked God, 'Oh Allah, I built the ark. When will the water come?'

The answer came from heaven, 'I will give you a sign. The water will come from the place where a flame appears! Prepare your ark to sail!'

"When he heard this, Yaiswudu loaded food and water on the boat. He placed specially chosen birds on the top deck. He and his wife, their sons and their sons wives would live on the middle deck. He put the rest of the animals on the lower deck.

"Suddenly his wife came running. She was worried, afraid even. 'Yaiswudu, I started building a fire in the tandir to bake bread, but water came up from the inside. It is still coming.'

"'Tell everyone to get on the boat!' Yaiswudu ordered. Fear seized him. He turned to God: 'Oh Creator, the animals are all enemies. What will happen when they are in the boat?'

"'My servant Yaiswudu, do not be afraid. I am the one who makes them enemies. I am the one who makes them friends.'

"Sure enough, all was quiet and peaceful on the boat. The wolves hid in a corner in terror. Only the brainless ass was obstinate and refused to step on the boat. Only after Yaiswudu shouted, "Get in the boat you obstinate beast!" did the ass step onto the deck.

"The heavens poured rain like a bucket for days and nights. Water also bubbled up from the ground and rose ever higher. This went on for forty days and forty nights. The water reached unimaginable heights. All the people and the domesticated and wild animals perished. The water bore their bodies into the seas and oceans.

"Yaiswudu walked around the boat and found Satan hiding in a dark corner. 'You old evildoer, how did you get on board?' Yaiswudu shouted angrily.

"'I was holding the ass by his tail so he couldn't get on the boat. When you shouted 'Get on board, beast!' I came on board with the ass.'

"Yaiswudu was furious. 'Satan, you are a tempter, seducer and troublemaker for all men, yet you have survived!' Then he decided to test the devil. 'Father Adam and Mother Eve were immortal in the beginning, but you led them into temptation and made them mere mortals. All the while, you remain immortal. That is unfair. Repent before God and ask him to make Adam and Eve immortal.'

"'I will do it, Yaiswudu, but will God agree with me? Do you think he will forgive me my guilt?'

"Yaiswudu heeded Satan and asked God to forgive his guilt.

"God replied, 'Oh Yaiswudu, all on your boat must bow to the memory of Father Adam. If Satan will bow to his memory and honor him, then I will forgive his guilt.'

"But Satan was indignant: 'I never bowed my head before your Father Adam when he was alive. How is it that I should now bow to his rotted body?' That is how Satan refused the friendship of an honest man.

"One day water sprang up through the bottom of the boat. Yaiswudu called out: 'Who can find the leak?'

“‘I will find it,’ said the snake, slithering forward. It slithered around the whole boat and, when it found the leak, plugged it with its tail. The boat did not sink and remained whole.

“Yaiswudu made a promise to the snake. ‘My friend, when the flood recedes I will grant whatever you ask of me.’

“Then he ordered: ‘Animals, do not mate while we are on the boat. Otherwise the boat will be too crowded and we will drown.’ In spite of his order, the mice on the boat multiplied beyond count. They began chewing holes in the boat out of dimwitted habit.

“Then God advised Yaiswudu: ‘Stroke the lion’s head.’ When Yaiswudu did so, the lion sneezed. A cat flew out of its nose and destroyed all the mice.

“Then there was much urine and feces on the boat. Everyone choked at the stench. Advice came from God: ‘Oh Yaiswudu, climb on the elephant’s back and stroke it.’ When Yaiswudu stroked the elephant’s back, two pigs leaped from its trunk and proceeded to remove all the impurity, pollution and stench. Now the boat was clean.

“At the end of forty days and forty nights, the great flood began to recede. Yaiswudu’s boat came to rest at the top of Hantengri Peak. The rain ceased. Rivers returned to their banks and the earth began to dry out.

“‘Go see if the whole earth has dried out,’ Yaiswudu said as he sent out a crow. The crow found some carrion and did not hurry back. Losing his patience, Yaiswudu sent a dove after the crow. The dove alighted in many places and got red clay on its feet. Then it flew back and recounted what it had seen.

“When the crow finally returned, Yaiswudu spoke to it angrily, ‘May people always be your enemies, and may your life be lived in fear. I will ask God to make it so.’

“Finally the snake approached Yaiswudu and spoke: ‘You promised to reward me for saving the boat and all of you. Here I am.’

“‘Tell me, beast, what is your wish?’

“‘Give me the creature that has the sweetest blood.’

“‘I will discover whose blood is the sweetest,’ said Yaiswudu. He sent a mosquito to find out. Proud of being chosen for an important job, the mosquito got carried away with itself and forgot about the time and the people waiting for it.

“‘What is taking that little bloodsucker so long? Go find it and hurry it along,’ Yaiswudu said to the swallow.

“When the swallow found the mosquito and asked it whose blood was the sweetest, the mosquito answered, ‘In all the world, it would seem that man has the sweetest blood. I must hurry back and tell Yaiswudu.’ The swallow, who was a friend of man, was sorrowed by what it heard. It decided to use guile.

“‘I see. I suppose the taste of that blood is still on your tongue. I would like to try it, too. Stick your tongue out.’ The boastful mosquito stuck out its tongue, and the swallow bit it right off and ate it.

“Fighting and shoving all the way back, the two finally came before Yaiswudu. With half of its tongue missing, all the mosquito could say was ‘buzz-buzz-buzz.’

“Yaiswudu was confused and turned to the swallow, who answered, ‘Friend Yaiswudu, here is what the mosquito told me on our way back. “There are many small beasts and animals of all sorts in the world. I have tasted the blood of many of them, but

the sweetest blood of all is the frog's. There is nothing sweeter than the taste of a frog's blood.”

““But why is the mosquito unable to tell me this?”

““It is friends with the frog, you see. That is why it is buzzing and pretending it can't talk.”

“Then Yaiswudu, satisfied by this answer, turned to the snake: ‘Wise tempter, your assistance was noble and invaluable. I am pleased to fulfill your wish. I give the blood and even the flesh of the frog to you and your descendents to be your favorite food and drink. I will ask God to make it so.’

“The snake was furious at the swallow. It knew that human blood, not a frog's blood, is the sweetest in the world. It tried to bite the swallow, but the bird flew up in the air. All the snake caught was its tail. That is why the swallow has a divided tail.

“That is how the Earth was cleansed. Yaiswudu's descendents multiplied, but Satan was always with them, quietly teaching each new generation to do evil. At the end of eight hundred years, the devil came down to earth and went to Yaiswudu to take his soul, but Yaiswudu turned to God: ‘Oh God, if you have any pity for man then free Uluk from Mount Kailash and chain Satan in his place. Then man, your servant whom you have made, will mend his ways.’

“The answer came from heaven: ‘He will not mend his ways!’

Adiler”

Tashtan was still a bachelor at thirty. There had been many attempts on the part of good friends, relatives and even acquaintances to find a nice girl for him. And of course, he met girls on his own. He had been in love more than once, but it seemed that fate had dictated that he would never find the kind of relationship that would lead to marriage.

All of the girls who were candidates for marriage eventually slipped from his life like sand through his fingers. He had even forgotten many of their names. People were beginning to call Tashtan a confirmed bachelor. He even fell prey to a rumor that he paid nighttime visits to the girls lining Mossoviet, Bishkek's golden mile, and that was why he was in no hurry to get married. Tashtan found such rumors offensive and was therefore both amused and pleased by the establishment of the “Tashtan Marriage Committee.” This was an initiative started by his friends' wives, who were so active that they were able to set him up a new blind date almost every week.

The marriage candidates all spent time worrying and visiting the beauty salon before their dates in hopes of pleasing Tashtan. And when they met the *dzhigit*, they were even more nervous than they had expected. At his rented apartment each of them walked softly and talked in a low voice while trying to keep up the conversation. But for some reason all of their efforts failed. Not one of them lit a fire in his heart.

Soon the committee members had run out of the right sort of girls to introduce to Tashtan. Furthermore, they were tired of doing a delicate job that had so far failed to bring a happy ending.

So they asked Tashtan a sensible question, “What kind of girl do you like, anyway?”

“They’ve all been attractive and smart enough, but not one of them seemed to be sent by fate!” Tashtan replied half-joking to the rebuke.

“If that’s the case, then do the hunting yourself! Why don’t you wait until you have wrinkles on your forehead? Then you can read the wrinkles to see who fate will send you.”

One week after this conversation, Tashtan met Jildiz. Rather, it was their eyes that met. Unlooked-for, a spark leaped up in his heart. Was it really possible that love could come from Tengri so suddenly, like a gift of fate, and that it couldn’t fail to leave its mark on him?

Tashtan and Jildiz had grown so close that they couldn’t bear to spend time apart. Their tender words flowed like a spring. Everywhere they looked there was reason to smile and laugh. Both realized that the world was beautiful as long as they were together in waking, in their thoughts and in their dreams.

It was in this state of euphoria that Tashtan and Jildiz walked hand in hand into the Golden Dragon restaurant.

The Almighty was a witness: the restaurant took in the two blissful lovers, greeting them with colorful lights, snow-white table linens and gleaming silverware.

The blonde waitress flitted over to them like a good fairy and welcomed them in a soft voice, “Good evening and welcome.”

Tashtan and Jildiz thanked her and began looking over the menu.

“I’m starving.” “Me, too.”

“I’ll order the lagman.” “Me, too.”

“And I’ll have a glass of cognac.” “Me, too.”

“I’m so happy today.” “I’m even happier.”

They didn’t notice when the waitress floated away.

Tashtan couldn’t take his eyes off the woman he loved. Jildiz cupped her chin in her hand and gave him a small, playful smile. She was basking in the *dzhigit*’s rapt attention.

At that moment, neither of them knew that the night would find them at Jildiz’ cozy studio apartment in a modest high-rise. Two fluffy pillows on a soft bed.

The next day was the last day of school. After lunch there would be an awards ceremony and a speech summing up the school year. Jildiz was in high spirits because she knew that her protégé Adilet would be recognized at the ceremony for his good grades.

Then someone told her that the director wanted to see her.

“Come in, Jildiz. I see you’re in a good mood today. What are your eyes shining about? I’m glad to see it, but I’m afraid I can’t kiss your hand today. Forgive me.”

“Do you have bad news?” Jildiz was apprehensive.

“We need to clarify where we stand.”

“Don’t scare me, Henry Abramovich. It’s the last day of school.”

"It's too bad that the last day of school has to be... Is this Narbayev's essay?" The director showed her a familiar notebook.

"Yes!" her eyes ignited with worry.

"And you gave him the highest grade?"

"Of course."

"So you listed Narbayev as a top student and nominated him for the Academy Prize?"

"He deserves it."

"Then I want you to know that we don't sympathize with what you've done for the boy. Narbayev's essay is absurd. He didn't write on the topic. It has been decided..."

"By whom?"

"By the jury. The essay competition jury."

"What jury, Henry Abramovich? I'm the only person at the Academy who can read Kyrgyz. The essay is in Kyrgyz."

"Exactly. You had him write in your own language because you thought no one would be able to read it. The regional jury made note of that particular fact in its findings."

"Of what fact? I want to see the findings."

"The jury findings? They're right here, my dear, but I can't let you have my copy. You'll have to read it in my office."

"It's just one short paragraph. And it isn't even signed." Jildiz looked up at the director in surprise.

"I'm sorry. Were you expecting tomes? Heh-heh."

"This just mentions the topic of the essay. It doesn't say anything at all about the content or the quality."

"That's just too bad. He didn't stick to the topic, so how can we talk about the quality?"

"He did write about the topic. All he did was change the names of the characters."

"Jildiz-aiyim, here's what it comes down to. I'm the director, not the jury. I can't check the quality of every essay. I just draw my conclusions based on what the jury says."

"What conclusions have you drawn?"

"In short, I think you have no sense of responsibility. You praised a weak student beyond his merit. That is a very bad sign."

"Narbayev was only behind early in the year. Now he's the best student in the class. I think the other teachers will back me up on that. I'm asking you to be fair." Jildiz forced herself to smile.

"I'm afraid I haven't told you everything. I didn't want to upset you."

"What else is there, Henry Abramovich?"

"You want me to be candid? This smells of politics. That's what I'm afraid of."

"Good God, how frightening," she smiled in spite of herself. "If there's dangerous politics involved then I want to hear all about it."

"Don't be facetious, Jildiz-aiyim. Our academy's name tells you what we are. You know there is anti-Semitism in Kyrgyzstan. That's no mystery locked away behind seven seals. Some of your, that is *our*, legislators keep harping on the issue and not in a

positive way. In that light, I'm shocked that you want recognition for a boy who took the famous story of the prophet Noah and tore it to pieces. Do you understand what we have grounds to suspect you of?"

"Henry Abramovich, for God's sake don't bring politics into it. Do you really think that an essay written by a fifth-grader can have political undertones?"

"It's a fact, Jildiz-aiyim. We're not talking about a fifth-grader. We're talking about his teacher and his teacher's ideas..."

The angrier and more red-faced the director got, the more ironic Jildiz' smile became.

She couldn't resist: "Are you trying to label me?"

"I didn't want to say it, but you left me no choice. Why waste words? I'm not long-winded by nature. And anyway, you're already very aware of this, aren't you, *aiyim*?"

"I don't know. I haven't understood a thing you said. What do you want me to do?" Jildiz raised her eyebrows.

Seeing this, the director changed his tone of voice, "Don't do anything, Jildiz-aiyim. Give me time to think. Don't do anything yet. You're pet will get his prize. But I want you to do some thinking, too."

"Excuse me," Jildiz covered her reddening cheeks with her hands. Then she jumped up and ran to the door.

"Wait! Wait!" The director caught her and handed her his card. "Think it over. You can call me any time. During the day, in the evening, even at night. And about your contract..."

Without listening to him, Jildiz left his office and slammed the door in his face.

Feeling agitated, she hurried out the front door of the school. Out in the courtyard she finally took herself in hand. In her heart she was overwhelmed with a need to see Tashtan and hear his voice right away. She took her cell phone out of her bag.

A voice crackled, "The subscriber is unavailable." Her heart started pounding. She dialed his number again. She heard the same message.

"Why's he unavailable? Where is he?"

Jildiz' shaking legs could barely hold her up.

At that moment Tashtan was sitting in the library archive. He was buried in papers but his thoughts were far away. A picture of Jildiz took shape in his mind. He went outside to smoke and turned on his phone. As if it had been waiting, the phone started to ring.

"Tashtan, I've been looking for you. I need to see you right away."

"Where are you, Jildiz?"

"At home. I really need you."

"I'm on my way. Do you want a Coke? Or some orange juice?"

"Make it mandarin."

They sat together drinking mandarin juice, unable to take their eyes off each other.

"I keep staring at you and I just can't get enough," Tashtan said with a smile. "How did I ever live without you?"

"How about me? Do you know why I can't take my eyes off of you?"

"I have no idea."

"I think you do know. I can't believe God really sent me such a tall, strong, good looking, intelligent man. For me! That's what I'm thinking when I look at you."

"I won't argue about the tall part. And maybe I'm strong. But there are serious doubts about my brains."

Jildiz gave a rich, throaty laugh. "The light shining from your mind has definitely found its way into Adilet's sweet head. Now we'll all have to pay for it. How are we going to deal with Abramovich's complaints about me and Adilet?"

"I figured it out, Jildiz. Your boss is complaining about something else entirely. First of all, I don't want you to be upset if Adilet doesn't make the honor roll. Nobody in Tibet cares about that. They'll test what he knows with their own exams. And secondly, I'll wipe out Abramovich."

"What for?" Jildiz' eyes widened. "What did the poor fool do to you?"

"He's not poor. He opened his own academy, so he's definitely not poor. Why don't we test him right now?"

"How?"

"He gave you his card. Call him."

"What would I say to him?"

"Say: 'I've thought it over. Let's meet.' We'll see how the old turkey reacts."

"That's what he's waiting for. He'll ask me where I want to meet."

"Call him. Then we'll see what happens." Tashtan was serious.

"That's too dangerous. I can't take a risk like that. How about this plan: tomorrow we go to the academy and withdraw Adilet's file. He has good grades for the year. Then I'll leave a letter for the director telling him that I quit. My contract's up anyway."

"I don't want you to lose your job because of me and Adilet again."

"I'll find another job."

"When exactly is your contract up?"

"It's already up. I just had a contract for one year."

"What are we going to do about the turkey?"

"We'll just walk away. Why fight him? Everyone has their weaknesses and anyone can have a bad day."

"After he made you so upset? Here's my idea: why don't I give him a taste of my fist?"

"There goes the kick boxer."

"That's the language men understand best. You don't need a translator. You just knock him down without saying anything at all. Anyone, Jew, black or a Papuan from New Guinea, will get the message. 'Any questions?' 'Nope. It's all cool.' Short and to the point!"

Tashtan put his fists on the table. Curious, Jildiz poked the *dzhigit's* iron fists.

"Oh boy, if you hit him it'll be lights out for Abramovich."

"It wouldn't kill him. But I guarantee he won't be setting traps for you anymore. Call him. We'll see what he does."

"I told you what he'll say. It would be ridiculous. I'm not going to call."

"Then promise me that you'll always be with me and that no one will ever touch my goddess."

"How do you want me to prove it?"

"Marry me."

"That's a promise I like! Nothing could be more romantic."

Aisada and Tashtan decided to talk to Salamat the next day about taking Adilet to Tibet. They couldn't afford to wait longer. Approaching him in the morning would be risky, since nobody knew what kind of mood the man of the house would wake up in. The evening wouldn't do, either, because someone might piss him off during the day. Lunch would be the best time. Aisada would do her best to cook juicy dumplings so that Salamat would tuck them away in delight, humming "Oh what a dish! These dumplings finger licking good!"

Aisada took a piece of meat marbled with fat out of the refrigerator and put it on the windowsill. Then she lay down to sleep. God willing, her only son would get an education that would make him the envy of everyone in town. But on the other hand, she would certainly miss him. He'd be so far away, and for so long...

Aisada woke up when she heard scuffling in the yard.

"Salamat! Go outside and see what's going on!"

"What?"

"I think someone's walking in the yard."

Salamat was a little hard of hearing and didn't hear anything. "But when a woman thinks something she won't leave you in peace," he said to himself and slowly started dressing.

"Maybe it's Tashtan," he said as he dressed.

"How could it be Tashtan? He works at night. He won't be here until the morning. Hurry up! It's something bad, I can feel it."

Now Salamat could hear the noise in the yard. It didn't sound good. He raced outside and switched on the light on the barn wall. It didn't come on. He pressed the doorbell. There was no sound. The dogs couldn't be heard, either.

Sensing that something was up, Salamat yelled to his wife to bring the rifle. He snatched it out of Aisada's hands and disappeared into the darkness. There was no moon that night. Only the fading constellation Libra was barely visible on the horizon.

Suddenly the chickens began squawking.

"Aieeee!" Salamat roared and shot into the air. He was no coward, but he didn't want to go into the barn. He heard feet running off.

Salamat shot in the direction of the footsteps. His rifle was loaded with salt.

The work of the nighttime invaders only became visible when the sun came up. Adilet had jumped out of bed and was now standing next to his father. He was shaking and crying from what he saw: two of their cows lay on the ground, their throats cut. One of them was missing two haunches. Her unborn calf had slipped from her body and lay in a pool of blood. The second cow was missing one haunch and was still alive. She was shaking in the last throes of death.

The thieves had cut what they could from the poor animals and raced off.

Salamat cut the second cow's throat to put an end to her suffering.

"I hope those bastards go to hell!" Aisada wept as she cursed the thieves. She knelt down by the body of the calf whose birth they had been expecting any day.

She wanted to place it on the straw but Salamat bellowed, "Don't go over there! You'll mess up the evidence. I'm calling the police."

"Where's Rem, Papa?"

"Over there. They got him, too."

Adilet leaped in the direction his father pointed, but his father grabbed his arm. "Wait for the police to get here. Then you can look. It was that motherfucker Sansyzbay who did it! I'll rip his head off and stick it up his ass! That's a piece of his jacket sleeve in Rem's teeth."

The boy shuddered. His father's face was pale grey and twisted in pain and fury. His bloodshot eyes bulged and his whole body shook.

Looking at the bloody scene in the barn, for a moment Adilet almost fainted. As he started to fall he reached out to hold on to his father. "Papa!" Adilet leaned heavily on his father's arm. "Why did Uncle Sansyzbay do it? He's family!"

"The hell he is!"

"How do you know that's his jacket sleeve?"

"He's only got that one rotten yellow jacket. Everybody knows it."

"So when that idiot was buying milk from us he was really just watching and planning," Aisada said, wiping the tears that poured down her face with the corner of her cotton print apron. "And he killed our best milkers. I hope the same comes to him!" Aisada's lamentation seemed to go on and on.

The police didn't arrive until noon. They began slowly taking stock, as if their chief concern was writing up the report, not catching the thieves. Two policemen made an unhurried inspection of the yard, the barn and the garden. They recounted what they found to a third policeman, who sat on a chair and carefully took down everything they said.

Nobody saw Adilet leave through the garden holding his father's rifle. By a roundabout path he made his way to Sansyzbay's house. He could not reconcile his heart or his mind to the terrible human cruelty and injustice visited on them. When the boy closed his eyes, he saw the butchered cows. He choked back the tears rising in his throat and sniffled loudly.

Sansyzbay's house was on the other side of a corn field that stretched in a narrow strip along a shallow gully. Adilet crept along the edge of the field. The high corn stalks shielded him from view. Soon he was opposite Sansyzbay's house. Adilet raised the rifle and aimed. Then he waited for his reviled relative to come outside. He had to keep wiping away the tears that welled up and spoiled his view of the target. Suddenly, Adilet heard a voice behind him. When he turned around, the boy saw an elder on horseback. The elder's long, white beard reached to his waist.

"Son, you could end up guilty of someone's death. Don't answer one cruelty with another. Go home."

Awestruck, Adilet listened to the elder. Then he was distracted by a dog barking. When he turned around again, clutching the rifle to his chest, the elder was gone! He was

gone, but his gentle voice and his words had cast a spell over Adilet. He stared numbly at Sansyzbay's house, unable to make himself move...

That night Adilet had an epileptic fit. It was the worst he had ever had. Salamat and Tashtan put a leather belt between his teeth to keep them from breaking. Then they covered the boy with a quilt and held his shaking body on the bed. Adilet soon lost consciousness. Pale and drenched with sweat, he lay sprawled on the bed. His breathing was shallow and slow.

"My God, why are you torturing my child?" Aisada cried out, sitting at the head of her son's bed. Her body shook under the weight of her sorrow.

Salamat had never given in to fear before, but this time he was silent. He said not a word and stared glumly at the ground. A shapeless fear was penetrating into his soul. A bull-headed man with a sharp temper, he rarely bowed his head under any kind of suffering and considered his own opinions and judgments to be the one true, infallible guide. Once he made a decision or pronouncement he never doubted it, although his stubbornness and unwillingness to compromise often caused him trouble. But the unthinkable evil perpetrated by his kinsman Sansyzbay had dealt him a terrible blow.

"My worst enemy would never do something so insane and cruel, much less a relative. In the whole history of the world, has a man ever run off carrying the leg he cut off a living animal? How could a Kyrgyz be so degenerate? Or have Adam's children all over the world become reprobates? They say that when a son kills his own mother the end of the world is near. Could it be peeking into every home?"

Absorbed with his heavy thoughts, Salamat spent several days in a state of gloomy dejection. Before he had been busy day and night with his pigs, but now he was detached from his usual cares. He no longer shot thunder and lightning.

Just when he had set his mind on finding Sansyzbay and kicking him half to death he heard that the police had already arrested him. So he went back into himself, hung his head and kept a preoccupied silence. It seemed to him that the whole world, even some kind of unknown force, was against him. He was so gripped by his worries that he began to feel an unrelenting fear.

In the early morning, before even waking, Salamat was already itching for a fight.

"Goddamn feline!" he grabbed the cat that was curled up on his chest by the scruff of its neck. "The little bitch is always lying around in the way!"

"Don't you want to get better? She was just warming your bronchitis," Aisada answered him back.

"That cat's the last thing my health needs."

"Well stop yelling. Can you at least stop yelling before your son leaves to go to school?"

Salamat had had more than enough of fighting with his wife since the previous day. He felt burdened by the imminent discussion of whether or not Adilet would leave for Tibet. His heart ached with the realization that he had to make a decision.

Knowing that if he stormed off in silence they would take that as his permission to let the boy travel to the end of the world, he just sat up in bed and grumbled, "I'm not letting my sick kid go anywhere!"

Aisada, Tashtan and Adilet froze. They weren't sure if they should talk to him yet. Usually when Salamat was angry the rolls on the back of his neck swelled, his eyes became bloodshot and his nostrils opened and closed powerfully. None of that happened now. Ever since his recent catastrophe he no longer screamed and got in his opponent's face to prove that he was right. His brother Tashtan had always borne the brunt of his attacks, and Salamat still felt inwardly that he was guilty in all that was wrong: Tashtan's research took up all his time morning and night, he wasn't any help with the chores and now he had come up with this idea of sending Adilet to study in Tibet. However, at the last moment Salamat refrained from laying into his brother.

Ever so slightly encouraged, Tashtan said with confidence, "In the new climate and surroundings his epilepsy will disappear. And he'll always be with me. I won't let him out of my sight."

"How's he going to study if he doesn't speak their language?"

"Why do you think he's been taking English since kindergarten?"

"You keep telling me he'll be a doctor, but when I ask him he spouts some kind of nonsense. Are you two fooling me?"

"What did he say?" Tashtan turned suspiciously to Adilet.

"Tell us, Mama's strong boy, my hope! What did you say to your father?" Aisada reached out to embrace her son.

"I was talking about studying *arhat*," Adilet wiped his nose with the back of his hand and looked at his father.

"I see," Tashtan broke in. "That's right. You could call it studying *arhat*. The word *arhat* means 'medicine.'"

Salamat sensed that Tashtan was prevaricating. His flustered face betrayed him. But without understanding the true meaning of the Tibetan word Salamat couldn't accuse his brother of falsehood. So he was forced to move on to other quibbles.

"Some thugs just brought disaster on us, but instead of supporting the family you've taken it upon yourself to leave and take this little snot-nose with you! Is that how a real brother behaves? You're just as bad as Sansyzbay!"

Hearing his brother compare him to a brute, Tashtan paled in anger.

Aisada was afraid. "You can't say that, Salamat! Look at Tashtan and then look at Sansyzbay!"

"What else can I say? He's of no use to me at all!"

"Let them go study. In case you're interested, I don't want to let go of my little boy either. But if we don't, what will he be? Other people's kids go millions of miles away to school. Just look at the neighbor girl! She's going to school in Toronto or somewhere."

"Toronto is one thing, but what kind of schools can they have in Tibet?"

Tashtan smiled ironically at his brother's disparaging tone and answered, "Tibet is where you'll find the capitol of the great Mystery, the enigmatic city of Shambhala. I can't explain it all to you. Only those who are destined to become visionaries can comprehend it."

"What on Earth?"

"Don't fight, for God's sake!" Aisada begged them. "Just say it straight out. Will you give your son an education or not? Tell me that once and for all!"

Salamat turned his wife and, with a glare that seared straight through her, spoke menacingly: "What about the chores? Who's going to do them? Do I have to break my back all alone for the rest of my life?"

"We'll break our backs together! Now stop it!"

"I'm warning you, woman. If these two fools go off to their little Tibet, waste all their money and come back home, you're the first person I'm going to throttle."

"Go ahead. Throttle me." Aisada pulled tensely at her headscarf. Then she stood up, shook out her skirt and stomped off. As far as she was concerned, the conversation was over.

Chapter Two

Katmandu, the capitol of Nepal, is called the city of clouds. The plane landed on the airport's farthest runway. There the passengers were loaded into a bus and driven up to the doors of the terminal. Soldiers wearing dark brown berets with badges on them formed a human corridor that prevented the passengers from stepping out of line, herding them straight up to the customs counters.

From time to time Adilet shifted his heavy backpack. He stayed close behind his uncle as they walked. His first trip on an airplane had been a fairly long one. He could still feel the instant when the jetliner pulled away from the earth and when it landed.

He had plenty of experience launching space ships on his computer screen and wandering among the stars, but all of those sensations together couldn't match the feeling of really flying through the sky on an airplane.

"My ears still feel funny," Adilet said in concern as they stood in the customs inspection line.

"They'll pop in a minute. Tilt your head back and take a deep breath," his uncle advised.

"There's a lot of tourists, isn't there?"

"We look just like them: track suits, sneakers, backpacks..."

"Our caps are different," Adilet smiled, pointing to his thin felt cap.

The other people in line studied their caps. They all looked to be Europeans. From their speech most of them seemed to be English or Germans. Many of them were tall and bony with wiry muscles. There were more men than women. Almost all of them were wearing sunglasses and shorts.

"Why are they going to Tibet?" Adilet asked in surprise.

"I think you and I are the only ones going to Tibet." Tashtan believed what he said. In his mind, after thirty years of isolation under Chinese rule, the people of Tibet were probably making use of their minor new freedoms to close off their borders, thereby sharply cutting off the giant wave of tourists. If tourists were allowed to trample the country like an army of ants, how could anything holy or mysterious survive?

Unfortunately, Tashtan was wrong. When they got on the Katmandu-Lhasa bus they were joined by a noisy throng of people in shorts and sunglasses. The crowd split into two groups, each with its own tour guide. On the airplane they had been subdued, but in the bus they talked loudly and laughed as if they were on a city street. Adilet didn't like any of it, so he sat in silence, his face turned to the window. Soon he was engrossed in observing the terrain of the unknown land.

In truth, Adilet had never seen much of his own country. He had only admired the familiar, pearly peaks of the Ala-Too from a distance. Now it was the snow-white peaks of the Himalayas that met his delighted eyes whichever way he turned. Closer at hand, the gravelly foothills gave way to a procession of low hills covered with sparse vegetation. Every now and then he caught sight of a single stubby tree. A swift stream babbled along with the road from up high in a distant gorge. The bus clattered on, struggling up to the tops of hills and then speeding down into wide valleys.

"Look at the kids playing!" Adilet pulled on his uncle's sleeve to get his attention. The bus was now passing a small village. Barefoot, hatless boys in threadbare clothes were running around with a paper kite. When they caught sight of the bus they smiled broadly at the passengers.

"We aren't in Tibet yet," Tashtan whispered in Adilet's ear.

He had meant to tell his nephew all sorts of interesting things while they were on the plane and throughout the trip, but he completely forgot his purpose. All he could think about was what had happened three hours ago at the Bishkek airport. His eyes still saw the sad figure of Jildiz. He had left his young wife crying on a seat in the airport's first aid station. They had gotten married in secret shortly before his trip and decided not to tell anyone until he came back from Tibet.

Since they had said their farewells at home so his family wouldn't see Jildiz, Tashtan was doubly surprised when she showed up at the airport.

"Jildiz-ezhe!" Adilet spotted her first as they were walking into the terminal. Tashtan was certain that his wife was at home, so he didn't believe his eyes at first. Then he was overjoyed and embarrassed all at the same time.

"Hold on," he said to Adilet, sending him ahead with the rest of the family to the other side of the terminal. He leaped down the stairs to Jildiz. They found an out-of-the-way corner and stood for a long time holding each other. Jildiz couldn't stop the tears that poured down her face. Tashtan cradled her to his chest and stroked her hair as if she were a little child, and his heart filled with tenderness and love and sweet sorrow. Then he remembered the time and that he needed to hurry.

"That's enough, Jildiz, don't cry. Wipe those tears away." But she became even more upset and put her hand on her heart.

Just then Adilet ran up to them and repeated what his mother had said: "Check-in is almost over!"

When Tashtan took his arms from around his wife, he saw how pale and weak she was. He took her by the arm and led her to the first aid station. Adilet held on to Jildiz's other arm.

After being given a mild tranquilizer Jildiz sat down. Her heart was still heavy.

"Go ahead. You've got to run." She forced herself to smile at Tashtan and Adilet through the tears that ran in rivulets down her cheeks.

Worried, Tashtan got on his knees in front of her and looked into her eyes.

"Where are these tears coming from? Is there some misfortune behind this?" he wondered.

"Okay, have a good trip," Jildiz said gently.

"I'll call you as soon as I get there," Tashtan promised. He couldn't think of anything else to say.

And so now his mind was not on the land of Tibet, of which he had dreamed for so many years, but on his wife. He had left her behind with red eyes and a swollen nose.

"Sometimes tears are a good thing, but sometimes they aren't," he sighed to himself. "But everything will be okay. You just have to be patient, sweetheart."

Just then a microphone crackled to life as one of the guides started in on her narrative. "We are on our way to Shambhala, a land that holds the great mysteries of man and nature. Two thousand years ago, a Jew named Jesus came here to study the art of prophecy. You have every right to be proud of yourselves, since no foreigners set foot in Tibet until the middle of the last century. Here you will find the great revelations of the human spirit and previously hidden monasteries and temples that were erected by unknown builders before the birth of Christ. You will see underground cities, holy lakes and rivers and their mysterious powers. You will climb Mount Kailash, which is at the spiritual center of the whole world. You will wash your faces with water from Lake Manasarovar, the lake which Buddha himself consecrated."

"Does she mean our forefather Manas?" Adilet turned to Tashtan in astonishment. He held his head higher and his eyes shone with pride.

"That's one of the things I'm here to find out."

"When will we see that lake? Tomorrow?"

"Later. You have to think about school first. The main question is whether you'll get in or not."

"What happens if I don't?"

"You heard your father. He'll strangle your mother."

"He didn't mean it. He'll just yell a lot. That's all."

"He won't be yelling! You have to get in, Adilet. There's no other way. I'm just worried about whether or not you know enough. Based on what I've heard the core subjects they teach are astronomy, astrology, biology and medicine. They won't tell you about the other subjects yet. You'll study those later if you pass the test."

"So they have the same subjects we do."

"There are a lot of differences. For example, in Kyrgyzstan they don't teach astrology in school. Here you'll learn about meditation, levitation, clairvoyance, prophecy and divination."

"That's a lot!"

"They'll choose what to teach you. It all depends on you, Adik. On whether or not you can answer their questions."

"Why don't you tell me what the questions will be?"

"I'd tell you if I knew. It could be anything. You'll be tested for six days straight. Did you know that?"

"Wow!"

"Don't say 'wow.' Focus your strength."

"Pay attention!" The guide's voice interrupted them. "Soon you will see Mount Kailash. Look to your left. There! Do you see that white peak in the distance? That is the holy peak. It is 6,666 meters above sea level. The holy mountain's four ridges face the four corners of the universe. Four great rivers flow from a source in the mountain's depths to India, China, Europe and Siberia. The shape of Mount Kailash resembles an Egyptian pyramid and you can clearly see the image of a large cross on it. From Tibet's capitol, Lhasa, it takes four days by car to reach Kailash."

“That’s really far,” Adilet was disappointed. Tashtan nodded in agreement.

“Look at the kids playing!” Adilet’s face brightened. “They’re walking on really tall wooden stilts. Wow! Baike, look how they painted them. At home we don’t paint them, do we?”

“Out here they make pigments out of clay. Look around. See how the earth here is all red and yellow clay? And look over there at those yaks.”

“Those are yaks?”

“Tibetans couldn’t live without their yaks. That’s their main livelihood. This part of the world is very cold.”

“You said that Tibetans look like Kyrgyz, right?”

“Look at their faces. They’re Asians, but they aren’t related to the Chinese. They call themselves the Bodun. There are two tribes here called Kachyn and Tangyt whose language is an ancient Turkic dialect. They have words that are close to ours, like *tenir*, *manas*, and *kozho*.

“Can I have everyone’s attention? Up ahead is Lhasa, the capitol city of Tibet. It is situated at the foot of the mountains, 3,650 meters above sea level on the bank of the Kyichu River. Lhasa has a population of 80,000.”

All the passengers pressed their faces to the windows, straining to see the enormous Potala Palace sitting up high with its back to the mountains. This magnificent palace which gave the impression of a high, unattainable cliff was where Tibet’s Dalai Lamas lived and worked.

The bus station was so crowded that there was nowhere to move. Tashtan hung a sign around his neck showing his name in English. There they stood for the longest time with their backpacks on the ground. Tashtan was waiting for a man from the Zhohan temple, one of the largest scholarly centers in Tibet. The man was late.

Guides divided all the tourists into groups and led them away. The bus station gradually grew less crowded. Soon the only people left at the station were Tibetans and two Kyrgyz who looked like them.

“Their dogs sure are shaggy, aren’t they?” Adilet said as he tossed pieces of bread to a dog that kept approaching him with a beseeching look on its face.

“Sure is cold.”

Tashtan started to worry. Just then he heard someone say “Tash-tan!”

When they turned around, they saw a young man wearing a flowing yellow robe. He had a very noticeable black mark in the middle of his left cheek.

“Om! Mani padme hum!” the young monk bowed slightly and then spoke in English: “Let’s go. I don’t want you to lose any more time. I was already late. I apologize for that.” The Zhohan temple was to the left of the Potala Palace, not far from the sloping mountain face. Around it were small, low houses, stores and shops. The streets were paved with stone. The only wide, asphalt road was the one leading to Potala.

The young monk who had picked up Tashtan and Adilet and was now driving them in a clunky old Volkswagon was named Ngvan Dei. He and Tashtan were engaged in a lively conversation when the suddenly started to laugh.

“In Kyrgyz, your name would be Ngvan Five,” Tashtan touched the monk’s shoulder as he spoke. “Or Ngvan Zhuma. In our calendar, ‘Zhuma’ is the Muslim name for the second day of the week.”

Then Tashtan turned to Adilet and explained: "In Tibet, the day of the week you're born on becomes part of your name."

Tashtan and Adilet found a room in a hotel not far from the Zhohan temple. Although it looked faded and ancient on the outside, inside it was outfitted to European standards.

The next morning, Tashtan took Adilet to the temple school. The gate was shut tight and there was no bell to ring. Three boys about the same age as Adilet were standing by the gate. One of them looked to be a Mongol and the other two were Indians.

It seemed that nobody had any intention of opening the gate. Tashtan rapped on the metal rungs with the back of his hand and waited. Meanwhile, the three boys were watching Adilet standoffishly. Their eyes kept returning to the cap on his head. It was obviously the first time they had seen a white Kyrgyz cap.

Suddenly the gate swung open and a bony monk with a long neck wearing a bright yellow robe appeared. His narrow, dull eyes set in a dull and indifferent face showed no hospitality, nor any other reaction. He looked past Tashtan to focus on the young boys. Then he moved Adilet out of the way to let the three boys in without any questions, apparently because he recognized them.

Then, in halting English the monk told Adilet what to do: "Go forty steps from gate. Sit down. Cross your legs under you. Face temple in lotus position. Sit. Do not move until you are told to stand. Only think about why you came here."

"How long will he have to sit there?" Tashtan squared off to face the monk, who was already turning to go inside.

"None of your business," the monk called back. Without turning around, he went inside and locked the gate behind him.

Adilet sat with his legs crossed under him as he had been told. Afraid of making too many movements, he tried to stare at the temple. At first he sat up straight, but by evening his lower back ached unbearably. Just then a dusty, biting wind picked up from the direction of the foothills and covered his face with gritty sand. As the turned-up edges of his cap filled with sand and dust, they got heavier and pulled the cap over his eyebrows. His eyes started to sting. No longer able to sit up straight, Adilet bent over slightly and almost lost his balance. Hunger was making itself known, as well – his stomach was grumbling and whining.

Assuming that the monks' test would last until the evening, Tashtan calmly went about his business. He returned to the temple at sundown. The gate was closed as before. When he climbed over the outside wall by using small jutting stones as footholds, he couldn't believe his eyes: his poor little nephew was still sitting nailed to the same spot on the ground. Tashtan's first impulse was to leap down and run over to Adilet, but he held back at the last minute. Adilet saw Tashtan out of the corner of his eye and almost burst into tears, but he kept hold of himself and made not a sound.

"They'll let you go soon. It's already evening. Come right back to the hotel," Tashtan called softly to him.

Still hoping that the test would end soon and his nephew would come running in, Tashtan sat in his hotel room reading his papers. He didn't feel himself falling asleep. When he opened his eyes, it was pitch black outside. Cursing, he jumped up, dressed and hurried off to the temple. The gate was still locked. Once again Tashtan climbed up the wall and saw the lonely seated silhouette of Adilet.

“Adilet?” he whispered his nephew’s name.

“Baiké,” the boy answered softly. “I’ve already waited for so long. I can keep waiting. Get down from the wall.”

Tashtan was surprised. He didn’t know what to say or do. But he obeyed Adilet and jumped down. “They left the child all alone on an empty lot! I bet those monks forgot about him! What kind of test is that? You can’t do that to a child!” Tashtan paced back and forth, looking up angrily at the gate. “They could have at least warned us! The boy’s sitting on the bare earth!” He wanted to drum on the gate but changed his mind and decided to be patient. Adilet’s words held him back. He leaned against the gate and waited. Soon the sky filled with bright stars. They seemed ready to fall right into his hand, they were so close and large, burning with a magical, golden light. And there were hundreds of little electric lights shining from the windows of the large temple. But Tashtan couldn’t reconcile the wonderment he saw around him with the monks’ heartless treatment of a child. God saw how they were behaving to the boy who came from so far away to study and learn. The boy had never done them any harm, yet they treated him like a criminal.

Tashtan began slowly pacing along the wall again. Then he climbed up the wall again, hoping that his presence would give his nephew moral support. Adilet sat as before. A donkey with hobbles on its forelegs hopped over to him and hopped away again. Before that, a dog had wandered over and sniffed at him. The beasts seemed to be giving Adilet their own test, but he remained unmoved. His little nephew’s forbearance made Tashtan surprised and proud.

Time passed. Tashtan was tired of sitting on top of the wall and the cold night air was getting to him. But Adilet sat motionless, without saying a word. Tashtan became apprehensive and that made him angry: nobody even came out to check on the boy. What if he was having a seizure? What if his heart stopped?

All the time while Tashtan was being tortured by such thoughts and suffering in his soul, Adilet was alive and well – he just couldn’t move an inch. His whole body ached with exhaustion and his knees were especially sore. His legs were heavy and frozen as if filled with lead. When he saw Tashtan-baiké and tried to move, unbearable pain shot through his body and he saw sparks. When the dog had come over to sniff him he had wanted to lean away, but his joints ached so badly that he almost groaned aloud. It was better to just sit motionless.

By nightfall Tashtan was completely enraged. He jumped silently down from the wall and, staying low, ran over to Adilet.

“How are you, Adilet?”

“Okay,” his nephew answered right away in a whisper. Tashtan saw the outline of a thin man. It looked like the long-necked monk who had met them at the gate during the day. Tashtan bent down again and silently ran back to the wall to hide.

“Eat this food, my son. I will take bowl in the morning. At night you can move. You can sleep, but only right here. In the morning, sit again like you did today. Do not worry, my son. We are not heartless and this sitting is not torture. Maybe you and your uncle think so. Later you will understand. I cannot say more.”

As soon as the monk left, Adilet, who was starved, fell on his side. He grabbed the spoon before he could even straighten his legs out. It was too dark to see what the

food was. It tasted like oatmeal mixed with melted butter. The pitcher was filled with delicious tea and milk.

Tashtan crept over in the dark. "What are you doing?" he asked in surprise.

"Eating."

"Are you coming with me?"

"He said not to leave. I have to sleep here. It's a test, baike."

"Good Lord!"

The little boy, who had come from far-away Kyrgyzstan in search of knowledge and now sat all alone under the low, starry sky in one of the thousands of hideaways in harsh Tibet, intuitively sensed that this was the most important night in all his nine years: this was the night when his fate would be decided.

He found a hollowed-out spot in the earth next to him and fell over on his side. He put his cap and his two folded hands under his head and immediately fell asleep, no longer feeling the sharp, dusty wind as it bit his face. The earth under him grew warm, since the clay of high-mountain Tibet was like a dried-out tree that contained not an iota of moisture. That is what saved Adilet from catching a cold.

Adilet woke at dawn to the loud sounds of a *karnay*. Startled, he opened his eyes. At first he couldn't understand where he was and how he had come there. For a few seconds he looked all around himself. He wanted to jump up when he came to, but instead he moaned. He was not accustomed to that kind of pain in his shoulders, back and knees. With a clear understanding of what he had to do, Adilet sat up. He folded his legs under him as he had the day before and focused his eyes on the temple. The rising sun's golden rays danced on the icy peaks of the mountains and then reached all the windows of the four-story building.

Adilet observed with interest how the temple came to life. At first all was quiet, like a sleeping city. Then it seemed to sigh deeply and stretch. The life inside woke all at once: here and there monks' shaved heads began to appear in the windows.

The sun rose over the frozen mountains and the temple's gate began to open and close as groups of monks left to go about their business. Just then a bunch of boys about Adilet's age came tumbling out of the temple. Acting as if they had just been freed from prison, the boys noisily chased each other, kicking at each other in fun.

When they saw Adilet sitting motionless they began to taunt him by throwing handfuls of sand and pebbles. Adilet ignored them pointedly. He tensed his whole body to keep from giving in to their obvious provocation. After teasing him for a while, the boys cursed in a strange language and ran off.

The second day of the test was no easier. At noon Adilet felt unaccustomed pangs of hunger and grew dizzy. He began to lose consciousness, leaning so far to the side that he almost fell. Gathering all of his willpower at once, he barely managed to snap out of it. The sky quickly grew dark and the stars blazed into sight almost simultaneously, like bright lights in the distance.

Adilet felt extreme pangs of hunger again. He was losing interest in the temple and any hope that the monks would take pity on him. He was overcome by shaking and a feeling of weakness. If Tashtan-baike had come again like he had the night before, tears

would have spurted from Adilet's eyes. He was ready to ask his uncle for something to eat and say "Let's go. I won't go to school here." He had lost all strength to endure the humiliation of the test. But Tashtan-baike did not come.

Sometime near midnight the gate creaked and quietly swung open. Adilet's heart skipped a beat and his body tensed. The creaking was exactly the same as the sound made by the old swing on the playground in Bishkek. Adilet strained his eyes into the darkness where the gate was. His heart beat faster. He strained to hear his beloved creak again, but the metal hinges of the gate remained open and still. A silhouette appeared in the opening and approached Adilet.

"My son, do not lose hope. Do not lose faith in your efforts. We have not forgotten you. It is late at night. Eleven o'clock. Many boys cannot endure the test and leave on the second night. You overcame yourself," the monk said. This time he was pleased. His voice was soft. Then he placed in front of Adilet the same kind of food he had brought the previous night.

"I do not know how long the test will last," the monk said as he left. If Adilet had heard those last words, it is possible that the *tsampa*, as the monk called the food, would have stuck in his throat. As it was, the boy thought that the buttery oatmeal was the best-tasting food on earth. His cold body filled with warmth.

That night for some reason Tashtan did not come to see his nephew. Adilet curled up on his side again in the hollowed out spot and fell fast asleep. He dreamed about the *Uch Kuduk* swing. With each swinging motion the swing issued a long, melodious and sad sound. All night the swing troubled his mind with its creaking. The sound seemed to reach all the stars in the boundless universe.

On the dawn of the third day, Adilet was woken by loud talking. Half-asleep and barely able to walk, he went to the nearby toilet, which was delineated by four low, stone walls.

Then he returned to his spot and sat as he had been told. When he remembered that he had heard the creaking of the gate that night, either in a dream or for real, he began to study it, completely forgetting the monk's direction to him: "Do not think about anything else. Keep your thoughts on the temple, on learning and on Holy Buddha." Adilet was tired of thinking about the temple and Buddha, especially since he didn't know very much about Buddha in the first place.

Now his thoughts were focused on the gate. Its two massive iron halves were held to their posts by rusty hinges. When the rusty metal moved, it creaked. Apparently there were two different objects on different sides of the world (the swing and the gate) that made exactly the same creaking sound.

After lunch, Adilet was entertained by a flock of sparrows that flew in from somewhere. He thought they looked familiar. The friendly congregation alternated between flying up in the air and coming back down again, chirping the whole time. Then they hopped up to Adilet without any indication of fear and looked him in the eye: "What are you doing here? Why did you come here from Kyrgyzstan?"

"I came to study," Adilet told them aloud. For a few lively minutes the sparrows pecked at crumbs near Adilet. Then they chirped their thanks, flapped their wings and disappeared. Adilet started to feel heavy and sad because the birds had left him, and also because Tashtan hadn't come for so long. If he didn't know how long the test would last, was there any point to sitting there stubbornly for no reason? When would the monks end

his torment? He didn't keep his thoughts on the temple or on Holy Buddha, or even on studying, since he couldn't imagine what kind of studying went on in the large temple among all those monks with shaved heads. Maybe they would decide that Adilet wasn't good enough to study there. He almost hoped so! But then he grew afraid of his wayward thoughts. At home there was his father, Salamat, a man with a hot temper. If Adilet returned home after being rejected, his father would show him the sun and stars. He would attack his son in fury without waiting for a word of explanation. He would kick him into the pigpen and lock him in as he had done before in fits of anger. He would pick at Tashtan-baike. And if they came home after wasting all their money his father might knock his mother unconscious. He had come close before. Adilet couldn't remember how old he had been at the time, but he remembered his father's hands holding the wooden staff, ready to strike his mother. That time Adilet saved her from a terrible beating. That particular pain and loss of hope was still with him, like a splinter in his soul.

He also remembered what his father had said to him then: "Goddamn you to hell, you worthless son-of-a-bitch! What kind of man will you grow up to be with a mother like that bitch?" His father didn't stop there. Adilet hadn't understood then (and still didn't understand) why his father had called him worthless and useless. The words had wounded him, although he had been knee-high to a fly at the time. Even now, when he remembered them his heart filled with outrage.

When the sun sank behind the mountains and the last flickers of light left their snowy peaks with the advance of dusk, Adilet once again found himself wrapped in dark thoughts. "Maybe I'll die tonight," he thought gloomily. Tashtan-baike had deserted him and left him to the monks. He obviously didn't care if his nephew was dead or alive – otherwise he would have at least come by to see how he was. In a word...

Just then the gate creaked. Adilet knew the gate didn't usually open at this time. That meant the monks had urgent business. Sure enough, the monk he had seen before walked over to him without a sound. Bending over, he said in a friendly voice, "My son, you are free. Come to the gate tomorrow at sunrise." Overjoyed, Adilet jumped up and tried to go forward, but his legs were still crossed at the knees and, like dead weight, refused to move. Adilet fell headfirst with his rear in the air. Fortunately, he managed to catch himself with his arms before cracking his forehead.

Adilet walked out of the courtyard and disappeared into the moonless night. Only the weak, pale light from the streetlights supported his spirits. It took him a while to find the hotel. When he entered the room, Tashtan-baike was lying on the bed reading a book as if nothing was the matter. Without a word, Adilet collapsed on his own bed. He buried his face in the pillow and, gripping it with both hands, began to cry in a silent flood of tears. The only sound was his noisy sniffing. It was an outpouring of his anger at the inexplicable humiliations he had been subjected to over the past three days: the boys who teased him, the scruffy donkey with the stupid face, the hungry dog, the chirping sparrows, the hunger, the cold, the hard ground, the unbearable pain in every joint in his body. His beloved uncle had abandoned him to cruel fate.

Tashtan had expected his nephew to be angry and had prepared words to say to calm him down, but first he waited patiently. Adilet needed to cry himself out and get out

all of his anger before he would be able to listen and understand what his uncle said to him. Finally the boy stopped sniffing and his crying subsided.

"They were testing your endurance and willpower. Willpower is the most important quality for anyone who comes to Tibet to study. That's why they wouldn't let me come to you. They came here and warned me. So don't be angry with me. I want to congratulate you! I had no idea you were so tough. I'm really surprised," Tashtan spoke gently. He sat down on Adilet's bed and tousled the hair on the back of his head. "God willing, you'll lose your thick mop tomorrow."

"Why?" Adilet asked without raising his face from the pillow.

"I think you did well. One of the monks just came by to take down some information about you: your name, where you were born, and the time you were born to the hour. It's a good thing I wrote it all down before we left. Tomorrow they'll shave your head and give you a new name. You won't be called Adilet anymore."

"Come on, baike. Really?" Adilet lifted his head and looked at Tashtan incredulously with eyes red from crying.

The next morning Adilet went to the Zhohan temple alone. Blowing from the direction of the Dalai Lama's residence in the Potala Palace, a cold wind bit at the faces of the people walking against it and whipped tears from their eyes.

"If it had been windy like this yesterday I probably would have died," Adilet said to himself with a shiver. He turned toward the Zhohan temple and made his way up the steep hill. When he reached the gate he heard the first faint sounds of the *karnay*. Alternating between echoing and whining, the blustery wind carried familiar sounds from far off. "They're all hurrying to morning prayers," thought Adilet.

At that time of the morning there was no guarantee that anyone would come out of the gate, which meant that Adilet might have to wait a long time. But he couldn't wait. He had been told to come at sun-up. Feeling awkward, he timidly knocked on the metal gate with a pebble. He was in luck: the gate opened with its familiar creak and revealed Ngvan Dei, the monk who had met them at the bus station.

"Come in, Kyrgyz brother," he said politely. "I have heard good things about you. Today you will meet a very famous and learned lama who will test you."

"On what subject?" Adilet asked. He was worried.

"He will just talk with you on various subjects."

Adilet followed Dei, examining the courtyard as he went. His eyes were drawn to multicolored rings attached to the stone wall in front of the entrance to the temple. The rings were attached to shallow wooden cups. Inside each one he could see the blinking lights of candles. One by one, monks on their way to prayers touched their fingers to the dozens of rings. Set in motion by many hands, the rings continually spun and gave off exceptionally beautiful sounds. Intermingling, the lovely trills touched both the heart and the soul.

"Go into this room," Dei said after leading him through a long series of winding hallways.

Seated on a cushion with his legs stretched out behind a low table was the Lama. He was dressed in a dark red silk robe. His was shaved, and his wide nostrils and piercing eyes stood out in his round, pale face.

"Greet the teacher Lama Tsu as I do," Dei whispered to Adilet. He sank to his knees and bowed low three times. Suddenly seized by a fit of shaking, Adilet repeated each of Dei's motions.

"Come here, my son Adilet. Sit down," the Lama leaned forward slightly as he spoke. His eyes smiled in welcome. Hesitant, Adilet moved closer and sat down without a noise on the edge of a soft cushion.

"Sit up straight with your legs crossed, my son. It seems that you have the proper willpower for studying. We have studied your name and the year of your birth and it seems to us that it may be possible to open your third eye. Such holiness is only possible for one in a million of all those born under the sign Sirius. It goes without saying that you will have to make great effort.

Smiling, the Lama looked closely at Adilet. He was waiting for a reply.

Adilet was too nervous to understand what had been said, so he shrugged his shoulders and smiled naively. But in the next instant he felt his trepidation disappear and his heart fill with love and trust for this man he had met for the first time.

"Are you a devout Muslim? Do you go to *namaz* at the mosque?"

"No."

"Do you read *namaz* at home?"

"Nobody in my family reads *namaz*."

"I know, I know," the Lama gave a satisfied laugh. "And I suppose you are too young to have picked up the communist spirit. That is very good. It will help you. It will make it easy to work with you. But our program is very hard. You will face many difficulties. Out of a thousand boys, only one has the patience to learn all that is required. The others become simple servants whose job is to turn the rings and pray. We have to force many of them out of the temple."

Adilet nodded to indicate that he understood what had been said.

"If you have the endurance and strength to meet our requirements, and, most importantly, if you understand and expand on the knowledge we give you, then we will allow you to work on attaining superior abilities, including levitation. But you won't stop there. You will go further and deeper. It all depends on your mind and your iron will. Great geniuses and men of surprising talent have appeared in the world. All you have to do is open the way for them."

"I want to learn the art of *arhat*," Adilet said, once again feeling as timid before Lama Tsu as he had when they first met.

"You have landed not just near the eye, but the center of the eye. Any lama who attains the level of a prophet may become an *arhat*."

Lama Tsu leaned back on his high cushions and asked Adilet many questions, some hard and some easy. He listened to the boy's answers with obvious interest. At the end of their long conversation he said, "My son Adilet, you are interested in the universe's gravitational corridors. That makes me very happy. Before you met us you were already demonstrating that your birth sign of Sirius put you on a special path. May you enjoy your travels. You will laugh at that, since the people of our time are intent on conquering the universe with their technology. They are like a small child building a toy.

In reality, the gravitational corridors do exist. Many people have gone up into the heavens without any spaceships. Journalists around the world have written much about it. All you have to do is learn to fly. I assure you that you will find what you are looking for in your studies, in our temple.

“Regarding your second wish, I can say this: cloning already exists in nature. It’s called reincarnation. You will also learn all about this in our temple. But a lama’s main calling is to search for truth and justice on Earth, when man lives. In that sense, you are exactly what we are looking for. By the way, who gave you your name?”

Adilet couldn’t immediately think of what to say. “My parents gave me my name, but...” he stopped, wavering about whether or not to tell the story of how he came to be named Adilet. But Lama Tsu already knew why his name was Adilet. There was kind laughter in his eyes. He seemed to be waiting: let the boy tell his story. Finally, Adilet could hold back no longer. He told the sad truth about how a mysterious fate had subjected him to injustice ever since the day he was born.

“When my parents are angry, they usually say I was born on the wrong day at the wrong time. That’s why I’m so useless. They say I’m not of this world.”

“They’re absolutely right!” Lama Tsu laughed. “Your parents were speaking the truth! You really are useless there. You should have been born here. But mistakes happen in reincarnation. You said ‘the sound of the old swing always called out to me.’ That’s what we call *kalagiya*. It is a call that travels over the air or is sent telepathically. It is the voice of Shambhala, its call. Simply put, you have given me invaluable information, my son. You were created by the Great Mystery. Now you are on the right path. You’re just a little late. Seven years old would have been the perfect time. We consider a nine-year-old to be an adult and speak to him as such. I believe that you will make up for lost time. To do so, you will learn from us no matter what time it is, day or night.” Lama Tsu looked at the boy kindly. “If you trust me, then I will be your guide.”

“Of course I trust you,” Adilet spoke quickly. He felt that the man liked him and valued him. People around Adilet had never treated him so warmly or with such respect. Even the aura of his favorite uncle Tashtan, whom he worshipped, was dull and less magnetic in comparison. Only his teacher Jildiz seemed to understand the secrets of his soul, and now this elderly Lama from Tibet whom he had just met for the first time.

“In that case, I will tell you the password to Shambhala, my son Adilet.” Lama Tsu leaned forward slightly and fixed Adilet with a sharp look. “A piercing mind, a fiery heart and an iron will. Do you have those three qualities? I have conversed with you all day to make sure. I am not disappointed, my son!” Satisfied, Lama Tsu leaned back on his cushions.

Then he suddenly asked a question that caused Adilet much embarrassment: “Have you been in love with a girl yet, my son Adilet?”

Adilet blushed bright red as if he had been caught in the middle of a sinful act, for the lovely face of a girl named Shoala shined in his heart with a secret fire. He often felt sweet pain when he imagined her sparkling dark eyes. He had never opened his heart’s secret to anyone and was incapable of doing it now. He had even kept his secret from his closest friend, Tashtan-baika.

It all started during Adilet’s first days at the academy when the teacher gave him the seat next to Shoala and told her to help him with his lessons. After that, Shoala took him under her wing. That was why she bravely stood up for Adilet if anyone bumped into

him on accident or on purpose; she even fought with the other girls when any of them turned their sharp tongues against her charge.

One time, to protect Adilet shoved another girl so hard that the girl fell flat on the floor. It happened in the gym. Afterwards, the injured girl went crying to the teacher, who reprimanded Shoala and gave her a D for behavior.

Adilet was upset about what had happened. He felt it was his fault and couldn't look Shoala in the eye for a long time. After that day she became more restrained and stopped fighting with people over Adilet.

Perhaps it was then that their still child-like souls ignited with the first sparks of a tender love of which they themselves were not yet aware.

Shoala stole glances full of hidden longing at Adilet. When he met her eyes with a look of shy sympathy she quickly looked away. For his part, Adilet began to distance himself from Shoala: little by little, the magical threads that only they could feel were all that connected them.

Their experienced classmates poked fun at them without spite, calling them "the bride and groom." The phrase appeared on the blackboard and on the walls. The girls in class worked especially hard to separate Adilet and Shoala and were only satisfied when the teacher assigned them to different desks.

But could that stop a sacred emotion sent by nature, one that stops at no obstacle, from attaining its ends? At the end of the school year when the students gathered for the class photo, Adilet screwed up his courage and, in front of everyone, handed Shoala a bouquet of three lovely flowers. His gesture was so unexpected that at first she was taken aback. Then she took the flowers and proudly walked over to the window with them. She didn't want anyone to see her blushing cheeks. None of their classmates even snickered. They seemed to have respect for Adilet's bravery.

When it was time to take the picture they were nowhere near each other: he was in the last row on the left and she was in the first row on the right. They were too shy to stand together. Afterward, Adilet held his an ultraviolet light to his and Shoala's faces in the picture, which made them stand out from the others with a pinkish halo. Adilet's secret was there in the picture for all the world to see.

Adilet suffered for many days before he left for Tibet. He couldn't make himself call Shoala. He even lost sleep over it. Finally it reached the point where he could no longer put it off. He called her cell phone.

"Hello. Shoala, I'm going to Tibet." Adilet blurted out.

"To Tibet?" There was silence for a moment. "Then have a nice trip."

"Okay."

Neither one said anything. If only Adilet had found a way to carry on the conversation. Or if only she had. Shoala was usually an outgoing girl, but now she was acting shy. She could at least have asked him about something.

"I don't know when I'll come back."

"Will you be back for school in September?"

"I don't know."

"Try to come back."

That was the end of the conversation. Adilet was left with a feeling of dissatisfaction and regret. Who knows but what Shoala may have felt the same. Maybe

the soft, childhood love that lit up their hearts with a tender ray of light will stay hidden deep within them for the rest of their lives.

Lama Tsu interrupted the flight of Adilet's touching recollections: "Our temple accepts boys up to seven years old. The reason for this is that boys any older may already have romantic feelings. Your eyes do not lie. A nine-year-old is much more mature, of course, so I must give you a warning, my son Adilet. If you mean to study *arhat* your entire life, then you will not be able to live the life of a normal man who needs a wife and children. We give our blessing to simple monks who are not destined to reach the pinnacle of knowledge. They are called Red Hats and are allowed to marry after they leave the temple. You see, studying to be a lama is like nothing else. It should give a man more satisfaction and joy than any marriage. If you understand this and possess the enough willpower, and if you are prepared to give up such earthly pleasures, then you may come to learn with us. You will dedicate your whole life to the one great mystery that only a very few ever attain. This mystery is more than I can explain to you here today. Think all of this over today. You will give your answer tomorrow."

Lama Tsu lifted a small, silver bell from his glass table. It chimed softly and melodiously in his hand.

His servant Dei appeared seemingly out of nowhere.

Tashtan gasped. "I thought you'd already passed the hardest test, but the big stuff is still on the way!" he burst out after hearing his nephew's story. "So Tibet is supposed to be your promised land? And they want you to give up any idea of having a normal life? I honestly had no idea things would turn out like this. What are we going to do now? What will your parents say when they find out?"

"I guess I'll go back home." Adilet looked up at his uncle doubtfully.

"I don't know. Did you tell them that you'd have to ask your parents?"

"No, I didn't think about that."

"I wish you had. Why don't you go tell them that tomorrow? None of them talk to me, anyway. Dei just came by once yesterday to get more information about you. All he said was 'If the boy is accepted to study at the temple, we will shave his head and give him a new name.' That didn't sound too bad to me. Everyone here has a shaved head. And about your name, well, you'll always be Adilet to us. But now you're telling me that it goes way beyond that. Dei will probably come back tomorrow. We'll try and tell him then."

"About what?"

"That we need to talk to your parents. A kid can't just decide for himself."

"Okay."

"Now listen, Adilet. You have seizures sometimes. We have to tell the monks about that, too. Right away. Do you understand?"

"Sure, baike. I want to go to bed."

Tashtan stayed up working long past midnight. When he needed a break, he went to turn on what looked like a television in the corner. It was actually a monitor. There were some videos lying near it. Tashtan put several of them in, one after another. All they showed were Buddhist monasteries, thousands of monks with shaved heads and prayer ceremonies. Although those were things that interested Tashtan, he wasn't in the mood to watch them now. He looked through the videos for something more entertaining, but without success. Giving up, he lay down to sleep. Some time in the night Adilet began to roll over restlessly in his bed. His teeth were chattering and he moaned as if in pain.

"Now he's having a seizure in his sleep," Tashtan worried. He sat tensely on the edge of his nephew's bed and watched his mouth and cheekbones. If they started to clench or spasm Tashtan was ready to open the boy's mouth and put whatever he could find, even the corner of the blanket, between his teeth. But in a few minutes Adilet's face calmed and he fell back into a deep sleep. Tashtan remained next to him with his eyes wide open. He was bothered by dark worries about Adilet's fate: what was in store for the weak, barely nine-year-old boy? He was born different and grew into a strange child. Now he was on the brink of a new, cloistered life that was full of the unknown.

There was a knock at the door. Then another knock, this time louder. Neither Tashtan nor Adilet woke up. There was another knock at the door half an hour later. By then Adilet was lying in bed with his eyes open. He jumped off his bed and opened the door to see Dei standing there.

"The revered Lama Tsu came in person, but you didn't open the door. He sent me to find out the reason for such a deep sleep," Dei said as Tashtan hurried to the door. "Even if Adilet has decided not to study in Tibet, the revered Lama Tsu asks that he come talk to him." Dei was sad. He looked at Adilet with regret.

"I'll come right now," Adilet said. He was already dressing. Dei nodded and left.

In less than half an hour, the boy crossed the threshold of Lama Tsu's study. The elder was polite as before. He was in a good mood and a kind smile lighted up his face.

"You must not depend on anyone else to decide your future path," said Lama Tsu.

"I will stay here and study!" Adilet answered, his voice still hoarse. He remained standing even after Lama Tsu gestured at a cushion.

"If you are prepared to study Tibetan learning and choose the right path, then in the future you will achieve much to justify the approximately forty years you will have spent learning. But even if you are not able to choose the right path, you will enjoy wealth and power. You have the mind and the talent to attain those things. You will spend your life surrounded by pleasures. The only cause for regret will be that you will lose your spiritual powers."

"I want to study. But how do I choose the right path?"

"That's a question for the near future. Today you may start studying immediately if you wish. Dei will explain everything else. Ohm! Mani padre hum!"

With that, Lama Tsu rang his silver bell and nodded especially warmly to Adilet, indicating that he was free to go.

When Adilet left the study, Dei summed up what Lama Tsu had said: "Your future is in your hands."

Lhasa's outdoor market was a thirty minute walk from the temple. Dei took Adilet and Tashtan there to make some purchases.

As they made their way down the hill they were overtaken by monks riding yaks and ponies. People riding horses and donkeys were also hurrying to the market. Not far away, cars of many makes, mainly jeeps, raced along the road cut into the smooth hillside.

Dei talked to keep his charges from getting bored. "Wherever you go and wherever you look, you'll see that Tibetan society is divided into rich and poor, wealthy and impoverished. But one thing makes us different: people here care about the poor, the monks, the elderly, the young and the sick. It isn't considered shameful to beg. No matter how much money a man takes with him to the market, he is prepared to part with half of it when a poor man holds out his hand. There are a few beggars who are healthy and strong, and that is shameful. But in Lhasa everyone knows the real beggars by name. People care for the poor and defenseless."

Dei gave money to several beggars, and Tashtan followed his example.

"It used to be that you couldn't wear sneakers like that in the temple, Adilet. Now you can. So we will save your money and not buy shoes. But you'll have to have two pairs of slippers made of soft yak skin," Dei said, looking over his list as he walked. "You will wear the slippers to prayers. You'll need a lot of socks. You have to change them every day."

"How much will we have to buy?" Tashtan asked. He took a look at Dei's list but couldn't read it. Only Dei knew what to buy and in what quantities. Like at any market, wherever they looked there was Indian tea in a variety of packages, cloth and other products, mainly from China. However, Tashtan thought the goods looked to be of better quality and in more attractive packages than what was sold in Kyrgyzstan.

Dei constantly moved from one row to the next, always keeping an eye on his charges. The market was swarming with people, a third of whom looked to be European or American tourists. With backpacks so big that they barely fit between the stalls, the tourists shoved their way down the stalls, elbowing and stepping on others and causing great annoyance. These tall, broad-shouldered foreigners wearing shorts that bared their long, hairy legs, and their women, also wearing leg-revealing shorts and with their breasts almost spilling out of their tops – how did they feel among the Tibetans, especially the modest, devout and tactful monks in long robes? Only the tourists knew the answer to that question.

Dei knew many of the people at the market. He was constantly bowing to or greeting people, disappearing for an instant and then reappearing at his charges' sides. Of all the things they had bought, Adilet liked the prayer beads with one hundred and eight stones.

"One-hundred and eight is a special number for Tibetans. To understand why, you have to climb the sacred Mount Kailash. Every student needs prayer beads, which are semi-precious stones on a silver chain." Dei informed Tashtan and Adilet.

Their bag already held two long robes made of a rough, white material with tiny pleats at the waist, a leather dipper, a small clay pot for tea, a wooden cup with painted designs, a knife, spoon and fork, and several cellophane bags.

After they had purchased all those items, Dei wiped the sweat from his forehead and said, "Now we can go home."

"Why don't we go take a look over there?" Tashtan pointed to a gaudy billboard on top of a two-story building in the distance. The billboard featured pictures of lions and tigers. Dei glanced at his watch and held his hand out to Tashtan. "We don't have time," he said. "We have to climb back up the hill. It will take us 40 minutes to reach the temple."

Tashtan turned around to look at his nephew, who had dropped behind. Adilet was watching with interest as a pair of growling dogs began sparring. When his uncle called, Adilet ran up to them with an innocent, childish smile. Tashtan's heart throbbed.

They walked past saddled yaks, horses and donkeys. There were stout white and black ponies begging for attention, their bridles set with silver and the edges of their harnesses were stamped with copper. Young boys ran back and forth pushing wheelbarrows, some empty and some loaded. A thought crossed Adilet's mind, "Just like in Bishkek." But there weren't as many of them. The boy also noticed that many beautiful flowers were for sale at every corner in the market.

It was evening by the time Tashtan and Adilet returned to the hotel. Exhausted, they collapsed onto their beds.

All day Tashtan had wanted to ask his nephew a question but hadn't been able to spit it out. "Adilet," he began cautiously, "the conditions for studying here aren't what I expected at all. We talked about that yesterday. Why did you agree to everything right away? Do you think you can decide for yourself? What will your mother and father say?"

Adilet lay for a long time without saying anything. Then he smiled, "I got Papa's permission."

"What are you talking about?" Tashtan stared at Adilet in surprise.

"You want me to tell you?" his nephew smiled craftily.

"Yes, I'm asking you to tell me. I'm more than just your uncle. You mean as much to me as my own brother. Or do you not feel that way?"

"Come on, baike! Last night I had a dream about Papa. He was sitting with the monks wearing a dark red silk cap. He was sitting up straight, just like they usually pray in the lotus position in the Jokhang temple. It was like it was my first time praying there. Papa looked at me and winked, like he wanted me to come over to him. I wanted to go to him, but one of the monks got in my way and wouldn't let me pass. He said, "This boy is not our student yet." Then Papa stood up and came over to me. He took my hand and made me sit next to him. He said, "If he isn't a student yet, he will be soon." He gave the monk that was in my way the evil eye. Then I woke up and it was just a dream. But it all happened like it was real. I think Papa gave me permission.

Tashtan walked to the temple with Adilet. From now on his brother's place would be inside the temple. How many years would he study here, who would he become, when

would he return home to his own people...? Neither the older nor the younger Kyrgyz had the answers.

Adilet stood in front of the temple. It seemed different to him now, great and mysterious. He felt small and timid.

"Come back, have you son? Have you given up your ego? Son, do you mean to step onto the lowest step of the wheel of life and climb to its highest step? Is this your final decision?" Adilet heard these questions subconsciously. He still didn't feel how serious a step he was taking by dedicating him to a life of study in the temple.

Before leaving, Tashtan said, "Adilet, I'm going to phone Bishkek today at noon. What do you want me to tell your parents?"

"Tell them hi."

"I'm also going to talk to Jildiz-ezhe."

"Say hi to Jildiz-ezhe, too."

At that moment, Adilet's bearing, his face and his voice reminded Tashtan of a man at middle age.

Now for the first time Adilet realized that, although the temple looked like a rectangle from the outside its inside hallways actually traveled in circles and half-circles. Dei led him through one of these halls and into a small room. It was the barber shop.

"Neituk, this boy will receive his new name today. I want you to shave off every last hair on his head."

The barber was not busy. He eagerly jumped up and grabbed a fistful of Adilet's hair. "What wonderful hair! My hands have been bored, but they will be glad to shear this luxurious mop! Sit down little colt. Keep your eyes shut."

Neituk enthusiastically began cutting hair. He was so involved that his tongue showed between his teeth. From time to time he pulled Adilet's hair and the boy couldn't help crying out and ducking his head.

"Don't you like my work, little colt? There's not much more left."

There was actually a lot left to do. After clipping Adilet's hair close to the scalp, Neituk poured hot water over the boy's head. Adilet started to scream.

"That couldn't have hurt, little colt. Where are you from?"

Adilet pulled his head into his shoulders and said nothing.

"I asked you where you're from!" Neituk grabbed him by the ear.

"From Kyrgyzstan! Ow-ouch!"

"That's better. I didn't think I'd seen a crybaby like you around here before. But that's the first I've heard of Kyrgyzstan."

After wetting and softening Adilet's hair, Neituk started to shave his head with a triangle-shaped razor that looked like a miniature trowel, humming to himself all the while. Then he walked around the boy and admired his work.

"There you go!" he finally said. "Your head looks like a ripe melon. I've actually only seen melons in the movies. Do you have melons where you're from?"

"Yes," Adilet said, rubbing his bald head. He got out of the chair and looked in the mirror on the wall. When he saw his new look his cheeks turned bright red. He

studied his reflection in astonishment. Now he looked just like the people that filled the temple like a colony of ants.

With his glossy black hair replaced by a dark grey scalp, the boy's eyes and calf-like long eyelashes seemed even bigger, wide open and frightened. There was sadness and even something like in them, reflecting the boy's feelings as he consciously bid his familiar life goodbye. His old life had been left behind an invisible barrier. The new life that awaited him was still unknown, full of mystery and hard work.

Dei took his charge up to the third floor. There they entered a room lined by bookshelves.

"Lama Tsu said to find him a name," Dei said to the monk in the room. He pressed Adilet forward. While the monk in a yellow shirt paged through a massive book, Adilet, giving in to his curiosity, took a few steps into the room and began looking over the eye-catching spines of the books on the shelves.

The monk began comparing information in the book with notes on the slip of paper Dei had handed him.

"Oh!" the monk exclaimed, raising his finger triumphantly. He turned to Adilet, "It appears that the boy was born under the sign of Sirius. His name is 'Mani Yaso!' That's the name of one of the holiest of holies. Will you be able to live up to it?"

Adilet didn't understand everything that the monk had said in Tibetan, so he smiled and said nothing. "Mani Yaso," he repeated his new name silently. "Mani Yaso."

"I'll show you where you will eat. Then I'll take you to your class," Dei said cheerfully. He led Mani Yaso on.

As the boy followed Dei, he began to feel an unexpected shyness. First of all, he was completely bald. Secondly, his robe was too large and hung on him like a tent. His feet kept treading on the hem of the robe and the sleeves dangled past his hands. He didn't look like much. He even started to feel like the monks who passed by were staring at him and wondering where such a scarecrow had come from. Adding to it all, the dishes he carried in a bag were clinking loudly.

Finally they reached the first year classroom. It was furnished with low tables and stacks of fat cushions. Around a dozen boys were sitting in the classroom writing. There was a chalkboard at the front of the room. The boys' teacher was pacing back and forth at the back of the room.

"Go on in. Bow and tell him your new name," Dei told Adilet. He pushed the boy into the room and shut the door.

"Mani Yaso," Adilet said to the teacher. He bowed low with his arms crossed on his chest. The teacher said something in Chinese. It was a Chinese-language class. Mani Yaso asked the teacher in English where he ought to sit. The teacher didn't understand. He opened the door and showed Adilet out, but Dei was already gone. Sounding annoyed, the teacher said something that Adilet couldn't understand and took him to another classroom. Mani Yaso saw that most of the boys in the new room were Indian. The teacher had a dark face and wore a red beaded cap. He looked Indian, too.

He greeted Mani Yaso politely and asked in English, "Where would you like to sit? Up front or in the back?"

"Can I sit in the middle?" Mani Yaso asked.

"Okay! You're a middle-of-the-road guy. Have a seat. There's plenty of room. For now there are just six students in this class."

Mani Yaso chose the last seat in the middle row.

"I won't be working with you today. Just sit and listen. You can tell me what you understood tomorrow." With that, the teacher walked away and didn't talk to Mani Yaso again. The lesson was an introduction to astrology.

In the Jokhang temple, the workday began at midnight. The students Mani was with were called "the Brits." All six of them lived in one room. According to the all-knowing boys, their room was the coldest in the temple. The walls and floor were stone; only the ceiling was made out of an unidentified material. The boys slept on metal bunks that had once been used by Chinese soldiers. The wire mesh on each bed held three pillows in a row, and the boys covered themselves with light blankets.

"It really is hard to get warm in here, if you can manage to get warm at all!" Mani Yaso thought as he wrapped himself tighter in his blanket. He did not feel himself falling asleep.

Suddenly in the darkness, someone poked him in the side.

"Get up. Hurry! It's time for prayers!" In his dream Mani Yaso heard the whining voice of the Indian boy who was considered the group's leader. They all started pulling on their clothes. Mani Yaso pulled on his undergarments. He had followed the other boys' advice to sleep naked. They told him that way his body wouldn't smell and he would stay clean, thanks to the dry air in Tibet.

The boys joined the crowd stomping loudly down the stairs from the third floor.

They all entered the prayer hall. Mani Yaso immediately caught whiff of something soft and aromatic. Sweet herbs were burning in hundreds of little holders around the hall. The smoke wafted up to the ceiling and wrapped around the statues of saints placed along the wall, which made them seem to waver. Mani Yaso tried not to lose sight of his classmates. The monks and students quickly took their places, sitting down with their legs crossed under them.

The students sat facing each other in five lines down the length of the hall. Mani Yaso wedged himself in at the end not far from his classmates. His Indian teacher, Guru Tilak, came over and touched him on the elbow.

"Our rule is that first you must pray before you can learn, but for now you should just sit silently with the others. Let your hearing adjust. Once you know the hymn and prayers by heart, then you can join in," he said.

Following Guru Tilak's orders, Mani Yaso sat and listened carefully. The first prayer of the hymn rang out majestically in the hall. The boy's entire body began to shake: with each word the voices of hundreds of men in dark red robes filled the hall with such energy that it seemed the windows would soon crack. The majesty of the hymn accompanied by musical instruments and its glorious supremacy over the internal life of each individual mesmerized him.

The nighttime prayer lasted about an hour.

Mani Yaso and his classmates ran in a pack back to their room. Quickly undressing, they jumped into their cold beds. They slept until four o'clock in the morning, when they had to jump back out of bed and run to the prayer hall. The dawn prayer began at four-thirty and breakfast was at five.

During the morning prayer, Mani Yaso felt terribly hungry. He pressed both hands against his stomach. At one point his eyes closed for an instant and he drifted into sweet sleep. If he hadn't been sitting with his legs crossed he would have fallen over. Terrified, he opened his eyes and realized to his relief that he hadn't fallen. He looked carefully around and noticed that the Indian boys were dozing instead of singing lustily like all the others. As it turned out, their sins did not go unnoticed. After prayers, Guru Tilak reminded them that if anyone fell asleep during prayers he would immediately be expelled from the school.

Now everyone hurried from the prayer hall to the dining hall. Thankfully, the Brits sat in a corner not far from the entrance so Adilet did not have to brave the labyrinth of tables. The six boys took their seats and began to eat. It was the same thing – *tsampa* made of rye flour and tea with butter. Holy bread, an object of great desire, was given out only on holidays.

During breakfast a lector read to them over a microphone. At every meal the monks listened to selections from the *Tanjour*, Tibet's holy book.

According to Tibetan teaching traditions, people are best able to understand the content and meaning of a book while they eat. As a result, everyone in the dining hall, especially the *shele*, or youngest students, were supposed to chew slowly and listen to the lector instead of thinking about their food.

On the first day Mani Yaso didn't understand anything. The other five Brits broke the rule by becoming preoccupied by their meal. They had no choice, since it was forbidden to translate the 112 volumes of the holy books *Ganjur* and *Tanjour* into other languages. Guru Tilak would have to explain the selection they heard at breakfast during English class.

At six o'clock on the dot all the *shele* went to their classrooms. There was a scheduled break at nine o'clock, after which there would be another morning or mid-morning meal and then classes again until one o'clock. From one to two they went to gym class and did their homework from their morning classes.

At three o'clock they had an hour for rest. They were not allowed to play, talk or even move. Each student had to sleep in his bed.

On the first day, Mani Yaso could not sleep. He was full of impressions from everything he had seen and heard and experienced, but he had to lie quietly with his eyes closed.

Classes began again at four o'clock and lasted another five hours. The boys called their afternoon classes "hell" in English. In the afternoon there was no break. They couldn't even go to the bathroom. Whoever broke the rules would be seriously punished by Guru Tilak. When he punished someone, their polite and gentle teacher turned into a stern, pitiless taskmaster. His kindness and tact disappeared and he became downright abrasive. He would take his thin bamboo rod and, with a quick, almost acrobatic gesture, strike a misbehaving boy hard enough to make him cry. Mani Yaso had already seen him do it twice. He was surprised by how their teacher could strike a boy one minute and politely call him "sir" the next minute, as if nothing had happened.

Mani Yaso soon found himself at the receiving end of Tilak's punishment. He had run out to the bathroom when he couldn't hold in any longer. When he returned, he asked Guru Tilak to excuse him. His teacher smiled kindly and said, "Of course I'll excuse you the first time, but I have to punish you anyway." When the boy turned around to go back

to his seat, his teacher whacked him across the back twice with his rod. The first time Mani Yaso had seen the teacher strike a boy on the back, he was very surprised and wondered how painful the thin little rod could be. Once he had it on his own back, he felt like he had been burned with red hot iron and everything went black in front of his eyes. He groaned loudly and turned to Tilak with a look of stunned martyrdom. Then he turned and, without a word, went back to his seat.

Unable to believe what his teacher had done, he stared at the man. His eyes protested: "Did you really hit me? Did you have to do it? I didn't do anything wrong!"

As if he could read the boy's mind, Tilak said, "That's right. You didn't do anything wrong. If you had, the punishment would have been completely different." He gave Mani Yaso a charming smile.

The boy sitting next to him whispered "You dummy! Next time you mess up, don't say 'Excuse me!'"

Mani Yaso looked at him and said nothing.

One day during gym class an unfamiliar monk came in and called for Mani Yaso.

"Lama Tsu has told me much about you. Apparently the specialists here have finished studying your astrological chart. Now they have asked me to come right away and listen to your voice."

The monk took Mani Yaso to a room full of musical instruments. Indicating them with his hand, he asked, "Look around. Did you play any of these instruments at home?"

"I didn't play anything."

"Can you sing?"

"I sang in a choir."

"That's exactly what we need. Have you learned to sing the prayers yet?"

"I haven't sung them yet."

"Then I'll accompany you while you sing."

"I don't think I can sing alone," Mani Yaso said. He felt awkward.

"I'll sing with you," the monk laughed.

Accompanied by a two-string *kiyak*, their voices filled the room with the sounds of prayer. At first the monk had his eyes closed. Then he slowly opened them. After a minute he was staring at Mani Yaso.

"Has anyone at the temple but me heard your voice?"

"No."

"Keep singing. Louder this time. Let's go!"

The monk made Mani Yaso sing alone. As he listened, he studied the flowers on the windowsill and the objects on the table. Suddenly broke off playing his *kiyak*. His face was red and he was visibly upset.

"Don't go anywhere. Wait right here," the monk cried and ran out of the room. A little while later he came back with Mani Yaso's mentor, Lama Tsu, and two other monks.

Mani Yaso crossed his arms on his chest and bowed in greeting.

Lama Tsu was in an excellent mood. He embraced the boy. "Let's you're your voice," he said, bowing for Mani Yaso to sit down. The boy had no idea why the monks, and even Lama Tsu, were interested in his singing. But he carefully began singing the beginning of the prayer hymn as loud as he could. He knew he was a little hoarse and did

not have a beautiful singing voice. Sometimes he even made sounds that reminding him of a goose. The boys at choir had teased him about it, calling him “duck head.”

Now the monks and Lama Tsu, the most authoritative lama at the Jokhang temple, were interested in his singing. They listened to his goose sounds with delight. Mani Yaso couldn't understand it.

“The flowers and the things in the room vibrate when you sing. They recognize your voice. You were at this temple in a previous life. The temple knows your voice and loves it. My dear Mani Yaso, that means that you are the reincarnation of a holy person who lived here before. Perhaps you were once a renowned lama.”

These words came from a dignified monk in a yellow robe who taught at the temple. Lama Tsu lifted his hand to stop the monk.

“Mani Yaso, my son, come to this classroom until you learn the entire hymn. I want you to sing for an hour every day at noon. This musician will work with you.”

At the temple, Mani Yaso's days passed like a dream. He was constantly monitored by someone. Wherever he went, someone went with him. Every time he sat down, someone sat with him. Up until now he had just been listening in class and wasn't given homework like the other boys. Most importantly, he had not been called to the board to answer the teacher's questions. He saw how hard the lessons were for his classmates. They did meticulous work without raising their heads, burdened by worry and frustration and without any time to rest. That was probably why they gradually lost their playful, childish nature and always looked as anxious as adults worn down by eternal cares. Their faces were always creased with frowns and their movements were calculated. Nonetheless, a little bit of their childish essence sometimes broke through, at which time they would run around shoving each other like roosters. On occasion the shoving turned into fighting.

One day as Mani Yaso was returning from his music lesson, he saw five or six *shele* outside the bathroom door. They had surrounded a short little boy and were tormenting him. One boy hit him in the shoulder, another pulled his ear, and a third kicked him in the shin. The little boy had delicate features and looked to be from an aristocratic family. At this most important moment he held himself proudly and simply tried to ward off the blows as if he had no other choice. The tiny creature didn't run away. He stood there and endured the torment. He seemed to be trying to follow one of the cardinal rules: “be patient in times of difficulty.”

It was hard to endure such kicks and taunts: “He's some rich dude's kid!”

“Let's pull his tail!”

The little boy may have been raised to follow the Lama's teaching: “If you are innocent and someone hits or taunts you, accept it, for eventually the one who torments you will get his just desserts.” When Mani Yaso ran over to stick up for the boy, he heard Dei shouting behind him.

“Hey little stuff, show them what for! If you can't even defend yourself how will you defend others?”

What happened next was unexpected.

Turning to Dei, the little *shele* seemed to grow taller. He straightened himself like a boxer. Glaring at the *shele* who had tormented him most, he went face to face with him and hit him in the neck. His tormenter went down. The other boys were dumbstruck. One of the boys came to and tried to attack the victor from behind, but the boy whirled around and socked him in his Adam's apple so hard that he dropped to the ground.

"So you're a real man, after all!" Dei was ecstatic. "He did a great job!" he said to Mani Yaso, pointing at the little hero. The tormenters disappeared into thin air.

"Son, I don't know how smart you are, but you've got a real talent for fighting. From now on, only use your talent for good and never to do evil. Those boys won't bother you anymore, but they may go after others. If they keep acting up, teach them another lesson. Justice will be on your side." Dei patted the *shele's* head and winked at Mani Yaso, who was standing to the side. Then Dei called him over with a mysterious smile as if he wanted to share a secret with him.

"Mani Yaso, I've just talked with Lama Tsu. He wants to see you in his study in the morning. You'll have to go by yourself. I won't come for you," he warned.

"When should I go? I don't have any free time."

"After morning prayers."

"I won't have time."

"You sure are full of yourself, aren't you? Fine, I'll come for you. But promise you'll wake up as soon as I turn the light on. You sleep like a dead man. I could poke you in the side and you wouldn't wake up."

As he got ready for bed that night, Mani Yaso thought about Tashtan-baika. Why hadn't he heard any news from him? Had he talked with Bishkek? What had his mother and father said? Would they let him stay, or would he have to go home? He needed to know. He didn't have time to think about these questions during the day. In the morning he had to go see Lama Tsu. What did he want to say to him? What if he said "My son, I've received a letter from your parents. They want you to come home. You can't study here," and sent him home? Shoala would probably be waiting for him. It would be interesting to see how she reacted if he held out his hand and said "I'm not Adilet, I'm Mani Yaso."

With that picture of Shoala smiling in surprise, Mani Yaso fell asleep.

Mani Yaso did not know how long he had been asleep when he heard loud laughter over him. Half-asleep, he felt something cold slither around his neck. Terrified, he grabbed whatever it was with both hands. A snake! He had grabbed its middle. The snake began wriggling and encircled his hand from wrist to elbow. Mani Yaso screamed. He shot out of his bed and threw the snake on the ground. With his right heel he managed to stamp on the snake's head.

"Hey! You killed it!"

"Murderer! You killed a snake!"

"They'll kick you out of the temple for that!"

"Grab him! We have to punish him!"

"We'll punish him ourselves!"

Seconds ago the boys had been laughing, but now they were filled with ruthless fury. Without hesitating, they began punching Mani Yaso's head and face and kicking him wherever they could. At first he tried to defend himself, but soon he fell to the floor and lay bleeding next to the dead snake.

By morning the startling incident was known throughout the temple. It was too late to try to contain the scandal. According to the religion of the lamas, killing any living thing was a terrible sin. Tibetans do not kill animals for food, and they take special care of snakes, frogs and insects.

After punching and kicking Mani Yaso until he lost consciousness, his classmates put him back in his bed. Then they took the dead snake to the head of the temple, Lama Panchen Deli.

The *shele* Zhava led the avengers. The oldest boy in the class, he was physically strong and had a large head. His astrological chart had shown that he, too, was the reincarnation of a lama who had lived at the temple in the past.

The boys were determined to punish Mani Yaso, who had come to the temple from who knows where and didn't have a clue about the law that one must not kill snakes. They would see to it that the bloodthirsty Mani Yaso was severely punished. Compared to Mani Yaso's inadvertent action, the boys thought that putting a snake in bed with someone who was asleep was just a joke, like putting an ant on someone's hand. The whole thing with the snake had been a game for them.

Mani Yaso was just beginning to open his eyes when he heard a soft rustling. Someone sat down next to him. Who was it? He couldn't tell.

"My son Mani Yaso, I'm here to take you to my room. We will carry you. Just lie still, alright?"

Mani Yaso tried to nod but he couldn't. He was in bad shape.

Only a week later when Mani Yaso could finally hear his teacher's voice clearly did he come to enough to see that he was in Lama Tsu's medicine room.

Lama Tsu bend over the boy. "Your blood pressure is back to normal. You can check it by putting your fingertips to your temple," he said. Mani Yaso did as the teacher said and smiled.

"Father," (it was the first time he had used that word for his teacher) "Will they kick me out of the temple?"

"That is a difficult question. I have to talk with you. We will figure out what happened and then decide. You may walk around today if you wish, but only here. Do not leave this room. There may be others who are waiting to punish you for killing that snake."

At first Lama Tsu took care of Mani Yaso, but on the second week he entrusted the boy's care to Dei. Mani Yaso was delighted when he saw Dei, whom he loved like a brother. Dei had always been friendly with him, treating him with kindness and respect, but now there was something like mistrust in the man's eyes. He watched Mani Yaso with cautious reserve.

Finally he asked Mani Yaso reproachfully, "Is it true that in your country people kill yaks and horses to eat?"

Mani Yaso laughed. He didn't know what to say. People were calling him a bloody murderer and he might be expelled from the temple because he accidentally killed

a snake. What would happen to him if he admitted that the Kyrgyz kill yaks and horses for food? Nothing good, that was for sure!

Instead of answering, he moaned as if his wounds hurt. Then his memory suddenly saved him.

"Where I come from, if a snake crawls in the house they throw milk or *ayran* at it," he said, repeating something he had read in a book of folk tales.

Dei was surprised. "They do the same thing here. So we do have some customs in common. But you still killed that snake..."

"I was still half-asleep. I thought the snake would bite me. Will they kick me out of the temple?"

"That I don't know. Only Lama Tsu knows. If you aren't guilty he will clear your name. If you are guilty, he will never take you back. Lama Tsu's word is the law here in the temple."

The next morning Dei took the boy to Lama Tsu's study. Mani Yaso had never seen it before. While he was waiting for Lama Tsu to come out of his prayer room, he looked at the pictures and many-colored silks hanging on the walls. There were glass tables with lots of magazines, books and papers. Next to them were several shiny little figurines. There was a fat bouquet of flowers in a glass vase. Mani Yaso tiptoed over to the flowers and touched one of them. They were made of paper. For some reason the boy saw Shoala again, her face sweet and embarrassed as she held the lovely, fragrant bouquet he had given her.

"I spoke with your uncle yesterday," Lama Tsu's voice interrupted his rosy thoughts.

Mani Yaso whirled around and bowed to his teacher with his hands crossed over his chest.

"Your uncle asked permission to see you, but I did not allow it. If all goes well, you can see him next week."

"Thank you, Father. May I go see him at the hotel?"

"Yes, you may."

"Thank you, Father."

"Your Uncle Tashtan seems to be a deep thinker. He says that you would never kill a snake. That means that you were scared and committed the sin by accident. That is what I wanted to believe. In your case, I can forgive you because it was an accident and not deliberate. The ninth chapter of the *Tanjour* gives rules for how to treat animals and insects. It also contains an oath. I want to ask you to do something. Read it carefully and memorize the oath. Then recite it for me. After that, we will talk again."

Mani Yaso saw that Lama Tsu had also changed. His eyes no longer contained the same gentle light. They even seemed cold. Mani Yaso's heart suffered this change in the people who loved him almost as a tragedy.

Dei was right. Lama Tsu's word was the law.

Mani Yaso read the rules in an abridged English version of the *Tanjour* and recounted what he read to Lama Tsu. Only after hearing that did the teacher amnesty his student.

"You have a thorny path ahead of you, my son. I want to tell you about a very significant and serious discovery. After we heard your voice, a special group of scholars has been researching your astrological sign. I want to tell you what they have concluded.

You are the reborn reincarnation of the great Milarepa, a Tibetan yogi and poet who lived ten centuries ago. His internal life, his blood, voice, mind, feelings and, interestingly, your appearance, have come together as a new incarnation of the great man. But I'm afraid you don't have the proper education. You spent the first nine years of your life in another environment, so in the future each step you take will be a difficult one. Yes, it will be a thorny path. I want to caution you. When a young man resolves to dedicate his life to following the path of justice, he will have to conquer great difficulties and many unexpected and not very pleasant conflicts. You understand that well, am I right?"

Mani Yaso nodded. He wanted to ask Lama Tsu about something else but couldn't do it.

"When the great Milarepa healed the sick he used more than herbs. He healed people with his voice. According to the legends that have survived, he could revive a person whose soul had recently flown using his songs and his wonderful singing voice.

"The world has been waiting for Milarepa to be born again and recreated. Whether or not you become the incarnation of the great man is up to you now. You can only reach that height through tireless work, knowledge, and diligent study. I have announced to everyone in the temple that you are guiltless. But do not try to settle scores with your foolish classmates. They will not harm you again. I have one request: go to your room this evening and recite the oath from the *Tanjour*. Each shele must be convinced that you will never kill another creature, great or small. Otherwise you will not be able to live together in one room."

Mani Yaso hung his head. He listened to his teacher's instructions without saying a word. When Lama Tsu finished, he raised his eyes. "Okay. I'll do it."

"You must learn everything that we normally teach in the first three years of study in just one year. We know that you have the strength and endurance. After that, you will join my class."

"Father, how many years will I have to study?"

Lama Tsu laughed. He knew that the boy who had come from a far-off land thought of nothing else.

"You miss your home and your parents. That will pass, and it won't take long. Don't worry. You will decide how long you will study, for there is no end to study and learning."

Mani Yaso did not understand this answer from Lama Tsu and his eyes showed it.

"You don't understand, do you? Where you come from, people spend five years at university. Then they can go on to graduate school and even get doctorates. Our system is somewhat like that. Yes, it's true. Your uncle graduated from a university in Bishkek and came here to continue his studies and deepen his scholarly understanding. But nobody knows when he will reach the pinnacle of his field. It's the same here. The great Milarepa left much unfinished and unattained in his previous life. Now you must finish his business. That is the greatest mystery of reincarnation. In future lives a man must develop and reinforce his earlier achievements. In this manner he will finally reach the standing of a venerable *arhat*.

On the way back to his room with Dei, Mani Yaso asked him, "If they put a snake down my shirt again what should I do?"

"They won't try that stupid trick again. Don't worry. But remember that if you find a snake or frog in your shirt it's good luck! It means you'll be wealthy."

“I don’t need that kind of wealth. You can tell the other boys.”

Although Dei was a monk of the lowest rank and wore a yellow robe, he was Lama Tsu’s assistant and favorite. He enjoyed authority in the temple because of his unwavering honesty, meticulousness and reliability. And he was never afraid to criticize someone. Although nobody at the temple was openly ambitious, each little shele dreamed of becoming a trappa, and then a lama and then an abbot. Anyone with further career ambitions wanted to become a Panchen Lama or even the Leader. For those with a special gift, the highest rank was *arhat*. However, it was considered shameful to speak openly of ones ambitions to attain a higher rank or push oneself forward by shoving aside equals.

Dei possessed enough knowledge that Lama Tsu could have promoted him to a higher rank had he wished to do so. But for some reason, the thought never occurred to either Dei or Lama Tsu. Consequently, Dei remained just plain Dei and kept his yellow robe.

“Alright big shots! I’ve brought back our guest who came here to study from a far-off Muslim country. He still has the bruises you put on him. If you add even one little spot, I’ll show you the door out of the temple! Which one of you wants to be expelled? Speak up! Any takers?”

Dei gave each of the boys a menacing look. All five shook their heads guiltily.

“Then listen as Mani Yaso recites his oath.”

Mani Yaso was filled with anger, but he tried not to show it. He unfolded the paper on which he had written the oath and began to read: “As long as my eyes can see the world and my feet can walk on the earth, I will harm no person, animal or other creature, bird, insect, worm, ant or any other creature like me...”

“Lama Tsu will be pleased,” said Dei. He put his warm hands on Mani Yaso’s shoulders.

“But he killed the snake!” Zhavva, the leader of the boys, did not hide his annoyance.

“If you hadn’t put a cold snake down the shirt of someone who was asleep then you’d still have your colorful friend to keep warm inside your own shirts. Lama Tsu has said that Mani Yaso is not guilty. Do you hear me?”

The boys did not say “yes.” They just looked at the floor in silence.

On Sunday Mani Yaso was excused from gym class and from a trip to the mountains to collect medicinal herbs. Lama Tsu agonized for a long time before finally giving Mani Yaso permission to see his uncle.

He spoke seriously with the boy before he left the temple. “My son Yaso, you and I have already made a decision regarding your studies here. I hope that your uncle will not try to put pressure on you. People often create obstacles when they are not aware of a child’s astrological biography. However, you must not say anything about the great Milarepa. I trust that you will keep your word, for you have a strong will. That is the only reason I am allowing this meeting. As a rule, we do not allow students to see their parents and family during the first year of study. Perhaps you do not yet understand the importance of such discipline. I will see you at evening prayers.”

As soon as Mani Yaso closed the gate he raced down the street as if he had just been released from a cage.

Tashtan was at the hotel. "Oh, Adilet!" he grabbed his nephew and hugged him tight. "Just look at you!"

Adilet pressed himself to his uncle's chest. He stayed in his embrace for a long time. His heart was pounding. He was feeling angry and sad at the same time. His eyes filled with tears but he could not cry. His tears choked him and he began to shake.

"Stop it, Adilet! You're a big *dzhigit* now!"

Finally the boy pushed back from his uncle and collapsed on the bed.

"I'm not Adilet. I'm Mani Yaso," he said wiping his tear-filled eyes.

"Mani Yaso? That's a wonderful name they gave you," Tashtan said brightly, trying to make his nephew feel better.

"What's so wonderful about it?" Adilet asked angrily.

"In their language 'Manu' is the name of the first man, like our Adams. Yaso means..."

"Did you call Bishkek, baike?"

"I did. They were glad to hear that you passed the test."

"Is that all you told them? How's Mama?"

"I didn't say anything else. I want you and me to come to a decision first. I've been waiting for you impatiently. I thought you'd study here for five years, become a doctor of Tibetan medicine and then come back home to your people. But now it looks to me like once they get hold of a person they don't let him go. What do you say?"

"Who are my people?"

"Kyrgyz of course! Who else?"

"Here they don't split people up like that into my people and your people."

"They can say whatever they want. That's their problem. But you and I need to think carefully. I brought you here to study, but you don't belong to them. They can't make you give up marriage and children and live your whole life in celibacy."

"It looks like I'm theirs, uncle."

"Don't joke around!"

"It does look like I'm theirs, baike. I can't say anything else."

"What can you not say? Tell me what it is you can't talk about. Did they forbid you?"

"Don't ask me, baike."

"Why shouldn't I ask you? We still have a decision to make. First we have to decide whether or not you're staying here to study."

Adilet was quiet for a minute. Then, glaring up at Tashtan, he said "Papa always called me useless and pathetic."

Tashtan was taken aback. He didn't know how to answer.

"So you're mad at your papa, are you? You know your father says whatever comes into his head."

"I'm not mad."

"Then what is it?"

“Papa was right.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Adik! Don’t blame your father for everything.”

“Papa was telling the truth, baike!”

“You’re just being stubborn as usual. This isn’t the time for it. They want to lock you in the temple for the rest of your life. Don’t forget that.”

“Papa was right, baike. I’ve said it three times.”

Tashtan drummed his fingers on his knees nervously. Then he grabbed a pack of cigarettes and rushed out the door. He took a couple of long drags and held his breath before slowly letting out a stream of acrid smoke. He spit out his cigarette and went back into the rook. His nephew hadn’t moved, as if he was frozen.

“You’re a stubborn donkey!” Tashtan yelled. “They kicked you out of one school for being stubborn and they would have kicked you out of the Jewish school if it wasn’t for Jildiz-ezhe! This right here is not the time to be stubborn! You are in a strange country with strange people!”

“They don’t say that: ‘strange country, strange people.’” Adilet repeated obstinately without raising his head.

Irate, Tashtan began shouting. “Who cares about them? You have to decide your own future! I didn’t bring you here for you to be a celibate monk all your life. If that’s what you want to do you have to ask your parents first. I can’t give you permission on my own! We’re not talking about this anymore. I’m not your parent.”

There was more anger than authority in Tashtan’s voice. For the first time in his life, he was angry at his nephew. He could not make peace with the fact that he didn’t understand the boy. His dear little friend had distanced himself from him. There was something in him that Tashtan could not reach. He had loved Adilet from the day he was born. They had lived under one roof with one heart and cared deeply about each other. Aisada and Salamat were busy from morning to night with their barnyard full of livestock and didn’t have time for their little boy, so Tashtan had gradually taken him under his wing. When the kindergarten refused to take Adilet because he had no birth certificate, it was Tashtan who spent two weeks decorating the kindergarten building, painting scenes from fairy tales all over the walls so that they would accept his nephew. He always walked to kindergarten and later to school with the boy. He kept a watchful eye on Adilet’s education. While he was still in college he paid for Adilet to take private English lessons with a tutor. Tashtan supervised his nephew closely because of the boy’s exceptional abilities. From the first through the fourth grade Adilet was always ahead of his classmates. In terms of his erudition and comprehension, he was on the same level as a high school student. Adilet plowed his way through the books Tashtan brought him. He didn’t just absorb what he read – he made notes, analyzed them and memorized them.

When he was in the second grade, his teacher wanted him to skip to the fourth grade; in the fourth grade, she wanted to promote him to the sixth grade. His parents, however, were against the idea. They wanted him to be a normal child and were afraid of jinxing him. The experiments had been Jildiz’s idea, but eventually she gave up. She noticed that, while Adilet soaked up knowledge and everything new like a sponge, his feelings were always hurt by even the tiniest unfairness. Most of the time his extreme sensitivity and yearning for justice ended up smashed like a wave against a cliff, which fed his inner protest. Even something as minor as when heaters showed up in the classrooms where the principal’s relatives sat while other classes got no heaters at all,

seemed to Adilet to be a grave injustice. This brought about his letter of protest to the city school board and the principal's strong desire to get rid of the defiant boy, even if he was a tiny genius. Children his age – and many adults, too – felt themselves founder under Adilet's expressive, probing gaze. "He's barely knee-high to a grasshopper, but he can look right through you," people said about him, especially women. His own parents didn't always understand him. They didn't notice how often they criticized him as being "from another planet." When they were angry with him, they always called him "useless" and "good for nothing."

Perhaps that is why Tashtan had always secretly dreamed of getting his nephew away from his negative environment. Moving to a new place changes a person's fate. But Tashtan couldn't have imagined that his beloved nephew would get caught in such a trap. Both he and Adilet had given their thoughts and their souls to the idea of *Shambhala*.

"Why don't you say something?" Tashtan decided to pick up the conversation again. Adilet stared at the toes of his shoes in silence.

"Do you have the rest of the day off or do you have to go?"

"I have the rest of the day."

"Then let's go. I'll show you the Potala Palace. Or would you rather go to the mountains?"

"I think I'll take a nap..."

"Aren't you getting enough sleep?"

Adilet shook his head and lay down on the bed. Tashtan began cooking *beshbarmak* using some yak meat he had bought the week before. He decided to make a little feast for his nephew. Adilet was already dreaming about the lovely Shoala. Holding hands, the two of them were flying through the blue sky high over the Himalayas.

Part Three

The Englishman Thomas Rankin and his wife Sophie had brought their eight-year-old son Etien to Tibet from Switzerland, where they lived. Since the age of three the boy had demonstrated powers: whatever he wanted, he always got; whatever he predicted always came to pass. Neither Etien nor his parents noticed this at first, or if they were aware of something they didn't think it important. For example, Etien could be sitting at home and mentally call the neighbor boy – "go outside so we can play" – and the boy would come right out. Later, when Etien was in school, he decided he liked a girl named Laura. He kept her near him by ordering her not to play with anyone else.

When the girl realized she couldn't get away from him, she burst into tears and told the teacher, "Etien won't let me go!"

The teacher was annoyed with her. "You're the one who follows him around!"

One day Etien told his friends about a vision he had had. "There's going to be a car accident right here on this street. Just wait and see." Sure enough, a few hours later a car crashed on the street Etien had named. When his parents learned of his prophesying they were shocked. His mother was so frightened she burst into tears. After that, both parents tried never to ask him anything about the future. One day, however, Sophie's curiosity got the better of her.

"Etien, can you tell us if anything important is about to happen? Maybe today or tomorrow?"

“Two big towers like the ones across the street from my school are going to fall down,” he blurted out before dashing off to play with his friends.

“Don’t say that! That’s not possible!” his mother yelled after him. Feeling anxious, Sophie went off to work and forgot about what her son had said. When she came home that evening and turned on the television, she was horrified to see the crumbling Twin Towers in New York. The date was September 11, 2001.

The Rankins were stricken with worry for their son and panic soon seized them. They turned for advice to a club for mystics. The head of the group, who was from India, suggested that they send Etien to a monastery. Neither parent liked that idea.

Another member of the club told them to take their son to Tibet. “Tibet is the home of Holy Mount Kailash. If a person gifted with the power of prophecy goes to the mountain and performs certain rituals there, the heavens will set him on the right path in all that he does. Then he will not be harmed by his magical gift. And he will not harm others.”

Thus, Mr. and Mrs. Rankin took their son to Tibet for the summer holidays. In Lhasa they found a tour company and signed up for a hiking trip that would take them to Mount Kailash, Lake Manas and a number of ancient Tibetan temples and monasteries.

Tourism is an important source of income for the people of Tibet. Tashtan found himself in the same tour group as the Rankin family. The three Rankins, Tashtan and their guide were preparing to leave in an old Toyota jeep.

Their Tibetan guide, a man named Tze Tzar, instructed them, “Take enough food for 15 days. Make sure you have warm winter clothes with you. Don’t forget to take medicine for diarrhea, blood pressure and altitude sickness, or shortness of breath.”

When she heard that, Sophie, who was reed-thin, lost her nerve. She had brought some wool sweaters that she thought were warm enough, but she soon realized that even here in the valley they did not protect her enough against the cold nights. And during the days it was so hot that she thought her brains would melt. Before leaving for the trip, she had to run down to the Lhasa market and buy yak skin coats, fur-lined boots and hats with earflaps.

“Why are we going for 15 days? Why does it take that long? Sophie asked. She had decided not to ignore any more of the guide’s advice.

“You said you want to visit Kailash, and that means you’ll have to perform all the necessary rituals. For Europeans like yourselves that will take at least 15 days.”

“If we get there and find whatever Etien needs it will be worth it, even if it takes 15 days,” Tom whispered to his wife to calm her down. They had told no one about their goal to help their son. Etien was like any other boy from a wealthy family. He was restless and full of mischief, both headstrong and curious. He mutinied for the first time when the guide told him he couldn’t take his digital camera, MP3 player, cell phone or CDs with him.

While they were drove down the empty mountain road, Etien glowered at his parents – “Why did you bring me here?” – and turned to the window. For a long time he didn’t talk to anyone and kept his eyes on the barren mountain landscape of Tibet.

Tom turned to Tashtan to draw him in to conversation. "I wish we could have brought our video camera. I'd like to have some footage of this unspoiled landscape."

"It's probably a good thing that you left everything at the hotel. Otherwise the Chinese border guards would have confiscated your stuff. As far as I know, once they take something you won't see it again," said Tashtan.

Sophie was bowled over. "Mama mia! Are you sure? Why are there Chinese border guards here?"

"The Chinese army annexed Tibet in 1950. They've been here ever since."

"But how is that? Didn't the U.N. pass a resolution that they had to leave?"

"The resolution didn't say that China had to leave. It just said they had to respect Tibetans' rights. But that won't stop the communists, will it?"

Sophie turned to their guide. "How long will it take to get to Kailash?"

The guide, whose name was Tze Tzar, a young man with black spots on his cheeks and earlobes from frostbite, was sitting up front with the driver. He turned to her and spoke cheerfully, "It'll take three days. But you won't be bored on the trip. There will be a lot to see."

"Mama mia!" Sophie laughed nervously.

Hearing her, Etien turned to his father with a dour look that said, "you're getting what you deserve!"

For a while they all sat in silence as the jeep rattled along, each one wrapped up in his own thoughts.

The guide spoke first. "Look up ahead. There is the Jochi River at the place where four roads meet. The road to the left goes to Ui. To the south is Sikkim. The road to the right is the one we will take. Over there you can see the village of Sho. There was once an ancient monastery there, but the communists destroyed it. On the whole, they destroyed eighty per cent of our monasteries and temples. It was a terrible sacrilege. Our fourteenth Dalai Lama led a revolt against them, but they were much stronger. The Dalai Lama had to move to India.

Tashtan spoke. "He may be in exile, but he did get the Nobel Prize."

The guide smiled. "The Swedes appreciated his intelligence and humanism. One day His Holiness will win freedom for Tibet."

"Good God, just look how backward this Tibet place is. Everywhere you look it's in the stone age." Sophie shut her mouth and looked closely at their guide's profile to see if she had offended him by accident.

He spoke calmly. "We have never strived for riches. That is our nature. Our spirit."

"But you have to at least live like humans!"

"The Chinese are always telling us how well we live."

Tom jumped in. "Right, but now China has almost the same standard of living as Europe."

"People always point to America as an example, but we don't want to be like the Americans."

"So who do you want to be like?"

"The people of Tibet don't want to imitate anybody else. We are not interested in accumulating wealth. Our goal is to cultivate our spiritual life and do what we can to spread justice among the other peoples of the world. To awaken people's conscience. All

of the efforts and actions of our lamas have that goal. Unfortunately, there are many people who want to build brothels and casinos here in Tibet.”

Tashtan chimed in to support him. “They say this is a country of prophets.”

“Every person has not two eyes, but three. However, few people can see the world using the third eye. Our lamas are able to help certain people open their third eye.”

“Is your third eye open?” Sophie laughed. She seemed to be testing the guide.

“I do not have that gift. For that one has to be born under the planet Sirius.”

Sophie turned to her husband. “Sirius? What’s Etien’s planet?”

“I think it’s Oreon,” he mumbled without looking away from the window.

“Are you sure or not?” Sophie worried. What the guide was saying didn’t match her expectations. If their son’s planet wasn’t Sirius, then was the whole trip in vain?

Tashtan noticed that she was upset. “Don’t worry. The oriental horoscope is different.”

“I guess you’re right.” Sophie relaxed.

Their guide began telling them about the majestic and captivating nature in Tibet.

The Toyota struggled uphill all day but covered a mere one hundred kilometers. The sky was already darkening when they halted outside a half-ruined mountain monastery. A single light shone above the monastery’s front door.

“This is where we will sleep tonight,” their guide said. “You don’t have to worry. It’s warm inside the monastery.”

The travelers were met by a monk of uncertain age. He had a thin beard and wore quilted pants and felt boots.

The monk took Sophie’s bags from her. “Welcome!”

Sophie shivered. “Whew! It’s already winter up here. What’s the temperature?”

“Twenty-five below zero,” their guide answered after consulting a thermometer by the front door.

They discovered that only two rooms in the monastery were still standing. The Rankin family took the inner room, and the others were to sleep in the front room. There was an iron stove and a pile of yak dung bricks in the middle of the front room. The beds were flat stones topped with straw mattresses. The travelers lay down to sleep without taking their coats off. They couldn’t feel any heat coming from the stove, and to make matters worse the monastery door was not insulated. It was old and full of cracks through which the stars in the night sky were visible.

Tashtan went to bed after the others. His bed was next to the door. All evening he had been talking with the black-bearded monk who lived far from these two rooms in the opposite corner of the monastery. Ever the graduate student, Tashtan was mainly interested in finding material for his thesis. He had not expected to get much out of a lonely hermit living high in these harsh, rocky mountains. The man wasn’t much to look at. His ears, nose, arms and legs were all covered with black spots left by frostbite. Nonetheless, Tashtan was convinced that one thing was true of Tibetans: no matter how poor they were, with their stomachs almost always empty and their clothes a mess of holes and patches, their souls were overflowing with luminous energy. They knew and understood much.

By the time they reached adulthood, every boy and girl had soaked up the knowledge of the *Kalachakra*, *Ganjour* and *Tanjour*, which contained all the richness of Tibetan Buddhism. The *Ganjour* and *Tanjour* alone consisted of 112 volumes. Most of what Tibetan Buddhism teaches Tibetans revolves around the seven great mysteries that explain the origins of the universe, the levels of the cosmic world, the human planet, or Parabrahman – the story of man’s creation, his existence today and tomorrow, his death and rebirth, and the infinite nature of the universe and time itself. These are the great mysteries that can never be unraveled, as they do not lend themselves to human logic. In order to understand them, all future human beings must develop their intellect and reach a higher level of the mind. Consequently, one man devoting his life to Tibetan learning is like a drop in the ocean. The black-bearded monk told Tashtan all of this. It sounded to the young scholar like an astonishing fairy tale.

The monk said, “You come from a former Soviet state. That explains it. Your people have turned their backs on metaphysics. You are materialists. You want to explain the world your own way, but you don’t understand that your Darwin and Mendeleyev and Einstein based their science on what they found in our ancient books. They absorbed knowledge from our books before elaborating their theories.”

“Come on, really? I can’t believe that!”

“Of course you can’t. You only study 15% of all the scientific achievements made by man and simply ignore the rest. Your people are still in the dark. Admit it.”

“People’s minds are opening now. I brought my nephew here, for example, and put him in a Tibetan school.”

“You did the right thing. That was a good first step, but what matters is whether or not your nephew has the patience and endurance to learn here. From what I’ve heard, where you’re from people study medicine for five years. What can you learn in just five years?”

Tashtan laughed. “Five years is a long time to us. But let me change the subject. Why don’t you want to answer my question about the Bön faith?”

“Well, traveler, that’s a sad story. Bön was the faith of our Tibetan people before the lamas. Bön is not a religion. It was our Bön that gave you the science to explain that the energy in matter is the continual motion of the protons and neutrons in the atom.”

“So Bön is physics?”

“It’s faith. But even so, it is based on an astral understanding of the world.”

“I’m sorry, but we consider the Bön faith to have been a type of shamanism. It was a time of healers, sorcerers, exorcists and *bakhshi*³, wasn’t it?”

“Exactly. You said it right. All those occult devices, the maneuvers, and cunning and charms worked by decreasing or increasing the rhythm of the atoms in matter. That is how they healed people.”

“Stop right there. That’s what I’m really interested in. Can you...”

“No, I can’t. We left Bön behind forever. The Buddhists led by Padmasambhawa outnumbered us and forced their religion on us. They ridiculed Bön and called it black magic and sorcery. They said Buddhism was white magic. In the end, Tibetan Buddhism is halfway between the two. We belong to the new faith now. But don’t worry. There is a whole department on Bön at the research center in Lhasa. I’m sure you’ll find all the information you need there.”

³ *Bakhshi* – “magician, healer.” Originally from Persian (?)

After another day of heavy going, the Toyota finally brought the travelers to the banks of Lake Manas high in the mountains.

The guide spoke. "This holy lake is four thousand six hundred meters above sea level and over seventy meters deep. When we climb up to that cliff overlooking the lake you will see that it is shaped like a real, eight-petal lotus. The lake is the soul of the god Brahma. The Buddha lived here and gave the lake's water healing power."

Sophie was impatient. "Which side did Buddha live on?"

"We will go there. For today we will spend the night in a cave where the Buddha stayed. The most interesting sights are still to come. Do not be afraid at all."

"What does the lake's name mean?" Tashtan had asked the bearded monk the same question yesterday and been given two meanings of the word *manas*: in the Lanka language it meant "man," and in the Kachyn language of Tibet it meant "son of heaven." Tashtan was looking forward to hearing an interesting answer, but Sophie distracted their guide.

"There's a wonderful smell coming from the lake!" she exclaimed.

The guide was delighted. "The name Manas means "holy lake." He was just getting warmed up. "If you believe the legends of the lamas, the Indian god Shiva and his wife Parvati bathed in this lake. And in our own time, the ashes of the great Mahatma Gandhi were strewn over this lake. When Gandhi was ill he came here and traveled around the lake to get rid of his sickness. It gave him new strength and energized him.

All three Rankins ran down to the lake. Cupping their hands, they began throwing into the air, creating a shower of silvery droplets that shone in the evening's last rays of sun. Tashtan joined in the Rankins' game. He was both curious and infected by their jovial shouting.

After splashing to their hearts' content, they climbed down to the cave where the guide said the Buddha had slept. They were met by a monk in a yellow robe and yellow cap. He lighted oil lamps on rocks at the mouth of the cave and deep inside the cave. There, at the back of the cave, was a statue of the Buddha seated on a flat rock.

The cave had no stove for heat, so the travelers brought their sleeping bags from the jeep and prepared for bed. As was his habit, Tashtan took his place near the entrance. The guide and the monk went to sleep elsewhere.

A little while later, before the travelers fell asleep they heard a strange rushing noise. Then they began to feel a kind of lightness in their bodies, as if they were rising off the floor and, hovering in the air, being transformed into some other dimension. Tashtan pulled his head into his sleeping bag. He had the extraordinary sense of being surrounded by unseen souls who were quietly listening to his thoughts and his breathing.

Tashtan endured this odd feeling for a long time and did not notice when he fell asleep. Then, suddenly, he woke up in fright. A strange being stood over him and stared down at his face. In the pre-dawn darkness Tashtan could not see the being clearly. When he moved to unzip his sleeping bag the being instantly disappeared without a sound.

In the morning, the travelers awoke feeling rumpled and afraid. They even looked at each other with something like distrust. As it turned out, Tom and Sophie had both had

a bad night filled with terrible visions. They weren't sure whether they had dreamed them or not. Only Etien had slept well and undisturbed.

As soon as Etien crawled out of his sleeping bag, Sophie embraced her son and held him close.

"Were you afraid, sweetie?"

"I slept great, Mom."

Tomas said nothing, sitting with his chin on his knees. It took him a while to come around when it was time to get moving.

"Some cave," he muttered as he walked outside.

The jeep continued crawling up the mountain. The guide pointed out another lake, this one smaller than Manas.

"We call this lake the Great Black Lake. It is poisoned with negative energy. Tantra yogis bathe in its waters to increase their powers for evil. For them, death is a game. They make dishes out of the skulls of the dead. Black sorcerers derive pleasure from cruelty and evil. When family members die, they sit by the dead all night without fear.

"Just like we do," Tashtan thought to himself. He wanted to say, "We do the same thing. When someone dies, we place the body against one wall of the yurt, cover it with a cloth and sit with it for three days and three nights." However, he decided to say nothing. He didn't want the others to call him a black sorcerer.

That day they went over one hundred kilometers and crossed three mountain ridges before noon. When they came out from behind a large mountain covered with large pieces of black crushed rock, they finally caught sight of the shining peak of Mount Kailash. From a distance, the glaciers and year-round snow shining in the bright sunlight seemed like a perfect, unbroken expanse of pearly white. Tashtan's heart leaped with joy. Unlike the other mountains in Tibet, this peak was a perfect copy of the snow-white Kyrgyz yurt.

"Mount Kailash is six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six meters high. Many philosophers, thinkers, writers and theologians around the world say that Mount Kailash conducts the Earth's astral energy into the universe and connects it with other planets. Mount Kailash is by no means the only mountain with such power. There are thirty other occult points on the earth. However, Mount Kailash is the most highly regarded. People call it the spiritual center of the world and the Earth's axis. Like a pyramid, the mountain has four sides, one for each direction. There are four great rivers that flow from the mountain, one from each of its sides. You will find nothing like it anywhere in the world."

The travelers got out of the jeep and began preparing to camp for the night. They would have to wait until tomorrow to begin the hike to Kailash.

The guide spoke again as he was putting up a tent. "We will have to walk sixty-six kilometers around the mountain, so I want you to rest now and get a good night's sleep."

Sophie groaned. "Good grief! We can't walk that much in one day!"

"We have to try. But if you want, we can stop and spend one night in a cave."

“What’s the temperature up there?”

“The cave has a stove and yak dung bricks.”

Tashtan was curious. “Why is it sixty-six kilometers around? Whenever you mention a distance it always has the number six in it.”

“Either six or nine,” the guide corrected him. “When measuring the Earth, those two numbers have a special meaning that we do not yet understand. For example, take the distance between Easter Island and Mount Kailash. The midpoint between them is at six hundred and sixty-six kilometers. Or the distance between the Pyramid of Cheops and Stonehenge in England – six thousand six hundred and sixty-six kilometers. Here’s another one: this distance between the Pyramid of Cheops and the North Pole is also six thousand six hundred and sixty-six kilometers. That same number comes up nine times in just one quarter of the Earth. Is it a mystery or just a coincidence? I doubt it’s a coincidence.”

“What do the Tibetan legends say about that mystery?”

“In order to unravel the mystery, humans must find the Shantamani stone. In modern terms you could call it a stone file. This one file contains all the programs for the universe and the Earth, including the appearance of humankind. According to Tibetan legends, the Shantamani stone is hidden somewhere near Mount Kailash. It is possible that one copy of the stone is on Easter Island. The numbers six and nine are crucial to finding the stone.”

Silent until now, Tom joined the discussion. “Is anyone looking for the stone?”

“Most certainly. The Russian explorer Nikolai Roerich and his wife and son went looking for it. People are still searching today. Many people.”

When the sun came up the next morning, before they started their hike the guide measured everyone’s blood pressure. He asked them in detail about how they felt. He told his charges to be sure to pack their altitude sickness medication and any other medicines they would need. Then he checked all their backpacks to make sure they hadn’t forgotten.

“If Mount Kailash refuses a person, then this person may get sick. It has happened before,” he said.

The guide continued his education of the tourists. “The ritual of walking in a circle around Mount Kailash is called *kora*. Kora cleanses people of their sins. The more times a person walks around the mountain, the more his soul, or aura, is cleansed. You will see rocks with signs or images of the Buddha on them, as well as many other holy objects. Never try to touch one of them with your left hand. If you feel you must touch something, use your right hand. When you see large boulders sticking out of the mountain, do not try to approach them. If you need to sit down and rest, tell me and I will show you where you may sit.”

After giving these instructions, the guide set off. There were four or five other groups heading to the mountain that day, all wearing sneakers, jeans and ski-caps and with packs on their backs. It was a sign of globalization that the pilgrims had come from all corners of the globe, but here they all looked the same.

For the most part, the kora trail remains flat and does not go over any steep ridges, so people who make it to the trailhead without experiencing altitude sickness can be fairly sure that they will be fine for the rest of the hike. However, sometimes a person is suddenly struck down by a feeling of weakness. There is an explanation for this. Our world contains both positive and negative energy, black and white. Similarly, there is

more to Tibetan legends concerning Mount Kailash than just the spirit of the Buddha. His spirit is counterbalanced by the black sorcery of Demchok. The black power cannot reach a person through the right hand; only the left hand is subject to its influence. Just as you would never shake a person's left hand, you must never touch or pick anything up with your left hand if you wish to avoid Demchok's negative energy.

It seemed that the hardest part of the tour guide's job was just beginning. He walked in front of his group, often turning around to see that nobody lagged behind and to keep an eye on how they were doing. If one of the hikers accidentally kicked a rock or lost balance when crossing a boulder, the guide immediately appeared at his or her side for support. He was especially careful with Sophie, who was in turn keeping close watch over her son.

"Great Caesar!" she would cry, holding out her hand to the guide if she tripped or lost her balance. That was the name she gave the guide, who's name was really Tze Tzar.

Every six or seven kilometers, the group sat down for a fifteen minute rest. Other groups where there were no women (and above all no children) easily passed them. Tashtan asked the guide if he could join one of the other groups. The guide said no.

Tom said not a word the whole time, only occasionally stopping to help his son, who was huffing and puffing in the rear.

Suddenly a cold wind picked up. It became harder to walk.

According to the tradition of kora, as soon as one reaches the halfway point one must leave behind one's life to that point and embark on a new life and new fate. At the pass that marks halfway around the mountain, each person leaves something behind, if only a nail clipping or a hair.

Tze Tzar's group paused to perform the ritual. They were taking off their packs when Sophie suddenly screamed. She had wanted to sit down on a nearby stone that was endowed with strong energy, and it shocked her like electricity.

"Do not go off the path toward Kailash!" the guide said anxiously. He showed Sophie a rock on the other side of the path where she could sit.

Etien sat down right next to his mother. "Mom, what kind of rock was that?" he asked.

"I went to sit down and my whole body started shaking. It felt like all my organs would break into pieces!"

The guide attempted an explanation. "There are no birds on Mount Kailash. They never approach it. Even eagles keep a distance when they fly around here because of the very powerful energy radiating from the mountain. You cannot go closer than half a kilometer to the mountain."

Tom gave a rueful smile that he was becoming accustomed to. "Then why did we come?"

"Kora does not mean climbing Mount Kailash. We must walk all the way around it," said Tze Tzar. "If you want, you and Tashtan can try to sit on that rock over there. Just don't sit on it long."

Etien piped up, "I want to try, too."

Tashtan, Etien and Tom took turns sitting down on the stone and jumping back up. For fun, Etien sat down and leaped up three more times before his father dragged him away.

Tom turned to Tashtan and shared his opinion. "It's magnetic energy," he said.

"I don't think its magnetism. It's some other kind of geophysical phenomenon that affects the human body instead of metal."

"Are you ready to cross the border and perform the most important ritual we will be observing?" the guide asked.

"What the ritual, Caesar?"

"You each make a wish. As soon as we cross the halfway point, we all sit down and each of us silently makes a wish for the future and repeats it three times. Then you keep that wish in your heart during the rest of the trip around Kailash."

Sophie hugged her son. "Wow! That's the whole point!" She followed after the guide, stepping carefully and watching her feet. "Well, let's sit down and make our wishes! I wonder if they'll come true?"

"Ninety percent of the time," Tze Tzar answered.

The travelers had only been resting for ten minutes when the silence was broken by a large, noisy group of tourists.

They had no respect for anything they saw. Talking loudly, they stopped to eat a snack. Then, for some reason they decided to break their empty bottles against a stone, as if to demonstrate their lack of respect for Tibet and perhaps for its people. As Tze Tzar watched the tourists' offensive behavior, his face grew pale and a muscle in his cheek began to twitch. However, he said nothing to the large group.

Frowning, he turned to his own group. "If you don't mind, we should move on from here. It will be getting dark soon and we need to set up camp while there's still enough light to see.

Obediently, they all stood up.

Sophie whispered to her son so that no one else could hear. "Etien, honey, why don't you make a wish? Maybe it will come true."

The boy was looking out at the mountains. "What for?" he shrugged.

"Wish for this wind to die down a little. I'm half frozen."

Etien silently made a wish. The wind wasn't interested and kept blowing just as hard. The boy repeated the wish three times and the wind seemed to weaken.

"Mom, it worked!" But before the words were out of Etien's mouth, the wind picked up again and whipped his face with new force.

Tom overheard them. "It won't work right away."

"Maybe the wind here can't hear your wish," Sophie told her son. "So try something else. Wish for my head to stop hurting."

"Okay, Mom. I did it. Is it helping?" Etien asked after a minute.

Sophie tied her head scarf tighter and shook her head. "It's worse."

The second day of hiking was even more interesting. They saw two smooth slabs of stone, the larger one lying on top of the smaller one. The colors in both slabs were a mix of gray, red and brown. Who raised them? Who lay one on the other? Even powerful modern machinery would have a hard time putting the huge slabs in such perfect alignment.

"Do not go near them!" the guide warned. "Those stones were put under a spell by the great sorcerer and poet Milarepa during the war on Tibet's Bön faith. But his are

not the only spells here. Some of these stones are under evil spells and will crush a person who's aura goes against them. Don't even get close to them!"

"Was Milarepa Indian or Tibetan?" Tashtan inquired.

"Milarepa was a member of Tibet's Dulun tribe," Tze Tzar replied. "However, he fought on the side of Buddhism, not Bön. He knew the languages of the animals, birds and insects and talked to them often. Wherever Milarepa went, he was followed by ants. He told them, 'My tiny friends, nobody in this world values you or knows your worth. After all, you are the most organized of all species. Nobody appreciates the intelligence of your society.' He told the bees, 'Nobody will get in the way of your sweet labors. You are an example of one who has mastered the creation of heavenly flavors.' When a parrot alighted next to Milarepa, he told it, 'Judging by your voice, you would rather be a judge or at the very least a teacher.' This is the warning Milarepa gave to the crafty monkey: 'You destroyed the ants' hill and stole the bees' honey. Apparently you are destined to be violent.'"

The guide broke off his story to direct his tourists' attention to something else. "Look at the mark on this stone. It was made by the great Milarepa. No one with his ability to prophecy has been born since. But I have heard about a boy who recently came to the Jokhang temple. When the temple's scholars studied his astrological chart they came to the conclusion that he is a reincarnation of Milarepa."

When he heard this, Tashtan grew agitated. "Where was the boy from?" he asked, unable to contain his curiosity.

"I believe he came from the Tian Shan mountains. The Tian Shan are in a neighboring country."

"Do you know what the boy's name was?"

"No."

Tashtan was overcome with joy. He smiled broadly at Tze Tzar for a long time. He had to work hard to keep from shouting: "That boy is my little brother!" But he wasn't sure yet. Perhaps it was some other boy the guide had heard about.

Tze Tzar continued his tale. "If you rub the side of the stone with Milarepa's mark on it, you will see something like dust on your finger. Touch the tip of your tongue to it, and when you feel its salty taste, silently recite a prayer of your faith. That is one of the rituals."

When they walked further, they saw flat rock wall with openings cut into it at shoulder level. All the tourists took turns looking through them.

Tze Tzar's group got in line behind the other tourists. Only Sophie took advantage of the stop to sit down on a rock. She was suffering from shortness of breath and a splitting headache. Rubbing her temples, she swallowed pill after pill.

Tashtan shuddered when he looked through the opening. Far down below them, in a deep valley covered with snow, moved two dark human shapes. What people lived down at the bottom of that deep valley where no raven or even a vulture would go?

"Yeti," the guide explained. "Wild men."

The group hiked further. After they had covered a considerable distance, Tze Tzar casually pointed to a trail that went closer to Kailash.

"People also use that trail to walk around Kailash. It goes closer to the mountain than this trail. It is called the small circle."

Etien pulled on the guide's sleeve. "Then lets go that way!" he shouted. Over the past several days the boy had grown closer to their guide.

Tom supported his son's idea. "Sure. Why don't we take that trail?"

"Not so fast," said Tze Tzar. "We have to walk the outer trail, which is the one we're on now, thirteen times before we can walk the inner trail."

"Thirteen times?" Etien yelled.

Sophie's face fell. "Are you serious?"

Tom was also gaping at Tze Tzar.

"A guide never lies," said Tze Tzar calmly. He was surprised by his charges' reaction. "What is the matter, friends?"

No one answered. They were all trying to get the better of their annoyance.

Sophie broke the tense silence. "Walk the trail thirteen times! What nonsense! Who on earth can walk around the whole mountain that many times in just a few days?"

Tom joined in. "If someone walks the trail all thirteen times, does that mean his third eye will open and he'll become a prophet?"

"If your goal is to become a prophet you'll have to graduate from a Tibetan school first and then come here and walk around holy Mount Kailash one hundred and eight times. Even so, the third eye does not necessarily open for everyone who completes that journey," the guide explained.

"How many years do you have to study at a Tibetan school?"

"Ten to fifteen years."

Sophie was horrified. "A person could go crazy like that!" Suddenly her lovely face crumpled with burning disappointment. Her secret hope had been dashed. Tom frowned. He was disappointed, too.

Only Etien, protected by his childlike naiveté, did not notice his parents' disappointment that bordered on despair.

"Can I throw a rock from there?" Etien asked the guide, pointing to a steep cliff.

"Never throw a rock, even a tiny one! Down below there are other tourists just like you. Always keep that in mind."

Tze Tzar and Tashtan were worried. They had seen Tom lose heart in a matter of seconds and Sophie was unable to cope with the sudden disappointment.

Her eyes drilled holes into her husband. "This was all your idea! We should have gone to Singapore instead of dragging ourselves over these rocks for no good reason."

The mood in Tze Tzar's group was unexpectedly and hopelessly deteriorating.

The Rankins did not explain the reason for their disappointment or share the true goal they had in mind when they came to Tibet.

Etien was the only one who gave voice to his irritation, announcing to his grave-faced parents, "If you hadn't made me come here I would have gone to the Alps with my friends!"

"Tibet's worth visiting, too," Tom said to placate his family.

Despite the fact that the Rankins had obviously lost all interest in the trip, Tze Tzar pretended not to notice and, as before, tried to entertain them with his stories.

"God willing, you'll be able to walk the small circle some day. There's even more to see on that trail. There are two lakes right next to each other, one with living water, the other with dead water. You'll also see thirteen golden statues. And there are underground tunnels that are off limits, even to some lamas."

The Rankins didn't seem to be listening to Tze Tzar, so he shared his memorized information with Tashtan.

"I think you're very lucky," Tze Tzar said, trying to improve the family's somber mood. "We've had clear, sunny weather for the past three days. You know, lots of tourists walk all the way around Kailash and never see the mountain for all the clouds. Sometimes snow falls in the middle of summer. One time I carried two young hikers from London out of here on my back. They were up to their knees in snow and couldn't take a step. But today you can see all of Kailash, each and every ridge quite distinctly. Look over there. In the middle of one of them you can see a swastika. Hitler took his fascist symbol from that swastika, which belongs to an ancient culture. Hitler sent many expeditions here to find the way to immortality."

The more Tze Tzar tried to boost morale, the further the Rankins' mood slid. Sophie kept her eyes on the ground and never looked at the things the guide pointed out during his stories. The holiness of Mount Kailash had evidently lost all meaning for her.

If it weren't for the surprise yet to come, the Rankins would have gone home denying that there were any mysteries or holy places left in the world or any phenomena beyond human understanding.

On the third day, Tze Tzar's group turned off the trail to visit two monasteries situated some distance from their path.

Sophie turned to her husband. "What I want to know is why these backward, uneducated Tibetans who've never seen anything but the mountains they live in all of a sudden are supposed to have astral powers, or whatever you want to call it. They're just a bunch of people wearing ragged leather coats and riding yaks," her tone was derisory. She was sure that the guide heard her, but he pretended to be oblivious.

As if nothing was the matter, he suggested, "One of the lamas who lives at this monastery has walked around Kailash one hundred and eight times and reached complete kora. If you want, we can meet him."

Tashtan jumped at the chance. Sophie shrugged indifferently, but when she saw that her husband and son intended to go, she was afraid of being left alone and went with them to the monastery.

The monk who came out to meet them was the lama's assistant. When he heard that the tourists wanted to meet the lama, he disappeared behind the monastery's doors. Tze Tzar explained that he had gone to see if the lama would receive a group with a woman in it.

After receiving approval, the monk led the tourists into the monastery. One by one, they followed him down a narrow hallway and into the lama's room. There were images of the Buddha and other holy individuals on the walls. As usual, there was a wheel of life symbol on the far wall. The lama was seated on two cushions before a low, glass table under which he had stretched out his legs. He wore a bright red silk jacket and his hair was closely cropped. He looked to be advanced in years. Tze Tzar went in first. To show respect, he kneeled and then bowed low to the ground. Then he asked permission for his group to sit down. The lama raised his head and smiled for them to be seated. He poured himself some tea from a thermos on the table and went back to looking through some papers without paying the least attention to the newcomers. At one point, when they had been sitting like that for five minutes, Tashtan, who was staring at the Lama, heard his ears pop and felt the air in the room getting closer. Then questions began

to enter his mind from who knows where. A familiar voice asked him questions and Tashtan answered them. Some of the questions required complex philosophical distinctions, but Tashtan answered them correctly. Some of the questions and answers Tashtan had never heard before. Meanwhile, the Rankins stared at each other with a mixture of fear and amazement. While his guests were in this trance, the lama remained seated as if he heard and knew nothing. He just sat there looking through his papers and drinking tea.

When they left the monastery, all four began excitedly discussing everything that had happened to them in the lama's room.

Tze Tzar turned to Sophie, hoping that her mood had improved. "What questions were you asked?"

"About oncology."

"Are you an oncologist?"

"That's my job."

"What questions were you asked, Etien?"

"I didn't hear any questions. I was solving math problems."

"What about you, Tom?"

"Questions about my work kept popping into my head. I was arguing with my boss about something."

"Precisely. The lama we visited is a renowned telepath. He can read people's minds. Most importantly, he uses electromagnetic waves that he radiates to influence people's minds. For example, there may be ideas in your subconscious mind that inactive, or sleeping. He wakes them up and makes them active. I'm sure you've heard that the mind has unlimited capabilities."

Tom chuckled. "Then why does he live on this mountain? He ought to go make people use their lazy brains," he joked.

"He just returned from a trip to China. The heads of the Chinese government frequently invite him to visit. But the lama comes here to achieve arhat."

"What is that? Like Ph.D. level?"

"It's the level of a prophet."

"How long do you have to study to become a prophet?"

"Your whole life."

"I guess he isn't married, is he?" Sophie asked.

"No, he is celibate, of course. Monks like him are called followers of Tsongkhapa, or Yellow Hats. They do not marry."

"What does he live like that for? I don't get it. And look how old he is. Why does he need to keep learning?"

Tashtan put in a word. "As far as I know, when the lama leaves this world he will be reborn. Then he will continue with his studies."

"You see, after a person travels the wheel of life many times, he becomes a true Person with a capital P. We have not yet attained the level of a person..." Tze Tzar's thought was interrupted when the lama's assistant came back outside.

"The lama invites the small guest to see him," he smiled at Etien.

Sophie reached for Etien. "Come on, honey. We'll go together."

They went inside, but soon Sophie returned, enraged. "He says he wants to talk to Etien one on one. Can you imagine? He won't let his mother be with him!"

“That’s just the rule,” the guide said to calm her down.

“He’s still a little boy. He can’t speak for himself. The lama should talk to us, his parents!”

“Don’t worry, ma’am. In Tibet, a person is considered an adult at nine years of age.”

“We are Europeans and we don’t have to follow your rules and regulations.”

“You really shouldn’t worry, ma’am.”

The lama kept Etien with him half an hour. Sophie grew impatient and began pouring out her anger on her husband. “Your patience makes you dense. Our child has been gone for half an hour and you don’t seem to care a bit.”

Poor Tom was in luck. Just then Etien walked out of the monastery. His face was red and troubled.

“Mom, that old man guessed everything I was thinking,” he said.

“What else did he say?”

“He said ‘You have karma. Come study in Tibet.’”

Sophie thought for a second and turned to Tze Tzar. “How long did you say people study here?”

“Fifteen years. And then for the rest of their lives.”

“Wow! And what kind of degree does that give you?”

“There are many professions. It depends on which one you choose.”

“Etien, do you want to study for fifteen years?”

“I’ll be old by then.”

Everyone laughed.

“You can think about it. Let’s get back on our way, gentlemen!”

With that, Tze Tzar adjusted his backpack and set off. The others followed him. He reminded them that the next rest stop would be at the “Reading Man” statue. By the looks of it, the guide intended to walk in silence. The trail led up a slight incline.

“I can’t wait to take a hot bath,” Sophie said. Only Tashtan heard her. Tze Tzar did not. He might have been disappointed if he had. He was already feeling downcast. After all, he was responsible for making sure his tourists had a good time. In other words, that was what he was paid for and how he fed his family. It was his job. He did everything he could to make sure that the tourists enjoyed themselves, since they paid the government two thousand dollars each for a two-week trip.

When they reached the Reading Man they didn’t see any surprisingly smooth old stones. Instead, their eyes were met by plain black, red, yellow and brown granite rocks interspersed with prickly elms and low-growing junipers.

After the tourists had taken off their packs and rested for a while, Tze Tzar told them to follow him up the slope on their left. They climbed up, assuming that the Reading Man was there, but when they got to the top there was no sign of it. The guide told them they could see the statue if they pointed their binoculars at a distant valley. At the top of the valley, much higher than a man could climb, they could see the Reading Man beyond the white pillars that marked the border of Shambhala.

“Good Lord! I thought we could actually go and touch it. I saw the Roerich painting. I had no idea it was that far away. Now that I’m looking at it, that’s a really bizarre statue!” The others were glad to see that her mood had changed. “Caesar” couldn’t hide the fact that he was overjoyed.

“Nikolai Roerich actually approached the statue. No one else has ever done that. By the way, Roerich is the only European to receive the power to levitate,” he added for Sophie’s benefit.

“Nobody knows who created the statue, right?”

“It was created by people in a past world.”

“You mean there was a world before ours?”

“There has been an infinite number of worlds. Therefore, the universe is infinite, time is infinite, and life is a chain of death and rebirth. Life is also infinite. We and our dreams are infinite. Humankind’s goals are infinite.” With that, the young Tibetan glanced with a smile at the attractive, European Sophie.

As their hike drew to an end on the third day of the kora, white snowflakes began falling from the sky.

“My friends, my mission to guide you is now over. May you always be in a positive frame of mind! Go home in health and take unforgettable memories with you. We hope you will visit again or recommend our land of mystery to your friends.”

“Not a chance!” Sophie blurted out rudely. Tze Tzar’s smile went out like a candle.

Sophie went on ruthlessly. “This is no place for Europeans to take romantic vacations, if that is what you have in mind. All of your holy sites and all of your big mysteries are a bunch of nonsense!” She seemed to blame Tze Tzar for the harsh conditions of the walking trip, but even more so for her disappointment and her unjustified hopes for her son.

Tze Tzar stared at Sophie. He was upset and even sorrowful.

She realized that she had gone too far and softened. “I’m sorry, Tze Tzar, but you see, we’ve wasted a whole month of Etien’s vacation time.”

Tom kept his head down. His cheeks were red with shame. Tashtan shook his head in sympathy.

“You shouldn’t talk like that, Miss Sophie,” Tze Tzar answered, swallowing all the offensive things she had said. It was the first time he had heard someone speak so poorly and haughtily about the holiest thing he knew of – his harsh homeland. And the words were spoken by a woman – he had walked side by side with her for the past thirteen days, taken care of her and even been pleased by her beauty and her strength in making the difficult kora around Mount Kailash.

Suddenly Tashtan forced his way into the conversation. “It’s not like that anymore. In Europe the age of Nietzsche and Kafka is long gone. Now it’s pretty women like our friend Sophie who better represent Europe. If you don’t believe me, just read Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West*.”

There was mockery in Tashtan’s voice. He was obviously venting his annoyance at Sophie’s breathtaking tactlessness.

Tom tried to clear the air a little as they parted. “Don’t worry, Tashtan. Soon we’ll all be singing Asian songs. Cheers.”

Trappa Tilak stood at the door of Lama Tsu’s study waiting to be invited in. He had come to talk with the lama about some problems that had arisen in his class.

The problems had nothing to do with the boys' room, board or anything else of the like. They were related to the studies and progress of his six students. In such cases, Lama Tsu always had to be consulted, especially if Mani Yaso was involved, since nothing about the boy could be decided without the lama's involvement. Lama Tsu had specifically set out that rule. When Dei gestured to him, Trappa Tilak went into the study and bowed respectfully to Lama Tsu.

He spoke. "I am afraid my class will come to an unenviable end, Lama Tsu."

"I knew you would say that, Mudaris. But I thought you should observe your class for another week or so."

"I'm not sure of success anymore."

"I know. We only need speak of one of your students."

"You mean Mani Yaso?"

"Yes."

"Forgive me, Lama Tsu, but of all my students he has the least preparation."

"I know. His memory and reasoning have not received enough training. He is not at all prepared for meditation."

"It's not that he doesn't have enough training. His memory and reasoning are simply absent."

"That's why I want to free him from attending morning and evening prayers. For now, use those two hours to train his memory. And work on his reasoning, as well. Develop his capacity for philosophical thought, for considering and reflecting. You have to remember that the boy is completely green. At home he studied in schools that use the European standards and methods. If he matures in our care, he will be like an immortal tree bearing a priceless fruit that ripens only once in six thousand years. You have one other student to worry about besides Mani Yaso. We will decide the fate of the others at the end of the year."

Tilak the teacher had been a trappa for many years and was well aware that Lama Tsu was not entirely satisfied with his work. However, he felt that this was Lama Tsu's fault, not his own. Consequently, on the day of cleansing that is held at the Jokhang temple once a year, he openly shared his opinion of Lama Tsu.

On the day of cleansing, all three thousand monks in the temple, from the shele up to the leader of the temple, the Panchen Lama, and including Lama Tsu bathe and clean themselves and put on new robes before meeting in small groups in their studies. Then they all gather in the great hall. Until noon, anyone who wishes may speak his thoughts, opinions, especially critical opinions and publicize his displeasure with anyone and anything. The monks are allowed to give voice to their annoyance or anger with another monk, no matter who it may be. And no one is reprovved or punished for doing so.

On the previous day of cleansing Trappa Tilak mounted to the podium and, bowing to Lama Tsu, began courteously:

"The world of biology esteems your work on the origins of the lotus flower in nature. I respect your invaluable work and have devoted my life to studying it. To be honest, I am a small teacher standing in your infinitely larger shadow. But it seems that you do not notice that the man standing in your shadow is despondent because the bright rays of sunlight never fall on him to warm him. You do not care that your follower is left out in the cold. Or that he wilts and dies like a plant whose roots receive no water. I am

not the only one suffering this hopeless fate. Perhaps the others will speak for themselves on this account.”

When he finished his audacious speech, Trappa Tilak stepped down from the podium and sat down in his seat next to Lama Tsu. He was so agitated that his lips were trembling. He sat with his head down, not daring to look at the great Lama Tsu.

Lama Tsu bent over to him and whispered. “Don’t hang your head, Trappa Tilak. I know better than anyone what a hard-working teacher you are. Now Trappa Dzon is criticizing me just to imitate you. I will certainly listen to his criticism. But at the end of my answer to him I will say ‘Trappa Dzon, it would be a good thing if you let Trappa Tilak teach you how to work.’ So you should sit with your head up.”

After Lama Tsu had spoken he elbowed Trappa Tilak and smiled approvingly at him.

Six months had passed since then. Lama Tsu always greeted Tilak warmly and did not hide the fact that he liked him. Nonetheless, the poor man remained a trappa and was not proposed as a candidate for lama. If Lama Tsu had wished it, he could have instantly made Tilak happy by giving him a higher rank. Unfortunately, it did not happen and Trappa Tilak felt aggrieved and deprived of what was due him.

“Mani Yaso, starting today Lama Tsu has released you from morning and evening prayers. You will spend one hour in the meditation room and one hour in the memory training room,” Trappa Tilak told his student, whom he couldn’t help but envy.

“All of Lama Tsu’s energy is focused on this illiterate, poorly prepared boy from some place called Kyrgyzstan. The only thing this shele has going for him is his voice. Supposedly his astrological chart shows that he is a reincarnation of Milarepa. But who knows how accurate his astrological chart is? Even Lama Tsu has made mistakes before. Perhaps I should point that out at the next day of cleansing.” With those thoughts, Trappa Tilak led Mani Yaso to the meditation room. Then he turned sharply and left.

Mani Yaso was greeted politely by an elderly lama in a yellow cap. The most experienced teacher in the temple, “Sorcerer Labsang” already knew all about Mani Yaso. Without wasting words he invited him into the room and seated him on a wooden chair.

The teacher spoke softly. “First I will put a stop to the disorganized thoughts that come into your head. Then I will free your brain and your mind from these thoughts entirely, since they are an obstacle to learning. You will come here for one hour each day on the first week, then two hours a day, and then three hours a day, and so on, and we will finish with twelve hours a day. To be specific, an oil lamp will burn for twelve hours on top of your head. Will you be able to last that long?”

Mani Yaso had not understood everything, but he nodded.

“Then sit up straight, my son, and relax your body. Do not take your eyes off this green screen. Sit like that without the tiniest movement for one hour. To help you sit still, I will put this oil lamp on your head. If you fall asleep or move around the hot oil in the dish will spill on you. Be careful. Today and for the next three days give in to all the thoughts that come to you. Have as many thoughts as you want. Let confused, chaotic thoughts enter your mind. When you have had enough, your brain will get tired. That is

when we will begin to free you. In the end, your brain and your mind will be fresh and ready to learn. Only then, when the soil is prepared and fertile, will we begin sowing the holy seeds of the lotus, my son!” With that, the new teacher quickly put his arm around Mani Yaso’s shoulder. Then, mumbling happily to himself, he walked quickly away. Mani Yaso remained alone, not daring to move. There was a little dish of burning oil wavering on the top of his head.

When it was time for evening prayers, Mani Yaso followed Trappa Tilak to the memory room. It was a large, bright room that smelled of something nice – the most pleasant room in the temple. The walls were lined with wooden boxes, each one holding hundreds of cards with quotes from the *Kalachakra Laghutantra*, *Yajur Veda*, *Ganjour*, *Tanjour* and other books. At the bottom of each card was a note listing the chapter and page for the quote. Other boxes held papers covered with mathematical formulas and mountains of information on astrology and medicine.

The monk who met Mani Yaso spent a long time explaining the theory and practical exercises for memory training before sitting him down to work with the cards. For the first few days, Mani Yaso must pull out ten random cards, copy the information from them and put them back. He had an hour to do it in. Then he had five seconds to answer each of the teacher’s questions about what he had read. His answer should be as close as possible to the text he had just read. With each subsequent day the number of cards would increase, up to hundreds and thousands, and he must not forget a single thing written on any of the cards. At any moment the teacher could ask Mani Yaso to find a given card in the stack within fifteen seconds. In addition to Mani Yaso, there were a few boys from higher grades working in the memory room.

The boys did not know each other well. One day they began pushing each other and it escalated from a game to a scuffle and almost a real fight. Their teacher was angry and sent all of them to do kitchen duty.

He said, “A man’s worst enemy is another man if they do not know each other. Once you get to know each other better you will become friends, and friendship grows best when you are working. Go work in the kitchen together.”

As soon as they opened the door, the boys felt the hellish heat from the kitchen. It was so hot that Mani Yaso covered his face with his hands.

The cook greeted them with a wide smile. “Come on it, big shots!” His shirt was unbuttoned all the way and his chest glistened. He stood there with a devious smile on his face and a whip in each hand, looking for all the world like an angel of death.

The boys had to get to work right away. They were supposed to roast hulled barley, grind it by hand and cook it into tsampa. When the cook handed out jobs, he assigned Mani Yaso to keep the fire going under the three huge cauldrons, which involved constantly running between them. The others stirred the barley in the cauldrons with long paddles. On the cook’s orders, the boys also turned handles that raised the cauldrons off the hearth and moved them to the side, pouring the toasted barley into an even layer on a spread-out cloth.

When the barley had cooled, they poured it by the bucket into a grinder and ground it by hand. Only the older boys were strong enough to make the grinder turn. For over an hour Mani Yaso ran from one cauldron to the next, tossing yak dung bricks under them. When the boys caught sight of his face they began to laugh. The cook joined in. Mani Yaso’s entire face was covered with a thick layer of soot and his wide eyes blinked

under his long, thick lashes. All in all, he looked like a brigand. Yaso wanted to see himself in a mirror but there wasn't one to be found. He didn't seem worried in the least that the others were laughing at him and even joined in the general hilarity.

"You must be from a country where they've forgotten how to fire a stove. Where were you born?" the cook asked.

"In Kyrgyzstan."

"Where would that be?"

"In the Tian Shan Mountains."

"I've never heard of the place, that's for sure. Don't people build fires in your country?"

"We have an electric stove and gas."

"I get it. You're a city boy, so you'll have to learn. If you come around the kitchen more often you'll be a regular guy soon enough."

The boys felt sorry for Mani Yaso.

"Don't keep blowing on the fire. It'll catch by itself," one of the boys advised him. He sat down next to Mani Yaso.

Just as their teacher had known, on their very first kitchen duty the boys became friends. After work, they each received dry tsampa, or fried dough.

One other new boy besides Mani Yaso had recently received harsh punishment. The stripes were still visible on his back. The boys noticed them when they were all in the shower. They crowded around the victim, examining his back and touching the marks the rod had left.

The boy was livid. "The old pig was smiling when he hit me. How can I get him back?"

Nobody had an answer. The younger students had all seen older students jump or fall to their knees when they got beatings. If there was a way to get revenge on the teachers the older students would have already found it.

Some days it seems like trouble brings more trouble. That's what happened to Mani Yaso. He got assigned kitchen duty three more times. True, he wasn't in charge of the fire anymore. His job was to open packages of Indian tea and throw the leaves into pots of boiling water with salt, baking soda and, at the very end, round pieces of yak butter. All of this was left to boil a long time. The monks knew that putting broken pieces of dried tsampa into their tea would keep hunger at bay for many hours.

On two other occasions, Mani Yaso would up doing kitchen duty with his classmates, the Brits. For some reason Trappa Tilak was feeling cruel and cunning, turning mole hills into mountains and punishing the boys severely for small transgressions. He had his own method for enforcing discipline in class. When he was explaining a lesson he stood in front of his students at the board. But then he would give them an assignment and go stand at the back wall behind the boys. Each boy felt the teacher's ruthless glare on his back. They could never be sure whom the rod would bite next. When they wrote for a long time they were afraid to stretch their tired fingers, much less speak a word to each other, or Tilak would silently come up from behind and hit someone on the elbow or shoulder with his rod. Tilak apparently thought that this discipline was insufficient, so twice that month he sent his class to do kitchen duty.

When Lama Tsu heard about Trappa Tilak's punishments, he forbade the teacher to send Mani Yaso to the kitchen.

Dei conveyed this decision and its explanation to Trappa Tilak: "We must not waste the valuable time of the future Milarepa."

After that, Mani Yaso had special status in his class and in the other study rooms. Many boys envied and disliked him, and their number continued to grow.

New sheles who had only been at the temple for a year were not given any time off, but suddenly there came an announcement: they could have the last day of the next week off! The news that they would be allowed to leave the temple and rest for a day traveled faster than the wind. The boys were so excited they couldn't sleep. Everyone was preparing for their day off. For Mani Yaso, however, the pleasure was marred by a subconscious fear of being on his own, even for a day. He had become accustomed to the iron discipline and never-ending labor and wasn't prepared to go without it. What was he supposed to do outside the temple – wander aimlessly like a lost soul?

Nonetheless, on the day in question Mani Yaso joined the other boys early in the morning and walked out to freedom. First off, he looked in the direction of the hotel where Tashtan-baike had spent several days. When his poor uncle's trip was over, he hadn't been allowed to meet with his nephew and had gone home without saying goodbye. Lama Tsu had told Tashtan there was no reason for him to see his nephew, since any kind of meeting, especially one that involved saying goodbye, could sow doubts and worries in the child's soul. It might take him a long time to put down his worries and attain serenity again.

The games started right outside the temple's gate. Next door there was a summer playing field with sports equipment and a storage shed. Over the winter the boys had grown sick of the mandatory exercises so they ignored the equipment. They asked a teacher to open the shed, grabbed some soccer balls and volleyballs and ran to the playing field. Mani Yaso was curious about the "wooden legs," or stilts. He and a couple of other boys who weren't interested in playing ball took the stilts and practiced walking on them.

By lunchtime, Mani Yaso had gotten the hang of it. He no longer fell and could take giant steps on stilts that were as tall as he was. He and the other boys had a wonderful time playing.

One of the boys turned to Mani Yaso, "Why don't we cross the river at the ford?" Moving clumsily, they tottered down to the river. The ford turned out to be rocky. Mani Yaso had wobbled out to the mid-point when suddenly one of his wooden legs got stuck between two rocks. The water was deep enough that it just covered his feet. Just then, he noticed a scrawny man standing on the opposite bank. The man yelled something in Tibetan. Mani Yaso didn't understand him, but he nodded just in case. The man stripped off his shoes and, holding on to them, stepped into the water. The stranger had almost reached Mani Yaso when he took a step and disappeared under the water. An instant later the poor man came up spitting water as the current carried him downstream. Fortunately, he didn't go far before he was tossed up on the bank. When he came to, the man began cursing at Mani Yaso in a spitting fury. Apparently when he saw Mani Yaso up to his

knees in the water he asked him if it was shallow there. Without understanding the question, the boy had nodded.

Now that he had crawled out of the icy May water, the man quickly undressed and laid his clothes out to dry. Meanwhile, the boys hurried away from the scene, taking giant steps on their stilts. Their fear of punishment subsided only when they reached the other boys playing soccer. No one would be able to point out which of the many boys had almost caused an innocent man to drown.

In his second year at the temple, Mani Yaso was transferred to a class taught by Lama Tseren, a renowned Tibetan metaphysicist and specialist in the occult. With Mani Yaso gone, Trappa Tilak was left with just two students. Four of the boys had been expelled for poor academic progress. Lama Tsu had the boys' leader, Zhavva transferred to another class in the same grade and Mani Yaso was promoted two grades. Now he was in class with boys who were four years older than him.

Lama Tsu told him, "I am slow to give praise, my son, but the first life given to a man is always a short one. We must accomplish much in this time. If you do well with Lama Tseren this year and become a trappa, then we will talk again about your future. What do you say to that?"

Mani Yaso always loved to see his mentor's joyful, inspired face. Ever since Tashtan-baike had left, Lama Tsu was the only person at the temple who cared for Mani Yaso and supported him like a father. The only other person Mani Yaso was close to was his mentor's assistant, Dei. Like Lama Tsu, the always hurrying and focused Dei loved the Kyrgyz boy and never missed a chance to be kind to him. Dei seemed to take Tashtan's place as the boy's uncle and big friend. Without a doubt, the reason these people had such affection for Mani Yaso was his status as the reincarnation of Milarepa. It was a great joy and honor to be born as one of the brightest stars in the history of Buddhism, but it was even more remarkable to take the place of Milarepa in the modern world. Everyone at the temple knew that this reincarnation was no accident. It would have been different if Mani Yaso had been Tibetan. This Kyrgyz boy from the middle of nowhere still didn't inspire trust in the others; God only knew if he ever would.

Soon Lama Tsu was called to the Potala Palace to discuss Mani Yaso. Armed with the astrological charts for the yogi Milarepa and for Adilet Narbayev, Lama Tsu arrived at the set time for a meeting with the man who fulfilled the duties of the Dalai Lama. They spoke for close to an hour.

It goes without saying that Mani Yaso was not aware of Lama Tsu's interview with such an important figure, nor did he need to know. It was a matter for the Tibetans to discuss.

The acting Dalai Lama warned Mani Yaso's mentor, "Lama Tsu, I am confident that you understand how important your discovery is to us. For this reason, I entrust you personally with the boy's education. If he is successful after his third eye is opened, I want to be informed. Then I will meet with him. If his third eye does not meet expectations, then your discovery that he is the reincarnation of Milarepa will injure the study of Tibetan Buddhism."

Lama Tsu was well aware that the Leader was a strict man. If Mani Yaso failed to live up to their hopes, Lama Tsu would have only himself to blame. This sense of heavy responsibility was reinforced the next day when he found a letter from the Leader on his desk: "The education and upbringing of Mani Yaso shall be entrusted to Lama Tsu." Nonetheless, Mani Yaso still had to finish the year with Lama Tseren.

Lama Tseren was a dignified man with a refined appearance and manners. He was strapping and blessed with robust health and porcelain skin. He was not given to laughter, but his eyes shone with the purity of his soul and his thoughts. On the first day of class he managed to charm Mani Yaso.

"I've been to Kyrgyzstan. Is your capital Tashkent?" he asked, looking at the boy attentively.

"No, Bishkek is the capital."

"Bishkek? God will punish me. That's the first I've ever heard of a city called Bishkek. I suppose I do not know the geography of your country. But my son, I do remember your people wearing brightly colored caps and embroidered robes."

Mani Yaso smiled patiently. "That's the Uzbeks. We Kyrgyz wear white caps."

Mistaken for the second time, Lama Tseren blushed. "My ancient ancestors also wore white caps. Perhaps we share the same roots."

Lama Tseren put his arm around the boy's shoulders. Mani Yaso simply smiled. He was unaware of the importance of Lama Tseren's words – "God will punish me" and "white caps." Tashtan certainly would have been interested! The boy did not know how important that information would have been for Tashtan-baike's dissertation.

"Before we start on a new lesson, let's test what you learned last year. You completed the course in the memory room, is that correct? I will ask you questions from the cards you worked with."

Over the course of an hour, Lama Tseren asked questions in a low, melodious voice, testing Mani Yaso every which way and making him break out in a sweat. Afterward, he sat deep in thought for a long time.

"I want you to keep working on memory training this year," he said. "There's never any harm in that. Studying metaphysics requires deep and constant use of your memory. Furthermore, you will have to do the equivalent of three years worth of work in just one year. That was decided by Lama Tsu. Of course, we will be using hypnosis to help you learn so much in such a short time. I assume you are already aware of that."

Mani Yaso did not know, so he just shrugged and smiled.

Lama Tseren went on, "Europeans have closed their eyes to the ancient eastern study of metaphysics. They believe that metaphysics began with Aristotle. Then the 19th century materialists entirely rejected metaphysical methods of studying the world and described them as diametrically opposed to logic. We will prove that that is the wrong path as we proceed from lesson to lesson. You will help me, won't you?"

Mani Yaso smiled again and nodded. He believed in his abilities because he had a year of working in the meditation room behind him. He was now able to control his mind and free it of random unnecessary thoughts and ideas. He had erased all images of his first nine years of life at home: his parents, friends and even memories of Shoala, his first

love, and the precious few sweet moments he had spent thinking of her. Freed from it all, he was able to absorb learning and nothing else.

Returning to his room in the thick evening shadows after the computer class he held for Tibetan students, Mani Yaso almost ran into an unfamiliar man. The path was narrow and the boy could not go around the huge man, who did not get out of his way.

"*As-Salamu Alaykum*, Kyrgyz. I'm a Kyrgyz, too. Don't get scared. Here, shake my hand," the strange man said, bending down to Mani Yaso. The man's face was in shadow. Without thinking, Mani Yaso held out his hand and shuddered. The hand he shook felt more like the cold, tough hoof of a horse than a man's hand. He was so taken aback by hearing his native language spoken that he couldn't think of what to say.

"Since you're a Kyrgyz, too, that means we're brothers. If you have the time, let's talk. What's your name?"

"Mani Yaso."

"No, I mean your real name. Your Kyrgyz name."

"Adilet."

"That's better, little kinsman. My name is Barlas. Let's shake hands again."

Mani Yaso held out his hand. The man led him over to a large sack lying on the side of the path and gestured for him to sit down.

"It's a bag of yak dung bricks I'm taking to the kitchen," Barlas said and slapped the bag under him. "They burn and give heat just as good as coal. I saw you two times in the kitchen but couldn't talk to you. There's a guard behind the curtain. You probably don't see him."

Adilet began to speak in Kyrgyz for the first time in a long while. "One time I built a fire in the kitchen using those dung bricks. They really stink."

"They don't stink. It's just a sharp smell," Barlas corrected him. "These dung bricks are full of energy. I can drag as many as fifteen bags of them to the kitchen every day. That's enough for them. It would take at least that much coal."

"When did you come here?"

"About two years ago. But don't tell anyone you saw me. I miss my people and my home. That's why I had to talk to you."

Adilet did not know what to say to the mysterious man. He couldn't see the man's face and eyes because it was so dark, but he was enshrouded in a cloud of the smell he called "sharp."

"Everyone here knows you. You're pretty famous. They just call you the Kyrgyz because you're the only one here. Just this year they made me a monk, too. I'm a monk!" Barlas pointed at his chest with his thumb.

"Did you study?"

"No, but they made me one anyway."

"How?"

"They just did. You just have to work a year at the temple. And I guess I'm a little bit famous here, too."

Adilet did not believe the man. He wanted to stand up and leave.

“Don’t run off, Adilet. You’re in a special position. God willing, you’ll be their chief. They call their big chief the Dalai Lama.”

“I won’t be able to do it,” said Adilet. He did not like hearing praise. His whole body tensed up.

“Why not? I don’t speak their language. I came to Tibet and became a yak herder but I couldn’t do it for long. It gets down to 50 below up in the mountains, did you know that? Once I thought I would freeze to death. I lay down and held on to my dog. It was that dog that saved me, but I lost three toes to frostbite anyway. I don’t hear real well and all my teeth fell out.”

“Why don’t you go back to Kyrgyzstan?”

“I’d prefer to die in Tibet.”

“How old are you?”

“This year I’ll be twenty-nine.”

“Who gives you money for food?”

“I eat at the kitchen. But they don’t eat much meat here. I still can’t get used to that. They never kill animals. They just eat the meat of animals that die naturally. Did you know that?”

“I didn’t know. We don’t eat much meat, either. I miss it.”

“Of course you do! Remember what they say at home? ‘All a Kyrgyz wants is a knife and a piece of meat.’ Who was your father? Did he bring a lot of meat home?”

Adilet hesitated before admitting, “Papa and Mama are farmers. They raise animals. We even have pigs.”

“Do you eat them?!”

“No. We sell them.”

“Damn it all to hell! What’s happening to the Kyrgyz, eh?”

“We don’t eat them, baike.”

That was the first time Adilet had said *baike*, a word he had almost forgotten.

“Fine. But now I’ll say this. If you and I don’t get enough meat we’ll die. I’ll find some meat and cook dinner for you. Will you come?”

“Sure,” Adilet said quickly.

“Then I’ll wait for you here tomorrow at this same place.”

“I can’t do it tomorrow. Only the day after.”

“Why not tomorrow?”

“I don’t teach the computer class tomorrow.”

Two days later the Kyrgyz met again. It was a bright, sunny day. When Adilet caught sight of Barlas he shuddered with horror. There wasn’t a square inch on the man’s face that wasn’t disfigured by scars. He had a black hole in the place of one eye.

Barlas spoke to calm the boy’s fears. “Don’t be scared, Adilet. I’ll tell you the story of my scars.”

“I don’t have much time, baike,” Adilet warned him. He couldn’t look him in the face. At the same time, he felt rays of goodness coming from the stranger, and that put his heart at peace. Barlas looked like an old man, but the rays coming from him were clear and bright.

Barlas held out his hand. "The meat is ready. Let's go."

Adilet followed him. They entered a hut that was full of the warm aroma of boiled meat and meat stock. Inside it was hot but clean. The sides of the cast iron stove were red hot. On top of the stove meat was boiling in a metal pot.

"It's yak meat. I bought it the last time I was at the market. Have a seat and I'll pour you some soup."

They both fell to drinking the hot, aromatic soup. Adilet glanced around the room and noticed a piece of reddish fur and a paw peeking out from under folded blankets and a pillow.

He asked straight out, "Is that a wolf pelt?"

Barlas leaned over and pulled the pelt out. "Snow leopard. A poor snow leopard," he said. He paused for a moment and then continued, "Adilet, brother, the reason I was in a hurry to talk with you is this: I will never be able to return home. If you want to hear it, I'll tell you the story of my life. I don't have anyone else to tell it to. Kyrgyz never come here to study. They never even come as tourists. Three years ago a man named Tashtan was here. I never met him, of course."

"That was my uncle."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes. He brought me here to study."

"And he never came back?"

"No."

"That's too bad. If he came back I might get to talk to him. So you see, I'll probably never see another Kyrgyz in my life. My days are numbered. Three times in a dream I received a sign from above. I described my dreams to another monk and he told me I'd die soon. They aren't afraid of death and call things as they see them. Sometimes they even foretell their own deaths. That's why I'm talking like this to you. Cut off some meat. Eat as much as you want. I'll tell my story."

"In the spring of 1995 I went to Romania for the European kickboxing championship in Bucharest. Back then I was the top kick boxer in Kyrgyzstan and had won the Central Asian championship twice. Us Kyrgyz put on a good show in Bucharest. I won the championship and two other Kyrgyz took second and fifth place. People called it the 'Kyrgyz miracle.'"

"An Italian named Umberto lost the final round to me. I nearly killed him in the ring. After the championship, Umberto invited us to San Marino for a "no rules" fight. He must have been upset about losing and he wanted to repair his image with his fans. When I found out the fight had a prize of one million dollars, three of us accepted the invitation without thinking twice. We had to lie to our trainer. We told him we wanted to do some sightseeing and went right down to San Marino to make a million bucks."

"Umberto greeted us like long-lost friends and put us up in a five-star hotel with gilded toilets, the whole deal. It was on the Adriatic."

"San Marino was covered with billboards advertising the fight, even though it was unofficial. The billboards shouted 'Tian Shian snow leopard against the bear of the Alps.' Everybody in town knew the 'bear,' but none of them had heard about me, the 'snow leopard.'"

"I was mad at Umberto for the way I looked next to him on the billboards. His eyes were fiery, his whole body and especially his pumped up shoulder muscles were

glowing and looked like they were about to explode. Next to him, I looked like a scared Eskimo.

“Before the fight we had about two weeks free just to hang around and have a good time. But almost as soon as we got there we started getting strange threats. We started finding notes in our hotel room that said things like ‘We’ll smash your Eskimo head,’ ‘You’re gonna die,’ and the like. Then gorgeous girls started showing up and fawning all over us. We weren’t interested in them at all. We were waiting for three girls we knew to arrive from Bucharest. One of them, a girl named Angelica from Moldova, was my fiancée. She was born in Moscow and immigrated to Bucharest with her parents. I used to go there a lot, and we met and fell in love.

“Angelica introduced me to her family and I stayed with them a couple of times. This time I wanted to take her with me to Kyrgyzstan, but her parents were against it. My future father-in-law was a diplomatic, peaceful man. When he heard that we were going to San Marino he was disappointed. He didn’t want me to go. But we were proud and sure of ourselves and none of his wise warnings could keep us from going.

“So the three of us were staying in this hotel in San Marino and trying to get away from the prostitutes, but they cussed like sailors and wouldn’t leave us alone. They gave us a pretty hard time.

“We had no idea that Umberto’s friends were doing all they could to make us let down our guard and lose our fighting spirit. They were ready to kill us as soon as they had the opportunity. We figured that out when they tried to slip pills into our food to poison us or at least keep us immobilized with diarrhea.

“We usually traveled with the team, but this time we were on our own. We decided that each one of us would take on a responsibility: Askar was the doctor, and Esen, who had just taken third place, was our promoter. He signed the contract. He told us there really was a prize of a million dollars. He also told us that Umberto’s sponsors were organizing the fight.

“He was concerned that they wanted revenge. Askar disagreed. He said they just wanted to hurt us bad enough to keep us from entering the next world championship, which would be in Naples. I had made up my mind. I told them to prepare me for the fight. I wanted to risk it. I said that nobody forced us to come. If we won, we’d take the money and run.

“At first the organizers said I would be fighting Unomuno, the former champion of Italy. I said that was fine with me. I’d almost killed that Unomuno one time before. They kept us from hearing anything about the fight. All we heard were rumors that tickets cost up to five hundred dollars.

“Our girlfriends got there a few days before the fight. When I left for San Marino I didn’t want to worry Angelica, so I told her we were just traveling around and there wouldn’t be any fighting. When she found out the truth my Angelica started crying and begged me not to do it. It was like she had a sense something wasn’t right. I wouldn’t listen to her. I insisted that I was going to fight no matter what. I told her ‘you won’t find a million dollars lying by the road. Think of the wedding we can have with that kind of money!’ I kept trying to calm her down, but you know what she told me? She said ‘a fancy wedding never did anyone any good.’ As it turned out, Angelica was right to be worried.

“But don’t let me jump ahead. There were two fights before mine in San Marino. Then the main attraction was announced. They led me into the ring and let the fans jeer at me. Italian humor is cruel and heavy. You could say it’s murderous. They enjoy watching cruelty as entertainment. I stood there and endured their jeers and deafening laughter, the whistles and the screams that I was glad not to understand.

Finally I saw someone in a red cape run into the ring. It was Umberto. I leaped up from where I was sitting. Secretly I was happy. Back in Bucharest, when our eyes met in the ring I saw fear in them. In kick boxing it’s your heart that fights, not your muscles, and your eyes show everything in your heart. I guess it’s like a dog fight. As soon as you get scared you’re done for!

Before the fight, Esen and Askar and I had held council. I wasn’t supposed to try to earn points by attacking in the first few rounds. Umberto was the kind of fighter who wins by points, but the Italians would never let me get away with it. I just had one chance, and that was by going for the knockout. I needed to hit my friend Umberto so hard that he couldn’t get back up.

As soon as we entered the ring I saw that there wasn’t any fear in Umberto’s eyes. They were shining, and his whole face was arrogant. His every move was meant to intimidate me, like I hadn’t knocked him out before. He was high on morphine. I could tell right away. He went after me ferociously, just like I expected. The interesting thing about kick boxing is this: the more you get hit in the first round, the more your body wakes up and hardens. You actually get stronger. As long as you avoid a knockout you can handle anything. Know what, Adilet? When you’re trying to beat your opponent, music is really important.”

“Really?”

“It certainly is! They played the San Marino fight song so loud my eardrums nearly burst. The song was for raising the Italian fighting spirit, not mine. A song that isn’t your own puts psychological pressure on you. You feel like an orphan without any moral support, all alone in the crazy, crowded world. On top of that, the referee reacts to each move you make. He does it quietly enough so that the audience can’t see, but you hear him cursing and see him curling his lip like he can’t stand looking at you. That’s how they try to bring you down and put out your fire for victory. I was dancing around and keeping ahead of Umberto, so I managed to make it to the fifth round. Everyone was cheering for Umberto. They were pissed that I was dancing away from him and not attacking. When we stopped to rest they threw rotten eggs and banana peels at me. The referee acted like he didn’t see anything. At one point I was glad to see the referee slip on a banana peel and fall on his face.

“The fans were screaming so loud that the stadium nearly exploded. Italians are hot-blooded and reckless to the point of insanity. They are capable of descending in a crowd on the ring and trampling a fighter or the referee to death. It was round six and my opponent still hadn’t knocked me out, so the fans were fit to kill. They were screaming ‘Umberto’s a bag of shit!’

“It was becoming harder and harder for him to lift his arms. Apathy appeared in his eyes. That was exactly what I had been waiting for. I switched to attack mode. I knew that the effects of morphine start to wear off a little and then come back even stronger. In the middle of the sixth round I connected my heel to his chin so hard that the poor guy flew about three meters and landed on the floor. I wanted to finish him off so he couldn’t

get back up, but the referee saved him. He didn't whistle. He just got between us to protect Umberto from my blows. But I managed to go around him and knocked Umberto on the head just as he was getting up on his elbow. He went back down and didn't move again.

"The Italians were furious. They were roaring like animals. It was so loud I couldn't tell if they were cheering for me or cursing Umberto. The whole fifty-thousand-seat stadium just erupted. I went back to my corner. Esen and Askar were hugging me and crying they were so happy.

"I told them, 'we need to beat it before they kill us.'

"You two run, I'll stay," said Esen.

The enraged fans were already swarming around the ring. Over the rumbling tide of people we could barely hear our girlfriends screaming. We told them to get the hell out of there.

"The ruling hadn't been announced yet. A couple of medics put Umberto on a stretcher and carried him off. His fans were scary. They blocked off our exit, so I had to think fast. I pretended I saw someone and waved. Then I jumped over the other side of the ring and disappeared into the crowd. Even so, some girls managed to knock me over the head. At times like that, a pissed-off woman is extremely dangerous. One of them scratched my face pretty bad. That's what my crazy sport is like, brother."

"Did you leave without the million dollars, baika?"

Barlas laughed. "We didn't forget the money. But first we had to get out of there alive. We could find out the judges' ruling the next day. Esen called at noon. The judges were involved in a serious dispute. The referee and half of the judges said that my last punch came after the whistle. The other half of the judges said it came before the whistle. In the end, they announced that I was the winner. We and our girlfriends hid out in a small hotel on the outskirts of town. Day and night my friends took care of me and dressed my wounds. All we had left to do was get the prize money. Esen and Askar went in to sniff it out. They wasted all day in town and came back that evening empty-handed.

"When we asked them what the problem was, they said 'Those bastards don't intend to hand over more than ten percent of what you earned. First off, they won't let us see the judges' ruling. Then they said that you have to pay taxes on the money, then an insurance premium, and then you have to pay the fight's organizers and a fee to the stadium. Barlas, you're not going to see any of that money.'

"We were all upset. Angelica was the only one who wanted me to forget the damn prize and get the hell out of town in one piece. We wouldn't hear of it. The owner of the hotel we were staying in was a lawyer. When we told him about our troubles, he was furious at his fellow-citizens' dishonesty."

"He yelled 'You'll never squeeze a cent out of the filthy mafia. Don't even bother trying.' But then he gave us a risky idea. He said, 'take someone's kid hostage and tell the mayor about it. Tell him you won't give the kid back until you get your prize money. That will get the police involved. They'll make the mafia hand over the money.'

"We didn't like the idea, but we took his advice. He said that everybody in Italy took hostages. It happened every day. We knew that we couldn't plan it ourselves, so we asked him to do it. We told him we'd pay him if he saw the deal through. He agreed on a fee of one hundred thousand dollars and told us to leave his hotel and find another place to stay. He took us to an old man's house on the edge of the forest. Our girlfriends were

the ones who brought in the hostage. The very next evening they brought home a little girl, five or six years old. At first she played with the toys we gave her and danced and sang for us, but by bedtime she began looking for her parents and crying. If you can believe it, she was the daughter of Umberto's sister. I couldn't stand to hear her crying and went to sleep in the barn. Three days later all the headlines in the local papers were about the missing girl. Then Natasha, the Russian girl, went to see the lawyer. He gave her a telephone number and wrote out what we needed to say to the police. We used a cell phone to call them. What we were supposed to say was: 'Umberto, if you're a man then bring all the prize money and get the girl back.'

"We told him to come to a bridge over the river that flows through the town. The lawyer knew what bridge to go to and he was supposed to pick up the money. He decided to take one of us with him. He also had armed bodyguards for protection. There was a boat waiting under the bridge if the police showed up or if the other side got too close. We had it all planned out. We were sure of one thing: we knew where he lived. If he tried to make off with our money we were prepared to set fire to his two-story house and disappear.

"Now we had to decide which one of us would go with the lawyer. Each of us was prepared to go, even the girls. The lawyer said that he didn't care who went, but he wanted a man in case there was a fight. Esen said he would go. We nodded and said nothing.

"We got our money, right on the day we planned. It was like a fairy tale. To be honest, we hadn't thought we'd ever see the money, so when we got it we insanely happy. We paid the lawyer his money and divided the rest up between all of us to make it easier to leave the country. Without waiting a minute, we set off, trying to stay on central streets where there were a lot of people. We got to the train station and got on the train to Milan. Our plan was to go from there to Switzerland.

"Once we got settled in our compartment we realized that there were nasty looking people following us. To be safe, we gave the money to our girlfriends, who had their own compartment, and kept an eye on our shadows. As it turned out, we had every reason to be worried.

"In Milan, we got lost in the train station's underground passageways looking for the exit toward Switzerland. Our girlfriends were walking in front of us. Suddenly, a group of police officers stopped them and asked to see their passports, only they weren't real cops – they were the men who had been following us. I still don't know for sure who they were working for, Umberto or our lawyer, but they recognized all of us and had been following us the whole way.

"They attacked us in an underground passage. The three of us were carrying pistols. Shooting broke out. Natasha was shot and killed, but the other two girls got away. We took out three of the thugs, but the other two ran off. It was terrible, brother, but that's what happened. I never thought I would ever kill someone, but you never know what fate has in store for you. What happened to me next was even worse than that day in Milan."

Barlas poked at the fire in the stove, lit a fresh cigarette and sat for a while with his head down.

"Do you still have time?" he looked up sadly at Adilet.

"Not much, baike. Can I come again the day after tomorrow and hear the rest?"

“Sure. If I’m still alive.”

“You won’t die, baike.”

Two days later Adilet came back to Barlas’ hut to hear the rest of his story.

“We weren’t able to take Natasha’s body home with us, but we managed to get the money she had been carrying.

“Exactly three months later my fiancée and I arrived in Karakol. My home is in a mountain *ail* deep in the Ak-Suisk region near the Chinese border. My parents were delighted to meet Angelica. I think they would have blessed anyone I chose to marry as long as I stopped traveling around the world.

“My mother was in love with Angelica – ‘She’s adorable. She’s just like us, with black hair and eyes. And she’s so sweet and quiet.’ She truly loved my fiancée. On the day we arrived, my parents slaughtered a sheep to secure the blessings of our ancestors and neighbors. Then they began preparing to entertain the whole *ail* at our wedding. I told them to invite everyone in the village and all of our family and friends from around the country. I said we would set up forty yurts if we had to.

“Angelica was delighted by everything she saw in our village, the towering mountains and the river that flowed through the *ail* under the branches of willows, birches and tall bushes.

“She said ‘Your home really is paradise. I don’t ever want to leave here. I’ll invite my parents to come from Bucharest for the wedding.’

“I also had the one hundred thousand dollars I had won at the European championship, so we had more money than you could shake a stick at. It flowed like sand between my fingers. We gave away money to everyone in the village, however much they needed. What seemed like enough to my poor relatives felt like pocket change to me. When I gave them five or ten thousand Kyrgyz som, they couldn’t help weeping with gratitude.

“Of all our relatives, there were only two or three people who were against my marrying Angelica. The worst of them was a man we called Sailor. He had finished his army commitment years ago and was still a bachelor. One day when I wasn’t at home, the fool came over and started boasting to Angela.

“He said ‘I was in Bucharest once, and I walked all over dozens of girls just like you.’

“I wanted to rip his head off when I found out, but Angelica and my mother stopped me. They said I shouldn’t put myself on the level of a drunk idiot. I had always known that Sailor hated and envied me. When I became champion of Kyrgyzstan he happened to be in Bishkek.

“He got rip-roaring drunk and told my trainers, ‘Don’t get your hopes up. He’s a one-day champion and he won’t go far. It’ll go to his head.’

“I should have taken that opportunity to show him where crabs spend the winter, but I figured he was just a good-for-nothing alcoholic. And even if he was a jerk, he was family.

“So there we were, finishing up preparations for our wedding. We had already sent out lots of invitations when my cousin from Karakol came by. He was a cop.

“What he told us was shocking. He said, ‘You need to go underground for a while, baike. Interpol’s looking for you.’

“Right away I knew it was Umberto’s doing. We had shot at the thugs who followed us, so apparently they went to Interpol and told a story about how they were minding their business when a bunch of Kyrgyz punks attacked them. There’s no justice in this life, brother Adilet. There was no way around it. We postponed the wedding and I hid out in the mountains for a couple of weeks.

“I had a good rest in the mountains. I walked and rode on horseback through places I remembered from my childhood. I listened to the gurgling mountain streams and drank their clear water. I inhaled the smells of the mountain meadows. But then one night I had a bad dream. When I woke up my heart was beating out of my chest. I don’t know why, but a sense of foreboding drove me back to the *ail*. The whole way home a gray bird flew ahead of me. It would fly a little way and then alight on a branch and croak in despair, as if it was telling me to ‘hurry, hurry.’ I can still remember what that bird looked like.

“When I returned home, brother, I discovered that my life lay broken in the yellow reeds on the bank of our village’s deep river.”

Barlas lit another cigarette. He puffed away at it, staring with his one good eye at the fire. Touched by the story, Adilet looked at Barlas with anxious eyes: ‘What do you mean your life was broken?’ his face seemed to ask.

“That same day my Angelica went down to sit by the river. I guess she was missing me, my angel, and wanted some time alone. Sailor and one of his drunk friends caught her there. They raped her. My mother sensed that something was wrong and ran to look for Angelica. Those bastards attacked my fifty-year-old mother.

“By the time I got home the whole village was in an uproar. The people were enraged. They had just caught the animals. The bastards tried to break away from the strong arms that held them down. They tried to escape the beating they had coming from the furious villagers.

“At first I couldn’t guess what had happened. My precious Angelica was standing there, her dress ripped and her face covered with bloody scratches. She was crying so hard that her body shook. Then I saw my mother lying on the ground, burning with shame and horror. That’s when I lost my head.

“The village elders were appalled. They were also worried about what might happen. They came to me and said, ‘We’ll hand them over to the police so they can rot in prison.’ I looked at Sailor and his friend. Their eyes were cloudy, like you see on a rabid dog. They didn’t even realize what they had done. When Sailor saw me, he tried to break away and run at me.

“I told the men holding him to let him go. I was choking with anger. I don’t know what the men were thinking, but they let go of him. I’m not sure what happened next, but both bastards met their maker in short order. All I remember was splitting Sailor’s head in two. His brains were all over the place. I beat his friend so hard that his eyes popped out of their sockets. That’s what vigilante justice looks like, brother. I learned that hate is a powerful, unstoppable force. My boiling hate turned me into a predator. People say love is strong, but it seems to me that for humans hate is stronger. You know how the law looks on that kind of justice. I was looking at eight to ten behind bars because of that scum. And you remember, Interpol was already looking for me. I had to run.

“That day the whole village got together to bless Angelica and me and help us pack to leave. A close relative of Sailor told me ‘Brother Barlas, I forgive you. Your

place is in heaven, not in prison. Live with your chosen woman as long as God wills it.' Unfortunately, Sailor's younger sister wanted to pick a fight. She screamed that she'd sue me and see me put in prison. She said a lot more than that. It was hard to understand her position.

"And so, Angelica and I went into the mountains."

"I decided to take her to another world, into the fairytale land our father had told us about when we were small. I remember that we never believed him, but we always held our breath when he recounted the deeds of the evil characters and laughed in delight when he told us about the other characters' good deeds.

"He whispered to us, 'On the other side of Mount Khan Tengri is a land where the snow never melts and the glaciers are left over from the Ice Age. But if you go further and pass the impassible blue glaciers, you will reach a holy valley where amazing plants the likes of which no one has ever seen grow summer and winter and bubbling hot springs make the air as warm as the inside of your ear. Fish swim in the lake and animals graze on its banks.' At the end of the story he always sighed, 'The only problem is that the valley is inhabited by the yeti, who are wild men. They are the masters of their own corner of paradise and have no intention of befriending men from our own world.'

"In a twist of fate, Angela and I found ourselves wandering into that dangerous and mysterious land. Our backpacks were fairly heavy. As we climbed up into the mountains poor Angela had a hard time holding up under her heavy burden. Several times she came close to rolling back down, even though I did my best to hold on to her. I knew that we loved each other, but when I looked at her tiny frame I couldn't help but wonder where she got her strength. I had never known, never imagined, that love and devotion can be so unreasoning and self-sacrificing and yet so powerful and overwhelming. How else can you explain the strength that kept my poor girl going? She was an only child. Her parents had always loved her and protected her. Did she know where she was going and who she was following? She had simply faxed her parents a message that the wedding was postponed and they should stay home until they heard from her again. Then she followed me without a moment's hesitation, even though I had my doubts. Fate had made me a fugitive and I was at peace with my fate: I would live or die by fate. Of course, I was determined that as long as I lived I would protect Angelica with life. Nobody would ever dare lay a finger on her. But, brother, the world is evil and unjust and you never know what unpleasant surprises await you.

"When we reached the top of Kokbel and turned our feet toward Uzongu-Kuush, we looked back the way we had come and saw a range of stunning mountains. Their blue-gray ridges rose into sky-high peaks that glistened in the sun. The mountains formed a tight ring around the beautiful Djyrgalan valley and emerald Lake Issyk-Kul. It was an unforgettable sight. The tears that had clouded Angelica's eyes for the past two days disappeared and her face shone. That's the power of nature and the strength of its beauty.

"From the height of a bird's flight, Angelica gazed at the mountains on all sides. She didn't even stop for a bite to eat. All she could say was 'This is marvelous! What a miracle!'

"I think she even forgot that I was there. When we had stopped to swim in a brook in the valley, I saw the bruises covering her tender body and my heart ached. Now she forgot all about those bruises. Time and the immense beauty of my homeland's

mountains were healing her physical wounds and dulling the pain in her heart. Even so, I think her soul will remain scarred until she takes her last breath.

Barlas rubbed his chest, trying to quiet his aching heart. He lit another cigarette. Full of pity, Adilet couldn't take his eyes off Barlas' nicotine-stained yellow fingers. They looked like thick metal bolts. Impressionable and possessed of a vivid imagination, the boy had no trouble picturing everything this suffering man had told him. He saw a vivid image of the rapist lying on the ground with his skull cracked in two and his white brains spattered on the green grass. He shuddered.

Barlas continued his story.

"We saw Khantengri in the distance the next day. Angela stared at me with wide eyes, 'Will we really get all the way to Khantengri? Oh my God! It looks just like it does in pictures. Nobody will believe me that I actually made it to the world-famous Khantengri. Not even my parents will believe me. You just wait, Barik. You'll see when we get to Bucharest.' She took lots of pictures with her camera.

"Nothing in the world compares to Khantengri. For two days it hovered over us in majesty. We kept up a punishing pace, descending into valleys and climbing up ridges. On the third day we had to bid Khantengri farewell.

"Angela waved her hand at the peak. Her voice rang out, 'Don't forget us, Khantengri! We will come this way again.'

"I told her she'd be better off keeping her gloves on when she waved. I rubbed her cold hands and told her that you can lose your fingers to frostbite without even noticing it.

" 'How do you know you have frostbite?' she asked.

" 'First they turn red and then they start to itch.'

" 'Then what?'

" 'Then they turn blue and the frostbitten tissue dies.'

" 'That sounds awful!' She put her soft, pretty hands back in her warm mittens.

"I tried to sound cheerful. 'All of our clothes, even our boots, are design for mountain climbing. All we have to do is remember to rub cream on our faces regularly. I don't think frostbite will get us.'

"The further we got from Khantengri, the more worried I became. I was stumbling in a quagmire of doubt. We were surrounded by hundreds of indistinguishable mountain peaks reaching up into the cold blue sky. There were thousands of similar sharp cliffs cut into the high, craggy mountains; there were countless valleys and hollows. How was I to find the one we wanted? How could I know which way to go? Where was the mysterious, warm valley in which we hoped to make our home for the time being?

"Angela understood what was in my heart. She asked, 'Can you find a hot spring that isn't on the map?'

" 'Don't worry,' I told her. 'We're going in the direction the hunters pointed us in,' I said calmly. To lessen her fears, I showed her a map of the Tian Shan range, the mountains of Tibet and the Himalayas.

“‘If we make it to that ridge over there and spend the night under that cliff, then tomorrow we will reach the white glacier. My father always told us about a hot spring-fed lake in a small valley under the shadow of those cliffs. We just have to find it.’

“The weather took an unexpected turn for the worse the next day. The wind began to howl down from the darkening cliffs. Large icy snowflakes rained down on the pebbles and rocks underfoot. At first we held close to a ravine, but when we caught sight of a small cave we hid inside. Soon the weather cleared and rays of sun broke through the clouds.

“The sun was already high in the sky and we were still sitting in the cave. While it was still light the previous evening, I had gathered dry juniper branches to build a fire. Angela felt confident because we had plenty of supplies. Her spirits even lifted a little.

“She leaned on my shoulder and said, more to herself than to me, ‘So this is the romantic adventure I always dreamed about when I was little! Wild mountains, high cliffs, and me sitting next to a campfire with the man I love.’

“I looked at her tenderly and felt amazed for the hundredth or thousandth time: ‘How is it possible for one person to become so attached to another? And be so attached that she calmly entrusts her fate and even her life to him? But here she is! She trusts me as much as she trusts herself. Angelica is so trusting, loving and devoted to me, like a baby whose mother holds it and who could never imagine being dropped. She is with me and she is happy because that is all she needs. How can I return her complete love and trust? How can I live up to her infinite faith in me?’ Those were the heavy thoughts that burdened my heart. Without thinking, I pulled my pistol from its holster and counted the bullets. I only had two packages of ammunition. If anything went wrong, I had fifty shots. I also had my hunting knife. That was the extent of it. There was no telling if that would be enough to save our lives. We faced endless uncertainty that was as dark as night. There was only one thing I knew more or less for sure: if we ran out of supplies, I could shoot game for food.

“Suddenly the wind whipped up again. Hollow echoes reach us from all sides. Several stones broke off from the cliff above the cave where we sat, and soon the cave entrance was blocked by a pile of sharp stone rubble. The sky did not clear up until the next morning and when we managed to make our way out of the cave and continue our journey we were constantly slipping on the wet pebbles and rocks.

At that point I began to worry about altitude sickness. The hunters had warned us that we might experience shortness of breath before reaching the glaciers, but after that we would be fine.

“We followed the path marked on the map directly toward the glacier, hiking up a steep incline. Large rocks slid out from under our feet and an icy wind picked up. But we had no choice: if we tried to stay out of the wind by walking under the cliff face we risked being crushed by an avalanche, so we had to walk along the ridge with the cruel wind in our faces. In the mountains, the temperature on the ridge is always five to ten degrees colder than in more protected areas. Where we were hiking it was thirty to forty degrees below zero. Every time we stopped I covered Angelica’s face with a special protective cream. With every passing day our packs became lighter, but that did not make us feel any better. In fact, we felt like they were getting heavier.

“Sometime after noon Angelica began to complain of a searing pain in her temples and the back of her head. Soon I noticed foam in the left corner of her mouth.

That was what I had been afraid of: she was showing signs of altitude sickness. I sat Angelica down behind a large granite boulder, left my pack with her and scrambled up the rocky ridge to the top.

“Whichever way I turned I saw the silent, indifferent realm of the white glaciers that covered the mountain folds from the peaks to the valleys. My head was spinning: which one of those many valleys was the one we wanted? I studied the landscape through my binoculars and saw nothing out of the ordinary to interest me: bare, unassailable peaks, glaciers, snowy ridges and valleys, and nothing more.

“We spent the night under an overhanging cliff. Tucked under our tarpaulin, we immediately fell asleep in each other’s arms. I’d bet that by morning our heartbeats had slowed to twenty or thirty beats per minute.

“The next day I led Angelica by the hand and we finally reached the glacier. We were wearing special boots with spikes for ice climbing.

“Over the course of the night Angelica’s body seemed to have acclimated to the altitude. From that point on we would be traveling down the side of the mountain. We walked over the frozen snow that covered the entire glacier and the going got easier. Walking over the top of the snow we managed to cover a good distance. I decided to take another look through my binoculars and suddenly noticed mist hanging over one of the valleys.

“‘I see mist!’ I cried down to Angelica. Pleased like a little child, she began excitedly talking about how if there was mist covering the valley it would be several degrees warmer there than outside where the wind blows. We walked confidently in the direction of the valley, but when we reached it and entered the mist we were somewhat perplexed. The mist was cold. We felt no indications of warmth anywhere, just humidity. We had to tighten the ties on our hoods because the wet air was even more dangerous than the dry air outside the valley. Not sure of what to do, we walked for a fairly long time and even stopped to eat.

“Angela began to complain. ‘Why did we even come down in this valley?’ She asked me the same thing several times, but I didn’t know what to say.

“‘If we have to, we can get out of this mist,’ I proposed. We decided not to leave right away, but instead to continue on for a while. We had no desire to walk back uphill out of the valley, since the humidity made our packs feel even heavier with every step.

“Suddenly a wave of warm air hit our faces. Encouraged, we made our way as fast as we could to a vantage point on the ridge and saw that there was hot steam a little lower down from where we stood. Soon we could feel through the soles of our boots that the pebbles we were standing on were hot. I even began to worry that we had found our way into a volcano. We did not want to go further, since the hot, enveloping steam seemed to be rising higher and that worried us. But after a while we were glad to see that the mist was beginning to clear.

“Then we saw it: there was no snow or ice covering the ground, just dark red and gray rocks and pebbles that radiated heat. We began slowly making our way down in search of the hot spring. I told Angelica I thought we were near a volcano. She instantly caught my fear and froze. She removed her mittens from her sweaty hands and went to wipe her face, but she got an even bigger scare – her mittens were hot.

“Soon the mist slipped away past our legs and an astonishing view met our eyes.

“‘My God, we’re in paradise!’ whispered Angelica. I was just as astonished as she was and couldn’t believe my eyes. We were standing in a fairy tale, surrounded by amazing plants with huge leaves. A moment ago we had been freezing, but now we were sweaty and breathing hard in the hot air. The air shimmered with what seemed like silver droplets, and the whole deep bowl of the valley emitted thick, warm steam.

“Not far from where we stood water came out of the ground in a small fountain and trickled down the slope in a small stream. What surprised us most of all were the waist-high grass and thousands of bright flowers growing all over every square inch of the valley. Both of us had college educations and knew a little about geology, so we understood what geysers were. I had seen documentaries about the geysers of Kamchatka, where steam hangs low over the earth year-round, but I had never imagined anything like this valley surrounded by high mountains where the temperature is fifty degrees below zero.

“Angela bent down and touched a rock and then the leaves of a plant. She nodded to me as if to say, ‘It’s all real!’ I followed her example. Then I stuck my finger in the running water and almost screamed – it was boiling hot.

“For a while we stood there not knowing what to do, but eventually we regained our senses. We hiked down the slope almost to the valley floor and found a more or less dry spot. Over the centuries, the tall wild grass had grown and died and new grass had grown up in its place, creating a thick layer of matted grass that was as good as a bed. We set up our tent on the grass and took off all but our underwear. About fifty meters away was a small lake. We walked to the lake’s edge where the heat was like a sauna. There were reed-like plants growing around the lake and we saw little movements in the lake indicating that there was life in it. As if we were enchanted, Angelica and I moved carefully and slowly, speaking in whispers. Speaking in regular tones seemed out of place. Suddenly Angelica shouted in surprise and delight and I looked in the direction she was pointing: it was an ordinary juniper, but here in the valley it grew taller and, like a tree in the tropics, had entwined itself around the trees growing near it. Its branches were twisted together with competing plants that looked like grape vines heavy with ripe fruit, each of which was the size of an apricot. Angelica screeched when she saw them. We went over and cut off a bunch. The fruits were seedless and very sweet, but their flavor was closer to a peach than a grape. Without thinking about what we were doing, we ate the fruits until we could eat no more. Soon our stomachs started gurgling and we were both hit with an attack of diarrhea. She ran into the trees one direction and I went the other direction. That kept us busy for a while. When we got back together, Angela was trembling in fear.

“She said, ‘I keep feeling like someone is watching us.’ I felt the same thing, but I didn’t tell her.

“‘Don’t worry,’ I said, keeping my voice light. ‘There may be yeti here, but they won’t hurt us. They aren’t aggressive.’

“As soon as I mentioned yeti, Angela’s face paled and she kept as close to me as she could. We both listened intently to each rustle. At one point both of us clearly heard a branch crack not far from us. My heart leaped into my throat. Angelica dove into our tent. I hurried to grab my pistol and load it. From that point on, we did nothing but look around us, watching and listening for something we couldn’t see. I took my pistol

wherever I went. I decided that there was no escaping fate. If a yeti attacked us, I would have to shoot it. If it didn't attack, we would have to wait and see how it behaved.

"We probably could have drunk the water straight from the bubbling stream, but our noses told us it contained a lot of sulfur, so we decided to boil it. I cautiously built our first campfire, worried that it might burn out of control. Fortunately it didn't. In fact, it burned poorly because of all the moisture in the air.

"I called softly to Angelica. 'Come get warm by the fire!' It was my first attempt at humor since we had come to the mountains.

"Yeti are afraid of fire, aren't they?" she asked, sticking her head out of the tent. She was in no mood for jokes.

"Sure they are. If they inhale smoke, I bet they choke to death."

"We drank strong tea to settle our stomachs. We were relieved to feel that it helped. Then we went back to eating the strange fruits to get our stomachs accustomed to them.

"By then we were sure that there was something living in the valley. We could hear rustling, crunching, soft knocking and quiet, indistinguishable sounds. Soon we could even hear their voices: first it sounded like a cat's 'meow,' but then it sounded more like the grunting of a gorilla. The creatures were very cautious: not once over those few days did we catch a glimpse of them.

"One day Angelica was picking grapes as usual (that is what we called the strange bunches of fruit) when she started screaming. I was nearby, and when I looked up I saw a wild man hiding behind some vines not ten meters from us. He was at least two meters tall, with long arms and a face like an ape – his forehead was low and jutted out, his nose and mouth grew forward and he had no chin at all. His shaggy hair hung in his eyes, human eyes. However, his body was covered all over with thin reddish-brown hair.

"The man-monster was watching Angelica and seemed to be smiling. I decided to give him a scare and pulled out my pistol. I pointed it in the air and pulled the trigger, but it misfired. I pulled the trigger harder – again a misfire. My heart stopped and I felt cold all over when it occurred to me that the bullets were damp from all the humidity. That turned out to be the case, and not one of my bullets was good for anything. I'll tell you the truth, brother. I broke out in a cold sweat and was thinking 'So this is what it's like to die.' You're as good as dead when you lose your last hope for defending yourself!

"I ran into the tent to get my knife, but the wild man had disappeared by the time I got back. He obviously reacted quickly to danger. My father was right – the wild men were cowardly. That didn't make me feel any better. None of the bullets in my pack were usable. I started hunting for strong sticks and large rocks. When I found as many as I could, I laid them in a pile next to the door of our tent and began to plan what I would do if the yeti attacked us. I was obsessed with ideas for how we could defend ourselves: if I tied my knife to a long stick it could function like a spear, but we also used the knife to prepare food and to do a thousand other things.

"That was the beginning of my tensest, most frightening days in our 'hidden paradise.'

"We began seeing the yeti every day because they ate the same fruits we did. They also caught slithering, crawling reptiles in the lake. We weren't prepared to do that yet. Soon we became convinced that our 'neighbors' meant us no harm. They had a habit

that we approved of as soon as they suspected the slightest danger they ran off without looking back. Eventually we got used to the wild men and were no longer afraid of them.

“‘They’re related to humans, but they obviously evolved differently over time,’ Angelica decided. She lost her fear of them.

“We named the wild man that we saw the most often Anton. He would walk boldly right up to our tent while the others watched him from behind the grape arbor. One day Angela reached her hand out and gave Anton a piece of candy. He grabbed it and swallowed it. Then he snorted loudly and pulled out a tuft of hair on his chest. He wanted more candy. Angela pulled out a few more candies from what she had left. Anton didn’t wait for her to hand them over. Instead, he grabbed them from her and chewed on them happily. When I saw how long and sharp his claws were, I was terrified. It was like he had five daggers on each hand. When Anton asked for more candy, I realized we had made a mistake. He had drawn his own conclusions about what the friendly gesture meant and was trying to get inside our tent. Angelica tried to bar his path, but the wild man got down on all fours and started sniffing between her legs. Apparently he had highly developed senses of smell and touch like a dog. Angelica backed away from him, but he kept trying to get his head between her legs.

“‘Barlas, make him go away!’ she cried. I ran over and knocked him over the head with a big stick. He instantly turned into a predator and leaped on me. Brother, that fight is how I got these scars you see on me. Sooner or later people always fall into the trap of self-deception. This world of ours is evil. I still can’t understand how I came to trust that wild man. I was too stupid to see that he was first and foremost an animal and a predator. We were naïve enough to think of him as a human. My poor Angelica was so kind and trusting. While I fought the wild man she was terrified, frantic, running back and forth trying to help me. I can still hear her screaming and crying. I couldn’t manage to get my hand on my knife – it was lying outside the tent and the animal was blocking the opening so that neither Angela nor I could get out. There wasn’t enough room in the tent for me to swing back and hit him with my wooden club. He slashed my eyes several times with his razor-sharp claws, grabbed Angela and dragged her off. I could hear her screaming as he sped off with her. I tried to follow, but there was blood in my eyes and I couldn’t see anything. I wiped the blood away but it just kept coming. My eyelids and the skin of my face were hanging in shreds, but I kept running in the direction of Angela’s screaming. Suddenly I fell into a deep hole and hit my head on a tree root.

“I don’t know how long I was unconscious. When I came to and tried to look around, the sky and everything around me were red. I lay there in a stupor and slowly began to remember everything that had happened. That’s when I realized that my eyes were still bloody. It’s true when they say that man is tough as a dog. I lay where I was for two or three days and couldn’t even raise my head. Whenever I tried, the pain in my right eye was so unbearable that I had to put my head down. Somehow I found my knife lying in the mud next to my left hip. I don’t know when I picked it up. Finally I raised myself up and crawled back to the tent, where I collapsed again. I don’t know how long I lay there. I woke up to the sound of suspicious scuffling in the tent, but couldn’t make out what was going on. My vision was still distorted. Apparently my right eye had collapsed. I realized that the wild men were ransacking our tent and taking everything they laid their hands on. Knife in hand, I was burning to attack the two-legged beasts. Gathering all my strength, I jumped up, but the wild men who had been pawing through our packs ran off.

“In the morning, I could barely stand but I had to find food. Thank God, our canned food hadn’t been touched. I guess the wild men didn’t think much of the smell.

“I felt stronger two or three days later. After tying a rag across my blind eye, I went to search for Angelica. I tied my knife to a stick to make a kind of spear, but I knew that if I went deep into the valley I would never get out.”

Barlas glanced at Adilet. He laughed bitterly and continued his tale.

“The wild men were nowhere to be found: either they were watching me and planned to kill me, or they had gotten a scare and run off. I was convinced that they were every bit as cowardly as they were cautious. Unless their predator instincts awoke, they would never attack a man on their own.

“The only clear thoughts in my foggy brain were about Angelica, whether she was alive or not, and if she was alive, why she wasn’t making any noise. After walking a while I felt dizzy and had to sit down.

“That went on for maybe two weeks. Every blessed day I went out wandering the valley, searching for Angelica. Evening came quickly and I would make my way back to the tent and collapse. Later on I noticed that daylight only lasted two hours in the valley of the geysers.

“Finally my food ran out. I guessed that there must be wild goats in the area, but they stayed away from the hot valley, so I left the land of geysers and hunted in the cold for something to eat. That’s when I met the owner of this pelt, Adilet. Someone had wounded the snow leopard; otherwise I would never have been able to kill it since I was half-dead, myself. He could have made a meal of me in one swipe.

“I had my spear, so I walked over to him. He didn’t have the strength to get up, so he lay there and stared daggers at me. Our fates were similar: two wounded animals near death. We sized each other up for a long time to see who would blink first.

“Finally I told him, ‘It’s either me or you. Only one of us is going to live.’ He didn’t move, so I walked right up to him and plunged my dagger into his jugular vein. Then I had to sit and wait for a long time for his dark blood to run out. Finally he lost consciousness. I skinned and butchered him. Then I cooked the meat and ate until I was no longer hungry. I hid the rest of the meat under stones and ate on it for a long time. Leopard meat is tough. It even looks tough. And the taste – well, even a little bit is enough to make you sick.

“Brother, I never did find Angelica. It became clear that she was not alive. I’ll tell you the truth. I was scared of what would happen to me if I found her body. What would become of me if I found her after she died a horrible death, if I found her body? I preferred to remember my beautiful Angelica as she was when she was alive and keep her memory that way in my heart until I died. Those last few days I was afraid of finding her and stopped looking. May God forgive me.”

“Did you leave after that?”

“How could I stay after my Angelica died?”

“You left the geysers?”

“My heart was heavy in the valley of paradise. I wasn’t a wild man and couldn’t eat grass, roots and crawling insects. And I was tortured by the knowledge that Angelica’s body was in there somewhere. I couldn’t live with that. I tried to get out as fast as I could. See, brother, I try not to link the life I’ve led since then with the life I had before, with Angelica. And I don’t want to talk. I never thought that I would end up

living like a homeless dog after being the world champion and the pride of my country. You see what I've come to now."

"How terrible for Angelica!"

"My poor Angelica. Her life became hell and she lost her parents and her life all because she loved me. Can love really be that strong? But brother, when I drink my last drop of water there's one thing that calms my broken, tortured soul. I'll never tell anyone except you. The people here call you Holy Milarepa, so before I go to hell I'll tell you about my one small joy.

"I spent a year living with the yak herders on the Chinese border and my soul was always troubled: would I ever be able to find peace? Following my restless heart, I made my way along the footpaths and animal tracks of great Tibet. At last I found the Jokhang temple, where I found peace, more or less. Then I began having dreams about Angelica. That had never happened before. Now I see her in my dreams as if she were alive. Our hearts tremble, filled with love. I hold her hands and they are warm. I stroke her hair and stare into her gentle eyes. She looks back at me with such love and devotion. Sometimes I wake up with tears in my eyes. Once I came to Tibet I felt like Angelica and I are together again. We hold hands and fly through the sky, feeling the fluffy, soft freshness of the clouds and their warmth.

"Do you know what she says to me, brother? She says 'Let's fly away to another planet.' I ask her which one, and she says 'Sirius.' That's one I know I've never heard of. I'm just a poor man living on the Earth."

Adilet grabbed Barlas by the hand. "I know it, baike. Sirius is the brightest star in the sky! But if you want to get there you have to learn to fly. I mean you have to find the gravitational corridors between the stars."

"Angelica and I just fly around, brother."

"In your dreams, right?"

"Of course. If we really could fly, do you think we would stay on this cruel planet Earth? Unfortunately, God made man without wings."

"People can fly on their own, baike."

"Are you talking about technology?"

"No. People can fly by themselves!"

"I see. If that's your dream, then may God help you achieve it."

"There is no God, baike. People have to set high goals for themselves and achieve them."

"You've surprised me. Did coming here turn you into an atheist? Or is the Buddha your God?"

"The Buddha is not God. He is a prophet."

"A prophet? What's that?"

"It's a person whose eyes have opened to see this world and that world."

"That's all?" Barlas laughed. "I thought Buddha was God."

"I have to go, baike. People are probably looking for me."

"I won't keep you if you have to go, brother. But I want to say one last thing. Here in Tibet I learned that they don't bury the dead – they burn them. The ground is too hard to dig a grave. So I've set by some wood. Burn me like all the others. Maybe my soul will fly away to heaven. If everything they say is true, my soul can join with

Angelica's soul. I want to leave this life as soon as I can. Be my *oluk esi*⁴, brother. That's the only thing I will ever ask of you."

"Don't worry *baike*. I'll see lots more of you before your soul flies to Sirius."

"You talk a lot about Sirius, brother. Well, get going now."

"Next time I'll tell you when you will die. But remember, you'll be reborn again."

Barlas laughed.

Part Five

In his fifth year of study, Mani Yaso's parents came to Lhasa without warning or sending word.

At six o'clock in the morning Mani Yaso came to Lama Tsu's study for his lessons.

"Do you miss your father and mother, son?" Lama Tsu asked. He looked closely at the young man, smiling.

"Not really."

"You can see them if you want. Only now they will not understand you and they will disagree with everything you say. But do not be afraid. A grown man with a sober and analytical mind need not spar with a small child."

"I don't understand, great Lama. Are you sending me to Kyrgyzstan to see my parents?"

"Your parents are here. They are waiting for you at the hotel."

"Here? How strange!"

"Soon you will take a difficult exam to sum up your five years of study here. After that, we will open your third eye, my son. I must say your parents did not choose the best time to come, right before the most important test. But I do not want to keep you from seeing them. I expect you back in one hour, and I do not want to see you upset and worried."

Mani Yaso put on his reddish-brown trappa's robe and a thin hat of the same color. Then he hurried off toward the hotel.

With giant steps, he fairly leaped down the hill. To his surprise, he could only summon a sketchy portrait of his father and could not picture his mother's face at all. Perhaps that made the young man even more eager to see his parents.

Aisada ran to him first. "My son! My angel!" She hugged him tight and kissed him all over with no thought of letting his father have him.

"How are you?" asked Salamat when he finally got his arms around him. "How are you doing here?"

"Om! Mani padme hum!"

"What was that?" Salamat was shocked. His face got red.

"It means 'your fate is in your own hands,'" his son explained with a smile.

"Is that how they greet people here?"

Adilet did not want to anger his father. "Yes." He could see that Salamat had not changed. Whatever he couldn't understand made him angry.

His father smiled. "You're as tall as me now. Come here, let's measure you."

⁴ *Oluk esi* – (Kyrgyz) The holder or someone's remains, owner of his/her body.

“What kind of robe is that? It hangs on you like a sack.” Aisada turned her son to face her. “What’s it made of? Oh honey, you’re rail thin.” She gently stroked her son’s face and pinched his robe.

“Do you at least get enough to eat? What do they give you?”

“Different stuff, Mama.”

Salamat took his son by the elbow and pulled him close. “Do you get any exercise? Why don’t you have any muscles?”

“We study three types of judo.”

“Then why don’t you have any muscles?”

“Stop it, Salamat. All you talk about is muscles. Ask him about something else. How’s your health, son? Are you having any problems? I hope you haven’t had any seizures.”

“I’m fine, Mama. Did Tashtan-baike come?”

“Your baike is working non-stop to get his doctorate. He’s doing research in America right now. Your Jildiz-ezhe gave him two boys. They’re doing fine and well. I forgot, here are their pictures.” Aisada pulled a stack of photos out of her suitcase and handed them to her son.

His father sat him down. “You can look at the pictures on your own time after we leave. I want you to tell me about what you’re studying.”

Aisada broke in, sounding worried. “That’s right, son, tell us about your studies. Your Tashtan-baike told us a whole bunch of stuff that didn’t make sense.”

Adilet looked from his father to his mother. He wasn’t sure how to explain everything so that they could understand.

“I can’t explain it all. What we’re doing is studying justice.”

Salamat was angry. “You said you were going to study to be a doctor!”

Aisada tried to smooth over the tension. “I guess there are some secrets in your studies, aren’t there?”

“There are secrets, but I still don’t really know them, Mama. I have to take a hard test soon. After that, they’ll open my third eye...”

“Are your eyes closed? They look open to me!” his father bristled.

“Keep your voice down, Salamat!” Aisada begged.

“I won’t. He could have stayed home and studied to be a vet. He was always messing around with dogs and birds, he spoke their language, whatever. Look at how much money vets pull in these days. You pay six hundred soms for one shot! And private vets make the most.”

“What do you mean they’ll open your eye, son? Can you tell us about that or not?”

“I don’t know yet, Mama. I don’t want to say anything about that yet.”

Salamat moved closer to his son. “Then what subjects are you studying. You can at least tell us that!”

“Astronomy, physics, metaphysics, history, math, astrology, medicine, philosophy and a lot of other subjects.”

Salamat didn’t know what to say, so he shut his mouth. Then he decided to ask a question, but Adilet beat him to it.

“No, it’s not like that, Papa. We don’t have departments. We just have the subjects.”

Salamat stared at his son. "How did you know what I was going to ask?"

"That's one of the things I'm learning. It's called physiognomy. You can read what a person's thinking on his face."

Salamat looked suspiciously at his son. "What other skills have you learned?"

"Right now I'm mainly studying Agni Yoga. I can reduce my weight by ten kilograms by meditating. I'm close to being able to fly."

"Don't say that, son!" Asiada was frightened. "Come sit down over here and eat the food we brought you. I bet you miss home cooking. Come here, honey. Why do you want to lose weight? It isn't good for you."

Adilet ate a piece of pastry.

Salamat looked grim. "When that idiot Tashtan talked to us he was always vague. I knew back then that this was no kind of school. It's been five years already. I send money every year, but where's the results? Where?"

"Be patient. He hasn't finished his course yet for God's sake! Don't go jumping all over him..."

"What's the point if after five years he still doesn't know what he's going to be? Think for yourself, woman!"

"Don't send any more money, Papa. From now on I will be sending you lots of money."

Salamat was intrigued by this. "How are you going to send money if you're still in school?"

"I'll find a way. Just don't yell at Mama. I will pay you back everything you spent."

"Well, I didn't mean that you owe me anything. Don't get me wrong. I just want you to finish your education and have a profession. You keep talking about studying justice. Nobody studies that. Justice doesn't exist. And if it doesn't exist, then how can you study it?"

"Eat, honey. Your father's right about one thing, son. I agree with him. Justice is just an empty word people say! You remember that relative of ours, the killer? The one who butchered three of our cows alive and ran off with the meat? Papa never was able to get him sent to prison. He spent four years suing him. In the end they acquitted him. Papa suffered in his nerves. He almost lost his mind and spent a month in bed. Look at the white spots on his hands and face."

Adilet looked his father over in surprise, as if he was only just seeing him. It was true: his dark hands and neck were covered with white spots.

"I'll give you a medicinal herb, papa. You have to boil it and drink the water. Then rub it all over you in the moonlight three times. You'll be fine."

Salamat smiled for what seemed like the first time in his life. His face finally brightened. "That's more like it. Now don't you go scaring us."

"Let me run get the herb for you. I'm almost out of time."

"Can't you at least spend the day with us?" Salamat was taken aback.

"I can't, Papa. I was only allowed to leave for an hour." Adilet ran off, leaving his parents in shock.

"Goddamnit. Is he in prison, or what?"

Aisada sighed heavily and sat down on the floor. "He says his third eye will open. Says he's going to fly. What kind of school is this, Salamat?" she asked bitterly.

“That’s what I want to ask you. You and Tashtan!”

“He didn’t mean any harm.”

“He’s the one who filled the boy’s head with nonsense. Starting when Adik was a little kid.”

“I feel like I don’t know my own son. He’s like a stranger. He didn’t ask anything about home, about the family, the animals.”

“The mullahs got to him! You saw the robe he has on!”

“I wish he was a mullah. That would be better.”

“Right. But now he’s a Tibetan mullah. Who the hell needs that? Let’s take him home. Don’t get in the way, I’m warning you! I’ll take him myself.”

Inspired by this decision, Salamat looked like he was preparing for a fight, like a man who was about to grab his son and run away with him. While he was getting his courage up to take his son away, the door opened and a narrow-eyed monk came in.

“This is for you,” he said in English, handing Salamat a large bunch of herbs wrapped in paper. Then he gave Aisada a note. It was from her son: “Mama, Papa, don’t be angry with me. When I got back my teacher was already waiting for me so I went on to class. Goodbye.” Aisada went cold and dropped the note on the table. When Salamat read it, his face went beet red and his eyes bugged out.

“I’m going to talk to the director!” he shouted and ran out the door.

Salamat spent half the day trying to get into the temple and almost got in a fight with the monk that guarded the gates. It was already evening when he returned to the hotel. Right away he locked the door from the inside.

“Goddamnit! They want to put me in jail!” he was shaking, but it wasn’t clear whether he was afraid or angry.

Aisada was horrified. “My God! Who are you talking about?” She had already spent the whole day anxiously waiting.

“He shoved me, Goddamnit. So I punched him in the eye.”

“Who?”

“The bastard at the gate. He wouldn’t let me in.”

“Who are they going to put in jail? Not you?”

“Who the hell else?”

Overcome with fear and realizing that their situation had become dangerous, Aisada started packing their suitcases.

Salamat joined her. “Hurry up. Let’s get out of here!”

Not a single taxi went by, so they had to walk almost a kilometer to the bus station. At least it was downhill. Salamat could tell that no one was going to follow them.

“We’re going back home with all the food we brought!” The heavy weight of the bags made him angry.

“Well, we can’t just throw it all out, can we?”

“Goddamnit, I’ll give it to those beggars.”

“Yes, let’s give it to them. That will be a good deed.”

“Look at all of them. There are more beggars here than in Kyrgyzstan!”

“It’s none of our business.”

Salamat pulled all the food out of his bags and called to the beggars, “Come on over and eat. It’s our treat!”

The beggars fell on the food like vultures on a kill. In just a few minutes Salamat was sitting by his empty bags. He sighed and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“Well, Goddamnit, at least nobody’s chasing after me.” He sounded almost disappointed.

“That’s a good thing, too. Think of the shame if you went to jail for fighting!”

The bus to Katmandu was almost empty. Salamat and Aisada found seats right behind the few passengers at the front of the bus, as if they were hiding from someone. The bus wasn’t ready to leave yet. Salamat could not quell his unease: constantly sighing, he kept leaving the bus and getting back in.

Aisada pulled at the hem of his jacket, “Sit down and act calm.”

When the bus left the station and turned onto the highway, Salamat leaped up and shouted in Russian, “Hey brother, stop the bus! Stop the bus!”

“What’s wrong with you?” Aisada grabbed his sleeve.

He shook her hand off and kept yelling, this time angrily, “I said stop!”

The sunburned driver turned his dark, bloated face around. He didn’t understand a word.

“Stop!” Salamat ran to the door and started banging on it. The bus stopped.

“Get off the bus, Goddamnit!” he screamed at his wife. “We’re a couple of fools. If we leave, we’ll never see our child again. Don’t you understand?”

Aisada was too upset to speak.

“I said get off the bus!”

“What if they catch you?” Aisada mumbled to herself, but she followed her husband off the bus.

The driver said something in a loud, angry voice. He was probably telling them that he wouldn’t give their money back.

“Keep it!” Salamat gestured at him. “Just keep it!”

Then husband and wife sat down and waited for a car back to the temple where their son was studying.

“God forbid they catch you. What a humiliation,” Aisada said. She stood blocking the door of the same hotel room they had been in before.

“Let them catch me, Goddamnit. I’ll sit in their prison! I’m not going to run scared and leave my son behind. If we do that, we’ll lose him. You saw how they’ve messed with his mind! You heard the things he said. Nonsense! He doesn’t even know what he’ll be. Their school here is a bunch of baloney!”

The room was already filled with cigarette smoke. Salamat smoked his cigarette to the halfway point and, glaring at his wife, said “You go to the gate. You’re a woman, after all. His mother. So cry. Weep if you have to. Tell them you’ll complain to the director. Do what you have to get the boy out of there. Then I’ll talk to him myself!”

The Jokhang temple stood on top of a hill. Its massive metal gates were tall and made an imposing impression on anyone waiting outside for them to open. Aisada came nervously up to the gate. She felt its effect on her. Fighting her timidity, she looked all over for a bell. Not finding one, she knocked. As if she had been expected, there was a sound of someone fumbling inside with the metal latches and heavy locks. Then one side of the gate opened. A tall, thin policeman with a bandage on his head stepped out.

A thought crossed her mind. "I wonder if that's the one Salamat got in a fight with."

"Excuse me," she said in English.

"Who do you want to see?"

"I'm here to see the rector."

"He's not receiving people today. What is the problem?"

"My son studies here. The Kyrgyz boy Adilet."

"Ah, Milarepa? The Kyrgyz? And who are you?"

"His mother. I'm his mother!"

"I can't let you in if you don't have permission," he said. Then he quickly closed the gate in her face. The tall, cold gates stood as an unassailable barrier between her and her very own son.

Aisada was shocked. "He's still angry at Salamat," she thought. "I'm lucky he didn't arrest me." But in the next instant she was suddenly overcome with anger as her mother's instinct conquered her fear. She seethed at not being allowed to see her own son, to hold him and pet him after so many years apart. She felt slighted and did not understand why fate was punishing her. She could barely contain her tears. With each passing second her breath came harder and faster, threatening to burst out of her chest. Out of her chest came a storm of weeping that could be heard on the other side of the gate.

Usually the mother's heart is the first to sense that something is wrong, but this time it hadn't. Right until the metal gate closed in her face, Aisada could not have imagined not being allowed to see her son, or that she might lose him. She could never have imagined her world turning upside down so unfairly. It was not Adilet's mother who felt it first, but his father.

He had stopped the bus, screaming "Goddamnit, if we leave we'll lose our son!" Aisada's ears were still ringing with her husband's despairing words. She started crying harder, tears flowing down her face. It hurt her to realize that Salamat, a man, had been the first to understand the bitter truth of their position. Her insides seemed to burn with bitterness. She wept louder and louder, giving voice to her sorrow.

Suddenly the gate creaked and her son appeared. He was pale and frightened. Aisada opened her arms.

"Mama," he said gently, falling into her embrace.

"My joy! Let me take on your troubles! My only hope! My support! How can we lose you, and for no good reason? Promise me we'll never be parted again," Aisada begged him through her tears, pressing her little boy to her heart. Then she held him up by the shoulders. Her puffy red eyes studied him closely. Adilet did not answer her. That was exactly what Aisada had been afraid of. Her heart was bursting from her chest.

She whispered barely audibly, "Let's go see your father." Her knees began to buckle.

The little hotel room was so full of Salamat's smoke that he couldn't be seen.

"Come on in, son!" He waved at the cloud of smoke. "Now listen to me, Adilet. Will you come home or not? Talk plain and don't beat around the bush. When will you come home? Don't leave me and your mother to wear ourselves out guessing. Tell me straight up how things are!"

"I will finish my studies."

"When will you finish? Tell me straight."

"I don't know when that will be."

"God have mercy! How can this be happening? Why this trouble?" his mother keened.

"I don't know, Mama. I really don't."

Salamat interrupted. "Fine. You're going home with us now! I didn't send you here to engage in stupidity!"

"I guess I'm theirs now, Papa."

"What was that?"

"They need me. You don't need me."

"Please don't, son! Don't talk like that! Look at me, your mother, standing here in front of you." Aisada was both tender and suffering. She had recovered from her shock.

"How can you tell your own parents that we don't need you? We most certainly do need you. Papa and I both do. You're our own flesh and blood. Our only hope. There's no one to help us out with the livestock. Papa and I are getting tired. We have more pigs, and the cows are calving one right after the other. We do need you, son!"

"I'm theirs, Mama. I may have to study forty years."

Hearing that, Salamat blew up. "We're leaving right now! How dare you try to make fools of us and laugh at us? Get up, woman. Pick up your bags!"

"What about his clothes? He can't go like that."

"He'll go just like that."

Salamat threw his bag over his shoulder and, grabbing Adilet by the arm, dragged him along. When they got outside, Adilet carefully freed his arm and stopped his father. He looked into his eyes and used hypnosis to relieve his anxiety and anger. Then, to keep him from falling down, he gently leaned him against a fence.

"Mama, take Papa home," Mani Yaso said. "Don't be angry. I must cut myself off from everything."

Part Six

Lama Tsu watched Mani Yaso for a long time. His face was worried. "Why are you so upset, my son? In that state of mind you can't take your exams. Come to my study. I'll help you relax."

He had the young man lie on his back.

"Imagine that you have fallen from a high mountain. You are semi-conscious and cannot feel anything. Your body is lifeless. You cannot move, not even your fingers and toes. Stop the working of your mind."

Mani Yaso had practiced such methods in his meditation training and quickly did all that his teacher suggested. He slowed his heartbeat to forty beats per minute. Lama Tsu quietly took his pulse. Satisfied, he silently left the room.

Mani Yaso walked out of his mentor's study half an hour later. "Now you look the way you ought. You may go take your exam," Lama Tsu told him.

The examination booths were set up in a row in the great hall. Observers sat on chairs placed in a semi-circle. There were two temple police officers at each door. Before the boys entered the hall, they went into a side room where they were undressed, checked from head to toe and given fresh robes. This was how the temple protected young men taking the more advanced exams, so that they didn't damage their reputations during the testing by trying to cheat.

Each student was accompanied into a booth by a member of the commission. As soon as they went in, the doors were shut and seals placed on them. In each booth was a table with a pen and clean sheets of papers. Questions were handed into the booths through oval-shaped windows. Each subject took an entire day of testing.

There were so many questions that the students sat in the booths until ten or eleven o'clock at night. Three times during the testing they were given all the tsampa, tea and other drinks they wanted.

The testing went on like that every day for ten days. Many students are incapable of withstanding the pressure for such a long period of time. These are the ones who knock on their doors for someone to open their booths.

After answering half the questions, many of the students snooze for ten or fifteen minutes at their tables. That energizes them enough to keep writing until sundown. Then they hand in their work and go back to their rooms, where they fall into bed.

The written exam was ten days away. Each student would be asked to write an essay on any topic he wished.

Mani Yaso lost a lot of time choosing his topic. When he looked at the clock, it was already noon. He quickly put his papers in order, chose a topic from among the ones he had jotted down, and began to write.

"What have I gained from Tibetan learning? First of all, the Ganjour, Tanjour and Kalachakra, in which the Wheel of Time and Wheel of Life introduced me to two great mysteries that I had not understood before. I could never have found these great mysteries in any other field of study because no other field of study covers them. Long before our time, long before Plato and Socrates, the Kalachakra looked deeply into the two mysteries of the universe and issued the one true explanation, which is the theory of infinite space and infinite time. Human imagination, as a fruit of the human mind, is also infinite. The greatest power in the world is the human mind. The fastest flight in the world is the human dream. When I was a child, I would look up at the sky and wonder what was beyond the stars and where the sky ended. Later, in school, my teacher told me that space had no end because the universe was infinite. I had a hard time believing her because I could not imagine or comprehend infinity, a universe without borders, without sides, with no measure of time, a bottomless place with no sound and no voice. That is why Socrates avoided explaining the unknowable mysteries of the universe and even

refused to study the issue. The Kalachakra brought me out from behind the curtain of mystery and out of my ignorance. Now I know how the universe, the planets and stars were formed and how they disappear in the unlimited and infinite space, only to be born again and spin in never ending motion – the wheel of life and death. I also know where and how the conditions for DNA arose and how life was born, thousands of living organisms, humans among them.

“Continually living, dying and being reborn in the eternal motion of the universe, everything disappears for a time. Only the rebirth of a living being is eternal and immortal. This ensures the eternity of life. For example, the conditions in which fire is born are eternal. As soon as those conditions are present, fire once again springs to life. Thus fire is unquenchable and eternal! In the same manner, I, Mani Yaso, can die and be reborn. That is the key to my immortality. In another epoch, when the infinite universe dies and is reborn, I will also return to this world. That is what I learned from the Kalachakra. It led me to believe in reincarnation.

“And so, the planet Earth where we live and all the far-off shining planets and stars burning in the sky are not eternal, but changeable. The life of this cosmic cycle will last approximately four and a half billion years. There is an infinite number of such cosmic moments, and the great reason for their rebirth is Parabrahman, which, like the eternal method for making fire, gives birth to a new universe. But what remains in the infinity where all material lived out its life? All that remains are invisible primordial elements in the form of gas. When their atoms attain the seven powers and are turned into heat, all that is left will be a ray of light. Thus, the ray of light is the first concept we can see in the empty, boundless universe. A ray of light brings forth motion, and it is motion that causes turning. Turning creates bonds and interactions between atoms.

“Shake milk and eventually you get butter. Or take any other liquid and it will turn into something you can feel. In the same way, revolving cosmic dust turns into a speck of clay the size of a pea. Over a billion years, that clay turns into a planet and chemical processes bring forth DNA on the planet. A moist, acidic environment evolves and life is once again reborn. Among all the thousands of types of new life, the method by which man is just as stable and unchanging as the method for making fire. Fire is reborn on the planet, and with it an infinite number of living beings, including man. Once again the lotus blooms.

“How have humans evolved on the planet? Since man is capable of learning, storing experience, using that experience to develop and further his science, that means that each new generation possesses more experience than the generation before it. Therefore all of us on the planet Earth in the 21st century, through the molecules of our DNA, are the heir and carriers of experience gained by infinite previous reincarnations. That heritage is stored like an archive in our brain cells and our 33,000 genes. Contemporary science is just beginning to open the gates of the genome. Over the course of a lifetime, one person expends merely a tenth of the neurons in his brain. The rest are a storehouse of the past that is focused on the future. Long ago, the Neanderthals used those stores to develop and eventually become *homo sapiens*. From now on, in order to continue living on Earth until the set time, *homo sapiens* must raise itself another level and become super-human. To do so, humans must discover the extrasensory powers that already exist in our own DNA, namely prophecy, telepathy and levitation. Otherwise we will fall behind the sentient beings on other planets. Some of them have already

surpassed us by several centuries, which is why intergalactic ships in the form of saucers visit Earth to observe us. On occasion, these beings have rescued innocent people who are in trouble or dying and taken them away into the skies. There are many facts that point to this being true. I will be sure to discuss the fate of such people in my next essay. –Mani Yaso.”

After completing the oral and written exams, the trappas removed all the booths and were given three days off to rest. During that time they would be tested in three types of judo.

Mani Yaso attended special physical education classes because so much of his time was spent practicing levitation. During the exam he would have to reduce his weight as far as possible, demonstrate how to detach from the Earth and rise into the air.

Lama Tsu gave him some advice. “Just take your judo test and don’t practice levitation for the next three days. The levitation test will be extremely difficult.”

Heeding his mentor’s advice, Mani Yaso took the test on judo, at which he was already fairly proficient. After that he was able to rest. He needed the time, since the Lama had said all the trappas would have to pass the same subjects again in three days time. During the second round of testing they would have to sit with the Lama one-on-one and answer all of his questions. Three of the seven remaining students were unable to withstand the stress.

On the last day when the test results were announced, only two of the trappas were raised to the level of lama. One of them was Labsang, the son of a member of Tibet’s government. A gifted young man, Labsang was the most renowned and authoritative student at the Jokhang temple. One of the things everyone knew about him was that he had cut all ties to his parents and dedicated himself to a life of scholarship. The only other student to pass was Mani Yaso, but for some reason the ceremony at which he would be named a lama kept getting postponed.

After three days had passed, Lama Tsu told the young man, “We are decisively ready to open your third eye at the beginning of next week. Are you prepared?”

“As you wish. I am always ready for whatever you say, father.”

“We have calculated everything. The second day of next week is your birthday. That is the best day possible, but I must warn you about many things. In the process of evolution, almost every person has an undeveloped third eye. Many cultures of the world have legends about a third eye in the forehead, which can also be found in their artwork and masks. This third eye is connected to the pineal gland, which is under the stria medullaris.

“In ancient times people were all able to use the pineal gland and the third eye, which perceives cosmic rays instead of electromagnetic rays, to see everything from the reaches of space and a person’s internal organs to the structure of any type of matter.

“Believers say that only a god can have this power of sight, not humans, for if humans possessed such powers they would be able to read each other’s secret thoughts, leading to enmity and bloodshed. For this reason, the gods closed the third eye in humans. The pineal gland became dormant but did not disappear. There are some people who can see with their third eye – not clearly, but well enough to see the auras of those around them. You, my son, have that ability. It is a rare gift, Mani Yaso. As the reincarnation of Milarepa, you inspire in us great hopes. We will venture to risk it.

“There is one more thing I want to say: if our attempt is successful, you must swear an oath never to use your gift for evil. The aim of Buddhism is to bring justice to the entire world, wherever man lives. We have one goal, and that goal is justice!”

“That is my goal, too, father. My only goal is justice. If justice rules the world, everything else will fall into place.”

“I understand that you were subjected to injustice before you were even born.”

“I was not aware that you knew about that, father.”

“I collected all the information about you, my son. When we learned that you were named Adilet, or Justice, for a reason, we were very grateful to your parents. The fight for justice on Earth begins with just such small steps. I still have not initiated you into many secrets, my son, but I believe that you, like Milarepa, will join the pantheon of great wise men that have lived since the beginning of time. Each era has its wise men and prophets. Of course, I am not speaking of the world’s three famous prophets. Those three lost their way and left the teaching of the Mystery to follow the religion of a false god. Nor am I speaking of the tyrants and generals of the world. The men I speak of are the humanists who have always stood in opposition to those who spill blood, my son. Most of them have been simple men, except for our first teacher, Gautama Siddhartha, who was a descendent of the Shakyas, who came to India from Central Asia. The first discoverers and founders of the school of the Great Mystery were the yogi Patalanji; Confucius of China, the Tibetan arhats Tsongkhapa, Rigden-Jap and Milarepa, and the Greek philosophers Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato and Socrates. All of them were simple men. In later centuries these humanists were joined by thinkers, philosophers, writers and activists around the world. If it weren’t for their desire to help the human race and their teachings against all the evils on the Earth, we would gradually self-destruct. God willing, I think you will join the warriors of Shambhala. Life is only worthy of reincarnation if it is dedicated to the fight for justice, my son Yaso.”

“Father, I have many questions about Shambhala and Mount Kailash.”

“You will search for the answers your whole life. That is the task that faces you. For now, you must rest.”

On the second day of the week the sky over Tibet was exceptionally clear, like a sapphire. The golden gables of the Potala Palace shone with blinding brightness. Mani Yaso rarely noticed the palace, but on that day he stopped to look closely and the great edifice. Who had built the palace and when? This was the holy Potala where Jesus Christ was taught! Mani Yaso came at the appointed time to see Lama Tsu, who was more than a father to him. Lama Tsu loved the boy with his whole heart, for the boy had been born with a yearning for goodness and an ability to unravel the mysteries of the human soul. Today his mentor would perform a very rare operation on Mani Yaso, whom he loved as his own son.

Dei was pleased. “I knew you would be early,” he said when he popped out of Lama Tsu’s study.

“I didn’t look at the clock,” said Mani Yaso. He tried not to let them see the anxiety that had been with him all morning.

“Lama Tsu will be right out.”

They led Mani Yaso into a room that was divided in two. Soon they were joined by three more lamas dressed in expensive red silk robes edged with gold silk, indicating their high rank. The newcomers were not from the Jokhang temple. One of them listened to Mani Yaso's pulse for a long time.

The lama spoke English without an accent. "Speak it now," he said, looking at Mani Yaso.

Before replying, Mani Yaso looked at Lama Tsu. His mentor smiled and nodded for him to proceed.

"I, Mani Yaso, will never under any circumstances use the powers I have gained through Tibetan learning, the chief of which shall be the opening of my third eye, to harm people, animals or anything living on the Earth!"

The lamas glanced at each other and nodded approvingly. Then they placed an herbal compress on Mani Yaso's forehead, right over the thumb-sized soft spot right above his eyebrows. After wrapping a bandage around his head, they left the room in silence.

"You must expel all thoughts from your mind and lie on your back for six hours," said Lama Tsu. He squeezed the boy's hand firmly.

That evening, all four men returned to Mani Yaso.

Lama Tsu removed the bandage and stroked his favorite student's forehead.

"Good. It has softened well, so it won't hurt at all."

They placed Mani Yaso in a special chair with leather straps that they used to tie his arms down.

Lama Tsu bent down to speak to the young man. "We will not use an anesthetic. After the operation you will recount for us your sensations and feelings."

The lamas opened a case full of shining instruments and began to work. First they swabbed Mani Yaso's forehead three times with a special liquid and dried it with cotton. One of the lamas went around behind the chair. He tilted Mani Yaso's head back slightly and held it tight.

"Are you calm, my son?" asked Lama Tsu.

"Yes."

A shining gold instrument resembling a miniature needle touched Mani Yaso's forehead. He heard a soft buzzing and felt the needle painlessly enter his forehead.

Time seemed to stop for the boy. All he could hear was the quiet sound of the electrical instrument working. Finally the point of the needle passed through his skin and hit soft cartilage. Mani Yaso did not feel any sharp pain, but in the next instant he felt as if his whole body was being poked with needles. He began to shudder as his skin broke out in goose bumps.

Lama Tsu stood in front of his student, his jaw clenched, closely watching the instrument as it worked. Perhaps he stood like that on purpose so that the boy could judge by his face how the operation was progressing.

There was a soft tapping sound and the buzzing stopped. The tip of the whirring gold needle had drilled through the cartilage and touched the pineal gland, waking it from

its sleep. The lama inserted a small plug through the instrument into the pea-sized hole in the boy's forehead and held the tool in place for a little.

Mani Yaso felt incredible changes through his whole body. Now his face tingled and his nose was picking up new smells that he had never known before. Soon the smells disappeared and Mani Yaso felt that he was naked. Then his naked body was immediately clothed in a silky material and in the same instant his sensations were jolted by a powerful flash of light.

Understanding what Mani Yaso was feeling, Lama Tsu gently embraced his head. The young man's heart heard his mentor's thought. "Just wait a bit longer, son. Everything will be fine soon."

When the young man's feverish body returned to normal, the three lamas bandaged his forehead and silently exited the room.

"You must stay in this room for exactly one month, son. I believe the operation went as expected. No one will visit you here but me – all others are forbidden from entering. I will bring you your food. God willing, we will have plenty of time to talk."

Mani Yaso spent the first week lying in the dark room with thick black curtains covering its windows. On the eighth day the curtains were opened slightly. After seventeen days the room became light and the same three lamas returned. They took their time checking Mani Yaso's vital signs and then prepared to remove the plug from his forehead.

Lama Tsu squeezed the boy's hand. "Do not be afraid," he said gently. "Now you will begin to see with your third eye. Tell me how and what you see, and I will explain it all to you."

"Father!" Mani Yaso cried out. He was so upset that he couldn't find words to speak. He stared in surprise at the lamas as they left the room.

"Can you see their auras?" Lama Tsu asked.

"I can only see one of them clearly. He's all wrapped in pale yellow light."

"Wonderful!" Lama Tsu jumped up. "The operation went just as we hoped. Your eye has opened. You had it all along! Milarepa!"

"But father, I don't understand. Why is that lama surrounded by yellow light?"

"That is a rare type of aura. It shows the purity of a person's spiritual life, his thoughts and his wishes for others, son. Each person has his own color of light. Some people have many colors. You and I will be studying this like a school subject. It is one thing to see a person's aura, but an entirely different matter to recognize and interpret them, my son. Simple teachers like me can theoretically read auras but we cannot see them. You now stand much taller than your mentor, Mani Yaso!" Lama Tsu was sincerely joyful. He laughed when he saw how surprised his student was.

"You see light radiating from me and do not understand it. Is that right? Tell me what you see."

"Very pale, soft rays of light. On the right side, a little above your chest, the light becomes green and wavers a little."

"Exactly!" Lama Tsu exclaimed, as if he was the one who had finally attained great standing. His face flushed.

"The green light on the right side of my chest is an old lung complaint I have."

"What does it mean that there are pale rays of light around your head, father?"

“That makes me proud, son. I have never harmed a person in my life or harbored evil or even negative thoughts toward others.”

“I’m very hungry,” the boy smiled, embarrassed. “When I weighed myself, I saw that I’ve lost seven kilograms, father.”

“I know, I know, my son. You have been on a special diet. We will go to the cafeteria now.”

The cafeteria was empty when Lama Tsu and Mani Yaso arrived, but as soon as they entered the young man grabbed his mentor by the arm.

“That man over there is on fire!”

Lama Tsu’s laughter echoed in the hallway. “That man is the cafeteria watchman. He’s an uneducated, simple policeman. He has a fiery temper. His anger is like gunpowder on the tip of his nose. Are his rays of light blue?”

“He’s burning with blue fire.”

“You see everyone as they really are,” Lama Tsu said proudly. Then his face became serious. “From now on you will walk a difficult path. I am afraid you will have to hide from people what you see in them!”

Chapter Three

Slowly, word by word, even a humble soul can unexpectedly reveal surprises. It happened in the cafeteria one day when the cook, a close friend of Barlas, began to boast.

“If I want to die, I can do it any day I want. But I don’t plan to give my soul to God today.”

“How’s that?” Barlas’ single eye opened wide in surprise.

“What do you mean – how’s that?”

“How can you die just like that, whenever you want?”

“It’s a special skill. You have to know how to do it.”

“What kind of skill?”

“I told you. It’s special. Want me to show you? Here. Breathe out and without breathing in, try to pick up that big bucket of water. See? You can’t do it. Now fill your chest with air. If you don’t exhale you can even pick up two of those buckets without any problem. Right? Or here’s another example. If you’re scared or angry, your heart beats faster, doesn’t it? Then if you breathe deeply and hold your breath for a long time before exhaling, and repeat that four times, your heart relaxes, doesn’t it? Of course it does.”

“So you know more than the yogis, don’t you friend?”

“I’m nowhere near being a yogi, but when I have a bit too much to drink all I have to do is breathe deeply three times and I’m sober as a nun and ready to work my shift.”

“Ah. I don’t need to pick up that kind of skill. I don’t drink the devil’s water. But tell me how you plan to leave this world. Don’t be a mule – tell me.”

The cook was surprised by Barlas’ insistence. “Do you want to die or something?”

“Sooner or later we all pass into eternity. I want to learn that skill you have. Is it an easy way to die?”

“It’s never easy to breathe your last breath. You have to stop it gradually, a little at a time.”

“Stop what?”

“Your heartbeat.”

“How can I stop my own heart?”

“By going into a trance. The lamas call it meditating. I learned it from them. You have to practice a long time, friend.”

“I’ll practice! I’ll practice as long as it takes.”

“Get off it, will you? Just live your life. Live a long time. You’re only thirty years old. Me, I want to live a long time.” With that, the cook stood up heavily and made a move to go back to work, but Barlas leaped up and blocked his way.

“Come on, teach me. Be a friend. Do me a good turn.” Suddenly Barlas was trembling.

“You know what? You don’t look so good. Why are you interested in death all of a sudden?”

“I won’t die. Don’t worry. But I want to learn it. We Kyrgyz have a saying: ‘Seventy skills aren’t enough for a wise man.’”

“You promise you won’t die?”

“I’ll die on whatever day you tell me to!”

“But can you learn it? See, it’s not the kind of thing just anyone can pick up.”

“Maybe I can. Teach me, friend.”

The cook sized up Barlas with a look of doubt, even suspicion. His friend had gotten himself under control and looked calm.

“If you promise not to die then I’ll teach you,” the cook finally said.

“I told you I won’t die.”

“Then we can start tomorrow. Bring a clean rag with you.”

“A thick one?”

“No, just a plain handkerchief.”

“Should I fast before I come?”

“No. Go ahead and eat. You’re not planning to die tomorrow, right?”

“Right. Of course not.”

That’s how the cook unexpectedly found himself in the role of a yogi directing a man’s psychophysiology. During the break, after Barlas had dragged plenty of dung bricks to the kitchen, the cook laid him on his back on a mat and began teaching him how to gradually make his breathing slow and shallow.

“If the guard comes in and asks you why you’re lying here, just tell him you’re resting because you have a weak heart. Understood?”

“Okay.”

After Barlas had practiced many days with his friend the cook, it was time for him to practice at home alone.

The cook gave him some last advice. “Now listen. When your breathing stops for a long time and you feel really bad pain in your temples and the back of your head, you have to immediately take the handkerchief off your face or you’ll be sorry. Will you be strong enough or not?”

“Sure,” Barlas assured him, although in his heart he was impatient to master the art of trance and escape to the other world he dreamed of, the world where his most precious Angelica was waiting for him. He spoke not a word about it to his friend, always feigning sincerity and pushing his friend to teach him as fast as possible.

It was an important day for Barlas. Suddenly the sky over all of Tibet was obscured by heavy, black clouds. Not once all day did the skies part to release a downpour. The clouds did not disperse and the air remained heavy. The black sky hung low from dim morning to murky evening, suffocating all living things on the Earth. Barlas felt it in particular, like a lead weight on his head.

Whenever dark clouds gathered in the sky Barlas felt a dull, hopeless heaviness in his soul and a burning sorrow in his heart. It was as if the steel-gray clouds intended to cut him off from Angelica.

Despite the gloomy weather on that day, Barlas quickly finished his work. Keeping his secret plan deep inside, he turned to his friend the cook for one last time with a look of gratitude in his eyes.

"You've dragged in enough dung bricks for three days," the cook said. He looked at Barlas and saw something anxious or agitated in his friend.

Speaking slowly, he said, "Why don't you eat your dinner here?"

"I've got dinner at home," Barlas answered. Then he said goodbye like he always did and hurried to the door.

There wasn't a crumb of food in his poor hut, but he didn't care. He locked the door from the inside and went to his cot without lighting the lamp. His bedclothes were always on the hard cot, since he only rolled it out of the way twice a year at most.

Barlas simply moved the pillow to one side, undressed and lay down on his back. He was tired of everything. He no longer had the strength to continue his pointless existence, without a goal or hope for a better life to keep him engaged in this deceitful, cruel world. The emptiness had been in his soul for a long time. His whole being was gripped by a powerful wish that he could not conquer – the wish to die.

"Nothing could be better than leaving for eternity." He heard this thought as if it were spoken by a persistent voice outside his body. He had grown used to it. His heart was warmed by a conciliatory sense that death awaited him, and the persistent voice was in his ear all the time, always hurrying him into the next world. While he was around other people at work, the voice would grow quiet, hiding for the time being. His whole life from childhood through the present caused him nothing but bitterness over important things left undone, brave goals unattained terrible losses, and a dissatisfaction of the soul and the heart. There was no one episode to point to; all of it was bitterness. For that reason, there was no regret at leaving this life to disturb his heart.

"Barlas regrets nothing!" he would say to himself on occasion when, lying prone in his hard bed, the worm of anger and resentment gnawed away in his chest. Now he lay in silence, cut off from the rest of the world. He gradually went into a trance, hurrying to stop his breath.

But stopping one's breath isn't child's play. Barlas had already learned that. What if his friend had lied to him? The hidden suspicion flashed through his mind, but he ignored the unrest in his soul and persisted in trying to stop his heartbeat.

Still, it is a rare man who has no unfinished business. Barlas was no exception. There was one thing he wanted to do that he still had not done, but he waved the thing away and made his peace. After all, what else could he do?

In this cruel world, sometimes an insignificant wish can prevent a man from doing a great deed. It was a tiny thing that halted Barlas. The previous week he had decided to

find his fellow countryman, the boy Adilet, so he could shake his hand and embrace him one last time as an unobserved farewell.

But as it turned out, Barlas was unable to find Mani Yaso, who was hidden out of reach after his own bodyguard tried to kidnap him.

“What terrible times we live in! You can’t trust anyone. You will have to choose your own bodyguard from now on. Look at the faces of every guard in the temple and choose one who will be respectable and reliable,” Lama Tsu told him.

For two whole days the temple’s guards were sent one by one to Lama Tsu’s study. Mani Yaso sat next to his mentor and studied their auras. He kept his conclusions to himself, however, and remained silent both days. On the third day he named Barlas, his countryman.

“But he isn’t a guard,” Lama Tsu ventured cautiously, looking sideways at his student.

“He is a champion kick boxer.”

“And his aura?”

“Pale and golden.”

“Good. We will go together to see him.”

Many words were exchanged. At the end of the discussion, Barlas refused Lama Tsu’s offer to make him Mani Yaso’s bodyguard.

“My last wish was to see and embrace my dear brother. Now I can go. Do not hold me back, great teacher,” Barlas said with his hand on his heart. He stood to leave, but Lama Tsu laughed affably and stopped him.

“Don’t be in such a hurry,” he said. “If this boy is dear to you, then take care of him. That’s what we’re asking you to do.”

“Baiké, say you’ll do it,” Adilet said in his native language. He gave Barlas a smile full of childlike entreaty.

Barlas scrutinized his brother from head to toe with his one good eye and then stared at the floor. His soul was awash with a jumble of feelings, both love for this young boy from his homeland and a confirmed desire to leave for the next life where his beloved Angelica awaited him.

Finally, Barlas turned to Lama Tsu. “Great teacher, will our Adilet ever go home to his people or not? I need to know.”

“Mani Yaso is a special person on an important journey. Later on, he will be free to visit any corner of the world he desires. But since his every step is fraught with danger, he must always have someone with him whom he can trust as he trusts himself. Would you say I am right about that?”

Barlas did not look at Lama Tsu, but he listened to him closely, straining his good ear. He nodded hesitantly at the lama’s question.

“I just remembered a parable I want you to hear,” Lama Tsu said suddenly. “Once there was a young monk who had not fully discharged his commitments in this sinful world but was in a hurry to reach eternity. He reached an empty monastery at the top of a high mountain and decided to lie down there and release his hold on life through meditation. He lay down on a flat rock near the monastery and prepared to stop his breathing.

“A few days later, he heard a wonderful sound coming from the sky. The monk was already losing consciousness and did not have the strength to see where the sounds

were coming from. 'I don't care,' he thought. 'I prefer to die.' He continued his journey into oblivion.

"The next day, he heard the same glorious sounds. This time they bothered him. 'What is that cursed sound?' the monk thought. He found himself returning from oblivion against his will. He came to – and what a miracle! It was an ordinary golden eagle calling in the sky above him. In Tibet, the golden eagle's call is considered the voice of heaven. Did you know that, my dear Barlas?"

"Of course I know. We Kyrgyz call the golden eagle Winged Pasha. 'Pasha' means king. For us, the golden eagle is the most respected and holy of birds."

Lama Tsu was pleased. "Wonderful! That means you will be able to understand your whole heart what I will tell you." He enthusiastically continued his story. "So the monk who had desired death above all looked up into the sky. Up on a small crag in a high cliff wall a golden eagle was teaching its young to fly. Curious, the monk watched them until his eyes grew tired. He closed his eyelids. Soon he heard a weak chirping sound, only not from up high as he had subconsciously expected, but right next to his ear.

"The monk turned his head and saw one of the yellow-beaked baby golden eagles lying next to him. Its wings were not fully developed and looked bent. Apparently when the poor bird jumped from the high cliff his wings were not yet strong enough to carry him and he plopped down next to the half-conscious, half-oblivious monk who was trying to die.

"When he saw the helpless creature of God the monk was touched and raised himself up. He gently picked up the trembling baby bird and hid it in his robe. Warming it against his body, the monk was sorry to realize that he had no food to give the bird. There was nothing but stones and cliffs around them. He probably would not be able to catch a lizard or a mouse. Unable to think of anything else and not daring to leave the bird to die, the monk began feeding it the lice from his own body.

"The bird soon began to mend and the monk spoke to his lice. 'Little beasts, you drink my blood and feed off my body in order to live. I do not object, for I know the law of survival is harsh. In turn, I ask you to accept your fate. I will feed you to the baby eagle, so drink as much of my blood and eat as much of my flesh as you can and get nice and fat. The bird must always have food to eat.'

"Thus, the monk was forced to continue living by a test of his kindness sent to him by heaven. He withheld not a drop of his blood or an iota of warmth, forgetting about death for the time being.

"One day the monk opened his eyes and saw his feathered charge sitting with some gorgeous falcons. The birds were cleaning and re-arranging their feathers with their beaks and squawking about something like children laughing together about something. They were at the age when they couldn't get enough of playing and soaring through the clear blue sky.

"'Oh, what I wouldn't give to see my little one grow up to be a strong bird with big wings,'" the monk thought. In that instant he resolved that he would see that day. Later he decided he would wait and see how his clever, sharp-eyed eagle became a great and fearless king among birds. In the meantime, much time passed!

"When the gray-bearded monk finally closed his eyes for the last time, his eagle flew down to him with his friends. They placed the monk on their wings and carried the

eagle's father up into the heavens. Thus, the monk's wish came true, both in this world and in eternity..."

Barlas stood up, excited. "I understand, Lama Tsu! Brother Adilet, I understand! Tell me what I have to do. Whatever it is, I will do it."

Chapter Four

Lama Tsu was worried, upset even, when the head of the Tibetan administration⁵ suddenly decided to receive Mani Yaso earlier than the date he had set. There was an entire month left before the official meeting, and Lama Tsu had counted on using that time to prepare his student. Now he would have to do a month's worth of work in just one week.

He had no idea why the leader was in such a hurry to see Mani Yaso. Did he want to assign the young man to a post of some kind? Or was he just eager to see Mani Yaso, about whom rumors had spread through the Buddhist world, no matter how hard the temple tried to hide him? Perhaps the leaders of neighboring nations were peppering the leader with questions about the reincarnation of Milarepa. Or maybe the leader wanted to see Mani Yaso so soon because of the guard's failed attempt to kidnap him.

Mani Yaso was already working ten hours a day, but Lama Tsu added another three hours.

When the Leader had announced two months ago that he would receive Mani Yaso, the decision wrecked all of Lama Tsu's plans and he was despondent for two or three days. Mani Yaso had just begun a series of difficult exercises that Lama Tsu had designed for him and that would take a long time to complete. Those exercises had to be abandoned so that he could prepare Mani Yaso for the various questions he thought the Leader might ask.

One of most important and pressing tasks was to awaken in Mani Yaso's memory, consciousness and unconsciousness the spiritual treasure of the deceased Milarepa – his many philosophical, religious and ethical songs, sayings and teachings, as well as all the astral deeds he had performed during his journeys around the world. Many people who heard about Mani Yaso, even the Leader himself, were extremely desirous of discovering whether this young man from the Jokhang temple was truly the reincarnation of Milarepa or just a trick dreamed up by Lama Tsu. If it was just a risky ploy born of Lama Tsu's fantasy, it threatened to damage the reputation and honor of Lama Tsu and the Jokhang temple, of course, but also of the Leader and all of Tibet, even of the entire Buddhist world. Lama Tsu understood the potential danger, even though on that day seven years ago he immediately accepted on faith that the boy named Adilet from Kyrgyzstan was an exceptional individual. After the mysterious, miraculous event he witnessed in the music room, Lama Tsu believed firmly that Mani Yaso was the reincarnation of holy Milarepa. He was astonished by this discovery and thanked his fate many times over for sending the great yogi's reincarnation to be in his care.

In order to fully open Mani Yaso, Lama Tsu was careful never to talk to him about Milarepa. Many times the boy had asked about Milarepa, but Lama Tsu either answered obliquely or changed the subject. The teacher scrutinized every step his student

⁵ Appointed by Beijing to replace the 14th Dalai Lama, who left Tibet in 1959.

made and every word he said, sometimes retiring to his room to give way to tears of joy when his hopes were validated by Mani Yaso's words and actions.

"The holy Milarepa has returned! Oh world! And it just so happened that he came right to me!" Lama Tsu had hidden his tears of gratitude from the boy many times over the past seven years. They were tears of true joy such as he had never known in his seventy-nine years.

At lunch Mani Yaso went to the cook and asked him if he could make him a tea of boiled nettles.

"What do you want with boiled nettles? Do you want to use it as medicine for some complaint?" the cook inquired.

"No, I don't have any complaints. I just miss the taste of nettle tea," Mani Yaso answered.

Surprised, the cook informed Dei about Mani Yaso's strange wish, and Dei immediately informed Lama Tsu.

"Exactly!" cried Lama Tsu. Milarepa had lived for years as a hermit in a mountain cave, and when he had nothing to eat he drank the water in which he had boiled the leaves of nettles growing along the banks of a nearby stream. As a result of this practice, his hair, beard, moustache, and eventually even his skin acquired a greenish tint. When he remembered this, Lama Tsu wiped away his tears of joy right in front of Dei. Embarrassed, Dei hurried out of the room.

Lama Tsu told the cook, "Make some nettle tea for Mani Yaso, but make it weak." Then, still excited, he decided to confirm his suspicion.

"My son Mani Yaso, do they drink nettle tea in Kyrgyzstan?"

"I don't know, father."

"Have you ever had boiled nettles before?"

"No."

"Then why do you say you miss the taste of nettle tea?"

"I don't know. I remember that when I felt that way in Kyrgyzstan I tried to eat the fresh leaves, but I didn't like them. I've heard that nettle tea is much better."

"I have a question for you. Do you remember what your previous incarnation was singing about when he accidentally broke the pot in which he had boiled nettle tea to drink?"

Mani Yaso could not remember. He rubbed his forehead and temples for a long time trying to remember.

Disappointed, he finally said, "I can only remember two lines. The rest of it escapes me."

"Tell me those two lines!"

"This pot served me well for many years, it was with me yesterday but today it is gone / In this false, evil world the only thing is truth... Isn't that right? I think it is. That's the right answer."

Mani Yaso fell silent, but in a minute his eyes lit up again. "Yes! I just remembered another line. 'The fate of man has always been dreary.'"

“You can’t remember the other lines? Then you must be sure to meditate before you visit the Leader.”

Mani Yaso might not have been inclined to believe in himself, but since he trusted his mentor in all things he decided to spend a week in complete isolation in a dark room without a ray of light in order to recall Milarepa’s wheel of life: his life, his spiritual world, the treasures of his soul.

The bluish stone steps leading from the main entrance to the Potala Palace were like a wide river flowing from a high mountain. Mani Yaso ascended the stairs shoulder to shoulder with his mentor. Before he had come to Tibet, Mani Yaso (or Adilet) had never been particularly interested in the poor. Here in Tibet he rarely caught sight of beggars dressed in rags asking for money. But today he was scared. He had not expected to see such a large crowd of beggars and poor standing right in front of the Leader’s palace. There were dozens, even hundreds, of indigents – bent invalids on crutches, people without legs who somehow managed to crawl around on their knees, men with one arm, men with no arms... Vendors hawking tea, water and gewgaws hustled among the beggars, appealing to passers-by to buy their amulets and other little trinkets of bone or stone. Many of them laid out their cheap wares on the ground in front of them or on tables. In all, the palace square was like a raucous bazaar.

“Father,” Mani Yaso turned to his teacher, trembling, “who are all these people?”

“My son, these are the poor who come here from all over Tibet. They come to the palace to see the Leader, not to beg. Many of them are sick. They believe that the Potala Palace is a holy place and come here to bow down to it. Then they go to the Chakpori monastery on that hill over there, where they are given medicines of various sorts. The monks examine them and treat their illnesses.”

“I didn’t know there were so many poor.”

“It is like this everywhere in the world, my son. There are many such poor in Tibet because our religion does not incite people to accumulate riches and live a frivolous, happy and sated life. You may be poor and penniless, but live an honest life and always follow the path of justice. That is what our faith teaches.”

Engrossed in talk, teacher and student did not notice when the stairs came to an end. Suddenly they found themselves right by the massive brown doors of the Potala. Mani Yaso was pleased to see that all the muscular young guards knew Lama Tsu. Smiling respectfully, they bowed to him and pointed the way. Right before entering the Potala Lama Tsu turned to Barlas, who was walking behind them in his guard’s uniform, gesturing for him to wait there for them.

The Leader lived and worked on the fourth floor of the palace, so they had to go up even more steps. Although Lama Tsu had reached eighty years of age, he had climbed the palace’s outer steps without trouble, but by the time they got to the inner stairs he was walking like a tired old man.

“Father, let me carry you,” Mani Yaso offered. He was leading his teacher by the arm.

“Are you strong enough?” Lama Tsu laughed, catching his breath.

“Yes, father.”

“Then be patient. The time is not far off when you will carry me in your arms.”

On the fourth floor, Lama Tsu pointed to a door on the right. “That is the hall of Holy Incarnation. It has sculptures of our three previous Dalai Lamas. You will see those later.”

Now they were stopped by a large, dark yellow curtain, one side of which suddenly opened. Teacher and student entered a large hall with bright religious paintings and rugs hung on the high walls. The hall was guarded by green dragon figures. There were enamel, porcelain and marble busts and figurines of various gods from Tibetan mythology set out in a row on a series of low tables.

Right away, a lama in a dark red robe came out of the door opposite and beckoned to Lama Tsu. Left alone, Mani Yaso felt tiny and timid in the large hall with its high ceiling. Soon he was called in to the Leader.

The Leader’s throne room was much smaller than the outer hall but decorated very ostentatiously.

The young man did as his teacher had instructed him, bowing his head and approaching the throne. When he was three steps away from the throne, he fell to his knees and greeted the Leader by bowing three times. After that, he took the silk scarf from around his arm and carefully placed it on the leader’s knees. In return, the Leader hung the same kind of expensive silk scarf around the boy’s neck.

“Sit here, next to your teacher,” the Leader said to the boy as he stepped back.

Mani Yaso took his seat on a pair of stacked cushions and raised his bright, engaging eyes to the Leader, who looked kindly down at him. There was joy and surprise and approval in the leader’s eyes.

Mani Yaso sat with his head high, but his long lashes hid his beautiful, expressive eyes. He had a silk cord tied around his forehead.

The leader seemed to collect himself. He turned to Lama Tsu. “Tell me, esteemed teacher, where shall we begin our talk?”

“Wherever you wish, Your Holiness.”

“Obviously it was a great surprise to us, quite strange, in fact, that our Milarepa was reborn in a foreign land, not in Tibet.”

Hearing these words, Lama Tsu bowed his head. The Leader had once been his student and he knew he was capable of saying foolish things on occasion. Although it was a peculiarity of his, Lama Tsu had not expected him to be quite so tactless right at this moment, especially with Mani Yaso. Feeling awkward, he opened his mouth and coughed.

The Leader caught his mentor’s hint but had to continue on in the same vein.

He smiled at Mani Yaso, “I must personally verify that everything our esteemed Lama Tsu has told me regarding you is the truth.”

Lama Tsu was displeased by the Leader’s words, but he hid his displeasure deep inside to avoid angering his ambitious leader, a man imposed on him by the will of a powerful state that dictated its conditions to tiny Tibet.

“What do you say to that, esteemed Lama Tsu?” the Leader asked. Deep in thought, Lama Tsu had not been listening. He did not know how to answer, so he told the truth.

“I did not hear what you said, Your Holiness.”

The Leader laughed and slapped his thigh. "I see you've grown hard of hearing. I am saying that Mani Yaso will stay with me for a week to be tested. In one week I am expected a very important delegation. If Mani Yaso passes my test, then he will be present at the important meeting. If his third eye is truly open then he can serve for the good of Tibet. That is what I'm talking about. What do you say to that, Lama Tsu?"

The teacher looked briefly at the Leader and said nothing. Discipline and diplomatic etiquette prevented him from refusing. The Leader phrased the issue as if it were in the interests of Tibet. The Leader could have no higher interest. Nor could Lama Tsu.

Lama Tsu replied, "Your Holiness, you are well aware of our program's discipline and strict requirements. If Mani Yaso misses even a week of his studies it will be an irreparable loss. But you never repeat yourself and there can be no objection to your will, esteemed leader. Decide for yourself."

Again the Leader laughed. "You never answer anything without putting part of the responsibility on the other person. I know you well. But thank you for your answer, even if it is a vague one. The boy will remain in Potala for one week. That is my decision!"

"You will remain here in the palace, my son," Lama Tsu told his student with a heavy heart after they left the Leader. "I suppose the leader will mainly be asking you about Milarepa, in which case I am not worried about you. But be very tactful and cautious."

"Can I walk you back to the temple and then come back, father?"

"No, that is not necessary. I will take your bodyguard Barlas with me. You will have no need of him here."

Mani Yaso's days in the palace did not go as Lama Tsu had expected. They passed in an entirely different fashion. To tell the truth, at first the boy did not understand what was going on. He lived in comfort and ate all the best food – his plate was always full of berries and fruits he had never seen before and all sorts of delicacies. Mani Yaso did whatever the Leader instructed him to do without asking questions. He considered it his mission and a privilege to serve the great Leader, of whom he had always been in awe. His heart filled with pride, and without his even noticing it that emotion awoke in him his long-slumbering ego.

For the third day in a row, Mani Yaso sat on the other side of a curtain that was closed behind the Leader. His task was to study the aura of each person who came in to speak to the leader and afterwards to decode it – what the visitor was thinking about and what secret thoughts were hiding in his soul. For some reason the Leader was in a hurry, calling in dozens of his servants every day. He talked to them one on one, asking them to report on their work and achievements before giving them new orders and duties. He was obsessed with learning everything about each employee and turning each of their inner

worlds inside out. He asked Mani Yaso questions in Tibetan and in English. When the boy answered, also in both languages, he wrote down his words.

This time the Leader went behind the curtain to Mani Yaso.

“A lama will enter the room in a minute. I want you to study him carefully with your third eye. Always remember that you and I are working for the good of the Tibetan people, Yaso,” the Leader emphasized. His face showed that he was very pleased with the young man. He stood at the mirror for a while smoothing out the hem of his brownish-yellow robe and adjusting the cap of the same color that was on his head.

“I will soon raise you to the level of lama,” he said to Mani Yaso as he walked back to his silk cushions.

The lama who came in was tall and thin with a pale face. His clothes were very like the Leader’s robes and when he spoke with the leader there was a courteous smile on his lips. However, Mani Yaso was surprised to discover that the man had no love for the Leader. He neither liked nor trusted the leader. Mani Yaso was anxious. Although the man was outwardly calm and refined, inside he was ready to attack the Leader. All the while he was nodding his head in agreement, inside he was furiously thinking, “You Han aggressors will never force Tibetans to assimilate.”

Aloud, he was pointedly polite to the Leader. “Your Holiness! Are you sure that Lama Don, whom you appointed last week as head of the finance department will, will be able to perform his duties properly?”

While he was asking the Leader this question, inside he was thinking, “That man, Lama Don, will damage your authority and your honor. And I hope he does it soon. Then we will talk about you.”

Meanwhile, the Leader replied, “Toiba, I know that you are, shall we say, somewhat indisposed to Lama Don. But I need your work! Your work! If we are together, what can Don’s people do to us?”

“You are right, but still I would ask you to be careful,” Lama Toiba warned him. Inside, he was thinking, “I won’t waste my time talking with this evil fool until the 14th Dalai Lama returns. I’ll leave for India and leave him to his fate!”

Then he bowed to the Leader and asked permission to leave.

As soon as he had seen the man out, the Leader called Mani Yaso to him.

“Now then, my face-reader! Tell me about the man. What was the fool thinking? What were his thoughts?”

“Bad ones,” said Mani Yaso. He did not sit down on the cushions the Leader pointed to.

“I know they were bad ones. I want to know the details.”

After Mani Yaso laid it all out for him, the Leader’s face grew pale. He jumped up and then froze for a few seconds. “So he wants to go to India? To the 14th Dalai Lama? And he thinks I’m an evil fool? I see! He’s a dog! I’ll send you to India, alright. While I’m...I’ll get you! Watch out, fool!” Those were the angry thoughts Mani Yaso read in the Leader’s face. Embarrassed, he turned away.

A whole two months had passed since he had taken leave of Mani Yaso. Lama Tsu sat alone in his study with the door closed and cried. He had never imagined that in

his old age he would grow soft and cry like a small child. He was surprised and embarrassed. In Tibetan society, especially among lamas, men of Lama Tsu's stature were expected to have iron wills and not bend before any of life's hardships. When his tears had somewhat relieved the bitterness in his soul, Lama Tsu dried his eyes with his handkerchief.

For over two hours Lama Tsu's assistant Dei had been standing guard at the door. He opened the door a crack and, seeing his teacher hunched over, silently closed it again. He was afraid to say anything. When one's teacher is upset or worried, one must wait patiently until the teacher speaks. That was the unwritten rule of their relationship. However, it was rare for Lama Tsu to sit for so long without saying a word. What was the matter with him?

Dei was overcome by anxiety and impatience.

At last Lama Tsu decided that he had dried his tears enough. He did not bother to look in the mirror, since he knew that his eyes were red and puffy. He hoped that his tears had dried and would no longer choke him. He softly pulled his bell string.

Dei appeared as if he had been there the whole time.

"Any news from Potala?"

"No news, but you've been called for. The Leader expects you in half an hour." Lama Tsu thought his assistant's voice sounded harsh, but perhaps he was imagining it.

If he had just half an hour, he would have to leave right away. He would even have to ask the rector for his car.

His assistant guessed what he was thinking. "The car is waiting."

Lama Tsu would have preferred to avoid the car and simply walk without hurrying. For forty years he had walked to the palace, but now he was forced to take a car.

"I'd rather walk. The fresh air and warm spring breeze would fix my eyes in no time," Lama Tsu thought with regret as he dressed. "But it's getting harder for me to make it up the hill, even when there's no hurry. I'm old. But of course you feel old when the boy you taught becomes Leader and then makes you wait two months without even condescending to invite you for a visit. It's enough to make anyone old! Bear me up! Give me the strength to compose myself."

Try as he might to compose himself, Lama Tsu's hands betrayed him, trembling. Right away he put two sheets of paper on the Leader's table.

"What are these?" the leader asked, confused. He was about to sit back down after standing up to greet Lama Tsu and show respect for his teacher.

"These are two of your high decrees, most esteemed Leader."

"What is the matter? Do you not like them?"

"I have not shared this information with the members of the Jokhang temple. I decided I needed to speak with you first."

"I am all ears."

"You have made Mani Yaso a lama. I am not opposed, but I think there is no need to give him such a high title yet, since it could have a negative effect on the boy's perception of himself and on his ego. Furthermore, no matter who the candidate is, I

believe it is right and proper for the Jokhang temple to assign the title. That is the way it has always been.”

A sarcastic smile touched the leader’s imperious face. “High decrees are to be obeyed, not discussed, esteemed Lama Tsu. Now continue. I am listening.”

“The contemporary title of lama can do nothing to dignify the reincarnation of Milarepa, most esteemed leader.”

“Right. What is the other issue you wanted to discuss? I am listening.”

“The second thing I wanted to say is about your other decree. The last time I was here you said Mani Yaso would spend two weeks here. Two months have passed. The boy has not completed all of his classes at the temple and therefore cannot remain here at the palace for ever, most esteemed leader. If you do otherwise, his future will be irreparably and irreversibly damaged.”

“First of all, he is not a boy. He is a young man! And second, don’t you believe that the future of this sixteen-year-old is to serve Tibet? That is what I believe!”

“Yes, and other peoples, too. If necessary, Mani Yaso will serve the whole world. But he is not ready for that now, most esteemed leader.”

“He most certainly is! I recently met with trade representatives from a neighboring state. Do you remember? I believe I mentioned it to you. Mani Yaso gave me invaluable assistance. If it weren’t for him they would have deceived us again. The young man is ready for service. And you deserve much of the credit, esteemed Lama Tsu. Do not worry yourself but calmly do your work.”

“No, I am not worried, most esteemed Leader! I...I don’t think I can explain it to you. Mani Yaso cannot be a servant for use in small, everyday affairs. And furthermore, he has not finished even one half of his studies!”

“Lama Tsu, this is the first I hear that the Leader’s business is in small, everyday affairs. I think others do not agree with you!”

“Try to understand, Your Holiness! You are preventing the progress of the great Milarepa. Mani Yaso...”

“The great Milarepa was, first and foremost, a Tibetan patriot, which is more than I can say of you, Lama Tsu. I must say it to your face!”

“Pardon me, Your Holiness! Milarepa teaches us to be patriots of Tibet but also of the human race.”

“In my view, Tibet comes first. All else is secondary.”

“I will not argue with you, Your Holiness. Perhaps you are right. But the mouse runs along the ground and the eagle soars in the sky. It is not up to you to change their places.”

Never before had Lama Tsu felt such uncontrollable anger toward anyone. Never before had he spoken so harshly. Feeling blameworthy and not daring to look at the Leader, he was in a hurry to leave. He could not think here. Back at his study he would think about how to snatch Mani Yaso out of the grasp of this omnipotent and insatiable power.

The Leader was seized by fury. Before Lama Tsu could even stand up he began to shout in a staccato, “Do you think you are the only lama who can teach Mani Yaso? I’ll find another! As of today he is no longer your student!”

Lama Tsu felt as if a knife had been thrust into his already aching heart. This deadly thrust was the last thing he had expected from his leader. Unable to speak, Lama Tsu weakly sat back down in his chair.

Mani Yaso was sitting in the Leader's library. He had no inkling, and his heart did not warn him, that his mentor, a man dearer to him than his own father, had been dealt a shocking blow in his old age and was at that moment sitting not far away in the leader's office.

It was Mani Yaso's second visit to the library and he did not want to be there. He had made such a fool of himself on his first visit that he avoided the place, but today the Leader had dismissed him before Lama Tsu arrived and ordered him to stay in the library. Mani Yaso did not understand the reason for the order. He would have known instantly if he had seen the leader's face, but the leader avoided this by delivering his order through an assistant, as was his habit.

Mani Yaso would never in his whole life forget the discomfiture of his first visit to the library. It all happened suddenly. The Leader's family had organized a buffet reception in the library to celebrate Mani Yaso's elevation to lama. The young man had already been their guest a few times and participated in official ceremonies, so he knew the first family well.

The Leader's wife was a fair-skinned, vivacious and clever woman. She obviously admired the young man and couldn't take her eyes off him, even in her husband's presence. But for some reason she refused to allow him to open his third eye, asking that he keep a ribbon tied on his forehead.

Mani Yaso was not wary of the woman because she always radiated warmth and kindness, bringing him food and exhorting him to "eat something, drink something, sweetheart" in her cheering, velvety voice. Perhaps she reminded him of Aisada, the mother he had left behind in far-off Kyrgyzstan. He could barely remember her face, but he often felt a aching, hidden need to see her.

On the day in question, the first lady of Tibet and the mistress of the palace imparted glittering splendor to everything she touched. Always graceful, she busily moved around the hall giving orders as her beautiful, shining braids sliding across her back.

Everyone waited a long time for the Leader to arrive. Finally word came that he would be unable to attend the celebration. Then his wife called her two teenage daughters into the hall, as well as her oldest son and two or three other close friends of the family. She seated Mani Yaso among them. The young man had been anxious and worried before coming into the room, and as soon as he crossed the threshold he was blinded by the room full of people. It seemed to him that he was surrounded by women.

Before Mani Yaso could master his anxiety at being seated between the Leader's two daughters, the first lady took him by the hand and led him away. He followed her obediently to the center of the room.

In the blink of an eye the woman effortlessly removed Mani Yaso's light brown trappa's robe from its fastening on his left shoulder. Tossing it aside, she began to dress him in the expensive robe of a lama.

Standing there in his underwear, the young man suddenly found himself more or less being embraced by this curvy, fair-skinned woman. Goosebumps covered his skin while she put the robe on him, adjusted it on his shoulders and smoothed it down his sides. Suddenly he was aroused. If only the first lady would finish messing with his robe and stop touching him with her warm breath. Everything went black in Mani Yaso's eyes. All he could feel was his heart beating faster and louder. Cunningly, the woman began stroking his body as she adjusted his sleeves. If only the hem of the ill-fated robe would straighten out at the seams. Then abruptly, like a pair of nimble fish, the woman's white hands seemed to accidentally brush against his sacred, burning rod, which was rock-hard and ready to explode. Mani Yaso strained with all of his will, but the great power of nature yields to no amount of reasoning and it did its work this time. The young man's body knew pleasure. Like a bullet released from the barrel of a gun, a white stream gushed through his thin pants and soiled the woman's hands before sliding down his inner thighs and tight calves and pooling in his leather slippers.

So great was Mani Yaso's shame that he almost fainted. He ran from the hall and raced downstairs into his own room, where he locked the door. There he lay motionless on his bed, without eating or drinking, until the shadows grew long. Late in the evening one of the Leader's assistants came to inform him that the leader would be receiving an official delegation from Nepal at ten the next morning and that he was expected to be there. Only then did Mani Yaso begin to recover.

Now he found himself again in the hated library. For two months he had avoided the Leader's family, running from his wife like the devil from holy water. Whenever he saw the two daughters he hid as fast as he could.

One day at lunch in the dining room, the Leader's youngest daughter frowned and said, "Father, your new assistant Mani Yaso is crazy. Last time when Mama tried to put his robe on him he ran away."

"It's true. Ever since then he has been avoiding us whenever he sees us," the oldest daughter answered.

Their mother looked at the girls sternly. "Do not bother your father when he's eating."

"What do you mean he ran away?" the Leader asked his wife.

"Your daughters are exaggerating as usual. As soon as the young man had his robe on he got embarrassed and hurried to leave. Apparently he's very timid and shy. He wouldn't even sit down at the table to eat with us." The bold, lascivious woman easily put an end to the awkward conversation.

When she learned that Mani Yaso was alone in the library, she put on her felt slippers and noiselessly went in.

"How are you doing, young man?" she asked in her melodious, subtly languorous voice.

Mani Yaso jumped from his seat in surprise. Blushing, he turned away.

"Your clothes don't look fresh. You should change your robe more often." The woman began stroking the trembling young man. An intense, hypnotic force overcame

her. She wanted to soften and then tear to pieces this devilishly good-looking, frightened, trembling young man right there where they stood.

Luckily for Mani Yaso there was a knock at the door, which the sly woman had managed to lock behind her.

“Come in and have a seat, Lama Yaso. I have very good news for you,” the Leader greeted him in a tone of exaggerated cheerfulness. For some reason he stood up when the young man came in. Still not accustomed to his new title, the young man grew embarrassed, bowed three times and went down on his knees.

“First of all, starting today I will be paying you a monthly salary. You will make twice as much as my first assistant, but he does not need to know that. Secondly, you will no longer study at the Jokhang temple. You will be studying here at the palace. You will have another lama as your teacher. I will introduce you to him this evening.

Mani Yaso raised his eyes in surprise. “What about Lama Tsu?”

“He’s worn out, lost his sharpness. He was against my making you a lama and disagreed with my order to that effect. And you need a teacher who is stronger than Lama Tsu. The poor man gave you everything he could. He doesn’t have anything left to teach you.”

“Pardon me, Your Holiness, but Lama Tsu has taught me less than half of what he knows.”

The Leader laughed. “That’s what he told you! But he’s run out of juice. You’ll see that for yourself when you listen to your new teacher this evening.”

Chapter Five

“Esteemed Lama Tsu, we were one juniper board short of finishing the box. The carpenter wants to know if it would be alright to use another type of board for the side.” Dei waited for an answer, but the teacher did not speak. He lay in bed, detached from everything, and had not been to his study once in the past week. He hadn’t had a bite to eat for three days and after a week in bed was very weak. He wouldn’t say what the matter was. If he had complained of being ill Dei would have brought him medicine. But he said nothing.

All Dei had from him was a task Lama Tsu had given him the week before – “Go to the carpenter and order a box of juniper boards large enough for a man sitting in the lotus position to fit inside. Ask him to make it quickly. I will pay him right away.”

Apparently the carpenter had more work than he could handle and just didn’t seem to get around to the box. Dei had hoped it would be finished today, but now another excuse had cropped up. Supposedly the man was just one board short of the juniper he needed to finish the right side.

As he stood and waited for an answer, Dei kept his eyes on Lama Tsu. Melancholy thoughts overcame him. His teacher’s eyes were half-opened or closed. His face was hollow and his skin as pale as a wilted lotus petal.

Dei decided to repeat the question. “Esteemed Lama...” He took his teacher’s hands in his own.

“I think,” Lama Tsu answered in a wheezing, barely audible voice, “that he should not finish it with a regular board. It would soon decay. Pay him well and let the box sit in his workshop for now. You can get it when it is needed. My son Dei, you are like a son to me. I see no difference. I love you no less than Mani Yaso. I have found earthly joy in living and working with good people. Our holy father Milarepa was reborn and came to my hands. That is the greatest joy in my earthy life. But he fell into the deadly jaws of power. He must be freed as soon...as possible...” He stumbled, swallowing the salty lump in his throat. Tears shone in the corners of his eyes. Dei understood that his teacher wanted to tell him something important and sacred, so he got on his knees to be closer to him.

“I have thought and thought, and found no answer. Who can rein in the Leader? Mani Yaso could put him in his place, but I think this is not the time for it...” Lama Tsu said with a heavy sigh. He thought for a minute and continued, “There is only one way, my son Dei. I must leave this world as soon as possible in order to free Mani Yaso from his captivity at the Leader’s. I am already very late. If I had not met Mani Yaso thirteen years ago I would have left then. I was already sixty-six and I was ready to leave this world while I was strong in mind and body. After all, I will need strength and energy when I return to the world. But just when I had decided to leave before I was bent with age, the Creator put that exceptional boy in my hands like a star. How can I thank you for that, all-powerful Creator? I am pleased and grateful to you, Creator! My son Dei, hide these three letters without opening them. Mani Yaso should come to my funeral. Have our rector inform him. And I will tell him on my own. Then you must give Mani Yaso these three letters. Do not let them fall into anyone else’s hands. Do you hear me, Dei?”

“Into Mani Yaso’s hands?”

“Yes, but tell him that he must only open the first letter. Then he will understand when he needs to open the other two. Do you hear me, Dei?”

“I hear you, father. Would you like me to bring you some food?”

“No, that isn’t necessary. I can’t be late. I am ready for the journey, so listen to me well. Dig a hole and put the juniper box in it. Then put my body inside in the form of a lotus. Fill the rest of the box with fine salt and close the lid. Use stones to carefully line the side of the box that is missing one board. Put a marker on my grave after I am buried. The rest is for Mani Yaso to read in my letter.”

Three days later Lama Tsu stopped breathing and lay peacefully. According to tradition, a monk of the Jokhang temple dressed in a yellow robe knelt at his feet and recited the Bardo Thodol as the teacher’s soul made its way into the next world.

The teacher had repeated the Wheel of Life three times. He had perfected his acts, thoughts, deeds and all his spiritual qualities, always measuring himself against the Buddha while striving to attain the exalted title of “Human.” All of Buddhist Asia knew of Lama Tsu as a man following the highest goal. Furthermore, everyone had been waiting for the lama to voluntarily leave this world as he followed his mindful, sacred goal. Perhaps that gave Lama Tsu another good reason to hurry into the next world.

On the following day the deceased was buried. It was done as Lama Tsu had instructed his faithful assistant Dei. Neither the Leader nor Mani Yaso came to bid him farewell.

According to the Panchen Lama, Tibet's leader left the same day to pay an official visit to Beijing with Mani Yaso as a member of his entourage. The Leader was very displeased that Lama Tsu's body was to be placed in a box and buried instead of cremated as is the custom in Tibet. But Dei did not learn that from the Panchen Lama. He heard it from others.

That evening Dei received another piece of bad news, this time from the temple's cook. The Kyrgyz Barlas had gone to his final repose in his small mud hut, dressed in his yellow monk's robe.

When Barlas' soul ascended into the heavens at his cremation ceremony, his friend the cook and Dei were surprised to see many people, including the Panchen Lama, come to bid him farewell.

There was a special flat place in the red cliff behind the temple where Barlas' body, wrapped in a white sheet, was placed on the thick pyre he had built when he was still alive. After a monk read the Thodol, they lit the fire. The fire was cracking and beginning to send up sparks when suddenly everyone heard gunshots. Many people shuddered and were afraid. The shots were fired by guards from the Jokhang temple and other temples who chose that way to honor the memory of Barlas, who had been an extraordinary guard. The sound of the farewell shots seemed to linger in the air. All of the guards knew the name of Barlas and the legend of his boxing success and his later suffering. The grief-stricken guards stood at attention while the flames rose into the sky and then died down, finally flickering out, leaving gray ashes behind.

The cook and Dei found a sad letter from Barlas: "What a pity! After years of wandering far from home, I finally thought I had found peace in faithfully serving my kinsman, my highly esteemed little brother, but it did not happen. The only joy in my earthly life was stolen and hidden away in the palace of Tibet. Now I guess my countryman Adilet does not need me, so here is my last wish – put my ashes in a glass urn and give it to him. If he ever visits Kyrgyzstan, he should commit my ashes to my own earth."

Living at the palace put the young Lama Yaso beyond the reach of regular folk and even of many renowned lamas, so he did not receive the deathbed letters of Lama Tsu. Barlas' ashes in the glass urn remained in the keeping of his friend the cook.

That evening two highly placed lamas were very anxious as they waited to meet each other. Lama Yaso was to meet his new teacher in the Leader's office. The leader said that this new young mentor was stronger and more spiritually perfect than Lama Tsu. That appeared to be the reason for the young Mani Yaso's worry. He was surprised at what the Leader had said about Lama Tsu. He had not lost his faith in his favorite teacher, but he did not dare counter the Leader and declare his refusal to study with anyone but Lama Tsu. He was forced to hide his deep respect for his teacher, who was like a father to him, deep in his heart.

Lama Busmen, recently named Mani Yaso's mentor and teacher by the Leader, was experiencing discomfiture and even apprehension. He was expected to teach not an average monk, but the gifted youth from Kyrgyzstan who was the reincarnation of holy Milarepa.

Busmen, who had received a secular education in London and later returned to Tibet to attain the rank of lama in his home country, had been directly involved in proving that the young Lama Yaso was a saint. That was apparently the reason Lama Busmen was worried.

Before the meeting, the Leader told Mani Yaso, "I think it best that you cover your third eye so that your teacher does not feel uneasy when he meets you for the first time."

"As you wish, Your Holiness. I have no desire to open my third eye. After all, seeing and knowing another man's inner life and reading his thoughts is not exactly honorable, to put it mildly."

"Exactly. My dear Yaso, your gift should only be used in the interests of the Tibetan state."

"But Your Holiness, I see that your servants have begun to hate me."

"Why is that? Who do you mean?"

"The ones you have fired or punished harshly."

"Do not worry about them, young lama. They have themselves to blame. Do you see how people are? They pretend to be devoted servants, bowing to me and flattering me, but their thoughts and intentions were hostile. If it weren't for you, my two-faced servants could have done Tibet great harm. So do not worry in the least about them. The holy Milarepa is with me. Let it be known to all enemies, scoundrels, hypocrites and rabble-rousers! I will..."

Just then one of his assistants opened the door and reported that Lama Busmen was in the waiting room.

"Show him in," said the Leader, leaving the rest of the conversation for later.

Lama Busmen turned out to be a tall young man with long arms. He looked like an Indian with his dark skin and long nose. As soon as he appeared in the doorway Mani Yaso recognized him. He was one of the three surgeons who had opened his third eye.

When they had taken the bandage off after the operation, the first thing Mani Yaso had seen with his third eye was the aura of Lama Busmen.

"His soul and his wishes are pure." That was how the overjoyed Lama Tsu had explained the pale light radiating from Lama Busmen. Now when he saw the man again, Mani Yaso smiled politely.

"Well then, take your seats. I believe this is not the first time you two have met, is it?"

Before Mani Yaso could say anything, Lama Busmen answered the Leader, "You are correct, Your Holiness. As you ordered, I participated in opening the new Milarepa's third eye."

"Mani Yaso, did you recognize this man?"

Still smiling radiantly, Mani Yaso nodded. Without speaking, he stood up and respectfully placed the silk scarf from around his neck on Lama Busmen's knees.

"Esteemed lama," said Busmen as he stood and bowed to Mani Yaso, "I take this silk scarf from you as a sign of your respect for me, but I believe that we must all bend

our knees to the holy Milarepa.” He looked at the Leader as if to ask “What do you say to this?”

The Leader broke out in a laugh. “Go right ahead and bow to each other all you want. But don’t forget who is the student and who is the teacher. I want Mani Yaso to learn the monk Dodai’s powers of sorcery as quickly as possible. Tibet’s enemies are multiplying among us. They must be outed and given the punishment they deserve!”

The Leader cast an appraising eye on the two men sitting before him. Satisfied by their silence and obedient faces, he continued.

“Then let me introduce Lama Busmen properly. His full name is Naing Sing Busmen. He is a true Bod⁶ and he speaks English better than an Englishman. Lama Busmen, am I right that you are prepared to teach our young Lama Mani Yaso?”

“I am always prepared to assist Saint Milarepa, Your Holiness. And I am extremely proud that you have entrusted this important office to me. I only have one question to ask, Your Holiness.”

“What is it?”

“You know what it is. I am a guru in the tradition of Agni yoga and have no knowledge of the magic of Dodai.”

“You will merely be supervising our young lama. I will explain the rest later.”

“Will I be teaching Mani Yaso about Agni Yoga?”

“No. Tibet has no time for you to fly to other planets and look for other worlds.”

“I see.” Lama Busmen’s face fell. “Then why am I needed?” he thought to himself. He looked questioningly at the Leader, who said nothing.

After thinking for a minute, the Leader replied, “I have an important reason for giving you this duty. If you discharge it well, you will be sure to receive the post you requested.”

Dei awoke to a crash. It sounded like something had fallen. He lifted his head and rose up on his elbows. He looked around and rubbed his eyes. Everything in the small room seemed to be in order. But what had fallen? Had he dreamed it?

Dei sat in bed for a long time. His whole being was aware of the fact that he had been left all alone in this world. His heart ached, filling his insides with the sharp pain of having lost the man he had lived with for twenty years, serving him faithfully and honorably and giving him steadfast support throughout his life.

Two weeks had passed since Lama Tsu’s burial. Ever since, Dei had struggled to make peace with the fact that he had lost the one person he had been closest to. And Lama Tsu’s death did not feel at all like true death. Was he dead or not? Besides Dei there were many people who could not figure it out, since Lama Tsu had sat in the box in lotus position for many days before he finally stopped breathing. His body did not touch the earth. All the space between Lama Tsu’s body and the walls of the box was filled with the purest salt, which was bluish in color. Only after that did they close the box, lower it into the ground and cover it with earth.

Dei saw Lama Tsu several times each day. He saw all of his movements and actions, especially of his last few days, as if it were a movie playing before his eyes.

⁶ *Bod* – the Tibetans’ ancient name for themselves.

Without hurrying, Dei dressed noiselessly, had a bite to eat and sat back down on his bed. He did not know where to go or what to do. He had no duties and no other service as yet in the temple. There was just one important task that concerned him. At ten o'clock in the morning he was to give the three letters Lama Tsu left for Mani Yaso to a trusted person, one of the teacher's students. They had agreed on the time. The man was supposed to find a way to get the letters to Mani Yaso. True, it was not easy for ordinary servants to get to the top floors where Mani Yaso lived and worked. The palace's upper floors belonged solely to the Leader and his family. Nonetheless, they had to find a way to reach Mani Yaso.

Dei had already tried to hand over the letters several times. The first time he asked a friend who had access to the upper floors of the palace, but a few days later the man brought the letters back.

He said, "It looks like they have your Mani Yaso under wraps. No one can get through to him, not even a mouse."

The rector of the Jokhang temple made an attempt to give Mani Yaso the letters, but then he gave up his desperate attempts to see Mani Yaso.

The Panchen Lama seemed scared for some reason.

Soon they found out from one of the Leader's assistants that the leader had issued an order that no one be allowed to see Mani Yaso without his knowledge. Anyone who even attempted to do so would be made to regret it.

After that rumor came to light, there were no more brave men willing to help Dei. Getting the letters to their intended recipient had become a serious problem. Today would be the last attempt. The monk who had promised to do all he could to get the letters to Mani Yaso was a relative of Lama Tsu's who had been raised by him. He was the half-brother of a guard on the palace's second floor.

At the appointed time Dei approached the main palace of Tibet. He suddenly shuddered in awe at the majesty of Potala. He stopped at a large puddle left by the previous day's rain. Even in the rippling, clear water the reflection of the tall, fortress-like palace barely wavered. After reluctantly admiring the image, Dei walked on. Anyone who saw Dei at that moment would have seen that he was scared, even afraid of his own shadow, and walking timidly. Dei was well aware that the Leader had no love for him or for the deceased Lama Tsu, but he could not understand why. Therefore he was afraid. If he fell into the hands of the Leader's servants as he tried to hand over the letter he would be severely punished.

Before, there had always been a huge flow of tourists to Tibet, all of whom wanted to see the Potala Palace, but after the SARS epidemic broke out in China all the tourists vanished into thin air. Then the Chinese government got a handle on the epidemic and announced to the world that the danger was over. Prices for tourists were cut in half. Thus, the enterprising Chinese quickly made up for lost time.

Dei joined a crowd of tourists, but he was still afraid. Even a blind man would notice him in the crowd. He felt the guards drilling holes in him with their eyes. Trembling, Dei finally reached the appointed place. The guards' penetrating gazes still made him nervous. If one of them approached him he was ready to flee.

Finally, the monk he was waiting for appeared right on time. He took the packet from Dei and disappeared before Dei had a chance to say, "Let me know when you get it to him." He received his answer the very next day in the same palace entrance hall where

he had waited for the monk. It was not an answer, to be exact, but the packet that he received.

An unfamiliar guard came out and handed him the packet, saying “Mani Yaso is not at the palace. No one knows where he is.”

Stunned, Dei opened his mouth to ask something, but the guard cut him off by shrugging his shoulders.

Thus, the packet with its three mysterious letters and the small box filled with texts from the Kalachakra remained in their spot at the head of Dei’s bed.

Chapter Six

On that day Mani Yaso really was gone from the palace. He was riding in a Mercedes SUV with tinted windows in the direction of the Bayan Har Mountains on Tibet’s border with China. He was accompanied by Lama Busmen and two bodyguards, as well as a driver.

Whenever the vehicle jumped or bobbed the people inside felt like their innards were being shaken or about to pop. Their shoulders and heads kept bumping together no matter how hard the passengers tried to prevent it.

“Do we have a long way to go?” Mani Yaso asked, bending over to Lama Busmen.

“It’s a fair ways. I’ve been this way many times. Today it’s just a two-day drive. It used to take a week or more on horseback.

“You promised to tell me more about the Dropa,” Mani Yaso reminded him. Lama Busmen had gotten him interested in the small ethnic group. His curiosity and desire to learn more about them constantly bothered the young man.

“I’ll tell you right now. I’ve been studying them for five years, so once I start talking you’ll hear more than you wanted to know. But this thing keeps bouncing so hard that its turning my guts inside out.”

“Go ahead. I’ll listen, Lama Busmen,” Mani Yaso said. His voice was soft and insistent at the same time. Lama Busmen looked closely at him as if trying to figure out the reason for his persistence.

“There are about three hundred of them, perhaps fewer. They claim that their ancestors came here from the planet Sirius. When we get there you will see that they look nothing like us – they have huge heads, their eyes are very narrow and they have tiny bodies.”

“Didn’t you say they have big ears?”

“They’re like Choro. Their ears stick out,” Lama Busmen said to attract the attention of the guard, who was falling asleep. The man smiled faintly but could not manage to keep his eyes open.

Mani Yaso suddenly opened up. “I always dream about Sirius I hear signals from there. It’s been like that since I was a little kid.”

“Really?” Busmen asked incredulously, even frightened, as he looked at Mani Yaso.

“Yes.”

Busmen gave a nervous laugh. “You surprise me, Saint Milarepa. I suppose you can tell me much more of interest than I can tell you.”

“You first,” said Mani Yaso, smiling politely. “How and when did the Dropas arrive on our planet?”

“It isn’t just the Dropas. In Mali in West Africa there is a tribe called the Bandiagara. Some of them call themselves the Dogon and say that they also came from the planet Sirius.”

“Have you ever been there?”

“In Mali? Yes. I’ve spoken with the Dogon on four occasions. They look like the Dropas we are going to see, including their habits, beliefs and culture, but there are significant differences. After all, the two groups inhabit areas with very different climactic conditions.”

“So the Dogon have adapted to Africa’s heat, but our relatives the Dropas live in temperatures of minus forty degrees.”

“Right. We’re going to visit them in the summer, but up there where they live it’s almost like winter.”

“Why don’t they come down to the valley where it’s warm?”

“They’d never do that. They never leave their homes. They say they are waiting to be transported back to Sirius, so they aren’t allowed to leave for any reason.”

“When will they go back?” Mani Yaso did not notice Lama Busmen grip the armrest of his seat.

“That’s the important thing. This year marks nine hundred ninety-one years since the Dropas appeared on Earth. According to the legends they have passed down through the generations, they once lived on Sirius in the Canis Major constellation. In 1014, their spaceship crashed when it tried to land on Earth. The Dropas on board were not killed and remained right here in the Bayan Har. Now ask yourself, Milarepa, who will take them back to Sirius and when?”

Mani Yaso was surprised. “I can’t understand how they could live so many centuries on hope alone,” he said.

“I suppose hope never dies. They have transmitted it from father to son, generation to generation.”

“Can I talk with the Dropas? Do they speak Tibetan?”

“They do. They also have their own language. I could introduce you to the Dropas’ leader, Lurgan-La, but we have another reason for our trip and you know it.”

“I know. But I absolutely have to talk with the Dropas.”

“The Leader did not give his permission.”

Mani Yaso said nothing for a while. He didn’t know what to say, but then he asked, “Is it actually forbidden?”

“We have another purpose, esteemed Milarepa. I don’t have the authority to change it. And we probably wouldn’t have time to speak with them anyway. They don’t take to strangers immediately.”

Just then their SUV clumsily reached the top of the sloping hill and stopped. The people inside saw a flat valley open up in front of them.

“We have reached Bayan Har,” Lama Busmen said. He did not sound pleased. His voice even seemed sad.

A river of crystal-clear water flowed down the middle of the green valley. On the other side of the river, mud huts stood in rows up the side of the mountain. At first Mani Yaso thought they looked like the earthen burial mounds of Kyrgyzstan. The closer they

got to the mounts, barking dogs began to run out to meet them, followed by fleet-footed children who raced with the dogs. They ran easily, as if they were flying, their feet barely touching the ground under them. To one side of them women walked smoothly, carrying wooden vessels full of clear river water.

“Are those the Dropas?” Mani Yaso asked, pressing his face to the window.

“There’s not a living soul out here except the Dropas,” said Lama Busmen.

In order to get a good at the people from another planet, the two guards and the driver stared at the Dropas. There were more and more of them gathering in front of the vehicle.

Choro was nervous. “They won’t attack us, will they?” he asked, fingering his pistol just in case.

Lama Busmen warned the others, “They won’t attack, but I want the rest of you to stay in the car. I’ll explain our mission to them.” He got out and slowly made his way to the crowd of Dropas. All of them welcomed the guest by rubbing their elbows against his. The large-headed Dropas only came up to Busmen’s waist.

Meanwhile, Mani Yaso removed the tie from around his forehead and opened his third eye out of curiosity. To his surprise and slight disappointment, he wasn’t able to see an aura around any of the Dropas, no matter how hard he looked.

“I suppose their inner energy is blocked,” he decided.

Some children ran up to the SUV and formed a circle around it. The guard Choro began amusing them by making faces. When the Dropa children laughed in glee they revealed tiny, yellowish teeth and closed their narrow eyes so tight that even the slits were invisible.

A few minutes later, Lama Busmen got back in the SUV and motioned for the driver to move on.

“Once we pass the Dropa village we’ll have another hour to go,” he said to Mani Yaso. As usual, Mani Yaso was silent. He had already noticed that his new teacher was anxious about something, as if he didn’t really want to make this trip with him. The young man wanted to look his teacher in the eye and read his thoughts to find out what was going on in his soul, but he never had the chance. The teacher always avoided Mani Yaso’s eyes. He was obviously hiding something. In any event, Mani Yaso typically avoided looking into a person’s eyes unless absolutely necessary. Otherwise he preferred to keep his eyes off of people. He was even ashamed to look at them. He had soon come to realize that he was happier and calmer when he avoided the unnecessary emotions that were in plain view, since looking at a person gave him access to the person’s true inner nature. In the treasure chests where people kept their most secret thoughts there was also plenty of debris lying around.

The Bayan Har range stretched along the valley in bands of high red ridges. At the foot of the ridges there were black holes as tall as a man. They were cave entrances. Before the birth of Christ, Buddhist monks settled in the man-made caves, which were relics of prehistoric times.

Lama Busmen’s father-in-law was Dodai, a sorcerer known throughout Tibet and China for his black magic. Over the past three years he had given up practicing black magic and was on the path of liberation. That pursuit brought him to the remote mountains, where, after taking a vow of solitude and silence, he became a monk and a hermit. Until recent times the name of the Sorcerer Dodai had been enough to quiet

crying children and make any Tibetan tremble in fear, for they were firm believers in black magic.

In his day, the Sorcerer Dodai had been the best pupil of the famous practitioner of black magic Yuntun Tugal. He had used his spells to put curses on people, make them ill and drive them from the path of righteousness by sending them misfortune, sorrow and death. If he needed to, he was capable of calling down hail from the heavens to destroy entire fields of barley and rice. He had done it many times. But then, three years ago, Dodai called his children and grandchildren together and made a confession to them.

"I have considered myself unsurpassed and all-powerful in the art of magic. By my actions I have brought onto my shoulders an unbearable burden of guilt and all manner of sin. Now I sit with my head bowed and my heart sorrowing in the presence of the Great Light that gives life."

When that happened Lama Busmen had just married Dodai's middle daughter and knew nothing of his father-in-law's secrets. All he knew was that the monk Dodai was a man with a hot temper and difficult personality.

Therefore, as they drove up to the cave where his father-in-law now lived in solitude, Busmen told Mani Yaso, "Saint Milarepa, this Dodai is a sorcerer with a bad temper. Let me go speak with him alone."

The entrance to the cave was completely covered, with just a small hole visible at the bottom.

Lama Busmen bent down to the hole and spoke softly. "Father Dodai, it's me. Busmen."

There was no answer. Lama Busmen called his father-in-law again and again there was silence. Then he picked up a stone the size of a fist and knocked on the large stone blocking the entrance to the cave. Finally an ancient, bony arm came out of the small hole. It felt around outside the cave and, not finding what it wanted, disappeared back inside.

Again Lama Busmen began calling his father-in-law out of his cave-fortress. This time he lay down at the hole and gave a loud whistle. Then he shouted, "Father! It's me, Busmen. I brought you food and drink!"

Out of the cave came Dodai's angry, almost hysterical voice, "I don't need any food! Why can't you leave my soul in peace? You must be the most foolish son-in-law in the world. I told you all goodbye!"

"I brought you a letter from the Leader!"

"What bone does he have to pick with me? I've punished myself already. I buried myself alive for all my sins and evil deeds. What else can he want?"

"Read the letter and find out!" Busmen thrust a plastic bag through the hole. After taking the bag Dodai said nothing for a long time. Then the bag came flying out of the hole, landing at Busmen's feet.

"I can't open it!" Dodai's irritated voice rang out. "I'm not in here sharpening knives!"

Lama Busmen ripped a hole in the bag with his teeth and pulled out a folded paper. He stuck it into the hole.

After a long time they heard his voice again, this time energetic. "Tell the esteemed Leader that he can make anyone he wants a lama, but I don't have the right to accept it. Tell him that!"

"I'm sorry!" Busmen yelled, down on his knees at the hole. "I hadn't read the letter. If he's making you a lama you can't refuse him! That's never happened in the whole history of Tibet!"

"I'm not refusing. I just don't have the right to accept it! Doesn't the Leader know that? Or do you not know who I am, either?"

"I can't refuse to do the Leader's bidding," said Lama Busmen, trying to sound polite and convincing. His heart was beating fast for a subjective but very significant reason. He had to carry out the Leader's order. Even if it meant going home with a bloody nose, he had to do it. There was no other way. The Leader had entrusted him with an important piece of business.

"Did you read the letter to the end?" he asked, speaking loud and clear.

"No."

"Read it! Read it to the end!"

Dodai fell silent again, and Lama Busmen held his breath waiting.

"I didn't read it!" Dodai shouted.

"Don't act like a child, father! Read it slowly. I'll wait."

"You can't wait here. Go away!" Dodai shouted gruffly. "Why are you disturbing my peace?"

"The Leader sent me, father. Just listen to what he has to say. He didn't send just anyone to you. He sent you Saint Milarepa. Milarepa!"

Busmen got down again and put his ear to the hole, expecting to hear his father-in-law's voice. Instead, he heard someone walk up behind him. He turned around and saw a teenage Dropa boy holding a sack and a bottle of water.

"What is that? For him?" he asked. The boy nodded and shoved his goods into the hole. Then he hurried off without waiting.

After a minute Busmen called to his father-in-law again. "I came here with the reincarnation of Milarepa, father. Will you speak with him?"

"He should have written 'Mila-Dorje-Gyaltzen. When he was young he also fell under the spell of black magic. He was guilty of the deaths of thirty-five people. Keep that in mind! Mila-Dorje-Gyaltzen was no sinless angel.'"

"We know that, father. He has come to you. Will you talk to him?"

"Both of us studied black magic under Yuntun Tugal. Did you know that?"

"Right. The reincarnation of that other student is here to see you. Will you talk?" Without waiting for his father-in-law to answer, Busmen motioned for Mani Yaso to come over.

He shouted into the hole again, "Mila-Dorje-Gyaltzen has come to pay you his respects."

Mani Yaso went over to Lama Busmen and got down on his knee next to him.

Just then Dodai shouted "Mila-Dorje-Gyaltzen changed his mind and joined the school of white magic under the great Marpa the translator. He became a saint. Why is it that now he's decided to come back to my school of black magic?"

"Om mani padme hum! First I wanted to greet you from the Leader. He wishes you well," said Mani Yaso, bending over to the hole.

"Do you know all one hundred thousand songs of Mila-Dorje-Gyaltzen?" Dodai's question sounded aggressive and sarcastic.

“Forgive me, esteemed Dodai. Even in my past life I did not hold in my memory all the hymns I wrote. And today I cannot remember all the songs I sing on various occasions. I suppose that is a failing of mine.”

“Then I’m listening,” came the mocking voice from the cave. He was obviously testing Mani Yaso.

Lama Busmen’s face changed. He looked questioningly at Mani Yaso. The young man was calm. He sat down, folding his legs under him, cleared his throat and began to sing:

*O, esteemed monk Dodai,
Peerless black sorcerer,
Ask me if I have many enemies.
I will answer you
‘No, only Tibet has enemies.’*

*Then ask me if I am envious
Or miserly among men.
No, I know nothing of envy.
Of the envious I say:
They are our enemies, they hate Tibet.
The haters hide around us
With their weapons.*

*Then you ask me ‘Do you intend
To harm anyone or cause tears?’
That is not my way, I say.
It is others, not I who wish for evil and cruelty.
Those whose minds harbor no kindness.
Their souls are filled with evil.*

*‘Then why do you ask a strong black sorcerer
To bestow you with power?’
My answer is simple, if that is your question:
I will stop enemies from entering Tibet.
I will be a help to the great Leader,
Who is prepared to give his life for his country.*

While Mani Yaso was singing his whole body trembled and large beads of sweat glistened on his forehead.

The monk Dodai gave a gravelly laugh. “We’ve all been duped in our senses. Back in the day, the spiritual teacher of black magic Yuntun Tugyal, Milarepa and I were just as duped. Wherever there is white magic, black magic must also reside. Thus willed our Creator. And what can we do about it? You, the reincarnation of Milarepa – do you intend to let yourself be fooled again? Won’t two times be too much? I see you are still full of childish naïveté.

Mani Yaso had not expected it to be so difficult to talk to old Dodai. He didn’t know how to answer, so he shut his mouth.

"It is the esteemed Leader who asks you," Lama Busmen butted in, losing his patience.

"That's what I'm talking about, son-in-law! I'm talking about the Leader!"

"The Leader has bestowed a great honor on you. You don't understand."

"Do I need that now? Answer me, son-in-law! I said answer me!" Dodai barked. He seemed to have lost all self-control. His words echoed hollowly in the cave, followed by silence. He had grown used to silence and peace and the sudden disruption had worn him out. The crimson sun sank behind the mountains marking the end of the short winter day.

They decided to spend the night where their SUV was parked. At first Lama Busmen wanted to go down into the valley to the Dropas, but he changed his mind. He couldn't leave Mani Yaso alone with his bodyguard. He was responsible for Mani Yaso and only trusted himself.

All of them felt the cold as soon as the warmth of the sun's rays was gone.

"We'll cover up with everything we have," Lama Busmen said as he got into his sleeping bag.

No sooner had they gotten comfortable in their nests and begun to drift off than they heard footsteps.

"Busmen! Our leader invites you to come talk with him," said the man who approached them.

"What did you say? Who are you?"

"You are invited to have a pleasant conversation."

"By whom?"

"Our leader. Lungan-La the Second."

"Is he inviting all of us?"

"Yes. All of you."

"Or just me?"

"No. All of you."

Lama Busmen was put out by the unexpected invitation, but he couldn't refuse.

"Perhaps I'll go by myself," he thought, but he rejected the idea. You never knew where danger was hiding. The leader of Tibet had entrusted Mani Yaso to him, Busmen, and he had to guard him like his own body. They had been unable to trust Mani Yaso with bodyguards for several years. All of the guards were corrupt. Money was a devil that could do anything to the soul and conscience.

"Are we going or not, Busmen?" Choro asked from the SUV's trunk.

"I'm thinking."

"You could think a little quicker."

"We have to go," Busmen said finally. They couldn't ignore the Dropas' hospitality.

The SUV's powerful headlights cut through the pitch black to brightly illuminate the Dropas' low, mud huts and drive the frightened village dogs back into their holes. Soon the SUV stopped in front of one of the mud huts.

"They light their houses with glowing rocks," Lama Busmen whispered to Mani Yaso as they walked side-by-side.

Although the hut looked less than inviting, and even impoverished, from the outside, inside it was bright and cheery. Lurgan-La the Second turned out to be a tall man whose movements were light and quick.

All the guests did as Busmen did, greeting Lurgan-La the Second by touching elbows with him. Then they went into the room and sat down on benches along the wall. Interestingly, Lurgan did everything for himself. There were no signs of a wife or children. The leader took a bunch of aromatic herbs, lit them with a Chinese lighter and put them in a flat dish on the floor in the middle of the room. A pleasant aroma filled the room. After that, Lurgan brought more bunches of herbs from other rooms and, handing a bunch to each guest, asked them to light them.

Lama Busmen had obviously participated in the ceremony many times before. He stood up first, lit his herbs, inhaled their fragrance and went back to his place. Without sitting down, he held his back straight and addressed their host.

"We are grateful to you, esteemed Lurgan-La the Second, for your kindness and hospitality."

Soon all the guests were seated holding bunches of the sweet-smelling herb that burned with a greenish-blue flame.

"Smell them," their host smiled. "Your souls will be cleansed of sorrow and worry. Your hearts will be light."

"What do you call this herb?" asked Mani Yaso.

"It is called *menep*. It is not from your planet. We brought the seeds from Sirius. Our kinsmen in Africa were unable to make it grow. Apparently it cannot tolerate a hot climate."

"What is the climate like on Sirius?" Mani Yaso asked, unable to contain his curiosity.

"According to our ancestors, there is neither summer nor winter. It is a temperate climate without change."

"What do you eat?" the bodyguard Choro joined in.

The leader leaped up and asked, "Are you hungry? Should I bring the food?"

"No, thank you. We ate not long ago. I was just curious."

"We also brought food from our homeland. I will show it to you." Lurgan opened a side door and pointed to tall plants whose branches were bent by the abundance of pods growing on them.

"These fruits are our food. To put it your way, this plant bears fruit summer and winter. This is the only thing we need."

"So you don't eat meat?"

"It is a great sin for us to eat meat. Everything our bodies need is contained in this plant."

"Do you have contact with your kinsmen in Africa?" Mani Yaso's eyes were burning. He had to know.

The more Mani Yaso interrogated Lurgan-La the Second, the more worried Lama Busmen became.

"We used to have contact. I actually came from there. I am a Dogon. With every passing epoch we lose part of our original natures. The Dogons came to Earth from Sirius much earlier than the Dropas. Almost twenty thousand years has passed since then. The Dropas have been here only since 1014. In both cases, we ended up here as a result of

what you would call a spaceship crash. What I mean is that our ancestors would have flown home if it hadn't been for an accident during the testing they were doing above your Earth. Unfortunately, the Earth's bio-energy is very weak. Here we lost the light rays that used to shine inside of us. Then we lost our ability to fly through space. Then," Lurgan turned away for a second to wipe away a tear. "Then we lost all the magic powers we had on Sirius and became like the rest of you. That is what Earth has done to us. Of course, I don't want to offend you. But you see, we have none of your selfish ego. We are born without egos. For you, the ego is the most important part of your being. That is why evil and injustice have such a strong hold on each of you."

Mani Yaso's eyes were burning, reflecting the fire in his eager soul. He was physically drawn, as if by a magnet, to Lurgan the Second.

"But have the people in your home forgotten about you? If they have, then you must find some what to go back their on your own," Mani Yaso said eagerly.

"I told you that we are like Earth people now. Our kinsmen from Sirius fly around the Earth every hour of every day, but they don't come to get us. Even so, we have not lost all hope of returning to our planet."

"But sometimes they take regular Earth people, back to Sirius with them!"

Up until this moment Lurgan the Second had assumed that Mani Yaso was just a curious young man. Now his narrow, green eyes opened wide with fear as he stared at the young man.

"Yes, we know that. We have heard. When innocent Earth people are unjustly sentenced to annihilation, they take them to Sirius. For example, the British soldiers of the Norfolk regiment in 1915 or the hundreds of people living in the Roanoke settlement in 1590."

"What about the three thousand Chinese soldiers at Nanjing in 1937?" Mani Yaso added.

Lurgan the Second couldn't take his eyes off the young man.

"I would like to talk with you alone someday, when we don't have to hurry," he said.

Lama Busmen broke in. "I'm afraid we won't have the opportunity. We are on important business. Perhaps you could help us?"

Lurgan the Second gestured to indicate that he was always ready to help. Then he jumped up from his seat.

"Please, sit down," said Lama Busmen. He had not expected Lurgan the Second to be so nimble. "Let me explain first. There is a man meditating in a cave in your mountains. His name is Dodai, and he is a monk. As far as I can tell, has a good relationship with you. That is why he decided to stay here, near your village. We have to convince this monk to do an important job for us. I believe that you, as the leader of your people, are the only person who can influence this monk. He will not listen to us and ignores our attempts to persuade him."

Lurgan the Second froze when he heard that. Like a small child who has been asked a very serious question, he looked from one guest to the next.

Seeing Lurgan's confusion, Mani Yaso whispered to his minder, "I think you have asked him for something that he doesn't understand, esteemed lama. Do not repeat the request."

"But what else can I do? I don't have any other way out!"

“Do not worry. The esteemed Dodai will do what you wish tomorrow morning.”

When Mani Yaso and Lama Busmen returned the next day, everything went as Mani Yaso had predicted.

“Om mani padme hum! Father, we have returned to you and pray that your spiritual sight and your feelings are calm,” Lama Busmen spoke loudly into the hole.

He had barely finished speaking when a piece of paper, rolled up and tied with a string, came flying out of the hole, hitting him in the face. He caught it and looked at the others with a smile.

“This is what we asked for,” Mani Yaso’s minder told him. “It’s the original text of his special magic. During his lifetime he never showed it to anyone. Now we finally have it. My dear Mani Yaso, you and I will be able to carry out the task given us by the esteemed Leader!”

Suddenly they heard Dodai’s hoarse, angry voice. “Milarepa, or his reincarnation Mani Yaso, was never my idol. He took my magic text from me. I did not give it to him. Mani Yaso took it from me by force! Now wait and see how many human skulls will lie at his feet.”

Without bidding his father-in-law farewell, Lama Busmen hurriedly guided Mani Yaso away from the unpleasant, angry words Dodai hurled at them in despair.

“He is too angry to know what he is saying. He’s an old man who’s lost his mind,” Busmen said when they got back in the SUV. Right at that moment Mani Yaso caught sight of his face and looked into his eyes. To his surprise, although his minder was outwardly happy that he finally had the papers he needed, his soul was burdened by protest and hopeless sorrow.

The Bayan Har mountains go on forever. Here, behind countless bare ridges cut by the narrow, high cliffs of passes where even the raven does not venture, Mani Yaso was imprisoned. His simple cave was here at the foot of a steep red cliff, far from the eyes of the Dropas.

The entrance to his cave was blocked by stones, with just a hole at the bottom for fresh air to get in and a hole at the top for ventilation. Inside the cave was a special drain for removing impurities. The cave was lit by one glowing rock. Mani Yaso’s stores consisted entirely of two bags of hulled barley roasted in pistachio oil and water in a special vessel that kept it from going stale. He was to spend three months and three days in that kingdom of darkness.

To prevent Mani Yaso from being disturbed during his meditation, Lama Busmen had the SUV and the bodyguards set up far from the cave on the other side of a large ridge. No sounds should reach the young man. No one was allowed to look at the cave through binoculars. Lama Busmen and the bodyguards were charged with keeping any people away from the cave and preserving the natural silence.

Chapter Seven

Dei woke up suddenly as if someone had yelled in his ear. Although the Jokhang temple housed three and a half thousand people who were all in constant motion like ants in an ant hill, for the past month Dei had felt completely alone, orphaned and dispossessed. He noticed no one and needed nothing, and there was no one to take an interest in him. As it turned out, Lama Tsu had been the only person in the world who needed Dei. He had been both father and mother to Dei, his mentor and his family.

Dei lay in bed a while thinking. Someone really had yelled, but his memory hadn't held on to the words. Suddenly Dei remembered about an important upcoming event: he was supposed to meet with the Panchen Lama, the rector of the temple, who had summoned him.

When the rector's assistant had come by the day before to inform him, he couldn't believe his ears and became tongue-tied. The rector never invited little people like Dei to meet with him. After all, it's best to know one's place. If anyone was invited, it was just Lama Tsu.

Dei leaped from his bed and began dressing in a hurry. Once he had donned his yellow monk's robe, his cap and his yak-skin shoes, he looked at himself in the mirror.

"I suppose the Panchen Lama will offer me some sort of work to do. I hope he does." That thought had given wings to Dei's heart yesterday and still caused a sweet trembling.

There were several people waiting in the Panchen Lama's anteroom. Finally it was Dei's turn.

"Om mani padme hum!" Dei said respectfully before crossing the threshold. It was a little too soon.

Noticing it, the Panchen Lama smiled and went to Dei.

"The face of our esteemed Lama Tsu is always with me," the rector said as he shook Dei's hand.

"You were always highly valued by my wise mentor, Lama Tsu."

"Come in and take a seat. I have just one question to ask you, esteemed monk Dei. When Lama Tsu went to his final resting place he wrote letters for Mani Yaso and, I believe, left them with you for you to give him. Why have you not given them to him yet? Answer me!" All of a sudden the Panchen Lama's voice became harsh and demanding. Afraid, Dei shrunk into himself.

"I have not been able to get the letters to Mani Yaso, no matter how hard I've tried," he said, finding himself in need of justification.

"Why is that?"

"I cannot go into the palace. They will not let me in. Then I turned to a guard I know, but he returned the letters to me and said that Mani Yaso is not at the palace. No one knows where he is."

"No one knows?"

"That is what he said. 'No one knows.'"

"What does that mean?" the Panchen Lama bristled. "That's impossible. Then bring the letters here and give them to me. I will give them to the holy Mani Yaso. Did you read them?"

"What, the letters?"

"Yes."

“No, I didn’t. They’re sealed.”

“Is there anything in them that might displease the esteemed Leader? Do you know?”

“The Leader? I have no way to know.”

“Then bring them to me, quickly.”

“Esteemed Panchen Lama, I’ve been without work for two months. I now see that idleness is the worst form of...”

“I am interested in Lama Tsu’s letters,” the Panchen Lama interrupted him.

Dei almost ran from the rector’s office.

The rector had met with him, for sure, but as it turned out he was not in the least interested in Dei. The monk was so angry that his insides burned and his legs took him as fast as they could run away from the Panchen Lama.

Dei ran into his room and took the three envelopes and the small box out from under his pillow. He put them in a bag and, hiding the bag between his undershirt and his body, raced off into the temple’s dark basement. Nobody knew the dark labyrinth of the basement as well as Dei, and few people ever found a reason to enter the grave-like darkness under the temple. For as long as Dei had served Lama Tsu, he had always hidden his small savings in a crack in the basement wall. Any way you looked at it, the crack was the best possible hiding place. The only drawback was that when paper money lay there it became damp and mildewed.

Dei hid Lama Tsu’s letters in the crack.

He was spurred on by a vague feeling of suspicion. Perhaps he felt accountable to the soul of his mentor Lama Tsu.

“Come what may,” the monk said to himself when he went back upstairs. He meant to calm himself this way, but nonetheless he lay awake in his bed until morning.

The Panchen Lama also seemed to be able to think of nothing but the letters. He called for Dei during the pre-dawn prayers.

This time he did not greet Dei. “Where are the letters?” he asked harshly. His irritation was apparent.

“Esteemed Panchen Lama, I was told not to give the letters for Mani Yaso to anybody else.”

“Who told you that?”

“Lama Tsu. My esteemed mentor.”

“Then your esteemed mentor must have written words to Mani Yaso that he wished to keep secret from others! That is why the all-knowing Leader has ordered that the letters be found. Dei, you’re a little man. Do you want to follow in your esteemed mentor’s footsteps, or do you want to live?”

“I intend to live, sir.”

“If that’s the case, then bring me the letters! Do it before prayers are over. If you’re late, you’ll have only yourself to blame. You have already made the country’s leader wait!”

The rector’s harsh words about making the country’s leader wait hit Dei over the head like a hammer.

He left the Panchen Lama’s office wobbling, helpless and pitiful. “I made the Leader wait!” He was seized by fear and began breathing heavily.

“It is the Leader who wants the letters! The Leader!”

Many times he had flown to great heights in his fantasies before coming back down to earth. But now he found himself connected with the Leader in real life. And he had made the man wait. He had never dreamed of anything like this.

Dei walked passed his room. He intended to go down into the basement, but suddenly an unseen force stopped him, as if it had him by the hem of his robe. It forced him into his room.

He did not know what the force was that held him, but he was unable to make himself go into the basement. He had no wish to even touch the letters, much less take them anywhere.

Dei locked himself in his room and curled up in a ball on his not particularly clean bed. He lay with his face in the pillow. "I wish morning prayers would go on forever," he thought, his heart aching with the absurd wish. But the prayers ended. Dei could hear the monks as they walked past his door, talking loudly amongst themselves. He thought they were being loud on purpose.

Dei's heart beat even faster. In despair, he thought "Perhaps the Panchen Lama will forget about me and not call for me." But it's a hard life, and people's wishes are rarely taken into account.

Dei heard a voice. "The Panchen Lama says for you to appear immediately!" It was, of course, the voice of the rector's assistant. Alas! There was no escaping reality. Obeying the voice, Dei went to the door.

Despite the fact that the Panchen Lama was talking to someone, he angrily punched the button on his desk for Dei to come in.

"What right do you have to hold on to the letters? Who are you, after all? The letters are for Saint Milarepa. Why didn't you bring them? The letters are official business. Do you understand that or not? Do you intend to interfere in affairs of state? Answer!"

After hearing such a hailstorm of accusations, including the insinuation that he was guilty of a crime against the state, Dei was at a loss for words.

The Panchen Lama had to repeat himself. He shouted "Answer me!"

Dei's pale face was a mirror of the turmoil in his soul. The muscles in his cheeks quivered and his cheekbones stuck out, but he said nothing and kept his eyes on the floor.

"Have you lost your tongue?" the Panchen Lama yelled. Dei raised his suffering eyes. He looked like he was about to cry. His chin wavered and his mouth trembled.

"Go ask Lama Tsu! He is still alive in his coffin. Why do you torment me?" Dei croaked. Then he ran from the Panchen Lama's office as if the ground under him was shaking.

The Leader put on a thin robe and went into his bathroom. His eye fell on an amusing sight in the corner of the ceiling. A spider had trapped a moth in its web. It was wobbling about clumsily with all its legs splayed out as it tried to spear the moth with its poisonous fangs, but its prey beat its wings in a desperate attempt to get away. So far the spider was unable to get close enough. It should have waited for its prey to weaken over time, but it was dying of hunger.

“That is how nature works, but my Tibetan brothers keep trying to ignore that fact,” he said to himself with a smile as he watched the two tiny creatures dueling. One was fighting for its life, the other for its empty stomach.

“But no matter how hard my countrymen deny it, nature’s strength is in opposition, confrontation and fighting. Fighting! First of all for food, and then for land and water.”

“Fighting is the beginning and ending of everything! World history is made up of conflict. Tibetan Buddhism does not agree with that. And Saint Milarepa did not agree. Now we will see what Lama Yaso says. These are new times, a new epoch...”

With such thoughts the Leader seated himself comfortably on the toilet and, as was his habit since he had studied in London, opened the book he had brought with him.

The Panchen Lama of the Jokhang temple entered the Leader’s office meekly.

“Om mani padme hum!” he bowed to the leader three times from the doorway. Feeling guilty and afraid, the Panchen Lama could barely stand.

“How many times have I told you not to waste time bowing three times? One bow is enough. Now speak!”

“Your Holiness! I am beside myself because I was unable to carry out your request. This is the first time such a thing has happened to me and it is a heavy weight on my heart. Lama Tsu’s assistant, that idiot monk, says that his dead mentor is actually alive. He says that Lama Tsu is alive in his coffin. He told me to go ask him about the letters for Mani Yaso. After he said that, the monk disappeared. We have been searching for him since yesterday. We have looked all over the temple, but he is nowhere to be found. But eventually we will find him and subject him to corporal punishment, or to something even harsher.”

“I don’t need the monk to be punished! I need the letters! The letters!”

“I know. I understand, Your Holiness!”

“You do not understand. If you had understood, you would have sent the headstrong Lama Tsu into the next life according to Tibetan tradition instead of putting him in that box. Why did you violate the Thodol and obey Lama Tsu’s wishes? He had lost his mind!”

“Your Holiness, I was his student, as were you, and I could not fail to carry out his last wish.”

“You are not his student today. You are the rector of the temple. You should have done your duty. Do it now!”

“I do not understand, Your Holiness.” The rector paled.

“You have a high office, Panchen Lama! You ought to understand!”

The Leader could not give his order openly, so he used a combination of fancy, learned words and criticism of the rector to try and force the man to see what he wanted him to do. Thus the Leader meant to rid himself of the secret guilt that he felt in his soul by making the rector guilty of slighting Lama Tsu.

In his turn, the Panchen Lama blushed anxiously. No one could bear the leader’s penetrating eyes for long. His insides were boiling like oil over a flame.

“Great Leader, do you mean to say that we should remove Lama Tsu from his grave and, following Tibetan tradition, cut his body into pieces and feed it to the vultures?”

“There. You said it yourself! That’s why you are the Panchen! Now go quickly and do what you said. I will not remind you. I have no time for this! And you have exactly one day to find the runaway monk. There will be no extension!”

The Panchen Lama was one of the leader’s few supporters, so he felt somewhat confused. Why was the leader talking so harshly to him, a man who was his supporter and comrade? As if he, the Panchen Lama, had intentionally done something wrong. What was he guilty of, except for carrying out the last order of Lama Tsu?

Burdened by such dark thoughts, the rector did not notice how he made his way out of the palace’s dark hallways into the light of day. When he walked out, he felt like he had opened his eyes and found himself on a mountain top. The Lhasa valley’s waves of red and yellow clay rolled before him. In the distance he saw the peak of Everest, the pillar of heaven, and to its right holy Mount Kailash, the belly-button of Shambhala.

Usually consumed by his urgent, everyday affairs, the rector had never seen before what he saw on that day. He looked around him at the wonderful, rare world of nature. Such beauty! What a vast world! Who knew that Tibet was so wide open? Who knew what amazing people had lived and were still living in all those thousands of valleys and low places? Lama Tsu had told him about one of them, and the story came back sharply to his mind.

A gray-bearded monk with a good name and reputation decided to close himself up in a cave for several months of mediation. His dearest student, who was also his assistant, accompanied him to the cave. The helped his teacher by carrying his few belongings. Suddenly the devil seized him with a desire to keep the belongings: he hit his teacher in the head with a rock and left the old man for dead. However, the monk came to the next day. The injury to his head was serious, so the monk made a great effort to meditate in order to bear the extreme pain. Before he could even begin meditating, though, he lost consciousness and no longer felt any pain.

One day later another student came to visit the monk. He entered the cave and saw his teacher lying unconscious on the ground. The thick blood pouring from an artery in his neck had dried and begun to rot, giving off a terrible stench. When the young man helped the old monk come around and learned of what had happened, he decided to run to the nearest monastery and bring a doctor. The dying monk raised his hand and stopped him.

“When they see what happened to me they will start hunting for the man who did it. He has not gone far. They may catch him. If they catch him, he will be convicted and shot. I cannot agree to that. I would rather lie here so my student can escape. Perhaps someday he will reform and realize what he did. In any event, I will not be the cause of his death. No go, my son. Do not tell you story to anyone.”

So those were the amazing people who lived in Tibet’s mountains, in its uncounted valleys and low places.

The rector, who had long been unable to climb out of the gloomy depression that held his soul, walked briskly to his office, locked the door, and began packing up his personal belongings and papers.

Chapter Eight

Lama Busmen slept poorly that night, tossing and turning from side to side and onto his back. He thought that the new SUV's seats made a squeaking noise, but in truth there was no noise at all. Some time after midnight, the hilltop where they had parked was suddenly buffeted by hail and rain. The storm was wild and ominously loud, shaking their five-ton SUV like a toy. Then, just as suddenly, the storm stopped. Not believing his ears, Lama Busmen waited anxiously for the storm to continue. Finally he dozed off. He thought he had several unpleasant dreams, but he could remember nothing of them. Finally dawn came and the sky grew light outside the vehicle's windows. To everyone's surprise, there was no sign of the night's hail and rain – the ground was as dry as it had been the day before.

"Get up, men," said Lama Busmen. He knew that the night's hail was not a good sign, so he spoke softly when he woke the others.

"Get up. Three months and three days have passed. Today we must take Saint Milarepa from his meditation. Get up."

The entrance to the cave looked just as it had three months and three days ago. Nothing had changed. Stone lay on stone. They could tell that no man, not even a bird, had been there.

Lama Busmen was an experienced and veteran pundit. He knew that it is hard to bring a person out of meditation. It requires the skills of a master. Any careless or clumsy act can shock or even disable the person, so Lama Busmen went to the cave alone.

Noiselessly, he walked right up to the blocked off entrance and put his ear to the hole. Once he heard Mani Yaso's breathing, he was supposed to breathe at the same rhythm. That way he would be able to send psychotropic signals to Mani Yaso's mind and bring him out of *Samadhi*⁷. He was ready to begin, but he could not hear any breathing in the cave. Lama Busmen became worried. He sensed that the cave was empty. But, cautious and deliberate by nature, he did not give any credence to his premonition. He lit a bunch of aromatic herbs he had brought with him and held it to the hole. The sweet-smelling smoke entered the cave, but there was no effect. Then Busmen grew really afraid. He lay down on the ground and tried to look into the cave. He could hear and see nothing and felt the presence of nothing.

"Men, get over here!" he called to the bodyguards who were standing at a distance. The bodyguards ran up and obeyed Lama Busmen's order to open the mouth of the cave as quickly as possible. They didn't have to remove all the stones, for soon it became clear that the cave was empty. Saint Milarepa or Mani Yaso was gone.

"Oh no!" was all the horrified Busmen could say. The others were horrified, as well, and unable to speak.

"What will we tell the esteemed Leader?" Busmen said heavily at last. No one had an answer.

Then the bodyguard Choro suggested, "We should open it up the rest of the way and check the other end. Maybe there's another way out."

They quickly did as he said, but found no hole or even a crack in the other end of the cave. Mani Yaso's bed, his dishes and his belongings were all there, but he was gone.

⁷ *Samadhi* – (Sanskrit) Complete meditation focusing on a specific object (author's note)

Lama Busmen was distraught. "Where can we look for him?" He was pale as a sheet. When no answer came, he repeated his question several more times.

"Well? Where can we look for Milarepa?"

Meanwhile, Saint Milarepa was engaged in pleasant conversation with the leader of the Dropas, Lurgan-La. As before, the aroma of the traditional herbs rose from a copper dish in the middle of the room. This time the room was filled with a number of masks. Orange, green, red and white, the masks had a rare beauty, although they were much more handsome than the handsomest Dropa.

"We are preparing for a celebration," Lurgan-La told Mani Yaso, who was studying the masks with obvious delight.

"What celebration? When will it be?"

"The planet Sirius-3 will soon complete its fiftieth orbit around Sirius. That is what we will be celebrating. In terms of the way you measure time, it happens once every ten years. Just once."

"These masks really look nothing like any of you," Mani Yaso said, smiling.

"You're right. That was a bitter loss for us. We no longer look like ourselves now that we live on your Earth. We have lost our true faces. Now we look like this, gaunt and haggard, because it is so dry here and there isn't enough oxygen. And we live at an altitude that is much too high."

Mani Yaso decided to change the painful subject and talk about something other than the Dropas' appearance. "As far as I know," he said, "Earth's astronomers have not yet discovered Sirius-3. I suppose they can't find it."

"What can I say? I hope you won't be offended by the truth," Lurgan-La smiled at Mani Yaso. He felt somewhat awkward and was waiting for the young man to give him permission to continue.

"Say it," Mani Yaso told him. "Why should I be offended?"

"In that case, here's how it is. Your astronomy is still in its infancy. Let's forget about the Sirius galaxy for now. You only discovered the rotation of your own solar system in 1927. You found out that it was shaped like a spiral in 1990. True, you did discover Sirius and its moon, Sirius-2, in 1862. But your telescopes still can't see Sirius-3. We see our home with our unaided eyes once every ten years, in your time. That is why the upcoming holiday is an important celebration for us. We have no other holiday. When we see our mother-planet at a distance of 8.6 light years away we cry for three days and three nights until we lose consciousness. It is very difficult."

Mani Yaso smiled sadly. "I wanted to cry, too." Then he asked, "Here people talk about having a 'fatherland,' but I noticed that you call your homeland your 'mother.'"

"That's right. We have much that would be hard for your people to understand or accept. They don't really want to understand. For example, we don't have your tradition of one man belonging to one woman alone, or of one woman owning just one man. There was a time long, long ago when we treated relationships like property, but as the ages passed we lost that sense of ownership. A child is borne by its mother, but we are all responsible for raising it."

"Is that how you live here?"

“Yes. We are all responsible for those children playing over there.” Lurgan-La looked in the direction of the open door.

“Excuse me, Lurgan-La. Do researchers or other people like that visit you or the Dogon, your kinsmen in Africa?”

“They do, but I wish they wouldn’t. When I lived in Africa in the 1930s first the Frenchman Marcel Griaule and then Robin-Evans spent many years living with us. I was young then, not even one hundred yet.

“When we saw that Marcel had hairs growing in his nose and all over his chest we were so disgusted that we even abandoned our homes for a while. Then we got used to him. Putting it your way, we’re just regular humans. Here on Earth people say ‘we’re only human, after all.’ We aren’t allowed to take that word lightly. We have to withstand many difficult tests before we can call ourselves human. For us, a person isn’t automatically born human. We have to grow to reach that level.

“But eventually we got used to Marcel. He was a very good, simple man. His ego was much smaller than what most people on Earth have, so we respected him and told him our history. We shared our legends and songs with him. He wrote it all down on paper and recorded it on tape. In the end, we accepted him as one of us and included him in our list of ‘Humans of Sirius.’ He asked us to do that. He said he wanted to fly back to Sirius with us whenever that happy day came. Sometime later, after he had already left us, we heard that he had died.

“When Marcel’s articles were published, we found ourselves in a bad situation. Lots of different people started coming to visit us. Each of them asked us the same questions Marcel had already written about. Lots of the people called themselves ‘White Fathers.’ Those were the ones from a Catholic brotherhood. Apparently they consider themselves saints on earth.

“So people wrote all sorts of things about us. They had lots of disagreements and discussions. They still haven’t calmed down. Some of them wrote articles about us just based on what they had heard second-hand. One of them was a German scholar named Dieter German. He called us ‘wild, uneducated, ignorant semblances of humans. Their fairy tales about Sirius are simply nonsense.’ If he wanted to talk about us, then he should have come and asked us where we Dropas and Dogon got our information about things in the universe that astronomers of today’s Earth still haven’t discovered. But no, he didn’t ask!”

To back up his story, Lurgan-La laid out newspaper and journal clippings in Russian, English German and Chinese for Mani Yaso to see.

“Where did you get all these?” Mani Yaso asked, looking at Lurgan-La in awe.

“We didn’t gather them. Our friend Lama Busmen brings them to us.”

“Lama Busmen? Has he written a lot about you, too?”

“Not much. But maybe he will. Who knows?”

“But none of these publications are of any use to you, are they?”

“How could they be of use to us? Your people have not reached our level yet. You have one important deficiency – you believe that your planet is the only one in the whole universe to harbor life. You are convinced that you are the center of the universe.”

“We will recognize the truth, Lurgan-La. In time we will have to recognize it.”

“After that the Englishman Karyl Robin-Evans came to study us. He was working with Chinese archaeologists. They excavated our ancient graves and found many things

besides skeletons. One of the things they found was a flat rock with an image of a spaceship from Sirius and writing in a spiral. They took them away and never returned them.”

Just then they heard dogs barking and the sound of a vehicle approaching.

“Can I put this mask on?” Mani Yaso asked, leaping up with youthful agility.

“I think it will fit you if you put it on.”

Lurgan-La stood up and helped Mani Yaso put the mask on. Just then Lama Busmen appeared in the doorway. When he saw Mani Yaso he literally began to shake. He was overcome by joy and anger and the fear he had felt just recently.

“You gave me a scare, esteemed Milarepa,” Lama Busmen mumbled. His lips trembled as if he was on the verge of tears.

“Saint Milarepa is with us,” said Lurgan-La as he touched his elbow to Busmen’s elbow in greeting. He was unable to understand the state his unexpected guest was in.

Lama Busmen took himself in hand and spoke calmly and politely. “I thank you, esteemed Lurgan-La. You are very hospitable, but we must leave for home. We do not have much time. What do you say, Saint Milarepa?”

Without removing the mask from his face, Mani Yaso touched his elbow to Lurgan-La’s and whispered, “I will come to see you often. When will your great celebration be?”

“We cannot invite outsiders to our celebration.”

“Then I will come some other time. Together we will search for the gravitational corridors to Sirius-3.”

The Leader had waited impatiently for this day. He could not calm himself. He kept jumping up, pacing the room and sitting back down. He handed out orders to his servants, and if any of them asked him for clarification he was rude and petulant. He did not want to see anyone. His temper flared like a lighted match. When his youngest daughter came to call him to breakfast he showed her out of his office without any greeting.

There was a reason for his irritability. Several of the lamas in his clique had begun to think much of themselves. Their sins outweighed them. The esteemed Leader suspected that they were secretly conspiring against him, but he wasn’t able to catch the mutineers in the act. First of all, he wanted to find out exactly what their dirty plans were. Then he wanted to punish them secretly. An official reprimand required too much work and would mean exposing their stinking political intrigues and proving that they were blackmailing him. The Leader needed Mani Yaso if he wanted to have done with his enemies once and for all. He wanted to punish each of the villains without causing negative ripples in society. Each guilty party would know why he was being punished and would hesitate before trying to sharpen his claws on the Leader again. And if the mutineers refused to back down they would get a taste of Mani Yaso’s black magic. They couldn’t get away!

The esteemed Leader suffered in anticipation of Mani Yaso’s arrival until noon. Lama Busmen was supposed to have brought the young man back before this, but they still hadn’t returned.

It was time for the noonday meal.

“Father! Mother says for you to hurry to lunch! Come on!” This time it was the middle daughter who came. This time the esteemed Leader followed her up to the dining room on the top floor. He realized that his appetite had awoken and his stomach was rumbling. Lama Busmen overtook him before he reached the dining room.

“Your Holiness!” Standing two steps below the Leader, Busmen was anxious and short of breath. “We just got back. Heavy rains washed out the road in two places and that made us late!”

“Where is Lama Yaso?”

“In his room.”

“Have him come to me, and tell him to wrap a ribbon around his forehead,” the Leader ordered. He patted his daughter on the head and turned to go back to his study.

“But Father! Mother wants you to hurry up!”

“I’ll be there in a minute, sweetheart. You go on.”

“Father!”

The Leader did not particularly believe that Mani Yaso was the reincarnation of Milarepa, even though he was forced to believe. First of all, he was convinced by the multitude of proof furnished by Lama Tsu. Then there was Mani Yaso, his appearance, and especially his eyes: they were deep and clear and sometimes seemed to know the Leader’s heart and turn his soul inside out. The Leader could not bear those eyes. He avoided them. When the young man did not have a ribbon around his forehead the Leader tried to keep from looking at him.

The Leader was unaware of how he paced back and forth in his study, waiting for Mani Yaso. He tried to gain at least some control over his anxiety. He tried to master the diffidence that overcame him. Mani Yaso would soon appear before him as the possessor of a very powerful gift, the gift of black magic!

“Om mani padme hum!” Mani Yaso greeted the Leader by bowing three times. Then he took the scarf he had brought with him and laid it in front of the leader. He waited for the Leader to tell him to sit down. Instead, the Leader went to Mani Yaso and placed the expensive dark brown scarf with golden threads back on his shoulders.

“Now, have a seat. Make yourself comfortable, Milarepa,” the Leader smiled and indicated a row of cushions. He waited in silence for Mani Yaso to take his seat and fold his legs in the lotus position. Then he went on, “May I congratulate you with the completion of your meditation, Milarepa?”

Mani Yaso smiled and said nothing. It was a condescendingly polite, unreadable smile and it made the Leader suddenly suspicious. What kind of smile was it? What did it mean? Was Mani Yaso smiling like that because he had read the Leader’s hidden thoughts? There was no way to tell. It was always so exhausting to talk with someone who could read your mind. It was always a good idea to keep your distance from people like that, but unfortunately the Leader needed Mani Yaso right now. He needed to put an end to the underhanded colleagues who had him by the throat.

The Leader decided that it was not the time to discuss outside problems. His first priority was the actions of Lama Toiba. He was obsessed with bringing the 14th Dalai

Lama to his rightful place on the throne of Tibet. It seemed that Lama Toiba had many supporters among the country's most prominent individuals. The Security Council knew that they had already met in secret, but if the Leader tried to punish Toiba for his treason he wouldn't go away. Just the opposite – he would blow up. After all, he had nothing to lose since his post as head of the finance department was taken from him.

This was just the time for invisible assistance from Saint Milarepa.

"Tibet is small country perpetually plagued with unpleasantness and problems. You know that well, Saint Milarepa," the Leader began. "In geopolitical terms, we are always caught in the middle of big conflicts." He laughed. "I have my own theory about all these conflicts. Ever since humans appeared on earth they have grown and learned, been born and died in an atmosphere of conflict and bickering. Human history is a history of conflicts. There is no way out. Human society could not go for even a day without conflict."

"But there's a reason for that, Your Holiness," Mani Yaso began enthusiastically. Then he stopped.

The esteemed Leader paused for a few seconds and then continued. "Our homeland is once again facing difficult times. In times like these Tibet has always had patriots who walked the right path. It has also had traitors who followed a course of separatism that threatened the country's existence. You have returned home today after learning invaluable lessons from the monk Dodai. I consider him a true patriot who has done much for the good of his people. That is why I named him a lama. Before he left to meditate Dodai fought tirelessly against Tibet's enemies. Even though he is a sorcerer, the people of Tibet will never forget him. The great man always used his sorcery to keep Tibet close to China. Saint Milarepa, I believe that you will do a good job of continuing what Dodai started."

When he spoke those words the Leader felt joy. He watched Mani Yaso in hopes of seeing the effect of his words. Mani Yaso had not been looking at the Leader, but he had been listening attentively. As soon as the Leader said that he would do a good job continuing what Dodai started, Mani Yaso raised his wide, fiery black eyes to the Leader's face and then looked down again. That one look revealed the indignant question in the young man's mind: "Continue practicing black magic?" At that moment, however, Mani Yaso was concerned with not refusing the Leader's first important request, as he put it, for the sake of Tibet.

"My dear Milarepa, there are people who are toying with the fate of Tibet. I must speak to you openly about them. Unless we obstruct their criminal plans and stop their evil actions, like a tourniquet stops bleeding, they are bound to cause irreparable harm. They hold an axe over the country's head, and all in the name of their own personal enrichment. There is one man who is my close relative. I fired him because he could not do his job. Now he is nurturing an insurgence against me. I want to you find a chance to examine him with your all-seeing eye. Then you will know all the evil plans in his heart. His plans are blacker than a starless night. Perhaps you remember Lama Toiba? After you told me that he was planning to escape to India I managed to stop him. He still wants to go there and organize forces to fight me! I will not let him go anywhere! His foot will not cross the border of Tibet while I live!"

The esteemed Leader was so angry that his face went pale. Then he took himself in hand and spoke again to Mani Yaso, this time politely.

“My dear Milarepa, we must do something about these enemies of Tibet.”

Mani Yaso looked up at the Leader. His eyes asked, “but what should we do?”

“Punish them! If we don’t punish the poisonous fools it will mean trouble for our people. The great sorcerer Dodai easily put such men in their place. And he was right! The traitors will never give up their devilish plans. Never! So we must stop them!”

Mani Yaso said nothing. He squirmed in his seat.

Then he asked, “Esteemed Leader, what did the sorcerer Dodai do in such cases? Forgive me for asking you, but you see, Dodai absolutely refused to talk to us. He was angry. I’m afraid that your making him a lama had no effect on him. He argued with Lama Busmen for a long time and made it clear that he hates me. He fought us for a long time, trying to keep his black magic text from us. I was forced to take control of his emotions and force him to give it to us. I had no choice. I had to weaken him before he would give us the instructions. In the end he threw it out of his cave and sent me off with many evil words.”

“What words?” the Leader asked. He was worried. He did not like what Mani Yaso told him.

Mani Yaso went on. “Your Holiness, this is what I heard Dodai yelling from his cave: ‘In his youth Saint Milarepa made a mistake when he studied black magic. It took him forty years to recover from that mistake. Do you, Mani Yaso, intend to follow that terrible path? Then know that your path will be paved with human bones!’ That is what the sorcerer Dodai said to me.”

“Life can be cruel, Saint Milarepa. It seems that some men lose their minds with age. When he was young, Dodai practiced powerful black magic. No man could withstand his spell for long. Dodai knew how to make a man lose his reason. Not even the cleverest of men could get away from him. What magic did he teach you, Saint Milarepa?” The Leader was impatient to hear the answer.

Mani Yaso thought for a moment and then answered, “Dodai was furious with me, but he put me on the path of the cruelest black magic, Your Holiness.”

The Leader became animated. “What magic is that?”

“I can manipulate the mind of anyone near me. I can control his ego, his inner self, by strengthening or weakening it.”

“What’s that you say?” the Leader asked nervously. He was obviously not pleased with what he heard.

“Your Holiness, it is a kind of magic that can turn any man to evil.”

“That will take too long, Saint Milarepa! I need black magic that can give results today, without delay. I need to clear out Tibet’s enemies as soon as possible. Didn’t Dodai give you any other powers? Is that the only magic he taught you? Didn’t you ask him about other spells?”

“That is the only one.”

Mani Yaso could see that the Leader was very unhappy with him and worried about something. He looked at the man in surprise.

The Leader put his displeasure in words. “I see that Lama Busmen has failed to do his duty. I sent him to find a way to his father-in-law’s heart, and look what came of it! Perhaps his heart is not pure with respect to me. Did you notice anything like that, Saint Milarepa?”

“I had no reason to look for it, Your Holiness.”

“Well I want you to look for it. He always seems upset about something. I have a suspicion. He may be under the influence of Lama Toiba.”

“Lama Busmen did his best to follow your order.”

“They’re all like that. They pretend to be trying, but who knows what they really think. That is for you to find out, Saint Milarepa.”

Mani Yaso did not answer this. He kept his head down.

The Leader was made nervous by this reaction. He spoke in a softer voice, “I am sure that you understand why I am upset, Saint Milarepa. Everything I do is for the good of my people and my land. Don’t you see that? Now tell me, Saint Milarepa, when and where you will meet with Lama Toiba. My people will arrange everything for you.”

“As you wish, Your Holiness.”

“The sooner, the better.”

“I am ready. But three conditions must be met. The meeting should take place at sunset when the sun’s last rays are dying. We must meet in a building made of brick or wood without any concrete in it. And we must speak through an interpreter.”

“Perfect. I just have one question. After you strengthen Toiba’s ego, what will that make him do? I can’t understand. He’s already a haughty man who thinks too much of himself. Whenever you talk to him he acts like he’s the king of the world. Won’t it be too risky for us to put more hot air in him? That’s my first question. I also want to know what results to expect from your sorcery. Is there any way to speed up the process? After all, Lama Toiba is not alone. There are other people. I say people, but they’re really poisonous fools and traitors!”

Mani Yaso looked at the Leader in surprise again. “How many enemies do you have?” he wondered. However, he kept that thought to himself and answered the Leader’s question.

“According to Dodai’s text, when a person’s ego is split he soon loses all respect for others. Each case is different. Some people commit a crime and are caught by the police. Others end up even worse. Sooner or later they all go bad. Now I need you to assign me an interpreter. I must work with him for the next three days, Your Holiness.”

On the appointed evening, Mani Yaso met with Lama Toiba at sunset in a private room at the restaurant Mir in downtown Lhasa. While the two vivacious Chinese waitresses set food on the table, the young interpreter politely offered the men glasses of water and juice. Then he opened the discussion.

“Esteemed Lama Toiba, Mr. Go Moh represents a trading company in Cambodia. He is pleased that you accepted his invitation tonight. If you don’t mind, I will tell Mr. Moh more about you.”

With that, the interpreter began telling Mani Yaso about Toiba’s background and social class. He gradually started praising Toiba, who, although he did not speak English, sensed that he was being praised. Although it made him feel awkward, he did not stop the man.

Mani Yaso took the opportunity to match his breathing to Toiba’s and telepathically break into his mind. When the interpreter spoke the following words of

admiration – “Lama Toiba is a leader of his nation. He is a man who can have a huge effect on Tibet’s development.” – Toiba’s ego truly began to grow on a sense of pride.

Mani Yaso looked at Toiba’s smile. He caught hold of it and began his attack on the man’s mind. One after the other he sent signals to stroke Toiba’s heart and soul.

Every word Mani Yaso said was flattering and increased Toiba’s stature in his own eyes.

Whenever he could, Mani Yaso used phrases like “I am extremely proud to be talking with a man like you” and “it’s an honor for me...” All the time he was boosting Toiba’s pride and fortifying his manic belief in his own power.

Once that was done, Mani Yaso used the monk Dodai’s black magic to insert a much larger ego into the man, an ego of such size that nothing would be able to dislodge it from his soul.

Now Lama Toiba felt elevated and confident.

“Bartender!” he called out, “give us some Scotch whiskey! I want to treat my guest here from Cambodia. On the double!”

Then the two parties proceeded to discuss something more important, that is, their commercial affairs...

Chapter Nine

What happened came as a shock to everybody.

It was the fourth day of the month and Lama Toiba was giving a lecture on the topic of Tibet’s financial policies at a monastery in southern Lhasa. Everyone noticed that his behavior had changed dramatically. Usually reserved and respectful of all those around him, Lama Toiba suddenly recoiled in disgust from the lectern where he stood and glared down at the people before him with a pompous look on his face. Many people in the room thought that Lama Toiba was about to sneeze, but no sneeze was forthcoming. With the same haughty, pompous face he changed the subject to something completely different.

“I see Shakyamuni Buddha in my dreams. I see him often, and it is very lifelike. We meet each other, shake hands and talk like true friends. Now tell me, is there any other lama in Tibet who has met the Buddha? Of course not. If there is, raise your hand!”

While everyone in the room stared at Toiba in silence, he went on excitedly. “Well? I don’t see any hands! Therefore I want you to file away every word I say in your heads. No one can teach you as much about finance as I can. They all do just the opposite!” He completely lost his temper, furious at someone in his imagination.

“But the Leader listens to a bunch of windbags. He follows their lead and pursues their stinking policies. And what is the result for Tibet? Bankruptcy!”

Among the people in the audience were highly placed civil servants and pundits who also gave lectures on Tibet’s economy and financial policies. All of them gazed at each other indignantly, shocked to hear Lama Toiba criticize them and their leader. His wrath made him lean forward so far that it looked like he was about to fly off with the lectern.

Everyone knew that Toiba was a relative of the Leader and came from the same region, so although he had recently been fired from his post as head of the finance department it was assumed that he would be given another equally important post. But this put everything in a new light.

“I cannot hide the truth any longer! I will tell it like it is! If not me, then who? You’re all sitting there with your heads between your legs in fear!” he said in an accusatory voice. He was so riled that he openly called on his listeners to fight for Tibet’s independence.

Having never heard such open talk from Lama Toiba before, the Tibetans were shocked into silence.

Then Lama Toiba leaned even further forward and began to yell, “You are all for sale! Even without your help I will find a way to destroy the dictator who bankrupted our country! When I am victorious you will come running to lick my heels. Remember that!” He abruptly turned and left the room.

Everyone was stunned. No one knew what to ask or whom to tell, so they all sat there staring at each other in wonderment.

Lama Toiba’s anti-China sentiment could not be contained in the little country, and the wind soon carried them to great neighbors on either side.

One fine day a rumor whipped across Tibet that Lama Toiba was preparing to assassinate the Leader. It was staggering news. No one in Tibet had ever openly confronted the Leader. In the East, people are uncomfortable with open confrontation by the opposition. If worst comes to worst, they might smother someone with a pillow or use a silk thread to strangle him, but everything is done incognito, without excessive noise. Did you see anything? No. Did I see anything? No again. “The silent throttling,” in other words.

But what about the people? Once the people are up at arms it isn’t easy to calm them down. The people who were waiting for Toiba to assassinate the country’s leader couldn’t bear to wait any longer. Every day they came up with new ways the assassination could be carried out. They shared their ideas with each other in person and by telephone. The plan grew thick with details like a rolling snowball.

Meanwhile, Lama Toiba was using the same decisiveness he had shown in attacking the Leader to attack a scandal in his own family, except that it wasn’t helping much. It all began when his wife, the woman who had supported him faithfully from the very beginning, the mother of his four children, went back on a promise she had given him. That promise was that she would not allow their daughter and son-in-law to sell the house Lama Toiba had given them as a wedding gift.

In his usual state, Lama Toiba might have acquiesced to the sale. Now, however, he was shooting thunder and lightning.

“That stupid fool! So the poacher wants to sell my daughter’s home, does he?” he roared at his wife. “I’ll rip his drunk head off for that idea!”

“I’ll go by myself, alone!” his wife protested. Paying her no attention, Toiba went for the door. She grabbed him and held on to him as hard as she could to keep him from going. She begged, she prayed, she cried, but Lama Toiba did not heed her.

When the taxi stopped outside his daughter’s house, a five-year-old boy who had been playing in the courtyard ran out to the street. He recognized Lama Toiba right away when he leaped from the car and headed toward their house.

“Grandfather!” the boy shouted happily and ran to him. Lama Toiba picked up the boy easily. Then he slammed the gate and went inside.

His son-in-law lay on the floor like a frog near death. He was drunk beyond all recognition. Toiba’s daughter was nowhere to be seen. After walking around the room and not finding her, Toiba set his grandson down and began poking his son-in-law: he pushed him this way and that, but the man did not react. A frenzy of anger seized Lama Toiba. He grabbed his son-in-law by the hair and knocked his head against the floor. Only then did the drunkard begin to show signs of life.

“I’ll kill you, bitch. Don’t touch me,” the son-in-law muttered, barely opening his eyes. Lama Toiba looked at him in disgust. He was insulted. How could his daughter, whom he had always adored and raised in kindness and plenty, bear to have as her husband a confirmed drunkard who stank of dried vomit?

Filled with hate, Toiba picked up his son-in-law’s head again and smashed it against the floor harder. Like a wounded animal someone has thrown a stone at, the son-in-law began bellowing and trying to get up. One eye was wide open now. The poor idiot decided that it was his wife who was tormenting him, so he hauled his hard, stick-thin leg and kicked his father-in-law.

Just then the lama’s daughter appeared in the doorway with a piece of bread and a bottle of milk in her hands. Before she could set them down her husband jumped up and, not seeing his father-in-law, grabbed his wife by the hair and struck her in the face twice.

Lama Toiba roared, “You louse, look over here!”

Full of strength at fifty and very athletic, Lama Toiba began to mercilessly beat his scrawny son-in-law, whose nose immediately began to bleed. His grandson cowered in a corner, howling. Finally his daughter’s nerves snapped. With a scream of despair, she started scratching her father, trying to defend her husband. That made Toiba furious: how could his own daughter defend that useless, drunk fool?

He began pushing them through the door. “You two assholes deserve each other! Get out of this house!”

But then he saw what they were really worth, the son-in-law and daughter that he considered to be helpless and pitiful.

His son-in-law coiled like a spring. His daughter’s whole body was shaking. Red blotches appeared on her pale face and there was hate in her icy eyes. Together they fought back against him, and then they began an aggressive offense to try and push the strong older man out the door.

The son-in-law’s face was bloody, but he was already getting sober. “Look at your father! The one you were always so proud of! Is this how lamas behave?” he yelled at his wife.

The whole house rang with shouting and screaming. None of the three of them paid any attention to the little boy choking on his tears.

Lama Toiba, a man who not long ago had had a spotless reputation with Tibet’s leading intellectuals and had been a model of propriety to the public, found himself in a fistfight with his children. It was an unbelievable, incomprehensible turn of events. Toiba, however, did not realize that. The terrible ego that had taken up residence in him controlled his heart and his brain and filled his entire being.

The fight got worse. The lama’s daughter was a woman who often became hysterical at the best of times, and now she completely lost her mind trying to thrust her

father from the house. Meanwhile, the son-in-law raced around the room looking for the right kind of object to hit his father-in-law over the head with. He couldn't find anything. Lama Toiba finally realized that he couldn't get the two maniacs out of the house, so he ran into the inner room, grabbed the title to the ill-fated house from the table where it lay and shoved it in his shirt pocket. As he was storming out of the door his daughter splashed something wet in his face. It hit him like a rock. It felt cold when it first touched his skin, but then his whole face felt like it was on fire.

Toiba gave a terrible scream and fell to his knees, grabbing at his face. It was strong poison, so strong that the skin of his face began to melt and his eyes slid from their sockets.

Three days later all the papers and television stations reported on the demise of Lama Toiba. The explanation was "sudden death due to an accident." Nobody knew what that meant, and nobody wanted to believe it. Dozens of theories about the true cause of Toiba's death flew through the valleys and gorges of mountainous Tibet.

One newspaper reported that "Lama Toiba left under strange circumstances for the Sera monastery. There he was killed by his son-in-law, who is still being questioned. Tibetan law enforcement is asking who was behind the murder."

Everyone who read the story reacted the same: "Who's behind it? That's clear enough." They were throwing stones that landed in the Leader's garden.

Another newspaper informed the public that "Lama Toiba was giving a lecture at the Sera monastery when a crazy woman threw poison in his face. His heart stopped on the way to the hospital."

That article inspired many to say, "We all know who sent the woman..."

Potala was more than satisfied with the official explanation based on testimony the son-in-law gave police. In order to suppress the rumors that riveted the country's attention, the Leader issued an announcement to all state-run media:

"Lama Toiba went to see his daughter at her house near Sera. She lived there with her husband and child in a house her father had bought them. In a tragic accident, she dropped a bowl containing a poisonous liquid. Her father was sitting nearby and the liquid splashed on his face. His son-in-law was taking him to the hospital when he had a heart attack and passed away. The Tibetan government is in no way responsible for Lama Toiba's death. Anyone who continues to slander the Leader will be considered a traitor."

Less than a month later, discussions of Lama Toiba's death had died down and it was as if the man had never existed. In early February another outrageous event turned Lhasa on its head. The healthy, forty-year-old Panchen Lama, who was also the city mayor, was eaten alive by a pack of rats in the basement of his own home. If anything like that had ever happened before, no one knew of it.

The Panchen Lama's children had not thought anything of it when their father did not come to breakfast or lunch. But when he failed to appear for dinner they became worried and went down into the basement. They were horrified by what they found: the gnawed skeleton of a man lying on the bed where their father always rested. They could not believe their eyes.

The first thought that came to them was that their father had gone out and someone else had tossed the skeleton into their basement. They were too afraid to go any nearer the skeleton and called the guard who stood at the gate. He brought his flashlight and went down into the basement, where he froze: there, lying on a brocade bedspread and two fluffy pillows was the skeleton of the Panchen Lama. The guard recognized him by the bushy moustache that was still attached to his skull. The starving rats had eating everything else.

The police were called immediately. When they brought the skeleton outside there was no longer any doubt that it was the Panchen Lama. No one wanted the terrible story to get bandied about in the papers like Lama Toiba's death had been. What had happened was absolutely clear: the Panchen Lama had been killed by a pack of rats in his own home. There was nothing else to say about the matter, not one ambiguity to open the door for speculation and rumor about the mayor's death.

A few months after the Panchen Lama's body had been cremated, his widow and the mother of his three children was interviewed by a journalist from one of the city's private newspapers.

Still in shock, she had developed a lingering stutter. "At f-f-first m-my husb-ba-band was af-f-f-fraid th-that he would b-b-be killed. I told him n-n-not to w-w-worry." The poor woman burst into tears. Then she took herself in hand and raised her head from her pillow.

"I will t-t-tell you what ha-ha-happened. A sor-sorcerer made my husband go ma-ma-mad." There were more tears. "He t-t-told him that he was hi-higher than the Bu-Buddha. My husband be-be-be-believed him. He went to the ba-basement to meditate. There are a lot of ra-ra-rats there..."

Everyone who worked at the palace was forbidden to talk to Mani Yaso. He was placed under special watch after the death of the Panchen Lama. Beforehand Mani Yaso had at least been able to chat with the people who brought him his food and guarded his door. Now, like fish, they all kept silent. If he asked them questions, they shrugged, shook their heads and remained standing like statues.

It was the Leader who told Mani Yaso about the deaths of Lama Toiba and the Panchen Lama. The Leader insisted that no one was guilty in the least. Both men had died in tragic circumstances at home, both with their children around them.

Could the Leader have found any better way for his secret enemies to die? Of course not.

He had frowned when he told Mani Yaso about the deaths of the two lamas, but there was no hiding his inner celebration. It was clear that he was pleased with Mani Yaso. Why should he try to hide it?

The Leader came to Mani Yaso's room again. His eyes shone with pleasure and his joy was plain to see, but when he spoke he sounded melancholy.

"All the lamas in Lhasa are discussing the untimely deaths of our two highly placed friends. I'm afraid our enemies may try to start rumors that we had a hand in their deaths."

Mani Yaso did not understand. "Who?" he asked. As usual, the Leader avoided looking Mani Yaso in the eye. He stood with his back to him looking out the window.

"We. Your Holiness and myself." (Lately the Leader had begun calling Mani Yaso "Your Holiness" because he said that Mani Yaso was a saint.)

"But we did have a hand in their deaths," said Mani Yaso, looking at the Leader's back in surprise.

"Not at all! They both died on their own! They caused their own deaths. May anyone who wishes evil, forces evil, on Tibet receive the same punishment! The Creator judges us all. Remember this, Saint Milarepa. We had nothing to do with what happened to them."

Mani Yaso did not try to conceal his distress. "I am very sorry that they both died under the influence of Dodai's black magic, Your Holiness!" He was unable to see the anger in the Leader's eyes.

He did his best to speak calmly. "Allow me to repeat myself. Neither of us had anything to do with their deaths. Not you, not me, not Dodai!"

"But I increased the egos of five more of your enemies. What will happen to them?"

"I assume they will die normal deaths, as well."

"And we won't have anything to do with those deaths, either?"

"What do you want? Can you imagine a better victory?"

That surprised Mani Yaso. "Victory? What victory? Can you call this a victory?"

"Let's just see what happens next."

After the Leader left, Mani Yaso stood at the window for a long time thinking of Lama Tsu. According to the Leader, Lama Tsu had gone off somewhere to levitate for a number of years. That was odd. Why had the father whom Mani Yaso loved more than life gone to practice *Samadhi* without saying a word to him? He had never mentioned any plans of the sort.

Mani Yaso's thoughts were interrupted by a flock of smoke-gray pigeons that settled on the edge of the roof opposite his window. They kept pattering and waddling back and forth, flying up in the air, flapping around the palace roof and settling back down in the same place.

"They're dissatisfied, too," he thought. It seemed to him that the pigeons were worried about something. They were being watched by an enemy, perhaps a cat.

Just then he heard a timid knock at his door.

Mani Yaso was immediately seized by melancholy. He made himself politely say "Come in." He had no choice. It was the Leader's oldest daughter Seleng. Not yet fifteen, she was a mystery to Mani Yaso. She always shut the door and stared at him with languishing eyes, saying nothing. She wouldn't come in, but she wouldn't leave, either.

In Tibet girls are fairly uninhibited. Even European women, for all their talk of feminism, would be hard pressed to understand this freedom. Tibetans are not interested in a girl's virginity.

If a young man and young woman have a baby out of wedlock, another family simply takes in the child and raises it. Abortion is rarely ever suggested, and the baby is never left without a place in the world. This unique freedom, however, leads to inner discipline and caution. In an environment of sexual freedom, both young man and young woman try to protect themselves from the potential dangers. After all, if no one else is

looking out for them they must look out for themselves. The instinct of self-preservation is strong.

Today Seleng came in hesitantly and, as usual, stood by the door.

At first she had always come with her mother, who knew when Mani Yaso would be alone and took the opportunity to visit him. The Leader's wife would come in quietly and bring him something to eat, followed by her daughter. While the mother was looking the young man over – were his clothes clean? – fixing his collar and smoothing out the wrinkles on his chest and back, the daughter watched jealously.

“Go do your homework!” her mother would say, trying to get her to leave the room. It never worked.

After a while the woman finally gave in. Perhaps she was mortified at the thought that she was racing her daughter to get to the young man's room. Whatever the case, she reluctantly let go of Mani Yaso.

Now Seleng visited him alone.

It wasn't often that Mani Yaso could be found alone in his room. He worked from morning to night with the Leader, like his shadow. If he wasn't seated next to him, he was behind the curtain, watching the people who came to see the Leader by invitation and making notes about them. After they left he told the Leader what he had seen.

Seleng was a smart girl. She could tell by Mani Yaso's face if he was in a hurry and, bowing her head in apology, left as silently as she had come.

It made Mani Yaso feel awkward to see the girl staring at him with such devotion. He even tried to talk to her.

“Come in and have a seat,” he said to her one day, pointing to a chair. Seleng did not move. Her deep, lovely brown eyes just radiated a shy smile.

Her eyes said much to him. “Why did you embark on a life of celibacy? You should have pity on yourself. I want to love you. I want to touch your hands. It's too bad you haven't had your picture taken. If I had a picture of you I would hide it in my gold jewelry box and never show it to anybody, not even my sister. I might show it to my best friend. She would fall in love with you, too. Maybe I wouldn't show it to her. But since I don't have a picture of you I have to come here to look at you. I have to hear my mother's complaints about it. She says ‘You've lost your mind and abandoned your studies. You're too young to be in love. If this keeps up I'll send you to a girl's school in Beijing.’ She wants to scare me. I don't ever want to leave you, Mani Yaso, my love!”

Girls are delicate creatures with winged fantasies living in their secret hearts. If Mani Yaso had looked at Seleng with his third eye he would have seen all of her girlish secrets and happy dreams, but he did not dare do so. He knew that if he gave in to the temptation of feminine charm he would fall into a quicksand of love and never get out again. Lama Tsu had warned him about it many times when he was still Adilet, the little boy at the Jokang temple. Back then, before he thought of himself as Mani Yaso, when he was still green like a reed and thought of himself as Adilet, he firmly decided to forget about Shoala, the girl he loved best in the world. And he did forget her. When he sat meditating he was able to remove all the thoughts and memories of her from his mind.

Curiously, he was never able to forget the images of the fairy tales he had loved to read when he was little. They were still there in his memory, part of his flesh and blood. They still came to him in dreams a long time after he came to the Jokang temple, especially Aldar Kose, the dark-faced, skinny little man with a goatee.

The boy had always loved Aldar Kose because he taught greedy, rich men lessons with his clever words and silly exploits. He could still see the big green book of fairy tales with Aldar Kose smiling on the cover.

Not long ago, while he was meditating all night in the cave, he had a dream about the Epic of Manas. The great poet Manas, a man with a large, round head, thick lips and a thin moustache, tortured Adilet all night by forcing him to recite the epic with him. In the end, Adilet's thoughts burst forth like a raging flood of words about the magnanimous Manas. Then the big-headed Manas sat down and began to cry. Adilet could not tell if they were tears of joy or sorrow. His pity for the man was so intense that he woke up. Lying on his back, he realized that his ears were full of his own tears.

Something even more curious happened to Mani Yaso while he lived at the Jokang temple. There were many instruments hanging on the walls of the temple's music room. One of them looked exactly like a Kyrgyz *komuz*. When he was alone after class, he took the instrument down off the wall and tried to play a tune he had known all his life because it was always playing on the radio in Bishkek. No matter how he tried, his fingers couldn't figure out how to play the tune. After suffering several failed attempts, he finally tried to play the instrument with his lips and, to his delight, it worked.

Confident that he was alone in the room, Adilet began to play with enthusiasm, shaking his head and shoulders to the rhythm that pulled at his heart with its lovely, rippling sound. He was surprised that he still had so many tender memories.

As soon as he stopped playing, he heard someone applauding. Adilet jumped and looked around: a whole class of *shele* and their teacher were smiling and clapping wildly.

Blushing red to his scalp, Adilet put the instrument down and ran off.

What happened that day long ago was just silliness. The question remained: what was he to do about the Leader's daughter and her loving, ecstatic eyes? All he could think to do was avoid her face and try to frown seriously to let her know that he was in a hurry to get to work.

"Esteemed Milarepa," the Leader turned around, willing the smile off his face. In an instant Mani Yaso knew what had happened. Another one of those five people had died. What poor wretch was it this time?

"There's no reason to get upset. Apparently the Panchen of Ü province hit his own chief of police over the head with a crystal vase. Last night I got the call asking for permission to arrest him."

Mani Yaso frowned. Noticing this, the Leader shrugged his shoulders. "I have to do it. He broke the head of an innocent man. It is a terrible disgrace, of course, for a local leader to fight with a policeman. And in my country, of all places. What will the world think of Tibet?"

Mani Yaso looked at the Leader, who had his back to him. "There are four left."

"Don't count down like that, most esteemed Milarepa. Don't take sin into your soul. We had nothing to do with any of this."

"You said 'sin,' Your Holiness. Are my dark powers a sin or not? I can't seem to understand. This is the third person to suffer misfortune."

The Leader looked at him angrily. It seemed to him that the young man was talking too much. Then he turned aside again and continued.

"If you were putting spells on innocent people, then you would be at fault. That's the first point. Secondly, is there any actual evidence linking you to the two previous deaths? None at all? And I seriously doubt that your black magic is all that powerful, Mani Yaso, so don't imagine that you're to blame for every little tragedy that takes place."

"So that's how it is?" Mani Yaso said to himself in surprise. "I wasn't involved at all? I wish that were true." There was doubt in his heart. What thoughts were hiding in the Leader's head? What secrets was he holding onto? Why did the Leader make him keep his third eye covered whenever they talked? Why did he never look him in the face? And most importantly, why was he distancing himself from the people whose egos had been inflated, resulting in their sudden deaths? And it was curious that the Leader did not want Mani Yaso to see himself as the cause of any of it. All of these curious things together led to questions that festered in his heart.

Was the Leader of Tibet an honest man? Were all of his unlucky victims really Tibet's enemies?

Mani Yaso could have found the answers to these questions immediately if he had looked into the Leader's eyes, but the Leader had no intention of allowing that to happen. Sly and cautious, he never let Mani Yaso see his eyes.

One day, with a shrug that was becoming habitual, he told Mani Yaso "It seems that Lama Dundup, the head of palace affairs and a man I considered my right hand, has suddenly gone and lost his mind. He won't see any of the people who come to him on important business. He won't even see the important lamas I send to meet with him. What do you think of that? He is disrupting the work of the government!"

"What do you think the reason is, sir?"

"I don't know and don't want to know. He is ignoring my orders, and I feel no compunction to ask him why."

"Poor man. He is my fourth victim, Your Holiness."

The Leader cackled. "How many times have I told you not to consider yourself guilty of things that have nothing to do with you?"

"That's impossible, esteemed Leader! How can I turn my back on what I did?"

"You think too much of yourself, Yaso. Putting it bluntly, there is no way your sorcery could have affected those men. I have ordered an investigation of each incident. Everything is under my watchful eye and control."

"You confuse me, esteemed Leader! Why do you say I think too much of myself? I have never been proud of using black magic against people. Should I be proud of committing a crime? It would make me happy to think that I truly had nothing to do with hurting the seven men you speak of."

The Leader had never been spoken to so sharply before and it threw him off a little.

"What do I hear? This inexperienced boy hasn't even grown a moustache yet. How dare he talk to the Leader that way? Perhaps the name 'Saint Milarepa' has gone to his head. Or is someone from the outside influencing him? Who gave him the word 'crime?' I ought to question him carefully." All these thoughts raced through the Leader's head.

“Tell me, who do you share your thoughts with, Saint Milarepa?”

“No one talks to me. Nobody even answers my questions, Your Holiness.”

“Is that true? Have they all lost their minds? Why do they act like that?”

“I do not know, Your Holiness.”

“Fine. I will look into it and take steps. Perhaps Lama Busmen has scared them off by telling everyone that you possess black magic.”

“I have no idea, Your Holiness.”

“Go rest. I will take care of it.”

As Mani Yaso was leaving, the Leader added, “Saint Milarepa, we will be testing a few more people tomorrow. Sleep well!”

Mani Yaso left without acknowledging him.

Many years ago, the head of palace affairs Lama Dondup had been a teacher at the Jokang temple. He had given lessons to Mani Yaso. He was never haughty or arrogant and his ego was on the small side. Since he was not a talkative man, and if he did speak it was always tactfully and softly, he was considered very dignified by everyone at the temple. Dondup had also been Lama Tsu's teacher and his closest friend.

The Leader had talked to Lama Tsu and the Panchen Lama before hiring Dondup to work at the palace. Both men assured the Leader that Lama Dondup was careful and precise, especially with paperwork. He was patient like a cat waiting for a mouse.

Lama Dondup quickly put in order the chaotic sea of documents and official papers on affairs of state and religion. Then he took over management of the palace. This won him the Leader's affection and a good name in the palace and among the people. If it hadn't been for the tragic fate of his friend, Lama Tsu, which caused him to doubt the Leader's honor, he would have served faithfully for the rest of his life.

It all started with one worrying order. The Leader had Lama Dondup deliver to the rector of the Jokang temple his order to remove Lama Tsu's body from the grave and cremate it. Of course Dondup delivered the order, but he also did something else. He added the words “I do not recommend carrying out this order.” The Panchen Lama fully agreed with him.

“Esteemed Lama Dondup! I thank you for supporting me, but I must admit that I was weak. I was unable to openly disagree with the Leader and cross his will. However, I did not obey his unjust order. That, I feel, is a victory!” The Panchen Lama had sent this note to Dondup and disappeared without a trace. Only the note was intercepted by the Leader, who immediately called the head of palace affairs to him and showed him the note. The Leader said nothing, but by the next day Dondup could tell that the Leader considered him an enemy. His relationship with the Leader deteriorated further each day and he could see no way out. Lama Dondup was not a man who could call the truth a lie.

Soon Mani Yaso saw Lama Dondup's name in the black list of Tibet's enemies. He was surprised. But how could he, a young man with no experience of government, share his opinion with the country's leader? So he said nothing.

Mani Yaso lay awake with his worries all night after discovering that one of his favorite teachers was an enemy of Tibet. Later, when he was enlarging his teacher's ego as the Leader had ordered him to, Lama Dondup suspected nothing and answered all of

Mani Yaso's questions honestly, as one does when speaking to a dear friend. Of all the men named in the black list, Dondup had the smallest ego. Mani Yaso saw this and could not help admiring his former teacher.

Sorrowfully, he thought, "Poor Dondup, what will happen to you now?" And then it happened. When it did, Mani Yaso ran straight away to Dondup's office.

A dark-skinned guard with an unpleasant face sat in Dondup's anteroom. He jumped up when he saw Mani Yaso, but told him that Lama Dondup was not receiving anyone.

Mani Yaso spoke to him sharply. "Tell him that Lama Yaso is here. Tell him it is Milarepa!"

This was a dilemma for the guard. He shrugged as if to say, "It won't help. He won't see you anyway."

"Do what you're told!" Mani Yaso was beginning to sense his own importance. No matter how hard the palace tried to keep him a secret, everyone in Tibet and many people beyond its borders had heard of Milarepa. Anyone who ran into him at the palace bowed in greeting. The young man was getting used to his special status. When necessary, he was capable of speaking sharply and decisively.

He was Milarepa reincarnated. That, and his handsome face and aristocratic manners put people in awe of him. When he walked, his slender body swayed gracefully like a young tree and the hem of his brown robe swept the floor, delighting the eyes of all who saw him. His deep-set, penetrating eyes caused trembling in all who met his gaze.

Lama Dondup saw no one, but he decided to see Mani Yaso. No sooner had he bowed to Saint Milarepa than his new ego rebelled. Red fire leaped up in Lama Dondup's eyes.

He sneered, "You and the Leader destroyed one man, and then two more, but you won't get me! I'm not a lame goat like Lama Toiba or the Panchen Lama! The two of you aren't fast enough to catch me!"

Mani Yaso's face went red. Lama Dondup knew exactly what the Leader was up to with his help, although they had assumed it was all a secret. If one person knew the secret, then there were probably more who knew. The whole country knew. There were no secrets in the Potala palace!

"Esteemed Lama Dondup..."

"No. You can't fool me, Saint Milarepa. Don't forget that I taught you, and I didn't teach you to use black magic. I taught you to fight injustice on Earth. What are you doing now?"

"My dear Lama Dondup..."

"I suppose you've come here to attack me. How many people have you already sent to assassinate me? I didn't let any of them in. I know what you're up to."

It was clear that Mani Yaso wouldn't get a word in. Every time he opened his mouth Lama Dondup interrupted him.

Mani Yaso was stunned. His teacher had always been so dignified, tactful and soft-spoken with the most pleasing temper, but now his ego had outgrown his body and, burning with an invisible fire, had become an unconquerable force. Mani Yaso acted quickly. He focused on returning his teacher's ego to its natural size. It was unbelievably hard work. Lama Dondup never sat still. He jumped up, sat back down, turned away and then faced Mani Yaso to threaten him, his arms waving the whole time. No matter how

hard the young man tried, he could not catch the rhythm of the man's breath. Seeing no other way out, he finally had to hypnotize his teacher.

Lama Dondup became still, his heavy lids closing over his eyes. He was slipping into unconsciousness.

"Sit still. I have to free you from the curse," Mani Yaso said. Following his teacher's breath, he went into his mind. Then he repeated a short Sanskrit text sixty times. It was a spell, this time a good one. He finally caught Dondup's ego.

Lama Dondup's condition would only become clear the next day. Mani Yaso spent another sleepless night tortured by questions that racked his soul. The most burning question was this: had he become a sorcerer of black magic? He could not forget what Dodai had yelled from his cave, "Watch that Mani Yaso! Wherever he walks there will be piles of human skulls." The young man could think of nothing but those words. Was there prophecy in Dodai's words or not? The Leader always denied the prophecy. He insisted that he and Mani Yaso were guilty of nothing. His enemies died natural deaths. But Mani Yaso saw Tibet's "enemies" dying one after the other, all in the strangest ways. He saw the Leader's eyes shining with a strange light. The Leader was very attentive to him, making no secret of the fact that he was pleased with Mani Yaso.

The young man had to admit that, while the Leader said one thing, his thoughts were an entirely different matter.

What would happen to Lama Dondup now? If he was still under the power of the black spell he would stay locked up in his office, sure that every visitor was an assassin. But if he recovered and returned to normal, it would prove that he really had fallen under the power of black magic.

The piece of sky Mani Yaso could see from his window slowly turned blue with golden rays of light. The young man looked at his clock: it was seven o'clock. The Leader was already at work. He had to hurry to the Leader's office for his orders.

Before joining the Leader Mani Yaso had to carefully cover his all-seeing third eye, making it all but invisible.

Today, however, Mani Yaso did not want to go to the Leader's office. He had never questioned the Leader's authority until recently. He had always been in awe of Tibet's leader, but now he no longer felt drawn to him.

Mani Yaso hurried to dress, but instead of going upstairs to the Leader's office he went downstairs to see the head of palace affairs.

To the young man's surprise, there was no guard at the door. The office was locked. He sat down on a chair in the corner. He would be late to work, but he wanted to see Lama Dondup.

Sitting by himself in Lama Dondup's empty anteroom, Mani Yaso felt for the first time that he was doing something wrong. An ominous fear seized him. He expected a guard to come running in and slap handcuffs on him. He kept looking around and listening to every sound in the hallway. Soon he heard the sound of approaching steps.

The beefy guard appeared in the doorway. When he saw Mani Yaso he greeted him hastily, "Om mani padme hum!"

Mani Yaso stood up quickly and returned the greeting. He did not feel himself blushing.

"I need to see Lama Dondup," he said.

"Lama Dondup is ill. He is at home."

"I want to inquire about his health. Take me to his house."

Without saying a word, the guard began to walk.

Lama Dondup lay on a high bed. When he saw Mani Yaso, he raised his head to greet him.

The young man stopped him, gently setting him back against his pillows.

"How do you feel, Father Dondup?"

"I am ill. But do not imagine that you can kill me, Mani Yaso! Do not imagine that I am helpless here. Not at all! I...that..."

Mani Yaso's heart fell. He had failed to fix his teacher's soul. He could not undo his own black spell. What would come of it?

For an instant Mani Yaso lost his nerve. He did not know what to do. Then he bent over his teacher and removed the cap that he usually wore low on his forehead to cover his third eye.

Dondup said, "I'll go to the immortal Lama Tsu and sit with him. Together we will..."

Mani Yaso's eyes widened in fear. Lama Dondup's aura was flickering with dark red flames. He was seriously ill. Right around his body the aura was a dirty brown color. No man with an aura like that could live long.

Mani Yaso tried to hypnotize him again so he could put down his ego, but it didn't work. Lama Dondup had reach a place where hypnosis was useless. All his thoughts were concentrated on Lama Tsu. He kept repeating, "I'll go to Lama Tsu and sit in the grave with him...I'll sit with him..."

"Father Dondup, I love you as much as I love Father Tsu! But he is in complete *Samadhi*. You can't bother him!" Mani Yaso tried to read his teacher's thoughts, but the man turned away from him.

"You never read his letters," he grumbled, not looking at Mani Yaso.

"Whose letters?"

"I'm the only one who knows about them! I am!"

Mani Yaso got down on his knees by the lama's bed. "Tell me about them, Father Dondup."

The guard coughed loudly to remind Mani Yaso not to get too close.

"Tell me, Father Dondup. What letters are you talking about?"

"I won't tell you. The rector and I are the only ones who know. He's hiding because he's afraid. But I'm not scared! Do you think I'm scared of the Leader?"

Lama Dondup suddenly turned to Mani Yaso, his hate-filled eyes drilling holes in the young man.

"I do not think that, Father."

"I'm not afraid of you either, Mani Yaso! I don't care if you are a follower of the sorcerer Dodai. You are not Milarepa. I'm not the least bit afraid of you!"

“Do not be afraid, Father. I have to save you and three others like you. Help me, Father!”

“Don’t expect any help from me! I’ll...”

Finally Mani Yaso managed to catch his teacher’s eye. In a few seconds Dondup grew calm and fell into a deep sleep.

Mani Yaso remained on his knees, not moving. Lama Dondup was not in his right mind, but his words had cut Mani Yaso deeply. “You are not Milarepa. You are a follower of the sorcerer Dodai!” Was that the truth?

Had Lama Tsu spent his whole life overcoming a multitude of troubles, worries and even insults for this to happen? Was this what he dreamed of in his old age? Lama Tsu had worked night and day to prepare the reincarnation of Milarepa to fight for justice, but the opposite had happened. What could he believe in now? Who can you believe in this life? Who can you depend on? Tell me! Who can I believe in? Or is this world so greedy and unfair that no one can get clean? Is there any sign of purity and light up ahead?

Mani Yaso received a great, shining gift from the Creator when he reached adulthood, but he turned his gift black and became a pawn for the powerful. If he was no longer able to see white as white, then who would lift the neglected from where they cowered in the mud? Who would be their hope?

Like the howling of a dog who has suddenly lost his master, these and other gloomy thoughts tormented the young man’s orphaned soul.

Suddenly he heard a girl’s hysterical cry, “I’ll kill the black sorcerer! I won’t let him go until father recovers! I will douse him with poison and throw his body to the dogs!” Lama Dondup’s daughter ran into the room. The guard seized her.

Burdened by his heavy thoughts, at first Mani Yaso did not realize that these words of fury were directed at him. Nonetheless, he turned around.

Young and thin as a reed, the girl cursed him with tears pouring like a river down her tender white cheeks. If the guard hadn’t held her with both arms she would have attacked Mani Yaso and scratched his face.

“Take your black magic out of here!” she screamed, wrestling to break free from the guard’s strong arms.

The young man’s face went pale as a sheet. He could barely stand. He felt like an apprehended criminal who has nothing to say to justify himself.

“Who made man such a weak creature? With your lofty, all-encompassing mind, your deep sense of humanity, your ability to discern good from bad at a glance, after all, you are the reincarnation of a great yogi who lived thousands of years ago, how could you let yourself be led into a quagmire? How could you follow that man without a backward glance and let him spatter you with his sticky mud?”

The young man’s head bowed lower under the weight of these heavy thoughts and the sound of the girl’s miserable cries. If the tragedy had not unfolded right before his very eyes, Mani Yaso might never have realized that his situation was tragic. Who knows? After all, man is a weak creature!

Mani Yaso had no idea what he should do, but to his relief Lama Dondup suddenly opened his eyes.

"I...I..." he mumbled, struggling with his tongue, "I will go to Lama Tsu."

"Tsu is dead, Father! He's been dead for two years!" his daughter shouted.

"I say he is not dead. I will go to him..."

"Don't talk nonsense, Father! He's dead."

"Then I will die, as well. After that I can go to him."

"Papa!"

She ran to his bed, but before she could get any closer Lama Dondup sat up as if he had been shoved from behind and shouted, "Get out of my room! All of you! Get out!"

His daughter and Mani Yaso were standing near him. He pushed both of them away. It seemed to make no difference that one of them was the daughter he adored and the other was Mani Yaso, whom he despised. His illness was getting worse. How could he be saved?

Suddenly the guard who had witnessed everything came over to Mani Yaso and whispered in his ear, "The Leader is looking for you. He has ordered all the palace guards and police to arrest you on sight."

"I see," said Mani Yaso, taking the man by the elbow. "Do not tell anyone where I am until I have healed Lama Dondup."

Mani Yaso recalled the monastery in Galden, about 100 kilometers from Lhasa. It was home to a renowned yogi who also practiced white magic. Lama Tsu had taken Mani Yaso to meet this white *bakhshi* who was already advanced in years and beginning to show signs of age. Mani Yaso had no idea if he was still alive or not.

By evening on the same day, Mani Yaso found himself seated by the white *bakhshi*'s bed.

The old man was thin, with a stringy beard and a bald spot on the top of his conical head. His chest wheezed and whistled with each breath and his eyes were running, but he recognized Mani Yaso immediately.

"How could I forget you, my son? All of Tibet looks to you with hope. To my mind, the time has come for you to follow the path of Saint Milarepa," the old man said in a weak, hoarse voice.

"Thank you for your words, Father, but I have come to see you on urgent business. I have made a serious mistake in my life."

"You did not make the mistake, my son. They forced it on you."

"I have fallen into the trap of black magic. I have cast spells on seven people. Two of them are already dead. Free the other five from the spells, Father. If you refuse, it will mean my death."

The *bakhshi* looked at Mani Yaso for a long time, as if he could not believe what he heard. His eyes were dull and tired, but there were tears in their corners. He burst into tears and his dry body was shaken with sobbing.

"What happened, my son? I have no strength left. You see what I am!"

The old *bakhshi*'s tears sent a tremor of sharp pain through Mani Yaso's heart. There was a lump in his throat. He felt he could no longer hold back the hot tears welling up in him. He hung his head.

The old man grew quiet. "What spell did you put on those poor men?" he asked "I inflated their egos."

“Their what?”

“Their egos. Their sense of self.” Mani Yaso could say no more. His breathing was ragged.

“You got that spell from the damned Dodai!” the old man said, staring. “Who took you to him? That man must be buried. Who did it?”

Mani Yaso said nothing. He could make himself say the Leader’s name.

“I hoped that the Earth would bear no more of Dodai’s black evil, but my hope was in vain. The Earth never changes. I spent my whole life fighting Dodai’s black powers, but I am old and weak now. Here I lie in bed, broken and powerless. I can’t even get up.”

Mani Yaso spoke, “Dodai gave it up, Father. He’s the one who is broken. He has given everything up and lives alone in the cave where he will die.”

“He most certainly has not given up! He is not broken. He has spread his black powers among the people like a plague. I was not strong enough to fight with him to the end, and now you come to me...”

“What if I bring the sick man to you? Can you do it, Father?”

The old man thought for a long time.

“Perhaps I could gather my last strength and fight Dodai, the monstrous tyrant, one last time?” he said, looking at Mani Yaso out of the corner of his eye, as if seeking counsel.

“Try it, Father!” Mani Yaso began to hope.

“If I beat him this time, then I have won the war. But if he overpowers me, then he will have eternal victory. I have little strength left, and you are on the side of injustice now.”

“I am on your side, Father!”

“That is naïve, my son! Much water will flow and much time will pass before you are on my side again. Just bring me the man who is Dodai’s victim. Then we will see...”

Mani Yaso put Lama Dondup in a trance, making it an easy matter to bring him from Lhasa to the Galden monastery. The daughter was another matter. Stubborn and discourteous by nature, she refused to let Mani Yaso near her father and would not be won over. She was not picky about the words she used when she berated him. Finally the guards pulled her away from Lama Dondup. When they left, she was standing in the yard behind the locked gate.

“I’ll get you back, you’ll see!” she yelled over the fence at Mani Yaso’s back. He had kept his mouth shut like a fish all the while she was screaming at him, and he said nothing now. He was overjoyed to get her father away in hopes of saving him.

The old *bakhshi* was over ninety years old. Before Mani Yaso’s visit he had been going downhill not by the day, but by the hour. Now he began to come back to life. His inevitable path down to the inexorable, last line of life was slowed by the rising sun.

Every morning he told his children, "I survived the night because I was waiting for the sunrise."

One day his oldest spoke to him, shouting into the old man's ear, "You have done good your whole life. You have every right to leave for nirvana, Father."

"For that highest of pleasures? I'm afraid not, son. I am a simple man, born into the world only once. Who knows. Perhaps I will come back to this world again. How can I expect nirvana? Have you thought about that, son?"

"But you're a white sorcerer. If you've already borne all the pain and suffering of this life and don't return to suffering, then why shouldn't you enter nirvana, Father? You are worthy of eternal emptiness."

"Your words give me energy, my son, but I do not know the way to nirvana."

Lama Dondup was calm during the trip, but when he saw the *bakhshi* he suddenly grew agitated and tried to run away before being stopped.

"Father! Here is Laman Dondup," Mani Yaso said to the white sorcerer, who lay with his eyes closed, whispering a prayer.

"Aha! Here is a black demon from the tyrant Dodai! May his clan be consumed by fire! I'll show you!" With that, the old man (who had lain in bed for many months) jumped up and ran into the next room. After a long interval he called Lama Dondup to him and shut the door tight. All the while Mani Yaso was worried that Lama Dondup's hypnosis might weaken or lift completely. If Lama Dondup came out from the trance, he would fight to get away. Would the old *bakhshi* be strong enough to handle him?

Judging by the sounds coming out of the room Lama Dondup was calm. The *bakhshi* rhythmically recited a Sanskrit mantra that Mani Yaso had never heard before, slowly at first and then faster and louder.

"He has a different way of reciting mantras," Mani Yaso thought. "He will need much strength. Great Creator, give him all the strength he needs!"

The white sorcerer's voice alternated between a high screech and hoarse hacking. Then his voice traveled between indistinct mumbling, clear speaking and sorrowful moaning. Then he began screaming at the top of his voice.

The day began to wane toward evening. Each time the *bakhshi*'s son came into the room where Mani Yaso, sat his face was even darker.

"Why are you tormenting an old man?" he asked Mani Yaso crossly. "Father was too weak to hold a spoon, yet you keep tormenting him!"

"I am praying, asking the Great Creator to give the great *bakhshi* strength," Mani Yaso replied. He could think of nothing else to say that would make sense.

As time passed, the *bakhshi*'s son came into the room at even shorter intervals. His nerves were taut. He had an evil premonition that would not let him go. As it turned out, he was right.

Late in the evening Lama Dondup burst out of the room, distraught.

"Water! Bring water!" he yelled.

Mani Yaso was alone, so he ran to get the water. When he returned to the little room with Dondup and the old man's son, the *bakhshi* lay prostrate on his back. He did not move, and there was foam at the corners of his mouth. When Mani Yaso carefully

lifted his head and poured a few drops of water in his mouth, the old man regained consciousness. He looked at Mani Yaso, gave a little smile and closed his eyes.

“Father!” his son cried. “Open your eyes, Father!”

He was furious with Mani Yaso, but he was also angry with his father for putting himself through such a trial for these uninvited guests.

Then the white sorcerer raised his thin, trembling hands and put them on his son’s shoulder. His whisper was barely audible.

“I did it. I conquered the demon.”

Lama Dondup fell to the floor in what looked like a peaceful sleep.

Lama Dondup was exhausted. He lay for three days and three nights, but finally he regained consciousness. He did not notice Mani Yaso, who had sat by his bed. He called for his daughter. The young man jumped up and took Lama Dondup’s hands in his.

“Do you need something, Father?”

“You are here?” Lama Dondup asked in surprise. Then he raised himself up. Sounding guilty, he said, “I don’t know how many days I’ve been in bed. Apparently I was sick. What are you doing here, esteemed Milarepa?”

“Do you remember how I came to your house?”

“My memory seems to be confused.”

“That’s true. You need to eat something, Father. You haven’t had anything in your mouth for three days.”

Lama Dondup gave a smile, the kind of soft, warm smile he had always given. “You know, I don’t really feel hungry.”

“I will bring you rice water, Father. Then I will spend the day with the *bakhshi* who brought you back to life.”

Mani Yaso hurried, but he was too late. The *bakhshi* was no longer living. When Lama Dondup opened his eyes after lying paralyzed for three days, the old man closed his eyes for eternity.

Pain filled Mani Yaso’s heart as he took part in the funeral ceremony to send the *bakhshi* on his last journey. It was the only way he could show his respect and give his last thanks.

The Golden monastery decided to send off the white sorcerer with special honor. Early in the morning people began to gather at the square in front of the monastery. The funeral prayer from the Tibetan Book of the Dead, the *Bardo Thodol*, was read over the body. Then a red cap was put on the old man’s head, his body was covered with a red robe, and he was carried high overhead on a litter to the crematorium recently built on the edge of town.

There were journalists and foreign tourists in the funeral procession. One of the reporters put his microphone in Mani Yaso’s face and asked, “Could say a few words about the deceased for the newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty*? First introduce yourself, please.”

Mani Yaso drew back. "I did not know the deceased very well," he said, hoping that would put an end to the questions. Several more reporters ran over to him. Mani Yaso found himself surrounded by curious journalists with their microphones in his face. They apparently chose him because of how he looked, young and dignified, and wearing the costly robes of a lama. Mani Yaso's cap also attracted the attention of these clever, shrewd members of the media because it was a sign of his celibacy.

"Tell us your name, please!" three correspondents insisted, blocking his way. Mani Yaso was shocked by how insistent the reporters were.

"Can I ask you how old you are?" one of the microphone holders asked, trying to make it easier for him.

"Eighteen," Mani Yaso answered in English.

"How old were you when you became a lama?"

The young man shrugged and smiled sweetly.

"Excuse me, sir. Correct me if I'm wrong, but doesn't your yellow hat indicate that you are celibate?"

"Yes."

"Do you work at the monastery, or are you studying there?"

"I am studying, but at a different monastery."

"Was the deceased lama your relative or your teacher?"

"He was neither."

The journalists fumbled around for a minute. Mani Yaso took the opportunity to break through the ring and hurry on.

"What is your name? Who are you?"

"Can we talk with you again some time?" the newspaper men asked, running ahead and hurling questions at Mani Yaso, who had taken up a place in the middle of the procession.

The young man didn't know what to do or how to get away from the reporters who stuck to him like flies. He wanted to get out of the procession and run as far as he could from all these people. He began looking around for an opportunity and noticed that the police officers walking on both sides of the funeral procession were studying him closely. It had to happen. He had been gone from the palace for a week, ever since the Leader had declared him missing.

When the funeral ceremony ended and the large crowd turned around, Mani Yaso saw that he would soon be surrounded by police. Wearing brown berets with tin insignia, they were watching him from a distance. They weren't brave enough to approach him yet.

The police officers were well aware that Mani Yaso had taken all of Dodai's dangerous spells, and they had no desire to lay a hand on him. However, their job required them to arrest the strange young lama and take him to the palace. They followed Mani Yaso cautiously. As the crowd gradually thinned, they got closer to him.

Suddenly the young man decided to return to the palace. He wheeled around and asked in a loud voice, "Do you have a car?"

They had not expected anything of the like and were terrified.

"We do," one of them said at last.

"Then bring it here!"

The Leader was going over some papers in his office. When Mani Yaso walked in with a brave, decisive air, he shot an angry look at him and went back to his papers. He paid no attention when the young man kneeled and crossed his arms over his chest.

Mani Yaso waited a moment and then politely said, "Om mani padme hum!"

Finally, the Leader grudgingly said, "Have a seat."

Still he did not look up. Finally, he said, "I was forced to send the police to find you. Is that what you wanted?"

"The whole time I was gone from the palace I was in a state of anxiety and sorrow, Your Holiness. I decided that if it was my fate to follow the black sorcerer Dodai, then I would prefer not to live."

"What did you say? What was that? How many times have I told you? If black powers serve the cause of justice, the people and the land, then they are not black, but white!"

"I do not understand that, Your Holiness. Because of my naiveté I have hurt seven people."

"How is that? I told you that you had nothing to do with their deaths! I asked you to forget that idea!"

"I barely managed to save one of them. No, I did not save him. A white sorcerer did it, and he paid the price of his life. What will become of the other three, Your Holiness? It seems that I can do no good."

The Leader frowned. He was wary. "Who did you save?"

"You released Lama Dondup from his post. I am asking you to take him back. He is no enemy of Tibet."

"It seems to me like you think you're the leader here, Mani Yaso." The leader's tone was sarcastic.

"No. I feel like the evil Dodai. All I can do is cause evil and cruelty!"

The Leader stood up sharply and turned around to conceal his shaking hands, presenting Mani Yaso with his broad back and thick neck.

"Keep talking. I am listening," he said with studied politeness.

"I have much to say, Your Holiness, but I don't see that it will do any good."

"You have changed much in the space of one week. Who have you been talking to? Who has advised you? Tell me that!"

The Leader turned to Mani Yaso with a forced smile, but when he saw that the young man was wearing neither the ribbon on his forehead nor his cap, which meant that his third eye was open, he turned back around.

"I am prepared to sit with you face to face, Your Holiness."

"Mani Yaso, I see that someone has turned you against me. So I want you to rest first. Take some time to think. I have never wished you ill. I love you more than I love my own children. Now put on your cap and go to your room. You look tired. There will be plenty of time to talk about everything tomorrow. Do not be late. You have an important job to do here at the palace. Don't forget it."

Mani Yaso sat for a moment with his head bowed. Then he stood and left without a word.

As soon as the door closed, the Leader picked up a hand-held radio and issued an immediate order, "Close all the gates and doors of the palace. No one may leave the palace without my permission."

Early the next morning Mani Yaso went to have breakfast with Lama Dondup. They ate tsampa and drank tea with thick yak milk, but for the time being they avoided serious talk and chatted about this and that. Mani Yaso wanted to ask Lama Dondup about Lama Tsu and the letters the rector had taken with him when he left Tibet. Lama Dondup had already told him about these things, but he had been under the power of a sick ego at the time. While he was sick, Lama Dondup had had access to what was in his conscious or unconscious mind. How else would he have gotten the information?

Mani Yaso also wanted to ask Lama Dondup what he should do about the three other men whose egos had been magnified. How could he save them?

"My esteemed teacher," Mani Yaso began after Lama Dondup had finished his breakfast, "I am glad that your health has recovered. I admit my guilt and ask you to forgive me. I vow that I will never commit such a crime again."

Dondup became agitated. "Wait. What are you talking about? I would like to know how it all happened, and why. I know that you asked me to call in Lama Toiba, and then the mayor of Lhasa, and on the next day the head of Ui province. You talked with all of them. After that you brought in two generals from the defense committee, and a colonel, too. But I don't remember you talking to me personally. What did you do to me? That is what I want to know. I can't remember a thing, believe me. When Lama Toiba and the mayor were killed, people told me that the Leader was doing it through a black sorcerer. I didn't understand at the time. I thought, 'What is this all about? We aren't guilty of anything, are we?' I wondered about that quite a lot."

"Everything you have said is founded in the truth, Father Dondup. It is all my fault. I increased the size of your ego. Dodai taught me how. I did not know how dangerous the spell was."

"It is the cruelest of all the black spells, my son."

"May God punish me. I did not know."

"Now I understand," Dondup said with a smile, wiping his hands on a towel. "So if that's the case, why don't we magnify the Leader's ego a little bit? He doesn't need much. Just magnify it a bit and it will send him right over the edge."

"I can't do it now. I will never use that spell on anyone again."

"Even against a brutal tyrant who harms everyone and everything?"

The loaded question upset Mani Yaso. After a moment he answered, "In that case, I would need to ask you and Father Tsu for advice."

"I must tell you something, my son Mani Yaso. You must know the truth," said Lama Dondup. His tone changed. "Lama Tsu is not meditating. He is in a state of *Samadhi*. He stopped his breathing and joined his soul to the heavens. Before he left, Lama Tsu wrote you three letters. As far as I know, the Panchen Lama has them. The Leader had me convey an order to the Panchen Lama. He was to take Lama Tsu's body from its grave and burn it. Whenever there is danger, the Leader keeps out and uses others. I believe you have experienced that. But the rector was an honorable man. He

would not do such a despicable thing to the esteemed Lama Tsu, so he decided to disappear. He sent me a secret message before he left, but somehow the Leader intercepted it. I suppose that is why he decided that I was an enemy of Tibet. I am no enemy of Tibet, my son! I was just protecting Lama Tsu, who spent his whole life serving Tibet. He was the first to recognize you as Saint Milarepa. We supported him. But to our great sorrow, the Leader had other plans. He began to use your powers to further his own private, corrupt interests. He decided to use you to get rid of all the people he personally disliked...”

“I see, Father!” Mani Yaso said, cutting him off. He looked very seriously at his teacher and asked, “Father Dondup, you said that my mentor Lama Tsu was essentially dead. But he is alive! He sends me a sign for me to come to him. Which cemetery is he in?”

“The new one west of town.”

“I’ll go there right away. Then I will come back to you. We will talk about what to do with the generals later.”

While one man begins looking for his ultimate purpose early in life and soon finds it, another only comes to it later, sometimes quite late. And then there are the many people who never even try to find their purpose, and that is disappointing.

Lama Tsu’s purpose, the discovery of which illuminated his whole life and became his reason for living, came to him late in life when he was in his eighth decade.

This life is a fickle thing. Sometimes it goes just as you plan, but at other times it piles up a heap of minor concerns between you and your purpose. Then there are times when life holds out rose-tinted hope, only to yank it away from you and point your way to death as soon as your spirits look up.

For a Tibetan, leaving this world at the right time is the final and most important purpose in life. Violating this rule means violating the eternal circle of life, death and rebirth. Fate handed Mani Yaso to Lama Tsu. It was unthinkable for him to go to the next world, leaving his student all alone. It was unthinkable to break the link with his karmic *bardo*⁸. The young man still needed to gain strength and courage and master Agni yoga, a combination of levitation and the power of controlling the ego. Then it would be up to Mani Yaso what path to choose in life.

As Mani Yaso drew closer to Lama Tsu’s grave, his inner, spiritual ear began picking up signals. His teacher’s almost still heart was beginning to come to life, feebly, slowly, but it still could not manage a complete resurrection. At the same time, the young man began feeling waves of energy. They were weak. Lama Tsu was sending them to his beloved Mani Yaso, who had come to stand by him for the first time in a very long time.

“Father!” Mani Yaso cried, dropping to his knees by his dear friend’s grave. He was too shaken to speak. Tears of boundless sorrow flowed down his cheeks and dropped from his chin.

“Father!” he repeated in a hoarse whisper. “I have committed an unforgivable crime. What should I do?”

⁸ *Bardo* – (Tibetan) transitional state

For a long time there was no answer, but Mani Yaso sat and waited. He was stubborn and kept waiting.

Suddenly he began to feel prickly warmth in his whole body. Stronger waves of energy washed over his face and neck. The sensation did not last long. A revelation came to him as if it had flown out of the juniper box: Dei! That was it! Dei! The word took root in Mani Yaso's heart.

For three days and three nights Mani Yaso paid his respects to the soul of his mentor. When he returned to the city and went to Lama Dondup's house, he discovered that he was not at home. The Leader had given him his job back, so he had left for work early that morning.

"May I wait here for the teacher?" Mani Yaso asked Lama Dondup's daughter with a small bow.

"Do as you like," the pretty girl answered with a coquettish smile. This was the same girl who had threatened to kill him a few days before.

Mani Yaso went over to the open window. In Tibet, the autumn air is always unusual: during the day it burns the face, but at night it drops to near freezing.

Leaves fell from the many trees with a slow and steady rhythm that made it possible to count them. In the courtyards, which were divided by clay walls, children played, running and jumping and yelling. There was something Mani Yaso had forgotten about long ago, but it came back to him suddenly: he remembered the joy of watching children be silly and playful. As he watched the children, he forgot about his eighteen years and imagined himself joining them in a game that looked very much like the *lapta* he had played in Kyrgyzstan. Only the fastest child with the best aim was able to throw the ball and hit the "enemy" as he raced away.

Another group of children was playing a different game, a game so familiar to him that it made his heart ache. They were racing each other to see who could get to a long boulder on top of a grassy hillock first, just like the game "king on the throne." Mani Yaso was swept away on a wave of memories of home, of Kyrgyzstan, of his early childhood. He remembered playing the same games these Tibetan boys and girls were playing. He had always struggled to be the first, the best, the fastest. On many occasions he managed it, and he remembered being very stuck-up about winning and wanting to make sure that all his friends noticed. That had made his ego bigger.

"I guess it all starts when you're a child," he thought with a gentle smile. Now, as he thought back to that carefree time, he decided that games teach children to win at any cost before they are old enough to realize what they are doing. He remembered playing *alchiki* and wanting to win all the pieces so bad that he would keep playing until late in the evening when his mother came out with a stick to chase him home.

Later, after he and his friends started school and learned how to play computer games, they forgot all their street games and disappeared into their own virtual world. In the virtual world they had glorious fistfights and knife fights; they shot at each other and flew to other planets. They got so wrapped up in the games that in their hearts they became monsters waging war from space ships. And of course, they always won and

became immortal. Like a swamp, the virtual world sucked in their young, undeveloped souls.

"I guess people have always wanted to magnify their egos. Everywhere you look – in nature, in governments, in people, at stadiums, in deserts, swamps and forests, in the depths of the oceans, seas and rivers, even flying through the air – we are always fighting to win, to be the first, to have privileges. We call it living a dynamic life. We imagine that there's no way out of this process, that it can't be changed. That's why there is no justice on Earth," Mani Yaso said to himself, recalling the events of the past few days.

Lama Dondup's daughter interrupted his train of thought when she came to him with coffee in a china cup.

"Would you like some coffee?"

"Thank you," Mani Yaso replied politely. He went to the table where she had set the cup. They drank their coffee in silence. His face went red, but not from the heat of the coffee. Sitting alone in a room with a young woman was a serious trial of his self-discipline.

She noticed. With a coquettish smile she asked, "Have you read any books about love?"

"Not yet. Maybe someday."

"When? After you get old?"

Mani Yaso just smiled without answering her cunning question.

She burst out laughing. Then she composed herself and put on a wise face before saying, "Love is the holiest feeling. It's the best part of any person. You can't really live without it. You might as well be dead. Anyone who doesn't know how to love lives a really dull life. It's almost pointless. Didn't you know that? Why did you put that yellow hat on?"

Mani Yaso touched the hat on his head and smiled.

"Tell me the truth. Have you ever loved a girl?"

"There weren't any girls in the temple."

"But you live in the palace now. You can do what you like. Everybody there treats you like a god!"

"There aren't any girls there, either."

"Sure there are. If you go looking for them, you'll find more girls than you want. You should go downstairs some time."

"The Leader doesn't allow it."

"Go anyway. Or do you really want to be celibate your whole life?"

"Who knows? We'll see, I guess."

"A good looking young man like you shouldn't be celibate. You were created to love girls. And for girls to love you. That's what I mean! You were made for love!"

Mani Yaso gave her a curious smile. "Just last week you hated me. You said you would douse me with poison."

"And I would have. If you hadn't saved my father. I could have put your eyes out."

"I wasn't the one who saved him."

"It's all the same to me. He's on his feet again and back at work," she said contentedly. Then she became animated again.

“Do you want me to tell you about love? There are three kinds. The first kind is when you love a girl for her looks. Then there’s the kind of love where the girl isn’t beautiful at all but you love her for her personality, her rich inner life. And the third kind is when you just have feelings for a girl because she is a good person. Those are the three types of love. But I can tell you that it isn’t always easy to tell the difference between all the types. It’s a big difference, but you don’t always see it right off. Take the first type for example. Let’s say a girl wins your heart with her beauty, her figure, her throbbing body. That kind of love is based on sex, on physical passion. It’s a strong, wild feeling that won’t leave your body or your heart alone. Once it catches you, you have to give in to it and feel the bliss, even if it means risking your life. Physical passion is much stronger than logic and can’t be controlled logically.

“You’ll think you’re in love for real. You’ll think that you love the girl for her personality, her soul. And whenever you’re around her you’ll start acting all artificial because your body can’t wait. It’s on fire. You’re in a hurry. You’ll act important and put on your best manners so she’ll see what a special guy you are. You’re thinking ‘Come on already!’

“But the next day, once it’s done you’ll realize that it was physical attraction, nothing more. The attraction is gone. The girl will figure it out too, but only after the fact.

“The second kind of love...” she was going to continue her philosophy, but Mani Yaso started to laugh.

“I’m a psychologist,” she explained, feeling awkward.

“Now I get it. So you’re an expert on love, are you?”

“That’s why I’m telling you to fall in love! If you listen to me and let go of your heart you’ll be the king of love. I’m serious! Let lightning strike me if I’m wrong. You’ll be the king of love! You’ve got it all – you’re good looking, tall, and smart as they come! But most importantly, you have black magic that you can use to get rid of the competition. You can kill people, just like that!”

“Just like that?”

“Love knows no mercy. If you’re interested, I’ll tell you that love is blind and deaf. It’s insane. When love controls a man, he will destroy everything in his path to get what he wants. You definitely would.”

“Blind, deaf, insane. Those are the key words...”

“Exactly. Love is blind!” the girl laughed. “Here’s an example. What would you do if I fell in love with you? You would turn tail and run, leaving me to sit here and cry, right?”

“That’s a hard question to answer. You see...” He did not finish. Instead, he stood up sharply as Lama Dondup walked in. He looked anxious and upset.

“Esteemed Milarepa, there is an official warrant out for your arrest. You’re considered a fugitive.”

“I know,” Mani Yaso said.

“Those two generals you put a spell on were arrested last night.”

“What for?”

“Supposedly they were involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the Leader.”

Shocked, Mani Yaso sat back down.

“We have to do something,” Lama Dondup said.

“I’ll find Dei. Father Tsu gave me a sign. Maybe he has the letters.”

“The rector has the letters.”

“No matter. I have to find Dei first. Father Dondup, do you have an old monk’s robe I can wear? There’s no point in walking around wearing this expensive one.”

“I have plenty of old clothes, but I don’t know if they will fit. Anyway, I think the guards will recognize you no matter what you wear.”

“If they do, they’ll just arrest me. But that won’t do them any good.”

“I’m afraid you may be charged with the same conspiracy as those two generals.”

“You’re right. It will be better, safer at least, if the generals stay under arrest for now. Otherwise something worse might happen to them.”

“I can’t understand where he got the idea to arrest the holy Milarepa.”

“I doubt that anything is holy for him anymore, Father. But tell me how you are.”

“You told the Leader to give me my job back, didn’t you?”

“He would have done it without me saying anything, Father. You did nothing wrong.”

“I did not betray Lama Tsu. That is what I did wrong, my son.”

“So that’s the kind of man our Leader is? We must put a stop to this outrage as soon as possible!”

“You are the only one who can do it, Mani Yaso.”

“How? By increasing the size of his ego?”

“You can do anything, Saint Milarepa.”

“I will go see the Leader.”

“But what if they put you in jail?”

“Do not worry.”

A tall young monk strode through the halls of the Jokang temple wearing a tattered old robe. He walked to the end of the dark hall where Dei’s room was.

A strange monk opened the door.

“Om mani! Another monk used to live here,” said Mani Yaso, with his arms crossed on his chest.

“I’m new here. Ask my neighbor.”

Just a few days ago Dei had been seen begging at the western gate of the city market, but he hadn’t been seen since. That was all that Mani Yaso could find out.

The next morning, Mani Yaso had not yet reached the eastern gate when he spied Dei. Although he was dressed in the torn rags of a beggar, the young man recognized his slender, muscular figure. He stood behind a large, dark-skinned woman in a wheelchair.

“Om mani padme hum,” Mani Yaso said as he walked over to them. He was looking straight at Dei. When he saw the young man, his eyes opened in fright. He grabbed his head with both hands.

“How do you dare come here like this, openly?” he asked. Pulling Mani Yaso to him, he whispered, “Everybody at the market has been talking about you and the Leader.”

“What are they saying?”

“Lama Toiba’s children are looking for you. They want to kill you. All the guards are looking for you. The Leader issued the order. Did you run away from the palace?”

“I will go back if I have to. Do not worry, brother Dei.”

“I am not afraid. You should be afraid. Why do Lama Toiba’s children want to kill you? Did you do something to them?”

“It’s a long story, brother Dei. Can you tell me where Rector Deli is?”

“I can.”

“Where?”

“People say he’s at a Buddhist monastery in London.”

“Is that the truth?”

“One of his close relatives is a beggar here.”

“How can we find out for sure? If that’s the truth, I have to go to London right away.”

“Why do you need the rector?”

“He has the letters Lama Tsu wrote me.”

“I’m the one who has the letters!” Dei shouted. Then he pointed to the handicapped woman in the wheelchair. The look on his face showed that he saw no way out.”

Mani Yaso pulled Dei aside. “Is that woman your *Taro*⁹? The head beggar?”

“Yes, but don’t try to talk to her. She has a terrible temper.”

“And she took the letters from you?”

“I had to give them up. She holds us all hostage here.”

“Where are the letters now?”

“In a metal box she keeps.”

“How can I get them? Where is the box?”

“Where she sleeps. There’s a man who keeps watch over her things. The box is locked.”

“Is there any way to open it?”

“Then we’d be in real trouble. The box is full of silver and gold.”

“How can we get the letters?”

“Wait until this evening. Then we’ll see.”

Every development in the beggars’ camp depended on the mood Taro Damema was in. There was news in the camp: the monk Dei had brought in a tall young man who was either a student or a servant from the temple. That was all they could find out from Dei, who avoided answering directly.

“Then I won’t give your letters back!” Taro Damema said. She poked Dei between the legs with her cane. The monk was embarrassed, more by Mani Yaso’s eyes than by the woman’s gesture. He backed away from her. So did Mani Yaso.

“Come over here! Come closer! Why are you running off? Are you protecting your virginity?” Taro Damema laughed loudly, revealing a mouthful of broken teeth. The other beggars, who had gathered for dinner, laughed along with her.

⁹ *Taro – mother, leader*

“Here are your letters!” Taro Damema took three sealed envelopes from her box. “Come over here and bow respectfully with your arms folded across your chest. Then I’ll give them back to you. Here!”

Dei held his crotch with one hand and started toward Taro, but she shook her head. “That’s not good enough. We don’t want you. We know what you have. Have that young man come over and get the letters!”

Mani Yaso had to approach the woman. As soon as he reached her side, she bent over swiftly and grabbed him by the balls.

“Hey ladies! The manhood on this one is stiff as a rod. Who wants to kiss it? Come on over!”

Before she had finished speaking a hag sitting in one corner stood up and began to make her way over to Mani Yaso. The others were rolling with laughter.

“Get your hands off!” Mani Yaso squeaked. He pushed Taro’s hand away, just as Dei grabbed the letters from her other hand.

“Devil take you! Give those letters back! I said give them back! That’s your collateral. I’ll kick you out of here!”

While Taro Damema was yelling at the top of her voice, Mani Yaso and Dei leaped away.

“Oy-ai! To hell with you, Dei! Where will I get a husband now?” The two men were already too far away to hear her blood-curdling screams.

“Shameless hussy!” Dei spit and waved one arm.

“Brother Dei, how did you end up with those beggars? I don’t know what to think.”

“I was hiding, waiting for you. Now I will put the letters in your hands. I can finally fulfill the promise I made to Lama Tsu.”

“Where can we go now? To the temple?”

“The temple doors are closed to me.”

There is a two-story hotel called Mir in the center of Lhasa. When they drew near, Dei became upset.

“I don’t think they’ll let me in looking like this.”

Mani Yaso looked at Dei as if seeing him for the first time. He nodded.

“And you don’t look any better,” Dei said, pointing to Mani Yaso’s patched robe.

“At least we look like we belong together. But our clothes aren’t much, that’s a fact. Isn’t there some place we can hide?” Mani Yaso asked with an anxious laugh.

“We won’t be homeless. I have some money,” Dei said proudly.

“I won’t take all your money,” Mani Yaso answered gratefully. “Let’s find some place to spend the night. It’s getting late. Soon it will be completely dark.”

“I’ll go talk to the watchmen,” said Dei. He slipped through a side door of the hotel. He soon returned.

“They said we can have the room next to their room, but it will cost the same as a guest room.”

“What did you say?”

“I took it. What else can we do?”

The hotel's watchmen had apparently turned a small storage room into sleeping accommodations with two mattresses as an extra source of income. They did not want the owner to know, so they told Dei and Mani Yaso that they could not leave the room and locked the door.

"They're afraid. They think we're thieves," Dei concluded.

"I bet they do," Mani Yaso agreed. He took off his shoes and sat cross-legged on one mattress. Then he took Lama Tsu's letters out of his pocket and opened the one marked "1."

"Did you open the first one?" Dei asked. He sat down next to Mani Yaso and struggled to untie his boots.

"Yes."

My Son Yaso,

It is hard for me to write, since the tears in my eyes prevent me from seeing the letters on the paper. But I am not crying for myself. I am weeping over the fact that fate has separated us, and that we did not finish your studies. We did not reach our goal.

My tears are flowing because powers have forced their way into our lives that intend to turn you from your true path. Today, as you open this letter, you are in a difficult position. The path you have been set on is a slippery one that ends in great evil for humankind. Our paths have diverged, and you, my son Yaso, are not yet able to see the difference between black and white, lies and the truth, justice and injustice, even maliciousness. At your age, you are too young to see these things clearly when they begin to overlap. You reach for white, but black comes away in your hand. You try to go straight, but you end up going crooked. You want to do something great, but you end up doing something base. Therefore, my son Yaso, I cannot leave you without attaining what we worked for. I am in my grave, neither dead nor alive. I am in a state of Samadhi. I have no choice. I must hold onto the silver thread that connects my soul with yours. I will not let go of it. I am watching what happens to you. Half of my consciousness has already died, but the other half is focused on you. So listen to my last lesson. You will need Dei.

My son Dei,

There will come a day when our many years of meticulous, tireless labor will return one hundredfold. The Creator chose the two of us to be a support to Saint Milarepa. We must not forget our purpose. We have been given the highest honor. We will dedicate all of our next lives to this purpose. Our purpose is a great one – to turn a human animal into a human being in all of his glory.

My son Dei, take Mani Yaso with you. Go to Lake Manas. I trust your memory. Once when you were a young man I took you to an old monastery where Shakyamuni Buddha lived. I am sure you remember the image of the Buddha on a large, flat rock at the entrance to the monastery. To the right of that rock there is a narrow cave. You must go down into it and follow it all the way to the banks of Lake Manas. Stand there and raise your eyes to the high cliff to the left. You will see a red stone in the cliff at twenty cubits above the ground. You will not be able to get up there. Let Mani Yaso go up alone and move the stone to the right. This will open the entrance to another cave. The narrow path inside the cave will lead him to a secret room containing ancient manuscripts on parchment. He must locate the manuscript numbered 66.66.66 and open it. Inside he will

find two pages of the original manuscript in my handwriting. When I was a young man, I spent two years in that cave transcribing the ancient Sanskrit writings into the Tibetan alphabet. You must do what those two handwritten pages tell you to do. If the instructions are not followed extremely carefully and precisely, the person following them will encounter terrible misfortune. Burn my letter immediately after you have read it. That is all I ask of you. Do not open the second and third letters. When the time comes to open them, I will give you a sign.

Lama Tsu

When he finished the letter, Mani Yaso said nothing for a while. He held the letter and thought about what he had read.

“There is something in this letter for you, too,” he said and handed Dei the folded piece of paper.

After reading it carefully, Dei reached a decision. “We need to go to a tourist agency and sign up for a tour of Lake Manas. Then we will travel with a group of tourists.”

Mani Yaso was surprised. “Why do we need to join a group of tourists?”

“How else will we get there? It’s a three-day trip.”

“We’ll make it. Let’s sleep for now. We’ll figure it out tomorrow.”

“We have to buy warm clothes at the market or we’ll freeze up at Lake Manas,” Dei mumbled as he fell asleep.

Some time after midnight a fight broke out in the hotel restaurant. Dei woke up with a start when the noisy crowd reached the door of the watchman’s room. He jumped up and shot over to the door, forgetting that it was locked from the outside.

The brawling men kept bumping against the plywood door, which looked ready to give way. Terrified, Dei ran to Mani Yaso. Then he saw that the young man had not moved a muscle. He was still peacefully asleep on his side with his hands folded under his cheek. He had fallen asleep in this position as soon as they lay down. In the faint light from a streetlight outside the window, the young man’s face seemed pale and lifeless.

“You’re a sound sleeper!” Dei said. He bent over to see Mani Yaso’s third eye. It was a barely noticeable spot, like a freckle, and no bigger than a pea. “Perhaps his third eye sees even when he’s asleep!” Dei thought to himself. The thought scared him and he recoiled.

Suddenly the door flew open and the watchman ran in. He grabbed a shovel from the corner and ran right back out. Mani Yaso did not react to the noise at all. Apparently the fight was pushed out into the street, since Dei could hear the watchman’s voice from farther and farther away.

Dei could not go back to sleep. He sat against the wall with his legs under his dirty blanket, staring at Mani Yaso. “Some people certainly do sleep hard,” he thought in surprise.

He sat up almost until dawn. The last stars were going out when he finally closed his eyes.

In the morning he looked over – Mani Yaso’s bed was empty and he was nowhere in the room.

"I'm surprised at what a heavy sleeper you are," he announced when Mani Yaso walked through the door.

"I sleep heavily, do I?" Mani Yaso asked, laughing.

"It's amazing. Didn't you hear the uproar last night? I think it was a fight."

"There was a fight?"

"There sure was. It sounded like they were almost killing each other."

Mani Yaso looked at Dei with a sheepish smile. He did not want to pull wool over the man's eyes, so he told him the truth.

"Last night I was in the Bayan Har Mountains. I wanted to talk to the black sorcerer Dodai, but he can no longer speak and is near his end."

"What are you talking about?"

"I needed Dodai's help, but I couldn't get him to talk to me."

"Help from a black sorcerer? What did you need from him?"

"I need to remove a spell from four people right away."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I do know you lay here all night on that mattress, Mani Yaso! I never took my eyes off you! So what do you say to that?"

"That's why I didn't hear the fight, Brother Dei. I can be in two or three places at the same time. That can only help us. It can't hurt us, right?"

Dei blinked. He did not believe the young man, but he nodded slightly. He began to have doubts that made him feel uneasy.

"The Bayan Har Mountains are three days from here," he said, trying to catch Mani Yaso in a lie.

"Once I've been to a place, I find it again easily, Brother Dei. That is the result of Lama Tsu's work. What do you say to that?"

"So you're saying Lama Tsu turned you into a god?"

"No. Father Tsu has one goal. He wants me to fight for justice, but I have lost my way and can't find it. No, I have done worse. I have taken the path of evil."

Dei did not think much of the young man's sad revelation. He did not even understand what he was talking about. He just looked at him in astonishment and delight.

"So does that mean that if you want to be at Lake Manas right now you can just do it?" he asked, still disbelieving.

"No. First I have to see a place once with my own eyes. After that it's easy to find. But this time I will go with you."

"Then let's go."

"Let's. We'll go to the bus station and hire a cab."

"First we should buy some warm clothes."

"I think it will be better if we get a cab first, to set things rolling."

They decided to have a bite to eat in a quiet corner near the restaurant. Dei walked out into the street first. Then he shot back into the room like he'd been hit in the head. He didn't even have time to close the door. At least ten guards had been standing outside, watching their room. Their guns were drawn and their eyes were red – obviously they hadn't slept all night.

"Mani Yaso, you are under arrest by order of the Security Council of Tibet!" one of the guards growled as he stepped into the room.

While they were handcuffing Mani Yaso's arms behind his back, he managed to say a few words to Dei, who was cowering in the corner like a trapped animal.

“Stay in this hotel,” Mani Yaso said very calmly.

The police took their prisoner to a special room at the Security Council, after which they received an order to bring him to Potala. They were constantly busy, always keeping an eye on the prisoner and surrounding him on all sides. Only after they turned their special hostage over to the palace guards did they sigh in relief.

The guards removed Mani Yaso’s handcuffs and brought him to the Leader.

“I never imagined you would do something like this,” the Leader said without looking up. “Lack of discipline, pigheadedness and carelessness, not to mention your lack of regard for Tibet’s leader. Those are the acts of a man who has neither a sober mind nor any basic regard for his responsibilities.”

When Mani Yaso remained silent, the Leader shot an angry look at him. Then he continued his tirade.

“You were gone for over a week. Where were you? Are you an employee here or not? I have been told that you met with the generals I arrested!”

Mani Yaso wanted to say something, but then he changed his mind.

“Is that true? Did you meet with them?”

Mani Yaso had to answer. “I did. But it was no use. I cannot save them, Your Holiness.”

“Who do you want to save them from? They aren’t the ones who need saving. The people must be saved from them. You should think about that!”

“I have to fix their egos. Otherwise only harm can come to them and others.”

“There you go again with that old story of yours! They were crazy before you got to them. They’ve been planning a coup, so now they will be punished accordingly!”

“I saw their auras. They are both sick in their souls. Very sick. They need help right away, Your Holiness.”

“They’ll be fine. After they spend fifteen years in prison they’ll be healthy as mountain goats.”

“They won’t survive fifteen months.”

“We aren’t talking about them, Lama Yaso! We are talking about you. I am very disappointed in you.”

“You told me that Lama Tsu was meditating, but that is not the truth, Esteemed Leader.”

“Do not make me out to be a liar! You have no right! Everything I say is official state information!”

“Then the official state information is wrong.”

The Leader’s face turned gray at such audacity, and then he blushed scarlet. He could not utter a word in reply. Just then his assistant informed him that there was an international call for him, which brought him back to himself. Without looking at Mani Yaso, he waved for him to wait outside. Then he turned around and picked up the phone.

Upset, Mani Yaso paced up and down the hall. He did not want to go back to his room, but neither did he want to continue talking to the Leader. He saw no point in continuing their discussion because they spoke completely different languages and were intent on not understanding each other.

He was a trusting young man who had, until recently, put the Leader on a pedestal as a supreme leader and an important personage. He had never suspected that the Leader

was using him to hurt others. After all, how could he doubt the Leader and his decisions when the man was always talking about doing good for the Tibetan state and its people?

Although Mani Yaso was having logical thoughts of this sort, he still could not figure out what kind of man the Leader really was. Perhaps he was wrong about him. Maybe he had truly disappointed the Leader with his behavior over the past week. He hadn't thought about the Leader once the whole time. He had been running around trying to save his unfortunate victims from the spell he had put on them. It was a good thing that he managed to save Lama Dondup, and it was good that Dondup had his old job back. But he did not know what would become of the other three, even though he had tried so hard to help them.

He had done all of it on his own, without getting the Leader's advice. That was true. Perhaps that was why their relationship had soured.

Mani Yaso's thoughts were scrambled. After everything that had happened the week before, he was not sure he could tell the difference between truth and lies.

Suddenly he heard a warm, familiar voice behind him. "Mani Yaso, is it really you?"

He turned around and bowed quickly to the Leader's wife.

"It is," he replied, feeling embarrassed by the joyous surprise on her face.

"How terrible! What on Earth have you been through? Just look at your clothes! Where have you been all this time? Seleng! Seleng! Come here quickly!"

Her daughter ran in. "What's wrong, Mother?"

"Mani Yaso is back! Here he is!"

Mother and daughter behaved as if they had discovered a priceless jewel that had been lost, but they kept their distance from Mani Yaso and his filthy old clothes.

"Go back to your room, get clean and change clothes. We will call for you," the Leader's wife told him.

Soon everyone on the side of the palace belonging to the Leader's wife was preparing for a feast, although no one knew the cause. For now, only the Leader and his wife knew what the festivities were about.

Servants brought in gorgeous flowers to decorate the small hall on the sixth floor that was usually reserved for receiving highly placed guests.

"What's happening? Who are they expecting?" the servants asked each other as they ran about their business. No one had an answer. All they knew was that the Leader's wife was giving the orders.

That was not all that was strange. It was rare for the Leader's wife to change her orders, but now she was changing them several times a day. First she told the servants to set tables for one hundred and fifty people, but just half an hour later she reduced the number to one hundred and, in the end, to fifty. That created three times more work for everyone. Food and dishes that had been brought in had to be carried away. Sometime after noon it seemed that all was ready. The servants whispered that their mistress was coming to inspect.

“Open all the doors and windows!” she commanded. Then she inspected all the tables, stopping every now and then to scrutinize something. Then she went and placed two chairs side by side on the small stage.

Meanwhile, the Leader had invited Mani Yaso to his office for a chat.

“I have increased the number of bodyguards detailed to you. I hope they aren’t bothering you?”

“Six guards!” Mani Yaso sounded annoyed.

“Don’t take it the wrong way. There are people who would like to blame you for certain things. That is why I have increased your security to keep things quiet. Those people will eventually calm down.”

“The people who are angry at me?”

“Yes.”

“They will not calm down. They lost their father.”

“Esteemed Lama Yaso, I want to talk with you about something else. Is that all right with you?”

Mani Yaso shrugged.

“I know you will not allow Lama Tsu to be spoken of ill, but I have to tell you that he was an old-fashioned individual. As a teacher, he was captive to the old ways of the fourteenth century. Here’s an example: he took you, a good-looking young boy, and made you become a yellow hat monk. I am sure that you were too young at the time to understand the difference between yellow hats and red hats. By doing so, Lama Tsu sentenced you to celibacy. I found out much later. But it is not too late to rethink that. You are a man of your time, and we are living in the twenty-first century. Tibet is stuck in the dark Middle Ages. We have the bright sun over our heads and our eyes are open. The teachings of Tibet are spreading around the world. We have cultural centers in America and throughout Europe. Young, educated people just like you need to visit those places often and live according to the times. You need to live fully and do what is best for you. But here you are intending to live as a celibate. I don’t think that’s right for you.”

“I suppose we each have our own destiny,” Mani Yaso said.

“Don’t be a slave to your destiny. Be it’s master, my most esteemed Mani Yaso. If you don’t take charge of your fate you will loose out on the joys of this life.”

“I was taught that Milarepa thought more about the difficulties of life than of its joys, Your Holiness.”

“I agree. I am not trying to refute the idea of Saint Milarepa, but he lived in a different time. His was an era of religious fanaticism. In those days people were idealists. But we can’t cut ourselves off from real life.”

“But if I am the reincarnation of Milarepa, then I cannot just leave who I am and take on another guise.”

“Everything is up to you. It’s all for you to decide. If you want to give up celibacy, it’s up to you. My wife is preparing a surprise for you that has something to do with this. You absolutely have to come. It is very important to me.”

Mani Yaso looked at the Leader suspiciously, but, as usual, the man quickly turned his eyes away.

At that moment his assistant came in to call them to his wife’s celebration.

“Lama Yaso and I will be there shortly,” the Leader told his assistant. Then, to Mani Yaso he said, “I have to go do something. I will come get you in a minute.”

Mani Yaso's eyes were dazzled before he even entered the hall: the room was full of guests, many of them women. Most of them appeared to be important members of Lhasa's upper crust, people who visited the palace often and had a lofty sense of their own worth. All of the guests wore European clothes.

Faces shining, the glamorous women turned to smile coquettishly when Mani Yaso appeared. For a brief instant the colorful, butterfly-like fans held by many of the women stopped fluttering.

Mani Yaso froze. He had never been focused on by so many flashing female eyes before. Over the sounds of sentimental music issuing from the palace orchestra he could hear the beating of his heart. He felt the sweat on his palms.

He wanted to turn around but couldn't. He didn't know whether he should go to the right or left, but he couldn't walk straight into the hall. His legs began to tremble. Even the guards, who were still waiting to see how the Leader would punish Mani Yaso, felt sorry for him.

Meanwhile, the Leader's wife entered the hall from a side door. Regally she made her way over to Mani Yaso, took him by the elbow and escorted him to the front of the hall. There, she gestured for him to take his seat in one of the two chairs before disappearing back through the same door.

The situation was growing more unbearable for Mani Yaso. He could not understand why he was sitting there as if he were on display.

Sweat was pouring down his face. He could not take it any more. Hurriedly wiping the sweat from his forehead, he stood up and looked for a way to escape, but just then the music began again and the mistress of the palace came back in. She made Mani Yaso sit down.

"Om mani padme hum! Friends, welcome!" she spoke to the guests. "His Holiness wanted to be here for today's celebration, but since he has been detained by some important business we will have to begin without him."

She continued her prepared speech, but her voice began to falter. "The concept of celibacy has existed in Tibetan religion since ancient times. But my God! Those times are long gone! How long will we keep lagging behind the rest of the world? How many wonderful young men have put on the yellow hat and ruined their lives all because of this damned tradition? It's the old lamas that put them up to it. What do they care? They've already lived their lives however they wanted. Their ideas about celibacy cause nothing but harm to our country's young men and also our young women. Isn't that true?"

The guests echoed her in chorus: "Yes!"

The Leader's wife looked pleased. She took a deep breath and went on. "Just see for yourselves if you don't believe me. This young man works here at the palace." She put her hand on Mani Yaso's shoulder. "His old teacher made him become a yellow hat. It's enough to make you sick, isn't it? How long will we let this go on? How long will we let them do this to us? Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to be the arbiters. Let's free this young man from his terrible fate and save him! Why don't we take the yellow hat off him and replace it with a red one! What do you say?"

“That’s right! That’s the idea!” the whole room erupted at once. Mani Yaso felt like the floor had fallen away under him.

The Leader’s wife turned to their daughter, who was sitting in the front row holding a red hat. “Seleng! Bring the hat!”

Seleng was in such a hurry to bring her mother the hat that she almost tripped on her own feet.

Her mother announced, “Our oldest daughter Seleng will place this hat on Mani Yaso’s head! How do you like that idea?”

“Good idea! That’s right!” the voices were louder and more jubilant.

Mani Yaso felt lost. He would have been glad for a hole to open and swallow him up. Seleng quickly removed the yellow hat from his head and replaced it with the red one to deafening applause. When the Leader’s wife seated her daughter next to Mani Yaso on the stage, reporters holding cameras and video recorders ran out into the center of the hall and started taking pictures. Everyone loved the ceremony. It had been planned by the Leader’s wife, and she was a sly fox who knew just how the world works. The guests were delighted and kept up a standing ovation. All the applause was directed at the two young people sitting on the stage. There was plenty of room for flattery in the hall of the palace of Tibet.

A very strange thing occurred on one of the top floors of the Potala palace the next morning. Something of the like had already happened once before. The guards standing outside Mani Yaso’s door became agitated as they checked their watches. It was already after seven o’clock and time for the lama to come out of his room, but inside there wasn’t a sound.

“Open the door!” the head guard ordered. Then two guards rammed their shoulders against the door. They almost fell in when it opened, because it was not locked. The room was empty. Mani Yaso was gone.

Last time Mani Yaso had slipped out of the door without being noticed. This time the window was open. How could a person disappear from a room on the eighth floor of the Potala Palace? The roof was not accessible, since there were three more floors above. It was a mystery.

Shocked, the guards ran to the window and stuck their heads out, searching above and below.

No one, neither the Leader nor the people, could understand the mystery of Mani Yaso’s disappearance. It was especially confusing for the younger generation. Tibetans stopped studying the art of levitation many years ago, and any such memories are long forgotten. It has been centuries since anyone saw a person capable of levitating. Saint Milarepa knew how to fly, but he lived a thousand years ago and his first reincarnation came only in the 21st century.

For mortals, a thousand years is a very long time. That is enough time for the whole world to change over, and more than once, growing old, forgetting, dying, and then being reborn and transformed. But the universe is limitless and eternal, continually creating new epochs of life on the planets. For the universe, a thousand years passes in an instant. Anything can happen in an earthly lifetime in that one blink of the universe.

There was a time when all people truly possessed a third eye that was capable of many wonderful things: prophecy, sorcery and casting spells.

With time, those abilities disappeared into the realm of fairytale, dreams and desires when humans arrogantly placed themselves above nature. By doing so, people improved their living conditions, gained experience, reached the heights of science and learned to use technology, but at the same time they began to lose the innate abilities that were the gift of nature.

Was it a good thing or not? Humans can't see the answer to that question clearly because of their savage desire to always be first. The ego-human will never let go of his desire and his dreams. Ever hopeful, he keeps waiting for the bright future. It must be bright.

The guards were still gawking out the window and their boss was starting to get really scared. The source of his fear, of course, was the Leader. He had been the one on duty the last time Mani Yaso disappeared. Now it had happened again! He was sure they would fire him. But more than his fear of the Leader, it was the fact of the mysterious disappearance that made his face pale.

"Your Holiness!" he said, shaking as he bowed three times to the Leader. "I have not lived up to your trust in me. If you fire me I will go, but I will go without understanding what has happened. It is an emergency like the last one."

"What emergency?"

"Mani Yaso has disappeared without a trace."

"Again?"

"Yes, Your Holiness. Last time he slipped out the door, but this time he used the window."

The Leader glared at the guard, but there was fear behind the anger in his eyes.

He yelled, "Search the whole country for him! Go to hell and back if you have to, but bring him here to me!" The louder he talked, the more obvious it became that he was feeling less than confident.

"That idiot didn't even look at my daughter," the Leader thought to himself with annoyance.

Just that day he had received a faxed letter from the head of neighboring Nepal. *Your Holiness,*

Trade between our two nations has doubled due to the friendly and mutually beneficial relations between us. I was very pleased to receive these new figures and wanted to share them with you as soon as possible. It is my pleasure to assure you that our nations' economic relations will show growth in other areas as well.

I would like to make one request of Your Holiness in relation to the bright future of our relations.

According to trustworthy sources I have heard that you are mentoring a young man named Mani Yaso, who is the reincarnation of the great yogi of ancient times, Saint Milarepa. Apparently you have been able to use the young man to resolve certain important questions of state. Allow me to congratulate you on your success!

Also allow me to voice a request I have, as well as my reason for making it. People with separatist ambitions have appeared in Nepal, a nation that has always been a friend to you. I would ask you to send the esteemed Mani Yaso to Katmandu for several days so that I may clear up certain issues.

With the deepest regard, the Leader of Nepal.

The Leader had received similar letters from other countries, as well.

Chapter Ten

“Omm mani! What days were those? What epoch was it? No mortal today can tell, no matter how hard he tries. It was an era when the righteous anger of Allah turned plains into mountain ridges and the mountains crumbled into hilly valleys and were flooded by waters the likes of which had never been seen before, all because of the sins of humans. It was the time of the Great Flood. For centuries, golden azure water thousands of *arshins*¹⁰ deep covered the land from ocean to ocean. A green world of what had once been wonderful, aromatic plants swayed silently in that underwater kingdom. All living things on Earth came to rest in the arms of the watery greenery after inescapable suffering. For months the birds of the sky circled over the smooth face of the water, finally losing their strength, falling and finding eternal peace in the deep.

“In those days, there was no one to name the creatures of the Earth that had lived before the flood by their right names. No one spoke the word *Earth*. Nowhere could the word *water* be heard. No twig remained to give a spark of fire, so the word *fire* was not renewed.

“The fertile Earth lost its original beauty and charm and no longer attracted the bright Sun, the gentle Moon or the pearly stars. Even the sky turned away from it.

“But finally came the time for an awesome display of nature that could not be ignored. Gradually the endless blue water gave way to rocky mountain peaks, and gradually their naked cliffs and faces appeared. The Sun turned its bright face back to the green, awakening world, its life-giving rays bringing back something that had seemed lost forever – the miracle of life.

“Mountain ranges, hilly valleys and low-lying plains were soon covered with such vigorous greenery that the Earth bloomed more beautiful than before.

“Soon heavenly bodies both great and small delighted at the sight of a freedom-loving herd of horses, and especially of its leader, a strong, fleet-footed stallion named Apakai. He was a gorgeous product of nature, the embodiment of strength and grace. When he raced in front of the herd, his silky white mane and tale spread out in the wind like a banner. To do justice to Apakai, his fame was not due to his beauty alone. He was brave, always prepared to lay down his life for his herd and, most importantly, for his heightened sense of justice. He never handed out unwarranted punishment, but if a foolish colt or playful stallion found trouble outside the boundaries that marked the beginning of danger, Apakai raced after the prodigal one so fast that he kicked up stones and clumps of soft earth. When he caught the troublemaker, he bit him on the base of his tail so hard that the youngster flew back to the herd faster than the wind.

“Apakai stood on guard all day keeping an eye on his rowdy herd. He had no time to rest, for he was always galloping off after straying colts or breaking up fights among

¹⁰ *Arshin* – Old Russian measure of length, approximately seven tenths of a meter.

the mares. When dark fell, Apakai led the colts to the mares, who spent the night standing in a circle with their heads pointing inward. He kept watch over them all as they slept, for there was danger hiding in the deceptively quiet darkness. The herd of horses did no harm to anyone but the grass, but other creatures had been reborn on the earth, and they were bloodthirsty. They were dark gray, which made them difficult for even the most watchful eye to spot after evening fell. These were the killer wolves, the bane of Apakai's existence. A wolf never let go once it got its teeth into its prey, leaving nothing behind but tufts of hair and gnawed bones. That is why they were called killers.

"Their nighttime attacks were growing more frequent. If they had attacked one at a time Apakai would have kicked them to pieces, but they always hunted in packs. Once they caught sight of an animal, the victim's minutes were numbered. No matter how fast the victim ran, death was inescapable.

"The always hungry beasts feared nothing in the land but Apakai. He was a nuisance to them and they hated him. When they heard his neighing and the thunder of his hooves, the wolves slowed their pursuit and began to lose their hope of feasting on fresh prey. And when the iron hooves of angry Apakai appeared before them, they howled in fear and fury, turned back and ran as fast as they could, pouring tears of helpless sorrow.

"Unfortunately, Apakai was not always able to save the members of his herd from the wolves' teeth. Sometimes they came to a bad end. One of the horses was a young, milky white mare who was thin and listless after an illness. Apakai did not notice that the mare was not well, and he came to regret it.

"One moonless night a large pack of wolves attacked the sleeping herd. Horses are not beasts, so they were terrified and trampled on each other as they tried to save themselves. The sick mare ended up at the back of the herd. Apakai was racing along with the herd to protect it, and he lost sight of the little mare. When he turned around, he saw that she was surrounded by wolves.

"The stallion let out a scream and ran to save her, leaping into a terrible clash with the pack of predators. The fight lasted half an hour. Only after his four steel hooves had laid out dozens of wolves did the pack turn and run.

"Silence fell. Apakai was exhausted after the deadly fight, but he did not lower his head until he looked at the mare he had wanted to save. Half of her croup had been gnawed to the bone. Still, Apakai went to her and sniffed at her still-warm head. It could not help. Her lifeless eyes were frozen in fear and she could not feel her chief's sorrowing breath. Slowly the unlucky mare's remains began to lose their warmth.

"Spring arrived and Apakai was busier than ever. He needed to cover all the mares in order to maintain the herd. Next spring each mare would enjoy the pinnacle of motherhood, nursing a leggy colt. After all, Mother Nature is pleased at the birth of each new life. Apakai had to do his duty or risk losing his position as leader of the herd, but as time went on his spring rounds became unenviable, even difficult. The reason was the young maiden mares whose numbers increased every year. They followed him, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups, preventing him from eating, drinking or even closing his eyes to rest. They sniffed him all over and attempted to mount him on his high back. The maiden mares were desperate to mate with the stallion before he was ready. Always following him, they drove him mad with their attentions, so eager were they to

feel his hot flesh. Apakai knew that the maiden mares would remain aroused and in heat until he covered them as required by the life-giving force of nature.

“One of the mares, a coal-black maiden with slender legs and a fine layer of fuzz on her belly desired Apakai more than the others. She refused to let her rivals near him. Her whole body burned with impatient desire and she followed Apakai more than the others, nipping at his chest and mane and even the sac between his legs. It was more than the powerful stallion could stand. He neighed softly. His eyes rebuked her, but there was fire in them. He sniffed all over the trembling mare. Then he mounted her carefully, keeping the weight of his whole body off her.

“When the stallion’s hard, hot rod pressed against the young mare’s flesh it tickled her. She had never felt anything like it. Snorting, she kicked the stallion in the chest and dashed off. Apakai had to work with her a long time. At first the mare would stand quietly, entranced as he sniffed her body, but when he tried to mount her she would kick him again and run away from the tickling. Even so, there was no stopping the stallion once he was aroused! Now Apakai was the one following the mare in the heat of passion.

“Only after the stars came out in the night sky did the mare grew tired of running playfully away from Apakai. Finally she stood quietly before him, breathing heavily. Nature had been following them and it spoke to her, ‘Stand still! Stop!’

“Just as Apakai mounted her again the moon and stars seemed to sing together, ‘Give in to him! Stand still!’ The mare felt the call. This time she did not notice any tickling. She was overcome by a sweet wave of passion so strong that it blinded her. For an instant she lost consciousness, melting from the unbelievable pleasure.

“After guarding his family all night, at dawn Apakai galloped over to the black mare. Her back was still bent from the night before and there was drool on her lips. He could see that she hadn’t grazed at all during the night. Despite her weak condition, the stallion nudged her with his nose and urged her forward. The herd was already making its way up to a higher, richer pasture.

“Time passed and the herd lived in freedom and sometimes in danger in the wide open spaces of the mountainsides and valleys. Then one day strange creatures appeared in the area. The creatures walked upright on two long, skinny legs with two short arms hanging at their sides. Their heads were round and their faces flat. When the new creatures opened their mouths they revealed tiny white teeth. Their eyes were not animal eyes – they lacked the beast’s greedy, hungry glittering.

“For many days the two-legged creatures walked around the herd with what seemed like curiosity. They did not attack like the gray, long-faced predators, so the horses saw no reason to run when the two-legged creatures approached them.

“They had no way of knowing that these creatures were *humans* – the ones God had banished from paradise for their sins; the ones who had disappointed their father Yaiswudu after he saved them from death in the Great Flood.

“On one of those tranquil days, while Apakai was galloping back and forth in the valley to show off in front of the others, he suddenly disappeared as if the Earth had swallowed him up. He found himself in a deep pit that had been camouflaged with sticks and grass. The stallion could not get to his feet to leap from the trap. All he could do was groan in pain.

“The jubilant two-legged creatures appeared over him. Deftly, they tossed a rough rope lasso around his neck and tried to tie him down, but the tough stallion fought for all he was worth. He ripped at the rope with his hooves, trying to get to his feet, but there were too many of the two-legged creatures, all shouting, and they were clever and skilled. When one rope broke they had another one waiting to tie the fiery stallion again.

“The mares, colts and foals did not understand what was happening. They stretched their necks out and watched the strange behavior of the two-legged creatures in surprise. Why were the creatures being so cruel to the herd’s leader? What had Apakai ever done to them? The poor, lost creatures got no answer to their questions.

“That evening the two-legged creatures dragged Apakai off somewhere. Tears poured in streams from his huge, desperate eyes. That same night, the orphaned herd was attacked by a pack of wolves that had been waiting for just this opportunity. The beasts seemed to know that Apakai would not return. The fight that started on the grassy plain was not a fight for survival, but a fight to the death. Soon the mares’ pale silhouettes began disappearing into the dark shadows. The horses raced away to save themselves. Before, they had always run together in a big herd, but now the herd was thinning with every passing minute. One by one, the horses fell, rolled over and, before they knew what happened, were destroyed by the hungry wolves’ sharp fangs, their last breaths wheezing through their slashed throats. That night black clouds hung low over the plain, shielding the stars and the whole sky from the bloody scene below.

“Less than two weeks later, the wolves ripped to shreds the last foal from the white-maned herd, crunching its thin bones between their teeth. All that remained of the foal was its little hooves, like four empty lead cups.

“While the wolves had forgotten about the fearsome Apakai, the two-legged creatures gave him no peace. They would surround him and then carefully approach him, attempting to stroke his white withers and fluffy forelock.

“One day they put reins on the broken stallion. A red-headed young man with a long nose – a descendant of the High King – leaped nimbly on his back. At first Apakai did not know what had happened. Then it scared him when he caught sight of the rider on his back. His back was twitching unbearably. He snorted in anger and raised up on his hind legs to throw the two-legged creature. The rider just grabbed his mane tighter and squeezed the stallion’s body with his legs. The stallion screamed and reared again. Then he kicked so hard that his hooves seemed to fly up in the sky, but the rider just shifted from side to side and stuck to the horse like a burr. Furious, Apakai bucked and kicked even harder, and finally the stubborn creature flew off his back. The stallion tried to run away to his herd in the green valley, but the terrible, rough lasso and reins held him fast. Apakai could not fight much longer.

“The blue-eyed, red-headed creature rode the stallion often, and he was its only rider. This put him above the heads of foot soldiers and made it harder for enemy spears to reach him. It also made him infinitely faster. He was always first.

“After a while, Apakai began to be used in fighting between the two-legged creatures. A wide leather strap was hung across his breast and an iron triangle attached to it. Apakai had no idea what it was for. The rider on his back pulled his reins from side to side and kept spurring him with his feet. When he whipped Apakai, the stallion raced ahead, soon outstripping an entire company of two-legged creatures armed with spears.

“The whole time, the king was yelling to his men, urging them to kill. It was a bloody battle the likes of which had never been seen before, with no mercy on either side.

“Suddenly Apakai saw a whole crowd of creatures with pikes and spears running toward him. The stallion screamed. His master would not let him turn back. He had no choice but to leap over the two-legged attackers. With each jump, some of the two-legged creatures were thrown by his hooves, and others fell like trees. By the time Apakai forced his way out of the circle of attackers he had trampled many of them. Finding himself outside the fighting, he breathed with relief and decided to race away to his herd. But then the terrible reins forced him to go back into the fight and trample more of the two-legged creatures. His innocent hooves, which had never trod on anything other than the velvety green grass, now trampled over dead and dying bodies, turning them into a bloody pulp.

“The red-headed creature on his back kept yelling ‘I am the one! Now I will conquer the whole world! As long as I ride this stallion I can destroy anyone! I will conquer lands near and far, from sea to sea! I will throw them all to their knees!’”

“The creature was enraged, his eyes shining and his mouth foaming. With his bloody sword he struck at the prisoners around him. He could not stop.

“Then his gray-bearded father spoke, ‘My son!’ He was shaking at the cruelty he witnessed. ‘Your right hand goes on and on spilling blood. Let your left hand have a turn! Use it to wipe the blood from your horse’s mane and flanks! Where is the poor animal’s guilt?’

“The old man paid for his attempt to bring his son to reason. Incensed by the smell of blood, drunk with success in war and not even recognizing the Almighty, the madman screamed at his father, ‘I will not wipe it off!’ Then he lashed out with his sword and the whole crowd of two-legged creatures howled like a pack of hungry predators. Their howling drowned out all other sounds in the world. They were cries of praise for a man so mad prepared to kill his own father for the sake of victory and glory.

“As the old man’s head flew away and fell with a thump on the trampled, bloody ground, it still had a few seconds of life in it. His ears were beginning to fill with blood, but they heard the screams of the stallion and its longing for freedom, for family. The old man’s darkening eyes saw his arrogant son drag the reins so hard that the iron bit scraped against the stallion’s teeth. The horse shook its head in pain, reared up and issued a loud shriek of despair...”

“Who wrote this nonsense?” the Leader asked his assistant, shoving the pages at him with scorn.

“Mani Yaso’s room was searched after he disappeared. They found these pages there, Your Holiness.”

“No, I want to know who wrote it! I am asking you who the author is!”

“The author? We don’t know, Your Holiness! Perhaps Mani Yaso wrote it...”

“He’s a celibate monk! How would he know about stallions and mares?”

“I have no idea, Your Holiness. Forgive me.”

“How is the search going?”

“The monk they caught at the border yesterday turned out to be someone else.”

“I already know that! Isn’t there any other news?”

“Not yet, Your Holiness.”

The Leader found his assistant's stupidity annoying. He was about to give the man an ugly look when suddenly a thought occurred to him, "If Mani Yaso wrote that nonsense, then the bastard may have sullied my daughter. I bet all those damn monks use their yellow hats to cover up whatever they're really up to. I'll tell my wife to examine our daughter."

Chapter Eleven

Seleng fell ill. She lay in bed staring at the ceiling. In two weeks the young girl's face and body became thin and drawn. She trembled like a reed in the wind and her legs did not hold her up.

Many a renowned doctor and healer came to see her and take her pulse. One by one, they all shook their heads and shrugged. Her health seemed to be in order, but none of the healers could get her out of bed. The girl grew paler with each day and her tears fell in clear rivulets down her sunken cheeks. Her servant was constantly removing the wet pillows on her bed and replacing them with fresh ones.

The Leader was scared. He had a gnawing feeling that he had lost his touch or his luck lately. Things seemed to be taking a turn for the worse. It hurt him and frightened him to see his wife crying as she came out of their daughter's room.

This day was no different. Seleng refused to touch her food. Her mother held the girl's head up and begged her to take a sip of orange juice, but the girl just pushed her hand away.

"Why don't I take that picture down? It's not worth looking at," her mother said as she removed the photograph of Seleng and Mani Yaso that hung opposite the girl's bed.

Seleng was hysterical. "Don't take it down! Don't you dare touch it!"

"I'll just move it until you get better, angel!"

"Don't do it!" Seleng's lips trembled and tears poured from her lovely eyes.

Her mother was forced to put the picture back.

"Ask Father to come in," the girl said suddenly.

The Leader was on his way to lunch and dropped by Seleng's room as he always did.

"Say something, honey. Your mother and I just don't know what to do. We can't sleep at night."

"You aren't doing anything to find Mani Yaso!" she burst out.

"People are looking for him, dear. All the borders are closed, and all the police in Tibet are looking for him. Even the army is looking. Yesterday and the day before they caught two young men, but neither of them was Mani Yaso. They just looked like him."

"Father, you aren't looking for him!" Seleng repeated stubbornly. Her voice cracked and she covered her face with her hands. Then she suddenly jumped out of bed before her mother could catch her.

"I'll go look for him myself. Your guards are all idiots! Fools and idiots! They're asleep! I'll find him myself! I know where to find him!" She was so weak she could barely stand, but she began getting dressed.

Her mother grabbed her clothes away from her. "Don't do it, my precious! How can you go looking for him? You're so sick! He'll show up sooner or later. How far could he go?"

Then she turned to her husband, "I don't care where he is. You get him back now!"

Shocked by his daughter's behavior, the Leader cut his wife off, "That's enough! I've got people looking for him." He tried to help his wife hold on to their daughter, but their pleading was no match for her stubbornness. She put her clothes on and ran to the door.

The Leader hurried after her. "Wait! I'll have some guards go with you. They can help you look!"

As soon as Seleng was gone the Leader vented his anger on his wife. "You raised her!"

Without raising her eyes, the wily first lady of Tibet, a woman who could find a way out of any situation, replied, "Love is an illness. It's a mental illness. What can I do for her?"

The Leader had nothing to say to this. He stared at his wife for a minute and then turned sharply and went to his office.

"What a mess!" he mumbled to himself, shaking his head. "A real mess!"

His obstinate daughter was now feeling much better in body and soul and was driving around Lhasa in a Mercedes with tinted windows. She sat up front next to the driver and four of the Leader's bodyguards sat in the back.

As the car went down Beijing Street, Lhasa's main thoroughfare, it weaved left and right and sometimes skidded to a halt right in the middle of the street. The Mercedes was getting in the way of other drivers, but instead of stopping the car and fining the driver, traffic police stood back and bowed as the car sped past them.

The Leader's daughter was telling the driver where to turn and where to stop, and finally one of the guards lost patience. "Ma'am, please don't interfere with the driver. We're about to cause an accident!"

Just then she grabbed the driver's arm and yelled "Stop right here! There's Mani Yaso walking down the street! Don't you see him?"

Flustered, the driver turned right. There really was a tall, thin young monk walking down the sidewalk. The girl jumped out of the car and ran after him. Taken by surprise, the guards leaped out and followed her. When Seleng reached the monk and he turned around to look at her, the girl's face changed as if someone had thrown a bucket of icy water on her. Her pretty face was twisted in disappointment and anger and she burst into tears.

The monk was concerned. "Did you want something, *hanum*?" he asked, bending over her, but Seleng's bodyguards pushed him aside and took the girl back to the car.

"Wait a minute! Leave her alone!" the monk cried, not wanting to lose sight of the pretty, tearful girl who had appeared out of nowhere.

To keep the young man from causing trouble, one of the bodyguards opened the front of his robe to reveal his pistol in its holster. The young man smiled with embarrassment and hurried off.

Seleng's bodyguards grew flustered when she announced that she would keep looking for Mani Yaso without their help. She got out of the car.

It would be impossible for her to continue searching on foot. That morning's downpour had turned the street into a maze of puddles, and Seleng was far too inexperienced to make her way around them while shoving through a crowd of people.

"It's no use looking for someone on foot when you're in a big city," one of the bodyguards suggested, cautiously following behind her. Just then Seleng's cell phone rang. It was her mother.

"Please come home, angel!" Her mother's voice was hoarse and wavered. "You won't find Mani Yaso walking down the street. If he was out walking around the police would have gotten him by now."

"The police are idiots! They don't know anything! They'll never find him! I'll find him on my own!"

"Baby, my angel..."

Without listening further, Seleng switched off her phone and suddenly said she would get back in the car.

"Take me to the Muslim mosque!" she ordered the driver. "I know he's there!" she added confidently.

The Mastif mosque sat among several two-story buildings near the Jokang temple where Mani Yaso had studied and served for over fifteen years. The mosque courtyard was neatly swept. The small dog and scruffy orange cat that lived in the courtyard were sunning themselves by the door. All was quiet inside the mosque. As usual, there were few people around. It was only during Friday prayers that all the Muslims of Lhasa and the surrounding area came to the mosque.

The car rolled to a stop at the entrance to the courtyard and Seleng jumped out.

"Have you seen Mani Yaso? He's this tall and very good looking," Seleng explained, using her hands to gesture, to a young mullah wearing a Uighur *dopu*¹¹.

The mullah rolled his eyes up and said, "*La illaha ill Allah*"¹². Then he bowed his head and politely inquired, "Who is it that you are looking for?" Is the man a Muslim?"

"His name is Mani Yaso!"

"*Muhammadur Rasul Allah*"¹³! No Muslim by that name comes here, *hanum*.

"Don't lie to me! He's hiding in the mosque!"

After this rude outburst, the mullah's voice lost its respect tones when he spoke to the unbalanced girl. He came close to her, paying no attention to her bodyguards, and stroked her hips.

Then, with a dirty smile, he replied, "I do not lie, *hanum*. I always speak the truth. You would do well to believe me."

One of the bodyguards lost patience and shoved the lascivious mullah away from Seleng. "Get in the car please. I will search the mosque."

"No! I will search it myself!"

Seleng tried to run through the door, but the mullah quickly blocked her way. The bodyguard yanked him by the elbow and ordered him to stay outside.

After searching the mosque and finding nothing, Seleng and the bodyguards went to the Jokang temple.

¹¹ The *dopu* is a traditional hat worn by Uighurs and Uzbeks.

¹² *La illaha ill Allah* – (Arab.) "There is no God but Allah."

¹³ *Muhammadur Rasul Allah* – (Arab.) "Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah."

It was insanity to even think of looking for someone in the labyrinth hallways of the temple, where thousands of outwardly similar monks lived and studied in the company of crowds of pilgrims. Seleng's bodyguards were desperate to make her see this.

One of them displayed initiative. "Why don't we go see the head of the temple guards? He knows every mouse in the building," he said.

They had a hard time convincing the girl to meet with the head of the guards, a dark-faced man with a large moustache.

Standing at ease with his hands folded behind his back, he said "We have already received orders to find and arrest Mani Yaso. We are looking for him, but without luck so far."

"What do you mean, arrest him?" Seleng asked, her eyes growing round in her pale face.

"That was the order, *hanum*."

"Whose order?"

"It came down from the top," the guard said, pointing up at the ceiling.

"What do you mean, the top?"

"We were not told. We do not have the right to inquire."

"Why can't you ask? I want you to find out right now!"

The head guard was becoming increasingly annoyed. "I cannot do that, *hanum*." He looked her over in disgust, as if to say "Who do you think you are?" Then he gestured to indicate that their talk was over.

"Mani Yaso is in the temple!" Seleng announced to her bodyguards.

"That is impossible, esteemed *hanum*."

"If he was here, he would have been arrested a long time ago, esteemed *hanum*."

The head guard wanted to put the girl in her place with a sharp word, but he refrained when he saw how the bodyguards were pleading, calling her "*hanum*" and trying to convince her that there was no point in looking for Mani Yaso in the temple.

He was an experienced guard with a good eye, but up until now he had not paid attention to her expensive clothes, the gold bracelets and necklace with precious stones adorning her sleek arms and milky white neck, or the astonishing diamond earrings hanging from her tiny ears. He had never seen such lavish display in his life. How could he have failed to see it before?

The thought that she must be a "real *hanum*" had just crossed his mind when Seleng turned to him, trembling. "Mani Yaso studied here! You are hiding him!" There was misery in her voice.

"*Hanum*," he mumbled, wishing he could hide somewhere, "If you don't believe me, then let me show you. I have here the most recent memo from the Security Council on the search for Mani Yaso."

He took a sheet of paper out of his safe and held it out to Seleng with trembling hands.

Top Secret Memorandum No. 2

To: All border and security posts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region

Last time, Potala Palace employee Mani Yaso was seen meeting with the taro of the beggars' society, a woman named Damema. He then spent the night at the Mir Hotel,

accompanied by a former yellow-hat monk from the Jokang temple named Ngvan Dei. Dei served for many years as an assistant to Lama Tsu. Photographs of both individuals are attached.

All government posts and individuals involved in the search must immediately report any information about these individuals to the Security Council. The fugitives may be armed. TSC

When she finished reading the memorandum, Seleng put the paper down. For a second she looked lost. Then, remembering something, she issued an order that, although it sounded hurried, was also authoritative.

“Take me to the Mir Hotel!”

As it turned out, one of her former servants was a maid at the hotel. When she was called in, they saw that she was an attractive woman, but she looked terrified of Seleng.

“You put a spell on him! I know that you practice black magic! Find him for me!” Seleng screamed at the maid.

Confused, the woman took a step backward.

“Excuse me, *hanum*. We are looking for a Palace employee, a young man named Mani Yaso,” one of the bodyguards explained with a polite bow.

“I heard about it,” the maid said, instinctively covering her face with her hands in case Seleng tried to scratch her. “I heard about it on the radio. But I never saw the man you are looking for.”

“You’re lying!” Seleng screeched. “You couldn’t not notice a man like him!”

By this time, there were at least a dozen onlookers standing in the hall.

Seleng’s bodyguards were not sure how to get her out of there. They could not speak sharply to her, nor could they physically force her to leave. If they attempted anything of the sort they would be punished so severely that they would never forget it. Powerful people are the same everywhere.

“Get your crazy girl out of here! What does she want from me? I never saw the fugitive!” said the maid. She waved away Seleng’s hand and tried to break through the dense crowd of onlookers. The bodyguards wanted to break up the crowd, but it was not easy. Many of the people were seeing the Leader’s daughter for the first time, and they were also highly entertained by the spectacle. Amazed, they watched as the Leader’s daughter tried to catch the maid by the hair and scratch her face, but all she could reach was the woman’s collar and her shoulder.

The maid pushed Seleng as hard as she could and screamed, “You idiot! I don’t give a shit about your Yaso, whoever the hell he is!”

Just then, a tall woman with broad shoulders and powerful muscles rippling beneath her uniform ran over. She wanted to separate the two women, but that just made Seleng more furious. She ripped the maid’s blouse and pulled away her brassiere, exposing her naked breasts. The crowd began to howl.

“Grab your crazy girl!” the woman yelled to the bodyguards as she tried to break up the fight. It took her voice to snap one of the bodyguards back to reality after seeing the maid’s bared breasts, and he grabbed Seleng from behind. It was a sight to see, as the spoiled fifteen-year-old daughter of Tibet’s respected Leader tried desperately to get away from the guard, writhing like a fish caught in the tentacles of a black medusa.

That same evening, the Palace healers worked hard to calm the girl using hypnosis. Then they sent her to a psychiatric hospital in Beijing.

Chapter Twelve

The work assigned to Sorju, a monk at the Shakyamuni¹⁴ monastery, consisted of a simple routine: early each morning he went out to melt snow. He had to melt ten buckets of snow to get one bucket of water. It was getting harder to find clean snow, since the increasing flow of tourists had created more and more mud around the monastery. He had to walk far to find clean snow. He could have brought water from Lake Manas, but then he would have had to boil it. It would also have been very hard for him to walk down the steep gulley and climb back up with heavy canisters of lake water on his shoulders every day. Long ago there had been a clear, bubbling spring near the monastery, which was probably built near the source of clean water on purpose. However, over time the spring dried up and water became worth its weight in gold.

The Shakyamuni monastery had suffered much since the middle of the last century, perhaps because it was named for the Buddha. Shakyamuni had performed ablutions in Lake Manas when he lived in a cave nearby. Later the monastery had been built above the cave. No one could have known that the wonderful, clear spring would disappear. On the other hand, there is no end to human inventiveness. Despite the lack of water, the hearth fire at the Shakyamuni monastery has continued to burn for centuries. When one person leaves, another comes to live there. The holy place is never abandoned. And it has been that way for centuries.

The monk Sorju warmed his frozen fingers over the fire. He always thawed his fingers and the snow at the same time, otherwise his fingers would be unable to work. By the time he had gathered two buckets of snow his hands were numb to the wrists.

Then came a sound that Sorju had expected: someone was stamping the snow from a pair of boots. Breathing heavily, Dei came into the room.

“It’s plenty cold outside,” he said as he removed his overcoat.

“What do you care? You’ve got bigger trouble. Why don’t you beat it out of here? That border guard came again. I bet they’re looking to catch you. Who are you anyway, stranger? Who are you? Are you a spy? Tell me the truth.”

“I told you everything. I’m a beggar.”

“I bet everything you said was a lie. I bet you didn’t come here to pray your sins away. You’re probably up to something. Why else would the Tibetan government put a million Yuan on your head?”

“My head isn’t worth a fen!” Something like a rueful smile appeared on Dei’s pale face. “Did they say they wanted to arrest me?”

“No, but I could tell. They were pretty interested in you last time they came, and I was stupid enough to give them cause for suspicion. When the border guard asked me if anyone was living in the monastery with me, I told him I was all alone. Then he looked around the room and said ‘Is that other bed yours, too? Do you eat out of two bowls?’ He guessed that you’re here.”

“That’s fine. He’s welcome to know that I’m here. I didn’t commit any crime. Just don’t make me leave.”

¹⁴ *Shakyamuni – the Sanskrit name of Buddha*

"It's okay. I'm glad you're here. I see you have enough money. With you here I don't have to get by on what the tourists give me. We buy our own food. But..." Sorju broke off and looked at Dei suspiciously.

"There has to be a legal reason to arrest me," Dei said, thinking aloud as he prepared to put his coat back on.

"Do you think a border guard can't find a reason? This monastery is near the border. Forget about you. They could put me in jail, and I've lived here for a decade already. They don't care. But tell me the truth. Are you running from something?"

"I already told you that I'm a beggar. I haven't been in trouble with the law."

"Okay. If you say you're a beggar, then you're a beggar. But you have money. Where did you get it?"

"I had a little money. It's gone now."

"That little bit of money lasted us a whole year. Just think about all we ate! I've put on so much weight that my pants are about to burst. Your cheeks look round, too, even though your beard hides them. Remember how skinny you were when you showed up here? I'm grateful to you, for sure. But keep your eyes open. I warned you, so don't blame it on me."

"Should I leave?"

"Are you guilty of something? If you are, then get the hell out of here. Maybe the name you gave me isn't your real one. But remember this: the monk Sorju never betrayed a good man. And I won't betray you. I don't need a million Yuan."

Sorju spoke this in a complaining voice as he tossed yak dung bricks onto the fire. Dei was touched by the monk's decency. Sorju could have given him up a long time ago if he wanted a million Yuan. Every day the Tibetan radio station repeated information about the fugitive Mani Yaso and his companion, a monk named Dei, along with complete descriptions of both men. Every time border guards showed up at the monastery, Sorju let Dei out through a secret back door. That went on for a whole year. Dei couldn't help but feel grateful.

"Uncle Sorju," Dei said, taking a seat next to the man, "can I tell you something?"

"Go ahead."

"That million Yuan isn't on my head. It's on Mani Yaso's head. Do you understand?"

"Well, sure. But they have to start with you to catch Mani Yaso. You're the one they call Dei, aren't you?"

Dei swallowed hard and froze. He couldn't say anything. Sorju's words pierced his heart like a bullet. So the seemingly simple monk had known all along. He probably guessed when Dei came asking for a place to stay, but the whole time he had cleverly pretended not to know anything.

It seemed to Sorju that Dei was about to run. "Don't worry, monk Champa. To me you will always be Champa, even if your real name is Dei," he said, looking him in the eye.

Dei opened his mouth wide, as if someone had just stuck a hot poker in his back. That was how he smiled.

"Thank you. I will never forget it!" he finally said.

"Then think hard, Champa, about whether or not you're going to run."

"Uncle Sorju, I have to run. Otherwise I'll be causing you harm."

“Do you know where Mani Yaso is?”

“I am supposed to meet him soon. If they arrest me, will you go meet Mani Yaso?”

“Where is it?”

“He is meditating.”

“For a whole year?”

“Yes.”

“That’s a good thing, I suppose.”

“He is Saint Milarepa! You do know that, don’t you?”

“Yes. But nobody today will believe it.”

“I believe. Do you, Uncle Sorju?”

“Your Mani Yaso has to prove that he’s Milarepa. I’ve heard all about his black magic. He put a spell on seven men and two of them died. I don’t know about the others. The children of the two men who died want to kill your Yaso. Are they the ones offering one million Yuan?”

“The Leader put that bounty on his head.”

“They didn’t say that on the radio. Or maybe I missed it.”

“It’s all the Leader!”

Sorju looked up suddenly. “Do you hear that? Riders are coming!”

Dei heard the hoof beats and without a word disappeared through the secret door behind a rug hanging on Sorju’s wall.

Sorju was calm when the two Chinese border guards burst into the room. They looked furious. The politeness they had shown on previous occasions was gone.

“Stand up!” ordered the one who came in first. He was an officer. Sorju smiled in confusion and stood up.

“Cuff him!” the officer yelled. He began to search the room. The two turned everything upside down in Sorju’s room, but the only suspicious thing they found was the *nasvay*¹⁵ that Sorju used when his nose itched.

“Hash!” the soldier yelped when he picked up the bag of *nasvay*.

The officer grabbed it from him, sniffed it and tossed it aside.

A shadow of a smile crossed Sorju’s lips. He was glad that Dei had gotten away in time and was sure that they would keep him at the post for a few days and then let him go. However, they were unusually rude when they pushed him out the door, and that concerned him. Sorju was shocked to see Dei standing by the horses with his arms in chains. The poor monk’s ripped hat hung to one side, about to slip off. The chains on his arms were tied to the horses’ reins. It immediately became clear to Sorju that in the space of less than a quarter-hour he, who had lived at the Shakyamuni monastery for ten years, had become a prisoner.

Four border guards stood smoking not far from the monastery. Obviously they had done their homework before coming to catch their two suspects. They had discovered the secret door out of Sorju’s home and caught Dei when he came out.

“Take them away! You guard the monastery!” the officer called to one of the soldiers. Then he leaped on his horse and galloped away.

The border post was not far away, no more than a two- or three-hour walk, but it was all uphill.

¹⁵ *Nasvay* – chewing tobacco mixed with lime and other ingredients

Once the officer was far ahead, the soldiers began abusing their new prisoners and showering them with foul language. Dei got more of it than Sorju, who was close to fifty.

“Hey egghead! What’s in your lousy head? I can’t wait to grab my million!,” one of the soldiers laughed.

Another one joined in. “So you don’t want to talk? Well fuck you! You’ll sing once the Security Council gets hold of you,” he sneered.

“They’ll poke his ass with a hot iron.”

“You bet they will.”

The soldier walking next to Dei shoved him. “This fool sold himself to that rebel Yaso, who’s actually a Kyrgyz.”

Furious, Dei raised his head and glared at the soldier.

The man spat at him, “Just look at him! He’s ready to bite!”

“Warm his head up with your whip!”

“They’ll have to give the money to us, not the Security Council. We’re the ones who caught him.”

“No way. This bastard has to give us Mani Yaso first. Then we’ll get our bonus.”

“If he’ll talk.”

“Right.”

“We should work him over before we give him to the Security Council. Then he’ll tell us where his Kyrgyz boss is.”

“The captain won’t let go of him that easily. He’ll know how to beat the truth out of him.”

“If he won’t talk, then we’ll beat a confession out of Sorju, the old rebel. He knows where the fugitive is, too.”

“Don’t call him a rebel. Sorju minds his own business. He just go into this by accident.”

The other soldier laughed. “The hell he minds his own business! He’s a rebel, too.”

That same day, Sorju and Dei were taken by different roads to the central office of the Chinese border patrol service.

Exactly one week later a scandal broke out between two official branches of government in the Tibet Autonomous Region regarding the arrest of Dei and Sorju. The head of the Security Council sent the Leader the following report:

...Border posts do not have the authority to independently question suspects detained for reasons other than illegal border crossing. However, in continued violation of this provision of the law, Post 56 has held the two men detained in relation to the fugitive Mani Yaso for the past five days instead of transferring them to the Security Council. I demand that this serious violation of official discipline be halted immediately and the case turned over to the proper authorities.”

The border guards’ reply was brief: “The two detainees are being questioned due to illegal border crossing.” The Leader had almost no power to interfere in border patrol affairs, so the issue hung in the air another three days.

Meanwhile, the monk Sorju and Dei, who had no idea what an interrogation entailed, found themselves in the hands of experienced interrogators who specialized in beating confessions out of people. As a result, both men sustained serious injuries. They suffered terrible physical pain but remained silent, Sorju because he knew nothing, and

Dei because he was faithful to his friend. Finally they were locked together in a room fitted with special surveillance equipment. When they came to, the prisoners began to talk.

“Don’t just stand there! Sit down!” Sorju barked. He had every reason to be furious with Dei. When a ragged man came to the monastery gate and begged him for shelter, the kindly Sorju never imagined that he would cause him such suffering. It only became clear to him after a hellish week in jail.

“I can’t sit down,” Dei whispered through his purple lips, wincing in pain. “They clubbed my whole backside. You’re angry at me, aren’t you?”

“I sure as hell won’t be licking the bruises on your ass! If I’d known who you were...” Sorju stopped and looked away. He was angry with himself for hiding Dei for a whole year, even though he had known who he was. He had only himself to blame for pain he now felt.

“So they whipped your ass off. Good for them,” he said over his shoulder in a gloating voice.

“They didn’t beat you?”

“Why would they? If only I knew where your Mani Yaso was! But I don’t, do I?”

Sorju did not tell Dei that they had tortured him for three days, forcing him to stand with his legs far apart and not letting him touch the wall for support.

“Right. These men are animals, Uncle Sorju. They beat me so hard that I’d be glad to kick the bucket. Both my sides are covered with bruises and scrapes. Even a little breeze makes my backside hurt. I don’t want to look down there and see what it looks like.”

“What can you not look at?”

“My backside. I told you – I can’t even touch it.”

“You had it coming. So take a look, and then what?”

“I need to treat it, but how? Maybe I should put something on it?”

Sorju said nothing.

“It’s alright, Uncle Sorju. Lama Yaso will come back and revenge us.”

“Where’s he supposed to come back from?”

“From meditation.”

“When will he come back?”

“Very soon. I told you that I have to meet him, but I’m lying here instead. Bad luck.”

“I don’t care if you meet him or not!”

“I’ll introduce you to him, Uncle Sorju.”

“How are you going to do that if you’re in jail and dragged me with you? There’s nobody to watch over the monastery, damn you!”

“He’s a wonderful person. I wonder what he looks like now after his meditation. We’ll see.”

“They’ll just arrest him and put him in here with us. The Security Council’s after him.”

Dei chuckled. “Nobody can arrest him, Uncle Sorju!”

“Why’s that? I bet they can!”

“He has many powers. He can disappear and be in three or four places at the same time.”

“Have you seen him do it?”

“With my own eyes. These eyes right here.”

Sorju looked at Dei doubtfully. Then he said, “Maybe he can save himself that way, but you and I will rot here in jail.”

“We won’t rot, Uncle Sorju. We can escape if we have to.”

“Right. I’d like to see that!”

Chapter Thirteen

Lengthy meditation is a process that is difficult to enter and even more difficult to come out of. Mani Yaso spent an entire year in intense mystical study, living in a hidden cave in one of the steep cliffs overlooking Lake Manas, one of the most revered places in the Buddhist world. The last three months and three days of his meditation in the Agni Yoga tradition were the hardest. His friend Dei, a man of rare kindness and purity of soul, came under cover of darkness to bring him food every three weeks. Mani Yaso would let down the end of a rope and then pull up the bag of food from Dei, which contained barley fried in butter and a plastic jar of clean water.

Although each time Mani Yaso wanted to thank his faithful friend, he dared not do so, since the hollow fissure in the cliff face carried the smallest sound great distances.

All he could do was cup his hands to his mouth and whisper, “Thank you, Brother Dei. I will never forget your kindness.”

Dei did not answer aloud. When he had something to say, he wrote it on a scrap of paper and put it in the bag of barley. At his last visit he wrote: *Yesterday I heard on Tibetan radio that they caught another fugitive Saint Milarepa at the Palkhor monastery! Funny!*

“Why do they say fugitive?” thought Mani Yaso. “Who am I running from, and why? They are hunting me on the Leader’s orders, but I have done nothing to him. I wronged Lama Toiba and the Panchen Lama and they died from my black magic, but they are not the ones hunting me. True, their children want me dead. I have heard that before...”

Mani Yaso was always in a hurry, so after reflecting for a while on Dei’s brief item of news, he began to eat. Sometimes he drank tea. Other times he drank cold water. Then he went back to work. He was busy learning texts written out on parchment in the Tibetan language by Indian wise men five thousand years ago, as well as the works of futurists. Most of the transcriptions belonged to Milarepa’s teacher, the great enlightener Marpa Lotsawa, the first translator of Buddhist texts.

In turn, Lama Tsu copied Marpa’s manuscripts, which used the ancient Tibetan script, in contemporary script. Lama Tsu was also the author of the other works Mani Yaso studied. It was probably for this reason that the classic texts of Buddhist metaphysical philosophy stuck well in Mani Yaso’s mind. He even felt a warm breath issuing from the pages written in Lama Tsu’s hand.

The program he used to study the texts belonged to Lama Tsu, as well. The first step was called *tava* in Tibetan and consisted of reading the text carefully and mindfully. The next step was *teme*, or searching for the main idea of the text. Then came *gom*, when Mani Yaso reflected on what he had read to make new discoveries in it. The final step was *chiepa*, or summarizing the lesson and memorizing it. All together the program was

called “the straight path.” Mani Yaso spent nine months on this straight but, for the student, difficult path to knowledge.

When he had just three months left, he let down a note for Dei: *Brother Dei, do not come to me in the final three months. Take care of yourself and meet me in three months and three days.*

The final step after three months of meditation is the ritual of meeting your *Yidam*¹⁶, which means going to meet your fate or future. How did your meditation end? Was it successful? What mystical powers did you acquire? Was your meditation practice correct? Did you commit any errors? To find out the answers to these questions, the meditating individual must wait for a Yidam by going into a state of *Samadhi*. After this, eventually one of the saints appears. Christians usually see the image of Christ, Saint Peter or an apostle who is familiar to the person. Jews are met by Abraham, Solomon or Moses. Muslims see Muhammad or Ali.

Mani Yaso sat in *Samadhi* two times, for three days each time. Following the instructions he had, he sat upright with a pillow behind his head and his eyes closed. No Yidam appeared.

Now the young man sat and ate his fried barley and washed it down with cold water without noticing either food or drink. He was obsessed with his persistent, pulsating thoughts.

“My Yidam has not come. What kind of sign is this? Has my fate run against the rocks? Is my future hidden in darkness? Is it possible that my fifteen difficult years of study in Tibet were all for nothing? My life’s purpose has shattered like glass. I can’t understand it.”

If this keeps up, then Mani Yaso will have no choice but to follow the black sorcerer Dodai and hole up in a cave before leaving this life. Perhaps it was nature, and not the Leader, who took him by the hand to meet Dodai. Perhaps it was fate that prepared this for him? The experience and knowledge he gained over fifteen years, the new method for removing people’s egotistical egos, all his work to cleanse the mortal soul and promote tolerance – was all of it just a worthless bluff? Was that why no Yidam came to him? If only his dear teacher, Lama Tsu, would support him!

Mani Yaso began to focus on Lama Tsu. He was sure that his teacher would come to him. He could not refuse to come. Even if Mani Yaso had made an error in his meditation his teacher was sure to come. Like a father, he would point out where his son had gone wrong and give him advice. Even though Mani Yaso had left his care and stumbled, leaving the holy path, Father Tsu was sure to come at least once to stop him with a sincere word.

Made miserable by these thoughts, Mani Yaso decided to go into *Samadhi* for a third time. Only on the morning of the third day of meditation did he begin to feel slight, invisible signs that someone was with him in the emptiness of the cave. It was his Yidam, none other than his teacher Lama Tsu. His mentor was not visible, but Mani Yaso heard his familiar footsteps.

Lama Tsu’s voice came to him faintly. “You have not removed your *sadgyama*, my son Mani Yaso! Read the second letter I left for you. It will tell you how to remove your *sadgyama*. Read it right away!”

¹⁶ *Yidam* – (Tibetan) Enlightened being on whom a person focuses during meditation (author’s note)

Mani Yaso was embarrassed. He had forgotten the most important of the seven exits from Agni Yoga. He could not come out of meditation until he removed his *sadgyama*.

Lama Tsu, who hovered between life and death in his grave at a cemetery in Lhasa, was tortured by the crisis his student was in. It was obvious by his distressed voice.

Mani Yaso immediately read the second letter and began using his psychic energy to remove the protective layer that closely surrounded him. At the same time he waited for Lama Tsu to come closer.

No two meditating individuals sense the appearance of their *Yidams* the same way. Some people hear warm breathing, while others have visions. Mani Yaso felt the soft touch of a hand on his shoulder.

He turned, expecting to see Lama Tsu, but it was not him.

Before Mani Yaso could stand up, the hand on his shoulder took him by the elbow and led him forward. The fingers on his elbow were long, but as Mani Yaso stared at them he was unable to lift his head. He felt with his whole body that the person leading him was tall, bony and old with the face of an Indian.

The path, which disappeared in the distance and therefore seemed very long at first, began to narrow. As he followed the path down, Mani Yaso began to feel so cold that he could barely breathe. It was a sign that they were deep in the earth.

“Are we going underground,” he wondered. He wanted to ask the person at his side, but he did not dare. It was obvious that the path was no place for chatting.

Soon there was a turn, and then another turn, and then the Potala Palace appeared, shining, in front of them. A door in the side of the palace, so heavy that it seemed to be cut right into the side of the cliff, creaked open.

Mani Yaso and his guide entered a dark tunnel. When the door was closed behind them it became so dark that Mani Yaso could not see his hand in front of his face. Still holding Mani Yaso’s elbow, the old man gestured with his free hand and a torch appeared in it. Now they moved forward in the light of the torch. Soon the light revealed a massive gilded door in front of them. They struggled to open it and passed through it into the next tunnel. The old man replaced his torch with one of the oil lamps hanging on both sides of the tunnel. Because there were so many lamps, this part of the tunnel was well-lit. Suddenly Mani Yaso caught sight of a wheel of life drawn on a flat place on the tunnel wall. For an instant he felt dizzy and it seemed to him that the wheel of life was spinning.

The tunnel continued deeper, but the lighting grew brighter. Mani Yaso noticed shining veins of gold in the tunnel walls. In Tibet gold is not considered a luxury; rather, it is a holy, untouchable metal. Tibetans try to leave it where it was formed by nature.

In a little while Mani Yaso and the old man reached another gilded door. It had been closed for who knows how many centuries and seemed to have grown into the wall. They worked hard to open it and found themselves in a huge hall with an enormously high ceiling. All of the tunnels had been natural, but the hall was obviously the work of men. The walls were decorated with stunning symbols, diagrams and pictures, and the ceiling was painted to resemble the sky with tiny shining stars. Mani Yaso studied the images. It was not the night sky he had always known. It was some other, strange universe.

In the middle of the wide cave Mani Yaso saw three black granite sarcophagi. When he came closer to them his whole body began to tremble. It seemed to him that the people in the sarcophagi were giants, and they were alive: two men and one woman with their faces uncovered, wearing golden chain mail. The men were at least five meters tall and the woman was three or four meters tall. Their heads were elongated, their long chins extended forward, their lips were thin and their noses straight. They were real giants like the ones Mani Yaso had seen in movies. Mani Yaso and his guide made their way silently past the sarcophagi and opened the next door. On the other side was a path that inclined; it was paved with stones in a checkerboard pattern. Lamps lit both sides of the path. Mani Yaso was excited: he felt that they were on the threshold of an extraordinary, mysterious temple. Stepping carefully as he went down the path, the young man stared in amazement at everything around him. Streams of water trickled melodically from the high cliff walls, throwing up golden droplets and sometimes breaking into a thunderous roar, which caused Mani Yaso to jump.

Suddenly he remembered Shambhala: was it possible that this was the location of the spiritual center of the world that humankind had been seeking for centuries?

The mysterious man still held him by the elbow with his sinewy fingers. Mani Yaso was sure that he would not be able to walk a step if the man let go of his elbow. After a while they came before a gigantic statue. The man's fingers tightened around Mani Yaso's elbow. The statue was so huge that everything above its waist was in shadows, out of reach of the lamps. In order to see its face, they had to climb up to a special platform on one side of the statue. Once they reached it, the old man let go of Mani Yaso's elbow and bowed three times to the monument. Following his lead, the young man bowed low.

"Oh, great teacher Shakyamuni Buddha! I have come to you barely able to contain the tremendous joy that fills me!" said the old man, looking at the statue in adoration. The Buddha's eyes were half-closed and his lips were pressed together. Only his eyebrows, like the wings of a young eagle, seemed to move ever so slightly. They could hear breathing. It was not coming from the statue, but from somewhere behind it on the high cliff wall.

Then an organ-like voice boomed out, "Did I not tell you not to address yourself to me directly, but only to my words, Saint Milarepa?"

Mani Yaso grew feverish. His whole body felt engulfed in flame. So the mysterious man guiding him was his previous incarnation, Milarepa! How could that be? He hadn't recognized his own previous incarnation. Why hadn't Saint Milarepa spoken to him?

Unaware of the young man's delight, Saint Milarepa continued, "Oh great teacher! A rare hope has come to the people of Earth. That is why I came to address your image."

"Did you say hope? Can there really be any hope of saving humanity from sorrow and suffering?"

Milarepa fell silent. His reply, when it came, sounded hesitant: "This young man was given the Tibetan name Mani Yaso. His Kyrgyz name is Adilet. For the past year I have watched him in his Agni Yoga meditation. He has found a method of tempering the greatest evil in a man – his alter ego¹⁷. After studying all of your texts and the texts of

¹⁷ *Alter ego – Here, the second self inside a person (author)*

other *arhats*, he finally created a completely new mantra based on the strength of human reason. He chose one hundred of the strongest maxims ever created by humans. During tantric¹⁸ incantation, these maxims are capable of affecting a person at the level of the DNA that controls his alter ego. Using this mantra, he and any other sensible person can perform special exercises to correct the ego.”

“Humans have lived on the Earth for four million years. They think they are already perfect; however, not once over those millions of years have they applied themselves to any significant, unselfish goal. They have not been willing to strive for anything, Saint Milarepa! Do they have worthy goals? No! That is why I left Sansara for eternal nirvana. That was the end of my bitter sorrow and the worries that tormented me because of human suffering. You know that well, Saint Milarepa.”

“Yes, great teacher. However, your wise teachings have freed many peoples of the East from caste systems, a sense of superiority, mutual cruelty and a slavish existence. Your teachings have spread over one third of the earth and continue to grow!”

“All teachings, those that I gave and those of the ones they call prophets, cannot take away the cries of a newborn child, calm a man groaning in pain, or dry the tears of one who suffers. Now what do you plan to do with this young man, Saint Milarepa?”

“We will give people new powers! We believe that their souls and morals can be elevated so that they will become tolerant and kind to each other after their egoism is torn out by the roots. In the end, people will elevate themselves and attain the title of true humans, oh great teacher.”

“Through this new mantra?” Shakyamuni opened his eyes a bit and looked at the two people standing at his feet. Then he added, “A man can only be happy once he has died and then turned himself into a Saj tree that bears fruits for all living things, as it is done on the planet Nool.”

“How can we strive for that, great teacher?”

The Buddha raised his brows, which shone like the sun. It was not Saint Milarepa who asked that question, but the young man standing next to him.

Milarepa put his arm around the young man’s shoulders and they waited for the Buddha to answer.

“One of the paths was on this earth, my son, but humans are unable to defeat the devil that is in them. They are too late. Now it is getting more and more difficult to take the path. It is a holy task that was beyond me and those like me. Saint Milarepa, who came to Earth fifteen hundred years after me, was a witness to this, am I right?”

Shakyamuni fell silent. Tears of sorrow seemed to choke him.

Just then, the lights of the hundreds of lamps blinked off and the shadows grew around them.

Saint Milarepa’s voice wavered and he almost shouted. “The young man who asked you that question has faith and hope! He believes in people! Become the Yidam of his meditation, oh great Shakyamuni Buddha!”

“Then hurry, my son,” Shakyamuni spoke to the young man. “Listen to the voice of Shambhala. It is called Kalagiya. The five key letters of the Sanskrit alphabet make the word MANAS¹⁹. Just once a year, during either equinox, go into meditation and repeat this code word 108 times. Then you will hear a sound. This sound holds the secret of

¹⁸ *Tantra – Attainment of reality, spiritual enlightenment and universal awareness, Shiva-Shakti (author)*

¹⁹ *Manas – in ancient Sanskrit scrolls the word Manas is given as humanity’s first word, meaning sky.*

Shambhala. When you were a child you heard the creaking ²⁰of the swings and the gate. Now listen to the echo of Shambhala high in the sky and try to solve the mystery of the signs of Kalaigya, my son...”

After giving these instructions, the Buddha’s shining golden face slid into shadows and his wide open eyes seemed to burn with fire.

Chapter Fourteen

In the first days of spring, as the melting water began to flow under the thin blue ice, worrisome rumors spread over the land of Tibet. By phone and in person, people spread news of Mani Yaso, who had disappeared the previous spring. Some said that the black sorcerer was back in Lhasa and that people should stay away from him. Others said that he was no sorcerer, but the saint Milarepa. In short, regular people were knocked off their equilibrium and their hearts were invaded by anxiety and fear.

These rumors forced the Leader, who was personally in charge of the hunt for Mani Yaso, to intensify the nationwide search: all border posts and military bases were put on guard, employees of the Security Council kept secret watch over monasteries, temples and restaurants, and police filled the bazaars and other places where people gathered.

The phones at the Tibetan Security Council were inundated with astounding calls from workers, clerks and even the heads of monasteries, temples and restaurants, all of whom claimed to have seen Mani Yaso with their own eyes. Police and military forces stormed the locations given and searched them, but the trail was always cold, as if he had never been there in the first place.

These contradictory reports went from the Security Council straight to the Leader. Angered by all the confusion, one night the Leader snapped and called in the head of the Security Council.

“Is there anyone who hasn’t seen the fugitive? And your reports: is there any truth to them, or are they just the fantasies of sick people? It looks like panic to me.”

“Your Holiness, I have a statement from a border guard who was sent to watch the Shakyamuni monastery.”

“Let’s have it!”

The head of the Security Council opened a folder and took out the transcript of a taped interrogation. He placed it on the Leader’s desk. It read as follows:

Detective: What is your name? Tell me your full name.

Guard: Manan Li, soldier of the People’s Army of China.

Detective: What are your duties here?

Guard: The commander ordered me to guard the monastery.

Detective: When did the suspect arrive? What was the date and time? Don’t be in a hurry. I want you to give me all the details. Remember as much as you can.

Guard: It was last Wednesday.

Detective: Be specific. What time was it?

Guard: Around ten.

Detective: More specific!

²⁰ As it turns out later, it was the sound of the girl Kua-Kua searching for the herb menep, which would give her people the power to travel to other planets.

Guard: Well, it was after ten. About five minutes after ten.
Detective: Where did he come from, and how did he get here?
Guard: He walked in while I was sitting in the monk's room. I was very scared.
Detective: Were there any tourists around? Who else was with you?
Guard: A group of tourists had just left and headed toward Mount Kailash.
Detective: I am asking you who else was with you.
Guard: I was alone.
Detective: Give me the details. What kind of man came in? What did you talk about?
Guard: He was tall and wearing something like a light, white cape over his clothes.
Detective: How old was he?
Guard: About the same age as me.
Detective: How old are you?
Guard: Twenty-four.
Detective: What did he talk to you about?
Guard: He asked me where the monk was. I told him the monk had been arrested.
Detective: Go on!
Guard: He asked me who arrested him and who was with him when he was arrested. I told him I didn't know.
Detective: Why did you say you didn't know?
Guard: Because it's a military secret.
Detective: Fool! What else did he ask you?
Guard: He didn't ask anything else. He just looked at me hard and then went back outside.
Detective: Why didn't you try to stop him?
Guard: I did.
Detective: How?
Guard: When I grabbed my gun and ran after him, he disappeared.
Detective: What are you talking about?
Guard: I was naked. I had been drying my clothes by the fire. While I was getting dressed he disappeared.
Detective: You were at your post naked? Do you have any idea what that means?
Guard: What choice did I have? I was wet to the skin. I got rained on while I was cleaning up the monastery courtyard.
Detective: Was he armed?
Guard: I didn't see a gun on him.
Detective: Was he holding anything?
Guard: A bag with some papers in it.
Detective: What else?
Guard: That was it.
Detective: Which way did he go? Did you follow his footprints?
Guard: Sure. He walked about fifteen meters through the snow, but then his trail vanished.
Detective: What do you mean? He flew away?
Guard: I don't know. I'm still surprised.
Detective: Did he have a horse or a donkey?
Guard: There weren't any other prints in the snow.

Detective: Do you know what will happen to you if you try to hide something from us?

Guard: Yes.

Detective: Now describe what the man looked like.

Guard: Just like here in the picture. But a lot skinnier.

Detective: Are you sure it was the same man?

Guard: Yes. The same eyes and nose. And mouth.

Detective: What did you do next?

Guard: I called our sentry and made a report.

Detective: What did you say in your report?

Guard: 'Comrade Commander! The fugitive from the photographs you gave us was just here with me.' That's what I said.

Detective: What did they do?

Guard: They came in and looked around and wrote everything down. Then they locked me in jail.

Detective: Did your commander tell you who the man in the photographs was?

Guard: Yes. The Leader's number one enemy – the black sorcerer Mani Yaso.

At that point the Leader tossed the paper aside.

"The soldier is an idiot and his commander is a scoundrel!" he growled, glaring at the head of the Security Council.

Just then the Leader's red phone linking him with the Security Council rang.

"You pick it up. I'm sick of your ridiculous calls!" he ordered.

With trembling hands the man picked up the phone, listened for a while and then began yelling at the head of the crisis response center, "If you've lost your minds, then get the hell to a mental hospital! Every last one of you!"

"What did he say?" the Leader asked with a scowl.

"I cannot repeat it, Your Holiness! I thought that it was only my subordinates who had lost their minds."

"Was that General Bharati? From crisis response? What did he say?"

"Yes, Your Holiness! That's the one. He says the criminal named Mani Yaso is walking around the Security Council building."

"Then they could at least arrest him!"

"Your Holiness, allow me to go back to work. We will do everything we can to detain him. I will personally report back to you. We will arrest him. He can't get away!"

"When will you bring that villain Dei back from Beijing?"

"Soon, Your Holiness! For some reason Beijing does not want to give him to us. They're playing for time. They keep promising you, but they won't give him to us."

"Try harder. Be proactive. Bring him in today!"

The head of the Security Council nodded his bald head and ran off.

"What the hell is wrong with us if that insane fugitive can walk around a building full of fools looking for him?" the Leader thought cynically. Then he remembered his daughter, who was still at a mental hospital. A low moan issued from his chest. He placed his right hand over his heart and massaged the ache.

As the operation to detain the fugitive reached fever pitch on that cold spring night, Mani Yaso, dressed in a black cape, sat on his knees by Lama Tsu's grave in the

Lhasa cemetery. This time he did not have to wait long for the telepathic wave from Lama Tsu. He felt the warmth throughout his body and mind.

"I am ready to talk to you," the waves from Lama Tsu told him.

"I completed my meditation, father. The great Shakyamuni Buddha is the Yidam of my new mantra. I would have failed if it weren't for you, father. I do not know how to thank you."

"I do not need your thanks, my son. Your mantra is everything. Can you tell me briefly how you plan to change humanity's psychological makeup?"

"In the ancient manuscripts I found direction for my precept, father. The ancient Tibetan teaching of Bön contains information on the atomic vibrations of elements that coincides with contemporary discoveries in molecular genetics. By comparing those two data sets I came to the following conclusion: if you combine the retrospective method of biophysics with Agni meditation, you can turn back the age of any person and bring him back to his embryonic state. In the next stage you divide the embryo into male and female cells and adjust the vibration of neutrons and protons in each atom of the cells. Basically, you balance the embryo, because its atomic vibration is the signature of its genetic ego. If the ego is excessive, then the vibrations are sharp and chaotic. By balancing those vibrations you correct the person's ego. I realized that it's the fetus that matters, father. The fetus is where the ego hides. At the second stage of meditation, you turn the embryo into a fetus and the fetus into a person by directing the magical power of the words at them during the process. In the end, we get the result we want."

"Agni Yoga is a new school, my son. I think you must test your mantra through experimentation. Only after testing it can you begin to use it."

"I started with myself, father. I think it will work. Now I am working with three officers who were declared enemies of the state. The Security Council has them in prison. I spent a week with each one of them in isolation. I am going back to them now."

"Will you teach your mantra in Europe?"

"I will teach it wherever there are people, father."

"Humans are constantly setting their hands to everything on the Earth and under the Earth that can be changed. Even if the changes bring negative results, they still keep on doing the same thing for millions of years. The only thing humans can't change is themselves. That's what you are trying to do. You've taken on an unbelievably difficult mission, my son."

"The third stage of my mantra is called Tolerance. It gets its strength from music and words. I found the one hundred of the most penetrating, bone-piercing maxims that, when set to music, can bring people to a state of magical ecstasy, make their blood boil and then stick in their minds like burrs. I encoded it all using Sanskrit characters and set it to enchanting music. Anyone who learns the mantra can learn to be victorious against himself. That is my goal, father. I will establish a center to translate my mantras into all the world's languages and make audio recordings that will be advertised and distributed around the world. I will launch internet sites and organize clubs for adherents. I will also establish non-profit organizations in every country. I have drawn up detailed plans, father."

"You have my best wishes, son. You will have a hard time getting your plans off the ground, especially in Europe and America. They have very different plans for the future. The shadow leaders of Europe and the United States want to gain control over all

the world's wealth. As far back as one hundred years ago they founded a secret society called the 300 Committee to work against the Masons. My son, you will read all about them in my third letter to you. That letter will also describe what help I can give you."

The Leader had not taken a day off in years. Except for when he was asleep, he was always wrapped up in the whirlwind of his busy life: problems, intrigues, anxiety. Every now and then his wife told him he should take some time off for a vacation. He took no notice of her words. He only picked up a newspaper or book if he was in a particularly good mood. Then he would tell his wife that he was going to take a rest and would lock himself in the bathroom. Those five or ten minutes of privacy seemed to him a pinnacle of pleasure.

He could tell that his cares were taking a toll on him. His days were hectic, especially after he brought Mani Yaso to the palace. First of all, interacting with the unusually gifted young man required that the Leader be in a certain state of mind, and the effort made him uneasy. He was always careful to avoid the young man's third eye, as he had no desire for his thoughts to be discovered. That alone tormented the Leader. In the space of a few seconds Mani Yaso could uncover all the secrets he kept under lock and key. Because of this, the Leader was anxious to remain friends with Mani Yaso. Otherwise, it would be extremely difficult to work with him. And if he stopped working with him, then how could he get back at Tibet's "enemies?" Without Mani Yaso, he would spend over half his life in open campaigns and secret operations against them. His hair would turn gray before its time and his health would suffer. That was why finding Mani Yaso proved to be a stroke of luck he had never dared dream about. The young man simply fell right into his lap. But for some reason, ever since Mani Yaso had appeared the Leader had found himself facing more and more problems. Nothing went his way. First Mani Yaso declared that he could not be a black sorcerer, and then he started disappearing. He didn't disappear for good, but he would not let himself be found. Lately Tibet had turned into a very strange place. Because of some unconscious fear, the Leader couldn't quite bring himself to say Tibet was like an insane asylum. He was in charge of the country, after all.

It was the weekend and the Leader had no desire to get out of bed. Dark thoughts scurried about in his head like ants in an anthill. His favorite grandson was usually able to distract him, but for some reason he was not there that day. His wife had been busy in her room since early morning.

Just then the emergency phone in his office rang. The Leader got up slowly, assuming that someone else would answer it. He had other things on his mind, but the high-pitched trills kept coming. His wife went to the phone.

"It's the head of the Security Council! He says they caught the fugitive!" she told her husband.

"Who did they catch?" he asked, not particularly interested.

"Good Lord, who did you think they were looking for? Mani Yaso!"

The Leader was annoyed. "They've caught him and arrested him a hundred times before."

“Why are you telling me? Go talk to your own Security Council!” she sniped and left the room. She was obviously sick of all the ridiculous goings-on in the country. Bitter thoughts about her daughter were burning up her insides. She did not know how to cure Seleng of her obsession with that devil Mani Yaso and heal her heart.

The Leader threw on a robe and took the phone. “Is it true?” he replied with indifference to what he heard. “You’re bringing him here? Where did you catch him? On the Chinese border? Early this morning? What time will you be here? Nine this evening? What does the bastard have to say for himself? He isn’t speaking? I’ll be here. Bring him straight to me. And I want to see you with him!”

The Leader’s wife peeked in as he was dressing. “Did they really catch him?”

“I guess so. Judging by how that fool was stuttering he’s really worked up about something.”

“He can take that bald head of his right to hell!” she said and left.

After washing his face, shaving carefully and drinking nothing more than a glass of grape juice, the Leader went to his office. He did not want to stay at home. He felt out of place and nervous there.

When he walked into his anteroom one of his security officers was receiving information about the capture of Mani Yaso. He jumped to attention with the phone still pressed to his ear.

“Sit down. Give me a report about it,” the Leader said, patting the officer on the shoulder. Once in his office he ripped open the heavy curtain. He saw that spring was already in full bloom.

Sometimes even native Tibetans have a hard time noticing the arrival of spring, and visitors always miss it. There is no fresh green growth at your feet and no exuberant blooming of rainbow-colored flowers on the hillsides and valleys. Whichever way you look there is little else but tufts of needle grass and bare sagebrush. Wild things like lyme grass, hemp, sagebrush, mustard, plantain and lichen only grow on the banks of rivers or at the edges of fields planted with barley and millet.

Standing on the top floor of the Potala Palace, the Leader found leisurely pleasure in his mountain-top view of the Tibetan plain. The people were so hard-working! Each farmer plowed, planted and harrowed every bit of the land he rented from the government.

The Leader regretted the fact that, because of that cursed business with Mani Yaso, he had not had time to observe the spring farm work when everyone young and old spent all day in the fields. All he had done was hear a report from the head of the agriculture department and grant his requests regarding urgent springtime work.

The door opened. The security officer stepped in and reported, “Your Holiness! The criminal Mani Yaso has been caught!”

“Give me the paper,” the Leader ordered. His face did not move a muscle. When the officer went out, he sat down in his chair and began reading the fresh Security Council dispatch. It ended with the words:

The criminal was bound hand and foot and placed in a container. He will be delivered to the palace by nine o’clock this evening.

“Criminal.” The Leader said the word with distaste. “I’m not used to receiving criminals at my palace. But what should I call the damn boy? The word ‘criminal’ doesn’t fit him. ‘Fugitive’ would be better. Calling him a criminal gives him too much credit. It’s all that bald, brainless...”

Just then the Leader heard the heavy curtain move behind him. When he turned around, his eyes almost popped out of his head.

“A thousand pardons, Your Holiness! I had to spend a whole year in meditation.”

The Leader looked Mani Yaso over from head to toe. He was obviously wondering if the young man posed any danger.

“How did you...” he started to ask, but then he dropped his gaze to the floor.

“I don’t think there’s any need to ask about that, Your Holiness! Nature made me what I am. What else can I say? Again, I ask you to pardon me for appearing so suddenly,” Mani Yaso said. He gave an awkward laugh, for he could read the Leader’s face – “And that bald fool said they tied the devil up, put him in a container and were bringing him here!”

Mani Yaso bowed his head. “I have many doubles. Perhaps your ‘bald fool’ caught one of them. Do not be afraid, Your Holiness.”

Embarrassed, it took the Leader a minute to comprehend these words. When he did, he immediately took himself in hand and turned away from Mani Yaso. “That’s what happens when you let your guard down for a second,” he rebuked himself.

“Who gave you permission to leave for meditation? You abandoned your government post!”

The Leader regained his self-possession. No longer fearing Mani Yaso, he looked away from him, as was his habit, and waited for an answer.

“I had to leave for meditation. It is required by the program of study at the Jokang temple, Your Holiness.”

“So you’re still trapped in the snares of Lama Tsu? (He almost said “of the dotard Lama Tsu.”) I’m surprised at you, Yaso. He’s been gone for a while now. How long do intend to remain imprisoned by his stagnant, worn-out ideas?”

“It is my destiny, Your Holiness. I cannot evade it.”

“I believe that your destiny is tied to the fate of the Tibetan people. Tibet raised you, gave you an education and promoted you to a position of power, did it not, Yaso? If I’m wrong, then tell me straight out!”

“That is absolutely right, Your Holiness. But let us not forget one truth: your fate and my fate and the fate of all humans, including the people of Tibet, is written by one and the same hand.”

“Fine. I don’t have time to philosophize with you, young man. My job involves many responsibilities and doesn’t leave me much free time. I have no choice but to demand that others do their duty, and that includes you. You disappeared for a whole year, but I will forgive you this time, too. Get back to work and do your job with an understanding of its importance. That’s the first thing. The second thing is this: stop running around to different prisons and meeting with prisoners. That is an official order. Thirdly,” here the Leader glanced at Mani Yaso to see if he was listening intently, and he was, “I want you to understand, Mani Yaso, that your sudden disappearance has caused a crisis in our relations with neighboring states who have always been our friends. It’s true. I want to emphasize that. Several countries sent personal invitations for you to visit and

help them with a number of important affairs. For example, Kyrgyzstan wanted you to come for a three-day visit. And then Nepal, India and China were very interested in meeting you. What could I tell them? That you were on the run? That you had disappeared without a trace? That's the position you put me in. I was forced to lie. I told them that you were sick, and later told them that you were meditating."

Mani Yaso smiled. "That was not a lie."

"No, but those countries' leaders did not believe me. They were suspicious and eventually grew angry. They accused me to my face of lying to keep you from visiting them. They said I was breaking with the traditions of being a good neighbor. Then their displeasure and suspicions began to affect our trade and diplomatic relations. In the end I was forced to issue an official warrant for your arrest. Even then they did not believe me, especially the leaders of larger nations. They said I was playing games with them. You have to understand something, Mani Yaso: international relations are a delicate and sometimes risky affair. Even the smallest screw-up must be avoided at all cost. It would be different if Tibet, which you consider your homeland, were one of the powerful Asian tigers. So with all due respect, I have to ask you to understand our position. Do you see what I mean?"

"I understand, Your Holiness. It's to your credit that you put Tibet's interests above all else, but you don't need black magic to handle your problems. It took me some time to realize that black magic brings nothing but death, sometimes to innocent people. I want you to hear me out. I have to tell you about another way to solve your problems. I have a mantra that is rooted in white magic. It is called Tolerance. If you accept it, it will help you resolve all of your affairs in a reasonable manner. There is no reason to kill anyone."

"Nobody is killing anyone!"

"it would be unjust to refuse to recognize your guilt, Your Holiness. There is a good reason why the children of two innocent men, men who died terrible deaths, want to kill me."

"Their offspring have been given prestigious posts and will keep their mouths shut in the future. Don't worry about them."

"The jobs aren't what matters. In time I will publicly acknowledge my guilt and repent. They may kill me if they want. I can take no other path, Your Holiness. But we still need to reach an agreement. If you want to work with me, then we will only be using white magic."

With that, Mani Yaso fell silent and waited for an answer.

"I've told you before – there's no reason to go around acknowledging your guilt to anybody!" The Leader was so upset that for a moment he forgot himself and looked Mani Yaso straight in the eye. The young man read his thoughts immediately.

"You are right," Mani Yaso said. "If I acknowledge my guilt, then the dead men's children will accuse you, as well. That's obvious."

The Leader's face flushed. He turned away quickly. "First of all," he said, no longer able to control his fury, "first of all, that's not what I think. Don't go imagining nonsense. Secondly, those kids have no reason to be mad at either one of us. You can go talk to them."

"I certainly will, Your Holiness. Now let's get back to our problem. Are we going to use my white mantra or not?"

“What kind of mantra is it?”

“The name speaks for itself, Your Holiness. White magic causes no evil. The only thing it can do is cause positive changes in the human soul. If Your Holiness is the first to use these teachings, then your palace will know peace and your country will know justice! I am sure of it!”

“I don’t think there’s any lack of justice in the country, Yaso, but I don’t want to argue. I have decided to make you my chief advisor. The salary is double what you were getting before. You’ll get the papers today.”

While Mani Yaso was considering his reply, the Leader lost patience.

“Was there some other post you wanted? Nobody’s forcing you into anything!”

“I can’t stay in one place anymore, Your Holiness. I need to visit all countries. That is why...”

“You can travel. That’s what official visits are for. I’ll pay all of your travel expenses and organize everything myself. But you still have to have a settled office somewhere.”

“It makes me sad to realize that it will be difficult for me to work with you, Your Holiness.”

“Why? We will just be receiving people together like we used to. If you want to travel, why not start with China? The Chinese leadership is always inviting lamas to visit.”

“I did intend to go to Beijing, Your Holiness.”

“Then go in an official capacity, by invitation.”

Mani Yaso considered this, and then answered, “I’ll do it. I want to offer them my new mantra. How would you feel about that?”

The Leader laughed. “The Communists stamped out all magic, black and white, a long time ago. They call magic a class enemy.”

“Then why do they meet with our lamas?”

“To tell you the truth, I have no idea,” the Leader said. He thought for a minute and then continued, “I suppose they have their own reasons for working with lamas. It’s hard to understand Beijing. Impossible. Beijing is a mystery to us and to the whole world. You’ll see for yourself if you go there.”

“Then send me to Beijing, Your Holiness. Now tell me if you will work with my new mantra. I’m still confused.”

“What do I have to do?” the Leader asked, glancing at Mani Yaso with obvious irritation.

“There are three ways to do it. You could choose to meditate with the mantra. That’s the first way. The second way is to work in a group with the audio-mantra. If you don’t like either of those, then I can work with you myself using hypnotherapy, with your permission, of course.”

“Go to Beijing first. We’ll talk after that. Now I have to warn you that when you are visiting another country we must know in advance about every thing you plan to do or say, even if you just give us an approximate plan. You will be traveling through diplomatic channels. Everything has to go according to the instructions, so you won’t be allowed to do anything that isn’t on the schedule.”

“Who will be monitoring me?”

“The competent authorities.”

Mani Yaso realized that this conversation with the Leader was beginning to weigh him down. He had hoped to find common ground and see that the Leader was intent on doing good deeds in the future, but these hopes drowned in a wave of disappointment. The man who led the country apparently valued no one's opinion but his own. Mani Yaso could have taken control of the arrogant ruler. He could have done it without the man's permission, simply by hypnotizing him and turning his inner world in whichever direction he wished. But Mani Yaso could not do that. It would have been unjust to change the man's actions and his character without first getting his assent.

"When you are in Beijing, your main goal will be to improve our trade and economic relations with them. That is the only acceptable result. Anything else will be a complete failure," the Leader intoned very seriously.

"With all due respect, Your Holiness, I will not get directly involved in questions of trade or politics, war or revolution. My goal is spiritual renewal and a cleansing of people's consciences. If I reach that goal, then all the issues you mentioned will fall into place on their own."

"Right. That would be nice if it were true! Go right ahead and renew people's souls. If you can improve the morals of other heads of state even an iota, then the world will enjoy peace and security."

"That's exactly why I'm asking you to go first and initiate this great deed."

The Leader chuckled. "Leave me alone, Yaso! I'm not going anywhere. Do you really think I'm the worst, most unbearable leader in the world? Go fix the morals of the people who really need it. If it turns out that I'm the cause of all the evil in the world then you can be sure I'll turn to you for help." He laughed again.

Mani Yaso's spirits fell. If his upcoming meetings with heads of state all went the same way, then he was in for some difficult times.

Chapter Fifteen

Before Mani Yaso could leave for Beijing, Chinese officials demanded that the Leader pay them a visit. Those three or four days while he was gone turned out to be very useful for Mani Yaso. He spent his time in prison with the former governor of the Ü province, who was given an 18-month sentence for hitting his police chief over the head with a pitcher of water. The man was sunning himself in a far corner of the prison yard with his shirt off and a handkerchief over his face when Mani Yaso came in. He jumped up when he heard someone approach. His eyes were red as coals and his ego was protruding. By the looks of him, even if he got out of prison alive he would soon land back in serious trouble. He did not recognize Mani Yaso, even though the young man had spent an entire day "conversing" with him one year before.

"Don't come any closer!" he yelled as he stumbled backwards. "I am a holy person!"

"I understand. I would like to talk to you about something important. Don't be afraid of me."

Pointing at Mani Yaso, the prisoner called out to the guard at the gate, "Guards! Seize him! Catch him!"

The guards all started laughing. Then one of them replied, "Is that the devil come to get you? Now stop fooling around. Go back to picking your nits."

None of them could see the reason for the drama. First of all, the guards could not see Mani Yaso, since he had come into the yard invisibly. Secondly, the prisoner, who had until recently been one of the most respected leaders of Tibet's central province, was considered by prison officials to be an idiot because of his super ego. Every day the other prisoners laughed at him for talking nonsense and made fun of the ridiculous things he did.

When he saw this, Mani Yaso quickly left the poor man and started sneaking into his cell at night when the man was alone. He calmed the man using hypnosis. After the third time he repeated his Tolerance mantra, he began to see positive results.

"It's hard for me to believe all the terrible things you have told me, Mani Yaso, even though I lived through them myself. But I do believe you. I have no choice. Just look at me – I'm skin and bone. That is proof enough," the prisoner said tearfully, patting his own thin shoulders.

Mani Yaso sat for a while with his head bowed. Then he said, "I am very happy that I have healed you, even if it came too late. Soon you will be released. You won't try to get revenge against the policeman who sued you, will you?"

"How could I do that? I'm the one who should ask him for forgiveness. There's nothing worse than being hit over the head with a pitcher when you haven't done anything wrong!"

"That's true. There's no need for revenge. But you ought to think about your career. I think that the Leader will give you a decent post. Until then, I want you to rest and get your health back."

The next day, Mani Yaso met with the oldest son of the mayor of Lhasa, who was devoured by rats in his own basement. The Leader had made the young man deputy mayor of the city in the same office where his father had worked.

According to the rumors circulating in Tibet, the dead mayor's son desired retribution against Mani Yaso. People said he took a gun with him everywhere in order to shoot the black sorcerer on sight.

The deputy mayor's assistant came into his office. "There is a man named Mani Yaso who wants to see you," he said.

"What did you say his name was?" The young man could not immediately take in the news.

"Mani Yaso."

"Why is he here?" he wondered aloud.

The assistant shrugged.

"Did you ask him what he wants?"

"He just said he wants to see you. That's all he said."

The deputy mayor's face went white. He wavered for a minute, then said, "Ask him why he's here."

The assistant went out. He soon returned. "He says it's a personal matter."

The deputy mayor's face grew even more ashen. "Does he still work for the Leader, or not?" he asked his assistant.

"I believe he was fired," the man replied.

“Is he carrying anything?”

“No.”

“Show him in. You come in, too. We’ll be cautious. He’s a student of the black sorcerer Dodai.”

The deputy mayor stood up when Mani Yaso came in, but he was not brave enough to go to meet him. His instinct for self-preservation was stronger.

“Om mani padme hum!” Mani Yaso put his hand into his robe and pulled out a brownish-red silk scarf with golden fringe. He placed it over the deputy mayor’s elbow.

“I have no weapon in my pocket. Do not be afraid of me!” he said, smiling into the worried face of the deputy mayor, who looked to be close to his own age. Undersized and skinny, the homely young man did not look like one who desires revenge. In fact, everything about him indicated that he was frightened.

“When your father passed away last year I was not able to meet with you and share in your sorrow.” As Mani Yaso spoke, he kept his eyes on the mayor’s son.

The son was thinking “Why do you care about my father’s death?” Still, he gave a slight nod to indicate that he appreciated the sentiment.

After reading all of the deputy mayor’s thoughts, Mani Yaso was surprised. “People have shamelessly been spreading lies!” he thought. “Not only does he have no desire for vengeance against me, he’s actually scared to death!”

There was no more to say, but before leaving Mani Yaso declared the following. “I committed a crime against your father. If it is possible, I will try to redeem myself in your eyes.”

The deputy mayor smiled at Mani Yaso. His aura was shadowy and his thoughts were soft and indecisive, but that did not change his pale face. Nonetheless, after their brief talk the two young men parted ways with peaceful hearts.

As the thirty-five seat plane chased its shadow across the Kunlun foothills on its way from Lhasa to Beijing, the yellow and green fields of great China slipped away under its wings. The cultivated fields were divided up by neat intersecting lines like a sheet of graph paper. The first tributaries of the Yangtze appeared, followed by the famous Huang Ho.

Ever since the 1950s, Tibetan schools have taught intensive courses on Chinese history and culture. For Mani Yaso, the fields, mountains, rivers and even the clouds that sometimes enveloped the airplane were close to his heart. He had always wondered about the mysterious Chinese nation whose people made up almost one third of the world’s population. Now Mani Yaso returned to his happy thoughts, analyzing and refining them.

Over the course of its five thousand year history, this unique people has brought forth three separate religions and applied all three of them together. The Chinese were never infatuated with other people’s gods, but most importantly, they never created gods for themselves or attacked the gods of other nations. Throughout their history, the Chinese have, for the most part, defended themselves from invaders while avoiding bloody confrontations. To their credit, they are largely unfamiliar with the egoism that boils in the blood of even the world’s most powerless nations. Mani Yaso suddenly

remembered the words of Lama Tsu: “Our Han brothers are generally fair, but they lose their feeling of equality as soon as the issue of Tibet is raised.”

There must be a complication somewhere! Otherwise, why won't the Han, who are considered by experts in the West to be comparatively tolerant, set their Tubo brothers free?

Perhaps during his visit he would raise the question of Tibet and find out how the Chinese leaders saw the question. The Leader had said nothing about the issue. In fact, he had never mentioned sovereignty for Tibet in Mani Yaso's hearing.

In any case, he would sound things out. His own plans were uppermost in his mind. According to the Leader, he would have a number of meetings with four members of the Chinese government. If he could discover the inner secrets of those four, he would know what to do.

Beijing's smaller airport was crowded as usual. Two officers had traveled all the way from Lhasa with Mani Yaso. One of them was apparently Chinese, for as soon as they left the airplane he ran over to two officers who were standing nearby and pretending to look at nothing in particular. They greeted him warmly and he led them over to Mani Yaso.

“Welcome comrade Mani Yaso. My name is Han Li,” said the first, a thin officer in a gray-green uniform. A car pulled up before the four men had a chance to shake each other's hands.

Soon the car was speeding down the wide thoroughfares of Beijing, accompanied on both sides by an unending flow of bicyclists. On occasion Mani Yaso caught sight of cranes, a sign of new construction.

“Is this your first visit to Beijing, Comrade Mani Yaso?”

“Yes.”

“Our city is being completely rebuilt.”

The Chinese officers shone with pride for their capitol.

The car halted outside a tall building. The retinue of officers accompanied Mani Yaso in the elevator up to one of the top floors, where he went into an office. There was no name on the door, just a number – 39/4327.

“Welcome to Beijing Comrade Lama Yaso!” came the welcome from the owner of the office, a tall, bald man with a hunched back. His eyes, like the eyes of the officers at the airport, were penetrating, cunning and quick. “Let's get acquainted. I am called Comrade Huan Tze.”

“Mani Yaso.”

“It would be more precise for you call yourself Saint Milarepa or Lama Yaso,” Huan Tze said with a radiant smile.

Mani Yaso answered his smile, but said nothing.

“We will enjoy speaking with you in *Hanyu*, Comrade Mani Yaso. According to our information, you are fluent in the Beijing dialect.”

“I studied Chinese for ten years, but that was not enough.”

“Approximately two billion people speak *Hanyu*. That is twice as many as speak English,” Huan Tze said with a smile, revealing crooked, yellow teeth.

Mani Yaso was sure that the Leader had already warned all the people he was to meet in Beijing that they should avoid talking with him face to face. Even so, he could clearly see the aura of the first person to greet him and could read his thoughts almost in

their entirety. Huan Tze was talking without any uneasiness. He set a print-out in front of Mani Yaso.

“You may take a look at the schedule for your week in Beijing.”

As planned, the schedule showed meetings with four people, but Mani Yaso was doubtful that all of them were members of the government, as the Leader had promised.

When he handed the schedule back, he asked Huan Tze, “Can you tell me who these people are?”

“I cannot hide anything from you. These people are indispensable to our government, esteemed Mani Yaso.”

“That means they are spies,” Mani Yaso came to a sudden conclusion.

Huan Tze almost lost his cool. “You must pardon me, esteemed Mani Yaso, but great effort is required to protect a state such as China with its one and a half billion people. I won’t hide the fact that we are asking for your assistance.”

Mani Yaso read what Huan Tze was thinking: “First show us what you can do, young man.” He smiled at this and gave a slight nod. Beijing did not yet believe in the reincarnation of Milarepa. Beijing intended to test the young man, and the test would be carried out by state security with an eye to gaining an advantage at the same time. If he passed the test they had prepared for him, then the government’s leaders would meet with him; if not, then he could forget about any meeting.

“I have my own proposal for you,” he said. “We will talk about it after my trips around Beijing.”

“Of course. That goes without saying.”

“Now I just have one request, esteemed Huan Tze. You currently have two people in jail. One of them is a monk named Sorju. The other is a monk named Dei. They were arrested for offering me assistance. If you have no charges against me, then I think they must be released.”

“We have no charges against you of any kind, esteemed Lama Yaso, but the two monks you speak of were charged with illegal border crossing. The investigation will take some time.”

Mani Yaso frowned at Huan Tze. Just then he noticed the insignia on the man’s uniform. He was a general.

“Those innocent men have been in jail for three months, sir.”

“Yes, you are right. The investigation will be completed tomorrow. It may even wind up today.”

After talking for a long time with three of the four men arrested by China’s Security Council, Mani Yaso gave General Huan the following information:

“The real name of the first man I spoke with is not Cho Yan, as it says in his identification. His name is like yours, sir – Huan Yan. He was born in Tzan Xia, not Tenzu. He is a physicist, not an ecologist. He was forced to confess to cooperating with U.S. intelligence in China. Here is a recording of his answers. And one more thing: the large amount of money listed in the case file was taken not by this man, but by someone named Aivano, who used to live in Beijing and now lives in Europe. Huan Yan received less than one third of what he was promised, sir.”

After listening to Mani Yaso in silence, Huan Tze came alive. He was almost squirming in his seat.

“We’ve been looking for Aivano for a long time. I don’t suppose you could help us catch him, could you, esteemed Lama Yaso? My office is prepared to pay whatever you ask.”

“The man who can find him is already in your hands,” Mani Yaso replied with a wide smile. “Huan Yan. If you let him out of prison, he will find Aivano even if he has to go to hell to do it.”

“Our prisoner?” General Huan asked. He thought for a minute and then gestured for Mani Yaso to continue.

“Your second prisoner,” Mani Yaso went on, “is not guilty of anything at all. He is just a man whose convictions do not coincide with yours. He is very erudite and therefore considers the idea of communism a flimsy dream. A utopia. The fate of the Soviet Union has proved that he is right. Or do you not agree?”

“We can build communism and we will prove it, esteemed Lama Yaso. We are led by the Communist Party. If you, as a patriot of the Chinese state, would assist us, I am sure your help would be invaluable.”

“I am helping you!” Mani Yaso said with a laugh.

“thank you. But you should not try to vindicate the enemies of communism, esteemed Lama Yaso.”

“In my view, it is your third prisoner who is really guilty. He has killed several people. He is a criminal with a hard heart. There is blood on his hands and his ego is enormous. I used hypnopedia to make a recording of his confession. Now your investigators just have to work over each episode and charge him. Who is General Pen Li? He is secretly supporting this criminal.”

“Did you say General Pen Li?”

Huan Tze did not realize that he had leaped to standing. Mani Yaso read his mind without meaning to. General Pen Li was the head of the department.

“I can’t say anything about the fourth person yet. He is in a deep trance. I believe he has sustained a serious head injury. He probably has a concussion. If you don’t get him care immediately it will be too late.”

Huan Tze could not listen to anything about the fourth prisoner. His mind was focused on his department’s superior officer, General Pen Li.

Mani Yaso had one day to rest during his trip to Beijing. On the next day he was told that the leaders of the People’s Republic of China intended to receive him. Once that news came down, everyone who met or even talked with the “Kyrgyz from Tibet” behaved differently. The security service put Mani Yaso under such protection that he was practically isolated. The leaders of other government departments were not allowed to meet with him. The only sightseeing he did was an officially organized one-day tour of the Gugong Palace on Tiananmen Square. The interior affairs and foreign affairs ministries requested a one-hour meeting with Mani Yaso, but the security service would not allow it. Everyone who asked was told that Mani Yaso would have no meetings outside his officially scheduled visit.

In record time the security service opened an account for Mani Yaso in the Beijing branch of an international bank and transferred a large sum of money to the account as remuneration for his “assistance.” Then they ceremonially presented him with the passbook for the account.

That same evening, the Beijing city executive council was planning to make Mani Yaso an honorary citizen of Beijing. The ceremony was cancelled, however, because the Chinese leadership wanted to see Mani Yaso that evening.

The high government building, a symbol of the unshakable faith of the great Chinese nation, shines at night with an abundance of electric lights. The building is equipped with many elevators, but the group leading Mani Yaso took him to the Chairman’s office via a long series of brightly-lit labyrinth-like tunnels.

“Should I call him ‘Esteemed Chairman?’” Mani Yaso asked General Pen Li, who had spent the entire day with him.

“We always call each other ‘comrade,’ but there are times when that rule is not observed. Especially by foreigners.”

“I am no foreigner, but in Tibet we are not used to calling our leaders ‘comrades.’ The Leader is always called ‘Your Holiness.’”

“Right. Your Leader is the biggest of the biggest, the holiest of the holiest, isn’t he?” chuckled the general. The others followed him by tittering. Mani Yaso smiled and said nothing. From his first day in Beijing everything he heard and saw told him that the Chinese had little respect for “His Holiness.” Mani Yaso’s observations revealed to him why that was.

Chapter Sixteen

Even though it was late in the evening, there were many people running back and forth through the Chairman’s anteroom. Mani Yaso and his escorts were met by a smooth looking young man, who took them into a side room and asked them to take their seats around a low, round table that was set with a fragrant selection of berries and vegetables. Slender, smiling girls in khaki uniform jackets and skirts stepped lightly, their high heels clicking, and poured tea for each guest with a bow.

“The Chairman will be here any minute to meet with you,” the young man said to Mani Yaso and bowed his head.

Sure enough, in a few minutes the Chairman walked briskly into the room with his assistant. He was a thickly-built man of medium height and he wore glasses. His guests stood up. After shaking their hands, the Chairman sat down in the chair that had been placed for him.

“I kept you waiting for a while. I apologize. Let’s talk over tea, shall we?”

One of the officers escorting Mani Yaso spoke. “Comrade Chairman, allow me to introduce to you the esteemed Lama Yaso from Tibet.”

Mani Yaso stood and, with a respectful bow, placed on the Chairman’s chair the soft brown scarf with gold fringe that he had been holding.

The Chairman smiled. “Thank you! You are still a young man, but I have been told that I should call you ‘Your Holiness Milarepa’ or ‘Saint Milarepa.’”

“That will be fine once I live up to the name of Saint Milarepa. Until then, I still have to live up to the name Mani Yaso, esteemed Chairman.”

The Chairman made an approving noise. "Then you'll have an extremely busy life, young man. We are glad to see that you view your future that way. I have been told about the invaluable assistance you gave our law enforcement services. We Communists are open about our materialist worldview, but there is no hiding the face that some things in life are beyond human reason. For example, we can see with our own eyes that you have the supernatural gift of Saint Milarepa. There is no purely scientific explanation of that gift. Am I right, Comrade General?"

The Chairman, who had been speaking to Mani Yaso the whole time, suddenly turned to General Pen Li.

"Correct, Comrade Chairman," Pen Li answered hurriedly. Then the Chairman turned the conversation back to Milarepa. He asked Mani Yaso many questions that had interested him and listened to his answers, sometimes with his head bowed, and with obvious satisfaction.

After an hour, the Chairman smiled politely. "It has been delightful speaking with you," he said, apparently intending to conclude the meeting.

Mani Yaso was stricken with a sudden sense of distress that he might never see this exceptionally educated man again after taking such a liking to him. The Chairman was astute, with a far-ranging mind and an appealing lack of conceit. He followed a straight, clear path and was one of the most influential people on earth.

"I wanted to give you a very important message, Esteemed Chairman!" Mani Yaso blurted out.

The Chairman had been about to look at his watch, but he put his arm back down and looked at Mani Yaso inquisitively.

"Tell me about it, if it isn't a secret.

"There is no secret, but I wanted to communicate it to you in private."

At that, everyone but the Chairman left the room in silence.

"You have asked me many questions about Saint Milarepa because I am his double, born to follow the great man's dreams, so allow me to start with the question you asked. Saint Milarepa's only aim in life was to sow seeds of purity, goodness and justice in people's minds and souls. He put that above all else. His insightful poems are dedicated to that one goal. Thus, I have a duty to strive to make his dream a reality. That is obviously a job too large for me alone. Notwithstanding the tireless efforts of hundreds of geniuses like Saint Milarepa, who have constantly called people to moral perfection throughout human history, unfortunately the past century has shown a strong tendency of retreating from morality. If the moral face of humanity keeps declining at the same rate, then the secret plans of the 300 Committee will be accomplished in the next 50 years, Esteemed Chairman."

After expressing his most important thoughts, Mani Yaso looked up at the Chairman to see what his reaction would be. Without saying a word, the man twirled a pen that lay on his writing paper.

It seems that leaders of his class cannot allow themselves to show their emotions if they hope to remain mysterious to those around them. Perhaps that is a rule they follow – who knows?

As the Chairman did not react right away, Mani Yaso was forced to continue talking.

“Late last year a fresh generation of Committee members met in Manhattan. A full Boeing plane of them flew over from London with the prince. They met with the heirs of U.S. millionaires to discuss the paper called Recommendations of the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations in light of the Global 2000 Report program. The main idea of the program is the legalization of narcotics use. For starters, they will begin putting narcotics in the water, food and drinks at cafeterias belonging to schools and companies, street cafes and restaurants throughout Europe. In London, for example, dozens of public narcotics bars have already been opened.

“Their next step will be to gain legal status and official support for sex with animals and children and legal status for same-sex marriages. A number of governments have already begun adopting such marriage rights. They will also force the adoption of the “one child per family” rule around the world to reduce the Earth’s population. All of that is in addition to the methods they have used before – spreading epidemics, waging chemical and ecological warfare and establishing a Sect of the Devil and black magic centers. In other words, their goal is to ensure that the progeny of the 300 Committee enjoy a fairy tale lifestyle by leaving just a billion selected humans on earth. Workers in the three or four countries they choose will have to work all day and spend all night in narcotics bars watching pornography. They will not be allowed to have normal families and children because, in the end, they will all be replaced by cyborg robots.

“Right now the whole planet is engaged in a process with the attractive name of ‘political and economic globalization.’ Esteemed Chairman, these innovations have already brought lots of young members into the Global 2000 program. I would very much like to hear what you think about all this.”

The Chairman stopped twirling his pen and seemed to be considering how to answer Mani Yaso. As the pause lengthened, Mani Yaso began to worry. He was that the Chairman would say something like: “Perhaps everything you have said is just rumors, unsupported by facts. The media in the West frequently exaggerates things to create a stir.” But instead of answering, the Chairman began to ask questions.

“Pardon me, Saint Milarepa, but which countries do they want to have work for them? Have they named them?”

“China, India, Indonesia and Brazil.”

The Chairman gave a belly-laugh. “True enough. All four countries are already working. Don’t they count Russia?”

“They are planning to sharply reduce the population of Russia. Over the next thirty years they want to decrease the number of people in Russia by two-thirds, leaving just fifty million. The Committee members also believe that Russia’s gene pool is tainted with untreatable defects.

“What do the Committee members in the United States plan to do with their own people?”

“Only one third of the current population will survive.”

The Chairman snickered. “So they’ll leave us Chinese and Indians alive so we can be their slaves?”

“The Cambridge Institute for Medical Research is also part of the 300 Committee. The Institute has precise data on how many people should be left in each country. If you are interested, I can give you the data in writing.”

“This is interesting. Very interesting. But the People’s Republic of China already enforces a one child per family policy without the help of any committees. Does that mean that we are implementing their plans?”

The Chairman’s question sounded like a joke, but he did not smile. His face was serious, and he expected an equally serious answer.

“That’s how it looks on the outside, but first of all, your demographic situation is nothing like what the 300 Committee is trying to do. Secondly, I believe that China does not support the Committee’s goal of decimating humanity in order to carry out its egotistical plans. But even so, China faces a threat, Esteemed Chairman.”

“What threat?”

Mani Yaso did not want to scare the Chairman with his next thought, so first he smiled respectfully.

“Despite all the negative activities of the 300 Committee, the Chinese nation has a lot of authority right now. The national consciousness is progressing, and that is causing an economic boom. The Chinese and Indians already realize that in little over fifty years they will lead the world in demographic terms. It is obvious who will be the carrier of national egotism in the future. The Euro-American hegemony over other countries will soon fall into the hands of these two great nations. I think that this must be prevented at any cost.”

“I’m not sure what to say about your opinion that the Chinese people or the Chinese state will somehow start threatening the rest of the world, most esteemed Milarepa. After all, that has never happened before.”

“You are right, Your Excellency. But in the new era the Chinese people, especially young people, will take a sharp turn.”

“Are you perhaps talking about the *black rapeseed*²¹?”

“True, *black rapeseed* is unjust, Your Excellency. However, its ramifications for humanity are no greater than those of the dangers we have been discussing.”

The Chairman glanced at his watch, perhaps out of habit, and spoke again. “The Chinese people have never tried to solve the world’s problems unilaterally. If someone undertakes to do so, say the 300 Committee you speak of, they are mistaken. History has its own dialectic of development. You can’t change that. If you want to tell me something definite, I’m listening. We have already been here for three hours, esteemed Milarepa, but I do not consider that wasted time.”

“Esteemed Chairman, fate has given me a single goal. It was in following that goal that I finally developed a mantra that I call Tolerance. It is in the school of Agni Yoga and is combined with white magic. The purpose of the mantra is to put things in their place, meaning that it regulates egoism in the human soul. Ever since ancient times, whenever people’s egos cross the line in either direction, but especially when they are too large, that gives birth to destructive wars, monstrous destruction and the immense, hopeless sorrow and cruel death of millions of people!

“Excessive egos create tyrants, war-mongers and fascists who shed rivers of blood. We must join forces and fight this evil, Your Excellency. I turn to you as I would turn to a father, asking for help attaining my goal.”

²¹ In China, a birth certificate is not issued to a child born to parents who already have a child. The Chinese refer to such instances as *black rapeseed*.

The Chairman laughed. "Your plans are noble, but I am a leader of the materialists you have a problem with. How can I help you? In those kinds of situations we usually aren't good for much. People have told me about how you used black magic to influence several public servants in Tibet."

"Forgive me, Your Excellency. At that time I sinned against myself. I used the power of black magic to increase the size of the men's egos instead of making them smaller. It was an unforgivable mistake."

Without waiting for Mani Yaso to finish, the Chairman laughed and held up a hand. "I just had an idea, esteemed Milarepa. Why don't you try to implement your new mantra in the United States first? My colleague the U.S. president is trying to force his will on the entire world. Going against our recommendations that he wash the blood off his jacket first, he is once again up to his knees in blood. First Iraq, and now Iran is threatened. Can you fix the president's ego?"

Mani Yaso became animated. "There's no other way, Your Excellency. I intend to go there very soon. What you have said happens to be my final goal. After all, the 300 Committee was founded by former U.S. presidents. Bush, father and son, the Queen of England and her heirs are all Committee members."

"I don't think you'll be able to meet with them. They have their own astrologists and prophets, but they keep them under wraps. The Europeans are especially good at that."

"I think I will find a way to meet them. First I will try to publish an open letter to the current leaders of the 300 Committee. The Americans have common sense. I believe in them. I hope they will like the idea of my Tolerance mantra. The main thing is to show the Americans the true result of the mantra. There are prophets like me all over the world, but when you test them it's clear that they are less than truthful, to put it mildly."

"I think you'll be the first one the CIA draws a bead on."

"Of course. They have long ears and sticky fingers. They've known about me for a long time. If China's security service had reported that I failed the test I would not be sitting here with you right now. I'll have to get to the U.S. leadership the same way – through the CIA. But there are other ways if that doesn't work. The main thing, Your Excellency, is to make my hope a reality. I want the leaders of the Committee to voluntarily agree to have their egos fixed. Apparently not everyone takes this issue seriously. That is why I am asking for your help."

"How can I help you?"

"If you would be first to support the idea of adjusting people's egos that would be invaluable help."

"Should I start with myself? Or do you mean that you want me to contact the leaders of those governments?"

"It would be a terrific example if you started with yourself, Your Excellency. If you did it, then all of China's leaders, including public servants and judges, would be interested in doing a session of Tolerance."

"Yes, but if I go first, then I am admitting that I am the world's number one egotist," the Chairman said with a laugh. "Isn't that right?"

"Nothing is more valuable than a good example, Your Excellency. I have great faith in you."

“Then we will consider it, esteemed Milarepa. I think a man should not avoid improving his spiritual condition, even if it requires considerable spiritual effort. I believe Gautama Buddha said that the longer you live in this world, even if you do nothing, the more sins you take on your soul. Nothing is more important than cleansing the conscience. I have a proposal for you, esteemed Milarepa. Stay in Beijing. Work with us. We will put all the conditions in place.”

The Chairman removed his glasses and smiled at Mani Yaso. The young man was somewhat surprised, for behind his glasses the Chairman’s eyes were kind like the eyes of regular people, without any arrogance and conceit. That is probably why Mani Yaso answered the way he did, without any reservations.

“Of course I will have to live in Beijing, Your Excellency. There is much work to do here. We need to open Tolerance centers. If teachers here are amenable, then we will offer to teach our mantras in schools, since young people’s hearts are receptive and their personalities are flexible. You have my profuse thanks in advance if you take an interest in this.”

The monk Sorju meekly bowed to Dei’s will in everything, for he had come to realize that the man was educated, well-acquainted with the Chinese soul, industrious and apparently sharp-witted in all manner of affairs. When they were first arrested by the border service, however, Sorju did all he could to anger Dei by blaming him for the situation they found themselves in.

Now, Sorju said things like, “I just make herbal remedies. That’s all I know how to do.”

“You make exceptional medicines. You could search the whole world and not find anything like them,” Dei replied with sincerity. He was pleased that Sorju was being friendlier with him.

This time was no different – everything went just as Dei had planned. When they were freed from jail by the Central Command of China’s border service, Dei sat down in his cell and said he would only leave on one condition.

“Tell Saint Milarepa that we are here. We will do what he says.”

Dei’s act stunned Sorju. “What if they can’t find that Milarepa of yours? How will they get word to him?” he asked.

“Don’t worry, Uncle Sorju. They know where Mani Yaso is. I’m fairly sure that he came to China. I’m guessing from things they’ve said.”

“Who are you talking about? Who came to China?”

“Mani Yaso.”

“Your Milarepa?”

“Yes.”

“What nonsense! They’d arrest him!”

“No, Uncle Sorju. They wouldn’t dare. They need him. Don’t believe them when they say they’d arrest him.”

“Who do they need? Mani Yaso?”

“Who else? Let’s just try not to leave here for now. We don’t have any identification, anyway, so we’d just get arrested again five meters down the road. Our lives aren’t worth much. How can we get to Lake Manas?”

Sorju said nothing, even though he had reasons to disagree with Dei. “They won’t just leave us here because we want to stay. They’ll kick us out any minute now if it’s true that we’re free to go.” He wanted to voice his thoughts, but reconsidered. Dei’s word was now his law.

The next morning, the door to their cell opened and the guard loudly ordered them to come out.

“We won’t,” Dei calmly replied.

“I said get out of there! The one you wanted to see is here.”

“Oh!”

Mani Yaso was waiting for them on the street. There were three Special Forces members with him.

“Om mani padme hum!” Mani Yaso greeted them with a radiant smile. He embraced Dei and Sorju. “Let’s go find a hotel!”

After staying three days at a hotel belonging to the Chinese Security Service, Mani Yaso and his two protégés were forced to leave. It was difficult for a regular person to stay at the hotel. Dei and Sorju, both without any documents, were allowed in as Mani Yaso’s personal assistants, but would have required a great deal of unpleasant effort for them to go out again. And once they were out, they probably would not get back in.

Despite its luxury, Dei and Sorju were uncomfortable at the hotel. Mani Yaso looked tired when he returned to the hotel late in the evening, but the two men went on and told him that they would prefer to move to a plain hotel in the city.

“Fine,” said Mani Yaso without hesitation. “We will move in the morning. Do you know which hotel is the best?”

“It doesn’t have to be the best, as long as it’s comfortable,” Dei said. “I heard that the Beihai is a good hotel. It is closer to the center and there are plenty of buses. We have to get to work!”

Mani Yaso appreciated Dei’s foresight, so on the next day the two monks moved to the Beihai hotel. Mani Yaso had to remain in the government-owned hotel because the higher-ups wanted him there. It was explained to him that the average private hotel was unable to guarantee proper security for a VIP like himself. The number of guards assigned to him was constantly increasing, and they often rotated the cars that he rode in – either a black Jaguar or a yellow Patriot.

Soon Mani Yaso bought a four-room building not far from Sun Yatsen Park to house his axiological center. Dei and Sorju moved to a private hotel near the center, since Dei would be responsible for the day-to-day part of getting the center up and running, in addition to guarding it. The Chinese Ministry of Education sent them two girls and a young man to help them organize the center’s opening ceremony. The young people immediately took over and kept Dei and Sorju so busy that there was no time to breathe. Over two months while they all worked preparing the building inside and out, purchasing things that would be required for the meditation classes and setting things up, one of the girls fell in love with Dei. The girl was adroit and energetic in everything she did, and with her cheerful nature and sharp tongue she soon exasperated Dei by joking about his celibacy.

“I can’t let you be a celibate monk for the rest of your life. Over my dead body. We have the same name, and I like you!” Although her tone was lighthearted, she was being sincere. To prove she was serious, one day she hid Dei’s yellow cap and put a blue construction worker’s cap on his head.

Dei was offended. “Your name is Yi Dei, and my name is Dei. We don’t just have the same name. We are brother and sister. Do not play such jokes on your brother. It’s shameful.”

Dei hoped that this would put an end to her joking, but instead of being embarrassed, the irrepressible, flirtatious girl grew even bolder.

“It’s no joke, brother Dei. It’s love. No yellow hat can scare off love. Do you want me to tell you a story?”

They had all just sat down to eat lunch, spreading their food on a wide piece of paper. The others sat up with interest, looking forward to hearing a love story.

“Let’s hear it!” they encouraged the girl. Dei could not object, so he sat in silence with his head down. He was no longer the busy, talkative young man he had been before the appearance of this clever, outspoken girl. Now he behaved with reserve.

The girl began her story. “Long, long ago there was a young yellow-hat monk, just like brother Dei. One day the island where he lived was obliterated by a flood. Everyone perished except for that monk and his little sister. They survived as best they could. Then one day the brother told his sister that he was in love with her and proposed that they get married so that their lineage would carry on. The sister was upset and refused. Finally, when her brother’s pressure became too much for her, she said ‘If you can catch me, I’ll marry you.’ Then she ran off. Her brother quickly came up with a plan. He took a short cut and appeared on the path in front of her with his arms wide open to embrace her. Brother Dei, do you see what kind of young men there once were in China?”

“Then what?” asked one of the others in the group.

“She fell in love with him. But back then there were envious people who liked to gossip, just like they do today. They snitched to the god Tengri, who punished the pair by leaving them on a mountain peak so high that not even a crow could reach them. Hungry and freezing, they embraced each other as their souls left their bodies. Now that was love! Fearless, grand and powerful.”

Dei had wanted to say something when Yi Dei spread her arms to the sky, but she interrupted him. “Wait, brother Dei! Let me finish. Listen to the end of the story. The fire bird flew past the mountain and saw the two loving hearts expiring, so she took pity on them and covered them with a blanket of immortality. Exactly seven years later they were reborn, but during the time of their nonexistence their souls joined and became one. And there they are – two bodies!”

Yi Dei pointed to a brightly colored poster they had recently hung on the wall of the cleaned-up room. The poster, printed there in Beijing, depicted a two-headed woman with four arms and four legs.

The story and the image on the poster had such an effect on the people sitting near Yi Dei that they stopped chewing and stared, as if they were seeing the poster for the first time.

“That’s the power of love for you!” Yi Dei said with satisfaction.

“If they are related, then they cannot have descendants,” Dei managed to parry.

“Pardon me, brother Dei. I haven’t finished. It’s true – they are childless. Brother Dei noticed that. I wonder where you could find anybody as smart as Dei. But he is missing one thing – love. Too bad about that ridiculous yellow hat!”

“Is there any more to your story?” Yi Dei’s girlfriend asked with impatience and a note of cattiness in her voice.

“Of course it does. Keep listening. Our lunch break isn’t over yet. So after they turned into one being, the two lovers realized that they couldn’t have children and turned to the fire bird who brought them to life. They said, ‘Oh holy fire bird! You brought us back from death and returned us to this world! But what good is your kindness to us if we cannot have a child?’

“When she heard their cries, the fire bird said to them, ‘I agree, but because you are kin no child may come from your womb. You will create children, not from your womb but from your emotions and your undying love. Plant this twig, feed it with your emotions and you will grow a tree.’

“The fire bird gave them a twig. The twig, planted in the earth with love, grew day and night. Before they knew it, it was almost time for the tree to bear fruit. Since the fire bird had not told them what kind of fruits the tree would bear, the brother and sister waited impatiently for it to flower. Early one morning they noticed that soft, blue-green sprouts had appeared at the tips of the tree’s buds. The next morning they looked again and – miracle! – all the sprouts had tiny, crying babies. There were thousands of buds and thousands of little children, repopulating the earth with Han children. Now do you see how powerful love is, brother Dei?”

Dei refused to give up. “I’m not a Han, so I can’t fall in love with my sister.”

“That story isn’t about the Han, brother Dei. It’s about love. You have love for your sister, love for your father, love for your mother. And you have love that is for everyone. That’s how it is.” With that, Yi Dei gave a sad sigh and her face grew sad.

Sorju, who had said nothing during her story, felt sorry for the girl. He turned to Dei and said, “If that’s the case, then Ngvan Dei could love you like a sister, couldn’t he?” His toothless mouth gave a wide smile.

“That’s for brother Dei to decide. I just told the story to waste some time,” the girl replied. Then she stood up and went into the other room.

Dei watched her with an anxious face, but he did not know what to say.

“Did I hurt her feelings?” he asked his friend Sorju. Everyone in the room laughed to see the confident young man lose his nerve.

“Yes,” Sorju replied. “Of course you did. Now you have to go apologize.”

When all that remained to do in the new center were small finishing jobs, a young man showed up at the door without warning. He was followed by another man with an arrogant, severe face. Judging by his clothes he was a highly-placed bureaucrat. The young man deferentially opened the door for him and showed him the renovated, refurbished rooms. The bureaucrat looked everything over without a word and then turned to Sorju, since he was the oldest person present.

“I see everything is ready. You have done a very good job. How can I find Mani Yaso? I need to discuss the opening of the center with him.”

Sorju looked at Dei.

"We do not know where Mani Yaso is," Dei answered.

"Does he come here?"

"Not very often, but sometimes."

"Do you have his cell phone number?"

"Yes."

When Dei read out the number, the young man wrote it down quickly.

"I bet he's from the Ministry of Education," Sorju said after the strangers left.

"No, I've never seen him there," the girls attested.

"Didn't you recognize him?" asked one of the young men who was installing some computers. "That was the Leader of Tibet!"

"Are you serious?" Dei was afraid.

"You say you're from Tibet. Don't you recognize your own Leader?"

"He doesn't concern us, does he?" Dei said as he went back to work. Inside, he was worried. *Why is he looking for Mani Yaso?*

On opening day, they hung a sign high on the building that read "The Tolerance Center for Axiology." Although Mani Yaso had warned everyone to expect few people at the opening, the square in front of the building was jammed with cars. People kept driving in and parking right next to each other, and soon there was no place to set up a television camera. The cameramen and journalists had to weave in and out between the cars to get their footage.

Only after everyone left and silence finally descended did Dei say to Mani Yaso, "The Leader was here looking for you the other day. My heart is worried."

"I met with him," Mani Yaso replied, looking gratefully at his friend. "Their whole family is worried about their daughter Seleng. I did not know that she is in a psychiatric clinic here in Beijing."

"What happened?"

"I need to tell you, Uncle Dei. Who else can I be open with? Apparently the girl's illness is connected with me. That has made the Leader upset with me."

"What does he say?"

"He said it straight out: 'My daughter is ill because of you. Be compassionate. Make a decision and make it soon.'"

"What did he mean by soon?"

"He meant that I have to decide soon or his daughter will never be right again."

"So he wants you to marry her right away?"

"Exactly."

Dei sighed. "Girls have strange illnesses! When you and I lived at the Jokhang temple we knew nothing of these dangers. But I see that girls are a real problem when you live outside the temple."

"I can see it on your face, Uncle Dei. You are having problems with a girl, too. Who is she, Uncle Dei? You are thinking about her right now," Mani Yaso said with a smile.

"I can't hide anything from you, can I? You are like a brother to me. We have the same headache."

"Who is she?"

"The girl that was sent to work here from the Ministry of Education."

Mani Yaso laughed. "That's wonderful. She can work here at the center. She's a hard worker. But I'm afraid we are finished here. Now it's time to go to India. I already sent our passports off to get visa stamps."

"Then why did you say 'that's wonderful?'"

"We'll leave Uncle Sorju here to run the center while the two of us travel. Once we are done we'll have time to think about Yi Dei, isn't that right, Uncle Dei?"

"That doesn't really matter. Will the Leader treat you like an enemy and try to prevent you from working? That's the important question."

"I promised to heal their daughter. Starting tomorrow I will be doing three psychotropic sessions with her every day. When she gets her health back she may not even want to see me."

"I hope so," Dei said. He hoped that Mani Yaso would always wear a yellow hat like his own.

Chapter Seventeen

On one of Mani Yaso's last days in Beijing, his internet site registered its first invitation from India. Mani Yaso had already been planning to pay an official visit to Delhi, so he decided to accept the odd private invitation. The text was rude, but it intrigued him. For two days he thought of nothing else. On the third day he sought Dei's advice. He opened the site and showed him the invitation.

Milarepa! I saw your announcement and it made me want to spit on the ground. Are you a god? Who are you to fix people's souls? If you're really omnipotent, I'll give you my address. Come see with your own eyes the evil that is perpetrated on the earth and fix the people responsible for it. Then I will believe in you and tell the people about you. If you can't do it, then get rid of your site and hang yourself from the turban you shouldn't even be wearing! You won't get a penny from people if you aren't for real. There are plenty of men just like you around the world!

The angry Indian gave his address at the end of his message: *India. Kerala State. Kochin, Professor Phalke, owner of the Alambha guest house.*

Ngvan Dei laughed heartily. "I wonder what evil he has in mind. Maybe someone seduced his betrothed. We're not going to go running to him just for this, are we?"

"It's our first invitation, Uncle Dei. How can we refuse it? Think about it. I, for one, am interested."

"Let's find out first what evil he's talking about. Should we try to write to him?"

"You're right, but we don't have time for a correspondence, Uncle Dei. The Indian Committee has invited us to come in two or three days. We'll get there and see what we find out, alright?"

Dei nodded.

Mani Yaso's plans suddenly changed the next day. He was told that he would be met in Delhi by members of the intelligence service and that his schedule would be planned down to the minute. In Delhi, as during his visit to Beijing, his time would not be

his own during the day, and at night he would be under the watchful eye of special agents.

By noon Mani Yaso warned his friend, “Uncle Dei, I have arranged things with a tour agency and paid for the trip so we can fly to India as free tourists. Otherwise we will end up working for their spooks.”

“Will they let us do that? What if they won’t let us go?”

“I’ve already called Delhi. I’ll meet with them after we go to Kerala.”

“They went along with it?”

“Yes. They had no choice.”

The plane was filled with filled with tourists who loudly shared their negative opinions of India, the place they were spending serious money to visit.

“India’s where all the unregulated tourism started!”

“But everything’s cheap there. You can’t find a hotel in India that costs more than twenty dollars a night.”

“But the dirt, the food, the water, the mosquitoes, the snakes!”

“They say that homeless Indians die in the streets by the hundreds. By the thousands.”

“Did you know that morgue trucks go around before dawn every day and take the bodies to Old Delhi to feed the vultures?”

“I guess the vultures have to live, too!”

“They say you can catch anything in India. God forbid!”

“Indians are lazy. They never work.”

“That’s just the Hindus. They don’t care anything about power, money, their lifestyle, or even their lives. All they want is to get out of Sansara²² and go clean into the next world.”

Mani Yaso opened his eyes in surprise at the man who said that. He was lean and sinewy and wore glasses. He was fanning his face with a piece of paper using short, quick motions.

The man glanced at Mani Yaso. “You don’t like me?” he asked with a grin.

“Everything’s fine,” Mani Yaso answered with a smile.

The plane left Beijing late at night and landed in Mumbai at noon the next day. The sun was much brighter than in Beijing. In Mumbai Mani Yaso and Dei took a local flight to Trivandrum in the southern state of Kerala. That evening they arrived in Kochi, where Professor Phalke lived, when it was already late evening. The professor’s house was not far from the bus station. When they got out of the car, Mani Yaso and Dei stood not believing their eyes in front of a modest, two-story hotel with a small sign advertising it to be the Alambha. The internet invitation was for real. They both felt hesitant.

Mani Yaso tried to make his voice sound cheerful. “Well, Uncle Dei, press the button. We’ll see what happens.”

Dei pressed the button several times, but no sound came from inside the hotel. Just when he was about to knock on the gate, the front door opened with a quiet creak and a man in an Indian shirt and wide pants came out.

²² Sansara – (Sansk.) The endless cycle of rebirth and death in the wheel of life.

“No vacancy, my friends. I’m sorry.”

Dei’s voice was brisk, as usual. “*Muharat!* We came here on invitation of Professor Phalke.”

“Who would you be?”

“Are you Professor Phalke?” Dei shot back another question.

“Yes, I am.”

“Then listen. Saint Milarepa received the invitation you posted on his site. He is here before you. He came from Beijing.”

“From Beijing?”

“We greet you, esteemed Professor Phalke,” Mani Yaso spoke politely with his hands crossed over his chest.

“Is it really you?”

“Yes, I am right here before you, and I am the reincarnation of Saint Milarepa. My name is Mani Yaso. This man is a scholar and monk named Ngvan Dei.”

The next day Professor Phalke left the house at dawn and returned at noon looking downcast.

“I hired a houseboat. We can go,” he said. Around Mani Yaso he was shy like a small child. He was so gentle and diffident that he didn’t seem capable of saying anything rude to anybody. No one would believe that he wrote such an angry, rude internet message. Dei couldn’t help but ask the man what had been on his mind since the night before.

“Professor, did you write that message on our site?”

“Oh my!” Phalke shook his head. His sharp, fine-boned face turned bright red. “My neighbor wrote it. He is a taxi driver named Michael. He signed my name to it, but that was the right thing to do. You see, my older sister’s children live in the camp we will visit tomorrow. She died. They live there alone.”

“Will your taxi driver neighbor go with us?”

“He ran off. When he heard that you were here, he got in his taxi and took off as fast as he could. Forgive me. The message was extremely rude. I recently read it. Michael is a rude person, but his soul is pure.” As Professor Phalke said this he kept his eyes on the ground and tried to make out that everything was his fault.

Mani Yaso felt sorry for the simple-hearted man. To make him feel better he said in a friendly voice, “It’s alright. We are tolerant of rude words. Let’s go to the camp.”

Ngvan Dei was curious and no longer in awe of the quiet, still young man. “Did your neighbor just call you a professor, or is that your true title?”

“I am a professor. I worked for many years at my father’s *nanabai*.

“A *nanabai*? Do you mean a bakery?”

“Yes.”

Ngvan Dei shut his mouth and turned to Mani Yaso, who gave him a look that told him not to ask anymore questions.

It was afternoon when the rattling old taxi finally deposited them at the houseboat. Like a real house, it had two rooms, a kitchen and a shaded porch for catching fish and casting nets.

“I didn’t get a luxury houseboat. They’re very expensive,” Phalke sighed. He did not look at his guests.

“How much does this one cost per day?”

“One thousand rupees. That’s with three meals a day. The owner is a friend of mine, so he gave me a bargain.”

“But I see that four people work on this houseboat. If you split twenty dollars a day five ways, how can they afford to live?” Dei asked the professor.

“They usually get four thousand rupees a day, and they catch shrimp. That’s an important food.”

“So they sell the shrimp?”

“Of course!”

“Now I see.”

While they slowly made their way to the village of Munnar, the passengers spent a whole two days fighting tarantulas and blue mosquitoes. The water under the houseboat was not saltwater, nor was it lake or river water. It traveled over a chain of small tropical bodies of water linked by narrow channels. When the water petered out, the travelers reached dry land covered with thick banyan forests crossed by numerous footpaths and small trails. Professor Phalke said that one of those paths led to the camp.

Dei was surprised. “How do we know which one we need?” he asked.

“We must hire a guide from Munnar, but they are afraid of their chief and will not do it. You see, it was the chief who organized the camp.”

“What do you mean they’re afraid of him?” Dei asked. He was beginning to be irritated by the professor’s helpless attitude.

“His name is Marathi Guri. He is a cruel man. He could easily kill a man just because he doesn’t like him.”

“Isn’t there any law out here?”

“Marathi Guri is the only judge here.”

Dei shrugged with resignation and looked at Mani Yaso.

“Can we meet with him?” Mani Yaso asked.

“With whom?”

“With the head man.”

“We can go see.”

Village head man Marathi Guri turned out to be a pleasant-looking man of about forty. The large nose and heavy moustache on his shiny face gave him an air of benevolence. He wore a white fakir cap on his head. He gazed with amusement at his visitors, but when his eyes stopped on Mani Yaso he looked guarded.

“What are you here to trade?” he asked with a forced smile, eyeing the bags his unexpected guests were holding.

Phalke should have spoken first, but he seemed to be under a spell and could not open his mouth. Dei elbowed him.

“We aren’t here to trade, sir. We want to go to the camp. My sister’s children are there.”

The head man’s face became twisted in anger and his voice rang out powerfully. “Who told you to go to the camp?”

“We just wanted to go,” Phalke said nervously. He looked at the two men with him.

“Who the hell are they?” the head man growled, tilting his head at Dei and Mani Yaso. He could feel something odd emanating from the latter.

“This young man is the holy lama Milarepa, and the other is his assistant, Dei,” Phalke introduced his companions.

“Who invited them here? You?”

“I wanted to show these guests my sister’s children. They live in the camp.”

“The way to the camp is closed!” the head man began to yell, pointing his finger at the terrified Phalke. “Did you hear me? You came here last year. I remember you!”

It seemed that the camp was a very sore spot with the head man. While he was alive, he wouldn’t let even a mouse get through. When he realized this, Mani Yaso coolly inserted himself into the conversation.

“Esteemed head man! We came from far away just to see this camp. If you will allow us, we will take a look at your park and leave. I’m asking you not to stand in our way!”

“I said that the road is closed. Even if it wasn’t, none of you have the right to go there.”

“Why is that, sir?”

“That’s my business. It doesn’t concern any of you.”

The head man’s arrogant answer touched a nerve in Professor Phalke.

“The government issued an order banning camps like these! You are violating the law!” he blurted out in anger.

“What was that? I’ll have you locked up where you belong! It’s obvious you came here to steal something. Hey, officer! Come arrest this man. He stole a television from a houseboat last year. I recognize him! Arrest him right away!”

The head man was obviously used to behaving this way. An enormous policeman came out of the next room and followed his boss’ finger to Phalke. In an instant the professor’s arms were behind his back and he was led into the side room where the policeman had appeared from.

This turn of events took Dei by surprise and he became flustered. Mani Yaso was taken aback, too. He had promised himself that he would never resort to magic as a first line of defense, the crisis forced him to raise his hand to hypnotize everyone in the room.

Two minutes later all was calm in the head man’s office. Everyone was sitting where they had been before, looking meekly into Mani Yaso’s eyes.

“Do not be upset, sir. You will take us to the camp now. I do not want to hear any cursing or see any bad behavior. Our intentions are peaceful. Now, you go first and show us the way.”

Mani Yaso waited for his words to sink in. The head man’s bulging eyes began darting this way and that.

“He got it,” Dei thought with pleasure.

The head man stood up in a hurry.

In order to reach the camp, they had to get back on the house boat. They went from pool to pool and finally docked at a peninsula overgrown with reeds. The bank was fenced off with barbed wire, behind which they could see heaps of trash being picked through by some two-legged creatures that couldn’t possibly be humans. They were almost naked except for the rags that barely covered their privates. The group walked off the house boat and walked toward the creatures. As they got closer to the creatures, the rotten stench was almost enough to make them pass out. Mani Yaso and Dei stared in horror as they began to make out sad semblances of people, women and men, all with the

same face. They were emaciated little knots, some of them with their breasts hanging to their bellies like thick, wrinkled intestines. It was clear that many of them were suffering from scurvy and leprosy. Equally shocking was the presence among them of small children. There was no doubt that most of them had been stricken with rickets and meningitis and therefore were stunted in growth.

Mani Yaso tied a handkerchief tightly around his nose. His patience at end, he took the head man by the elbow and tried to keep his voice calm.

“What is this all about, sir? Who are these people?”

The man stood frozen, not registering the question.

Mani Yaso turned to Professor Phalke. “Can you tell me who these people are?” Phalke’s eyes were teary. He could not speak because of the terrible sorrow that gripped him.

With great effort, he managed to swallow his tears. “Those are my sister’s children over there,” he said. Then he began to shake, and tears ran in rivers down his cheeks. When Mani Yaso and Dei looked in the direction where Phalke had pointed, they saw two black-skinned ghosts, like little scarecrows.

Mani Yaso looked at the head man, who was still stunned into paralysis. During the trip his snow-white shirt and pants had gotten soiled. When Mani Yaso had seen the head man for the first time that morning, his aura had been a deep red. Now it was black. The head man could not answer Mani Yaso’s question, but his eyes became even rounded. Neither the head man nor Phalke was capable of explaining the purpose of the camp. Mani Yaso was forced to draw head man Guri out of his trance.

As soon as he was out of the trance, Guri began to weep. “You cruel, heartless man! Why did you drag me out here?” He raised his arms to the sky and began tearing at his shirt.

When he tried to run away, Mani Yaso grabbed him by the shoulder and spoke firmly, “Calm down. Who are these people? We came here to find out the answer. Why are you stalling? Is this your fault? If it is, then admit it. I am ordering you.”

“Why do you call me guilty? Who are you, anyway? Show me some identification! You don’t have any right to question me. I’m...” The head man began to splutter indignantly. He avoided looking at Mani Yaso, who was gripping him by the shoulder, and tried to throw himself on Professor Phalke.

Mani Yaso lost patience. “Answer my question!” he barked. Then he directed a wave of bioenergy at the head man that made his blood pressure spike. The man tensed up. His eyes turned dark blue and he felt like his heart was stuck in his throat and his eyes were about to pop out.

He babbled, “I did not invent this place, sir! The untouchables are not allowed to live next to other people in the village.”

“Why is that?”

“It is a tradition of the people, sir. That is why we have isolated them. It’s not my fault.”

“What about the law against these camps?”

“We try to combine the laws with tradition.”

“I see. So you’re ignoring your own government. Do it’s laws mean nothing to you?”

“We have thousands of years of tradition, sir. I did not invent it all.”

“Are there many of these camps in India?”

“In many of the states, sir.”

“He’s lying!” Professor Phalke burst out.

“I’ll teach you how to lie!” the head man growled. Then he turned to Mani Yaso, begging, “Make that man leave. Then I’ll...” he broke off and started to moan, making it clear that his body was being tortured. His eyes begged Mani Yaso to let go of him.

“Who in this day and age calls people ‘untouchable?’ The Buddha’s teachings eliminated that concept three thousand years ago!”

“Nothing has been eliminated! There wouldn’t be any peace otherwise! I see you are a man of Mahatma Gandhi, sir. Didn’t you know that this is the issue that cost him his life?”

“What issue?”

“He wanted to eliminate castes. He violated tradition and allowed criminals to reproduce.”

“How many people live in this camp?”

“Maybe over a hundred. But there are actually many more. They hide.”

“If the government sends people to your village to eliminate the caste system, you’ll go along with them, won’t you?”

“I will shoot myself. Remember that.” The head man groaned and toppled over on one side.

Dei was worried. “Calm him, Yaso! Otherwise we won’t get anywhere,” he said as he held the man’s head.

Mani Yaso did as Dei said. When the head man came around his behavior was markedly milder, but he was in no shape to engage in serious talk.

Speaking Chinese, Mani Yaso turned to Dei, “What are we going to do, Uncle Dei? I think we have a lot of work to do. I see that we cannot really trust local authorities. Apparently the officials in Delhi are not aware of much of what goes on in this huge country.”

“They’re all connected. In any case, we have to get Professor Phalke’s sister’s children out of here.”

“That’s the truth. Everything in that angry letter Michael the taxi driver sent was the bitter truth.”

“I don’t know what to do. I swear my head is swimming.”

“Here’s a thought, Uncle Dei. We didn’t study Tibetan medicine for nothing. Let’s go into the camp and look the people over. They’re almost naked, and most of their diseases can be diagnosed by their skin. Then we’ll think about what to do next.”

In his heart, Dei was not very interested in going into the camp, but when Mani Yaso untied the barbed wire from around the metal gate and crossed the barrier, he was forced to follow him.

There was no distinguishing the stench of rot from the stench of the people. The age-old, putrid smell had made its way into everything – the water, the soil and even the plants. It hung heavy in the air. It was deep in the blood, skin and bones of the camp people, so deep that it seemed impossible to cleanse them of it. Even a hurricane could not blow away the nauseating smell, much less an ordinary wind. When the stench became all-encompassing, Mani Yaso removed his handkerchief and stuck it in his pocket.

The history of inequality and division has rotten roots going back into the ancient, half-civilized times of *varna* in India or *casta* in Portugal, but the untouchables Mani Yaso and Dei found themselves among were people of the present day – men and women, young men and girls, children and babies living in the 21st century. No norms of human existence can justify their fate. Many of them could not even stand on their own, and it was not always obvious whether they had lived to old age in this hell or illness had so twisted them and they were at death's door. On most of them, their long, shaggy, dirty hair hung in front of their faces and the skin that stuck to their bones was completely covered with rotting sores, making it difficult to ascertain their true ages. Some of them had built huts out of reeds and an assortment of trash to protect them from the sun's burning rays. Here and there they could see women carrying babies. One of them opened her toothless, scurvy-rotted mouth and something akin to a smile appeared on her face.

Many of those who could still get around ran away from the newcomers in fear, but they did not run far. They ran a few steps, then stopped and turned around. Their muddy eyes betrayed a desperate explanation: *we would run, but we don't have the strength*. Running was a habit for the untouchables. Whenever a member of a higher caste appeared, they were supposed to disappear instead of standing around with their mouths hanging open. If there was nowhere to run, they were supposed to lie down at the feet of their betters so they could walk over their bodies.

Mani Yaso and Dei finished their tour of the camp and went out the gate, where Professor Phalke was waiting for them with his sister's children.

Dei was surprised. "It's strange, but we didn't find a single dead body. Do they eat them?"

"Perhaps. I wouldn't be surprised. Did you notice the big cooking pot on the fire over there?" Phalke asked them.

"Yes, but I was afraid to go over there."

"If you force a man to it, he becomes a beast," Mani Yaso said. What he had seen made him miserable. "Even if he's as tender as a flower and kind as an angel. Based on what I've seen, these poor people have three problems – malaria, syphilis and scurvy. What do you think?"

"And all the children have rickets," Dei said.

"Right. Here's what we'll do, Uncle Dei. I'll be in Beijing tonight. They need healing medicines from Uncle Sorju. Nothing else will cure them. You spend the night on the houseboat and wait for me. If I'm late, wait for me until late in the day. During that time you and the professor can draw up a list of the names of the people in the camp, as well as their relatives. If they don't know their names, give them new ones," Mani Yaso said. "Each of them must receive a passport."

"Oh my!" Dei cried, gesturing with his hand as if he'd been told about some impossible plan.

Upon his return from Beijing, Mani Yaso immediately set to work on head man Marathi Guri. He needed to reduce the man's excessive ego before he could give him assignments. Then he needed to organize tents for a camp outside the old camp boundary. He would take the untouchables there and treat each of them. After that, he would let

them settle where they wished and give them work to do. He would have to give them constant physical and moral support until they saw themselves as normal people and official citizens of the state of India.

But first of all, he needed to work with Guri. If his character changed for the better and he willingly gave up his cruel nature, then he would be a great help in implementing the good deeds that needed doing. In order to have an effective session of Tolerance with the man, Mani Yaso extended their lease of the houseboat Professor Phalke had rented. Then, feeling inspired, he began working right there on the small lake near the camp. He wasn't ready to let the head man return to the village yet.

Mani Yaso could not imagine that he might not have enough experience to correct the soul of the ultra-conservative Marathi Guri. The man's entire inner world had dried out like old tree sap. It was unbearably difficult work, and the three sessions over three days had no apparent effect on Guri.

Even on the sixth day the head man was still imprisoned by the feeling of superiority and caste ego that were rooted deep in his soul. He forced Mani Yaso to spend all of the miraculous energy of his gift, exhausting him almost to the point of fainting. If, after midnight on the last day of the week, Guri had not fallen to the floor a little before Mani Yaso, the young man would have been in trouble.

Perhaps during the last seconds of the mantra the young aspirant with hopes of sowing kindness around the world was helped by his Yidam and the great forces protecting him. Just a minute and a half after Guri fell to the floor of the houseboat, Mani Yaso collapsed next to him.

In the morning, the conditions of the two men brought together by fate were nothing alike. The head man put on the cap that lay next to his head and stood up nimbly. His movements were energetic and his mood cheerful. Mani Yaso, on the other hand, looked thin and drawn and remained lying on the floor all morning.

"What illness do you have, sir?" Guri asked with concern as he bent over Mani Yaso. He wanted to help the unfamiliar young man and his heart filled with sincere pity for him. Because they were alone in the houseboat, Marathi Guri was distressed and did not know how to help the young man.

Half-conscious, Mani Yaso was glad to hear that the head man's voice was usually soft and pleasant. The corners of his mouth turned up in a smile, but he could not open his eyes or stand up.

Only in the afternoon did Mani Yaso recover and bring Guri back to the camp.

"Look at him," Mani Yaso said, pointing at a man walking with a homemade crutch of sticks. "He wants to live! And over there – they made a wheelchair for that man missing both legs. And see how the blind man with his cane walks faster than the sighted around him? And they do operations here, it seems. Look at the nose of that woman over there. She made it out of clay and stuck it on her face. They all want to live, sir! They want to live every bit as much as you and I want to. Do you agree?"

Head man Guri gave a crooked smile and squeezed his nose with a handkerchief.

"Do you agree or not?" Mani Yaso asked, giving him a hard look.

Finally Guri nodded. A week ago his aura had been black. Now it was light gray.

Years passed. Mani Yaso's compassionate ideas were brought to life thanks to his hard work, tenacity and unshakable faith in the possibility of obtaining justice in this complex world. In India, the concept of untouchables disappeared, as did the untouchable people. The boys who were emaciated but alive at the end of the terrible camps grew into men, tall and slender as palm trees, and the girls turned into lovely women with the grace of white swans. A legend was born in the fiery, passionate souls of the descendants of those former untouchables. This legend was more important to them than the wonderful truth of what had happened to them. It was the legend of a Kyrgyz *dzhigit* named Adilet.

It happened that twin boys were born to a family and the parents named them Toma and Roma. Years later, when the boys still had no hair on their faces, they heard that a moon-faced girl named Gemacha lived in a village in their great nation of India. She was sewing a vest for a young man named Toma. She had begun sewing the vest one hundred years before. The girl's face, soul and heart did not grow old, and she never managed to finish the vest. The reason was that the god Brahma willed it thus. The girl would only finish the vest when Toma grew up, found her and asked for her hand in marriage.

When the twins became strong young men, they set off on a trip without knowing which way they would go. They walked along and asked everyone they met about the girl named Gemacha.

They finally met a woman with hair as gray as a harrier, who told them, "Ask the sun. From his height he is the only one who sees everything on earth."

"How can we ask the sun, grandmother? He will burn us up before we get to him."

"That is right. He will burn you up. Therefore you must go to his friend Adilet. The sun only listens to what his friend tells him."

"Where can we find his friend?"

"Do you see the end of the earth where the sun rises? Go there and you will see how Adilet and the sun embrace to greet each other."

Cheered by this advice, Toma and Roma walked as fast as they could toward the rising sun. But it was not easy to get there! They walked for many days and nights and for many months just to see Adilet.

"Brother Adilet, take pity on us," the brothers said when they found the friend of the sun and begged him for help.

"You should have come a little earlier. The sun has already risen. Come again tomorrow."

The next day, the young man who was supposed to marry the girl hurt his leg and could not go to the place where the sun would rise. Roma went alone. Adilet and the sun were standing together in an embrace, waiting for the young men.

"Hurry! Where is your brother? I must tell the sun about your request before he rises," Adilet said anxiously.

"My brother is hurt, so I came alone. Please ask the sun to tell me."

Then Adilet turned to the sun. "My friend the sun, listen to what I have to say. This young man and his brother are looking for a girl named Gemacha."

"The girl who is sewing a vest for her betrothed?"

"Yes. Can you help them Friend Sun?"

"I know how to find her, but it is a dangerous path. If the young men are brave and can remember everything I saw, then they will find her. Otherwise they will not escape death."

"We will do everything you say, oh noble Sun!" Roma promised.

"Then listen. Go to the highest tributary of the Ganges. There you will find the Dragon Bridge. One of you must turn into a zebra and the other into a gazelle, and both must cross the bridge singing and dancing. The dragon will be waiting for you on the other side. If he likes your singing and dancing, then he will let you go on. If not, he will swallow you both. This is a dangerous secret. If a man possessing this secret shares it with anyone else, then his legs below the knees will turn into a concrete mortar and he will not be able to move.

"If all goes well and you are lucky, you will follow a difficult path that will lead you to the home of Gemacha. If Toma is the one she is waiting for, then the work in her hands will instantly be finished and the vest will put itself on him. After that the three of you can return home. But on the way back you will face several more serious dangers. One of them is the gold chest that you will find on the side of the path. This is a temptation. If you open it, you will find a fabulously beautiful wedding dress. Gemacha will want to put it on, but you will lose her if she does. It will kill her. One of you must manage to rip the dress so that she can live.

"The golden chest is another secret that you must tell no one. If a man possessing this secret shares it with anyone else, he will be turned to stone from the waist down. This is not the last test. Remember that.

"You will walk a long way across an arid desert, where you will find a clear spring. Whoever drinks the water will die, so you must have the willpower to leave the water alone. If one who knows this secret accidentally tells it to another, then he will be turned into a stone in the shape of a human. Always remember that. Farewell!"

With that, the sun rose in the sky.

Roma returned to his brother. They went together along the path the sun had indicated and found the Dragon Bridge. Roma became a zebra, Toma became a gazelle and both of them sang and danced across the bridge well enough to stay alive. Apparently the dragon was satisfied by their capacity for fun.

Encouraged, the young men went on and soon found Gemacha's house. Before they could even enter the house, the finished vest flew out the window and put itself on Toma. Gemacha was overjoyed that her hundred years of weary waiting were over and immediately agreed to marry Toma.

The three of them set off back to the brothers' home. On their way, they saw a shining gold trunk sitting on the side of the path.

"How wonderful!" the girl exclaimed. She ran to the trunk first and pulled out an astonishingly beautiful dress. "God has sent me this dress!"

But no sooner had Gemacha held up the dress to put in on, when Roma grabbed it from her and ripped it into shreds. He was not able to explain himself to his stunned brother or his brother's fiancée. He just waved away their questions and endured their scathing looks. Toma was surprised by his brother's behavior and was secretly angry.

They made their way across the desert, tormented by thirst. Their lips were dry and cracked. Suddenly they came across a silver spring. Toma and Gemacha ran to drink

the water, but Roma got there before them and muddied the water. This made Toma furious.

“My brother is envious and wants me to die,” he thought. Aloud he said, “What are you doing, Roma? Do you want to get rid of me so you can take my place?”

Again Roma said nothing. Finally they reached home. Toma was eaten alive by suspicion – why had Roma interfered with them the whole way? Finally he could no longer bear his terrible doubts and began acting out his anger, saying terrible things to his brother. When their parents saw the animosity between their two children, who had always been the closest friends, they were distressed.

Roma finally lost his patience and told Toma, “My brother! I see that you are still angry with me and this is causing our mother and father sorrow. I will tell you the truth. Listen. You did not go to Adilet and his friend the Sun for the last time and did not hear what the Sun told me. He said, ‘If anyone tells the secret of the Dragon Bridge, he will be turned to stone from the knees down.’”

Thus Roma was forced to tell his brother the secret of the bridge. Before Roma even finished telling the story, his legs turned to stone from the knees down. Then Roma told the secret of the dress in the golden trunk and turned to stone from the waist down. When Toma realized what was happening, he begged Roma to stop, but Roma could not stop. He told the story of the evil spring in the desert and was turned completely into stone. Roma sacrificed his life to attain his brother’s forgiveness. The whole family was in mourning, and there could be no talk of a wedding.

The father told his son, “Toma, you were unjust with your brother. Now go back to Adilet, the friend of the Sun, and repent. We have no other way. Perhaps he will forgive you.”

After many months, Toma finally reached the hill where the sun rises and met Adilet. Bowing to Adilet and the Sun, he wept as he told them what had happened to them.

Then Adilet asked the Sun, “My friend the Sun, even twin brothers lost faith in each other and came to harm. I suppose we humans are born imperfect. We must ask you for help – there is no other way. Give me a little piece of yourself and I will bring back to life the brother who was turned to stone because of his faithfulness and decency.”

The rising sun thought for a minute and then broke off a palm-sized piece of his fiery body and gave it to his friend Adilet.

“If you need to help people, then how can I withhold a piece of my body?” the Sun said to Adilet.

Adilet took the piece of the sun, melted Roma’s stone body and brought him back to life. His family was overjoyed and the long-awaited wedding was finally held.

Chapter Eighteen

Whenever Kalagia, the voice of Shambhala, slices through Earth’s atmosphere and reaches around the world, the sound is only audible to a person whose inner core has already reached the state of *arhat*. The voice encompasses thousands of discrete sounds. Sometimes it sounds like the weeping and groaning of the billions of people who came before us, emanating from the deep underground. Other times it sounds like the cries and calls of all living things. There are also times when it sounds like noises and voices

coming from all corners of the Earth in many rhythms and tones – angry and cruel, sad and gloomy, happy and overjoyed. In places where blood is spilled in destructive wars, the desperate cries seem to rise all the way to the skies.

There were times when Mani Yaso could hear the groaning of far-off mountains among the multitude of other sounds. It was hard to say what mountains they were, but for some reason the sound made Mani Yaso's heart beat faster.

He stood on the high place between two mighty rivers – the Tigris and the Euphrates, which were engulfed in the flames of yet another cursed human war. Standing on the enormous, mountainous continent of Asia, above millions of ridges and sharp peaks, it was impossible to know which mountains were weeping and which were groaning, suffering from the pain inflicted on them by humans.

In those days Mani Yaso paid a special visit to Baghdad. He spent many days trying to calm the aggressive outbursts in the hearts of the enemies fighting each other. After those tense days he was seized by a desire to go to the high mountains whose groaning had given him no peace lately.

Early one morning he stood with Dei outside the Hyatt, Baghdad's tallest hotel, and said, "Uncle Dei, go to Nepal and make preparations to open another Tolerance center. In the meantime I will go where my heart is calling me. I won't take a plane. I will use my levitation experience. I want to see the mountains of Asia."

With these words, the *arhat* Mani Yaso broke away from the earth and soon disappeared from view.

Mountains! Mountains! Mountains! The Himalayas, the Hindu-Kush, the Pamirs, the Tian Shan, the Tenir-Too, the Alai-Too, the Alatau!

A land of eternal snow and glaciers spread out under the sky with no beginning and no end. The sight was more than the eyes could take in, dazed as they were by the extreme whiteness of the sun's reflected rays, like the bright light from a bank of enormous solar cells.

As Mani Yaso came closer to the top of Khan Tengri, he could plainly hear the groaning of the mountains. It troubled him to see that the aura of the Kyrgyz land was burning in dark red flames. Then it hit him – the groaning he heard was coming from the mountains of Kyrgyzstan! Why were they groaning so sorrowfully?

Were they expecting an earthquake in the region? Or were the tiny country's inhabitants anxious? What could worry their hearts? Had enemies hung the sword of Damocles over them? Perhaps that was why the hearts of the freedom-loving, independent mountain people were crying out in protest.

He would not be able to find out the true reason from the height of an eagle's flight. Outwardly everything seemed calm in Kyrgyzstan, but there was a storm in people's hearts.

Sensing this, Mani Yaso decided not to land yet. He would fly around the whole of Kyrgyzstan and get a closer look. For many years, no matter how hard he tried, he had not been able to imagine the face of his native land, the place where he was born and spent the first nine years of his life. He had grown to manhood among the high, rocky mountains of Tibet, but now Mani Yaso found himself enraptured by the stunning beauty

of Kyrgyzstan's rolling mountain ranges. However, his joy soon faded. His soul began to ache again when he heard the moaning of Khan Tengri, Sulaiman-Too and Manas-Too, and his heart caught the silent weeping of Aflatun-too.

In these holy mountains, where Iskandar Zulkarnain²³ once pitched his tent at the foot of Aflatun-too and the ruthless hunter Kozhozhash²⁴ was damned by Kaiberen, the protector of all wild animals, six sons of the Kyrgyz had recently been killed by the country's own leaders. No one was punished for the crime, and there is no drying the tears of the dead men's families.

When Aflatun-Too saw that there was no justice to be had from men, turned his weeping to the sky. Mani Yaso heard the voice of Aflatun-Too.

"My son, you have returned to your homeland. The Creator made you an *arhat*, but when will you help us?"

Mani Yaso did not expect this question and it confused him. He had been on his way down to find out how the government could possibly have opened fire on its own people, even if they were unhappy. Why couldn't they protest against injustice? What kind of government sowed discord among its own people, bringing their souls to the boiling point? That was what he wanted to ask people, but Aflatun-Too's sudden question forced him to hurry even faster.

An asphalt road wound like a dark gray snake through a deep valley. Mani Yaso noticed a thin spiral of smoke rising from the side of the road and came down to earth on a small hill nearby. The breeze carried the light, blue smoke to the Mani Yaso's hill and enveloped him. His special track suit, which could not be seen when he was in the sky, began to darken. Mani Yaso closed his eyes and inhaled the harsh smoke of the feather grass and silver sage crackling loudly on the campfire. A rustling roused him from his beatific state.

A man had caught sight of Mani Yaso, wrapped in smoke and falling from the sky. In a panic, he raced to his truck, which was parked on the side of the road. He was the one who had built the fire to signal that he needed help. He jumped into the open cab and, in the blink of an eye, crawled almost completely under the seat.

Mani Yaso walked over to the truck and looked in the window. The driver, a tall older man with a thin face, small ears and blue eyes, was still shaking as he pressed himself against the door. He raised his head a little, but was too afraid to look the strange visitor in the eye. Then he curled back into himself like a scared child.

"Don't be afraid, *baike*," Mani Yaso said, smiling in spite of himself. The driver answered by picking up a double-barreled shotgun from the seat and pointing it at Mani Yaso. Then Mani Yaso walked around the back of the sagging truck, where he saw a spare tire and a broken jack lying on the ground.

Mani Yaso put his hands on the back of the truck, concentrated all his muscles and increased the frequency of the delta waves in every cell of his body. This made his upper body hard as rock.

When his whole body was taut, he called to the driver, "*Baike*! I'll pick the truck up and you put the wheel back on."

²³ *Iskandar Zulkarnain – Alexander of Macedon*

²⁴ *Kozhozhash – character from a Kyrgyz epic*

The driver didn't believe his ears and didn't move a muscle. Then Mani Yaso got down on his knees and raised the huge chunk of metal with the strength of his delta energy.

Then he called to the driver again, "Hurry up and put the wheel on! I said hurry up!"

The driver felt the truck even out. Surprised, he fumbled with the door for a minute and then jumped out of the cab.

After putting on the wheel and tightening the bolts, he stood up and backed away from Mani Yaso, who was smiling with satisfaction.

"Who are you? A magician?" he asked.

"You needed help, so I came to offer it. Now take me with you. I'll pay for gas."

"Hey, you won't do anything to me on the way, will you? I'm no scaredy cat, but you're young and you've got crazy energy. Young people these days mean trouble. So who are you?"

"I won't rob you or hurt you. Don't worry."

The driver let Mani Yaso in the cab. As they drove along he glanced cautiously at the young man from time to time.

Suddenly they heard the whirring of a helicopter, which soon appeared. It circled above the truck and disappeared as quickly as it had come.

"I built the fire to call for help. That copter is following the line of trucks I'm with," the driver said, probably to scare his odd passenger.

"Come on. Who are you?" he asked again. It worried him.

"A traveler. This is my first trip to Kyrgyzstan."

"Where did you come from, traveler?"

"Tibet, China, India."

"The Orient, huh? I've been all over Asia. I even went to Tibet when I was writing my dissertation." He laughed. "Don't look so surprised, little brother. These are strange times in Kyrgyzstan. Folks with Ph.D.s drive trucks just to have something to eat."

"Can I ask your name?"

"Temir Omuraliev. What's yours? How about we skip the formalities?"

"Fine with me. My name is Mani Yaso."

The driver said nothing for a while, absorbed in his own thoughts. The truck was struggling up a slight incline that took them deeper into a valley with steep cliff walls.

Before long a shiny black Land Cruiser appeared from around a turn. A hand came out of the window holding the black and white striped baton of the highway police. Temir stomped on the brakes.

A highway cop with fat cheeks and a double chin stuck his balding head out the window. "Why are you hanging behind the others?" he growled.

"Flat tire, boss."

"Who gave you permission to pick up passengers?"

"He's my little brother."

The fat cop jumped down from the Land Cruiser with surprising agility. He strode around the truck, checked the seals and then ordered Temir, "Catch up with the others! And put your rider out at the first gas station or you'll catch a bullet between the eyes."

After the black SUV turned sharply and sped off, Mani Yaso looked at Temir with respect.

“Is that your boss?”

“He owns the cargo I’m carrying. Well, he doesn’t really own it. He works for the guy who owns it.”

“Why did he point his gun at you?”

“They’re too big for their britches. It’s not just me. They wave their guns at everyone in the country. They own the country now. We’re just flies they can swat if they feel like it.”

“That’s strange. I don’t get it. Who are these new guys in power? And the guy you call your boss – who is he?”

“I’d tell you if I knew. We don’t know who the real owner is. It’s even hard to tell who his foot soldiers are. But people make guesses, for sure.”

“What are you hauling?”

“We’re not allowed to know. They don’t let us near the trucks when they’re loading them. Our logs say the cargo is lumber.”

“Lumber?”

“Yeah. They log the spruce up here for lumber.”

“Is the truck yours?”

“It’s my little brother’s. He went to Russia to earn some money. While he’s gone, I feed my family by driving his truck.”

Mani Yaso laughed. “I guess I’m your little brother now.”

“Right. But that big shot pointed his gun at me and told me to put you out. So I’m sitting here and wondering what I should do.”

“Don’t think about it. I’ll get out if I have to, but I’m intrigued, actually. I don’t really want to get out and leave you. You’re hauling some mysterious cargo.”

“I have to eat, right? I mean...” Temir was interrupted when two big men wearing black masks and holding striped batons jumped into the road.

When the truck stopped, they checked the seals and told Temir to turn off to the left.

Temir was worried. “I’m going to let you out here, little brother.”

“Don’t worry. They won’t see me. If they ask you if you have someone with you, say no. And believe it.”

Temir did not understand what Mani Yaso meant, but he turned left. A black gate opened up in front of him and his truck rattled down into a poorly lit tunnel. He snapped his lights on.

“Did that scare you, little brother? I don’t think they noticed you, thank God.”

Temir said, staring ahead into the darkness. He sounded relieved. The truck made its way along the underground road.

“I wasn’t scared, *baike*, but the mysteries just keep coming.”

“Yeah. It’s just like in a movie. The boss only uses underground roads. Dark tunnels. They run like a spider web under the land of Kyrgyzstan. People call it the Dark Empire. That’s where we are right now. It’ll take us to the capital.”

“How far is it to the capital?”

“Over a thousand kilometers. If we get hungry, there are lunch stands at all the gas stations.”

“Times are hard for you, *baike*. I can tell. How much do they pay you for this?”

“About two hundred or three hundred soms more than for the same work aboveground.”

“But you can hurt your eyesight always driving underground with your headlights on.”

“Maybe so, but I have to live on something. My wife is a teacher. She makes a measly eight hundred soms a month.”

“Did you ever work in your field?”

“I did. I didn’t make much, either. Fifteen hundred soms. It got so bad that my kids couldn’t go to school because they didn’t have any shoes. Shameful! So I started advertising in the paper that I can haul cargo in my own truck.”

“So do you make enough to support your family now?”

“I guess so,” Temir turned to Mani Yaso and snorted. “But it’s close. Things have been looking up for me since I found these bosses, though. There’s almost always cargo to haul and we don’t ever have down time. We just drive all the time without any days off. After a while we all learned how to nap at the wheel without stopping our trucks. We do more than a thousand kilometers a day sometimes, but not often. We usually follow their schedule. Sometimes they herd us into a shelter and keep us there, even for a couple of weeks. When that happened twice, I started bringing academic work with me. Now I don’t care how long we stay in one place. I just sit in my cab and work on my notes. It’s a good deal!” He laughed.

“Do you know why they isolate you sometimes?”

“You’ll see no end of trouble if you ask those questions. They might even shoot you. We drivers just whisper about what we’re hauling sometimes when we eat together.”

“So what are you hauling?”

Temir straightened his tired back and looked crosswise at Mani Yaso, apparently trying to decide whether or not to tell him. Then he decided to go ahead with it.

“Look over there!” he pointed at several KamAZ trucks that were turning left. Their cargo holds were covered.

“Nuts! Walnut wood from Arslanbob. The best kind! Not long ago I saw a column of trucks go by with apricot and pistachio wood from Batken. I saw three or four trucks in my mirror. They were all carrying trunks of decades-old nut trees. That kind of wood is called cap wood. It’s considered the world’s most rare hardwood. Wood flooring made from walnut sells for five times more than oak. It’s true!

“When we get out of the Chuisk Valley I’ll show you trucks hauling gold dust from Kumtor and Makmal. There isn’t a single iota of Kyrgyz land that the Lord didn’t give riches to. They bring leopard skins, arkhar horns and mountain trout from over near Naryn.

Mani Yaso stared at Temir in shock. “Where are they taking all those riches? Who’s buying it all?” he asked.

The driver did not answer. In fact, he didn’t say anything for a long time. Mani Yaso’s penetrating eyes had put him on guard, and he could hear concealed anger in his voice. Temir realized that Mani Yaso asked him the question not because he was a driver, but because he was a Ph.D. and a member of Kyrgyzstan’s intellectual community.

Mani Yaso also remained silent, stubbornly waiting for an answer.

“To tell you the truth,” Temir finally spoke, his voice sounding embarrassed as he changed gears without looking at Mani Yaso, “I haven’t thought about that question much. We haul our cargo over the border and get our money. Where it goes from there has nothing to do with me.”

Temir looked at his watch and started. When they reached the next refueling station he jumped out of the cab and disappeared. Soon he came back. To Mani Yaso’s dismay, he was not alone. Two heavily made-up girls not much over twenty chattered to each other as they climbed into the cab. They stopped talking when they opened the door and saw Mani Yaso, but their shyness soon passed. They focused their playful looks on him. With a show of importance, the girls climbed into the back seat, which had been folded down for the driver to use as a bed. The cab filled with the smell of cheap perfume.

Giggling, the girls lounged in the back seat, not once taking their sultry eyes off Mani Yaso. Suddenly one of them leaned forward and unbuttoned her blouse, releasing her firm breasts.

“Hey *dzhigit*, take a look at this!”

“Why didn’t you say hi?”

“Are you deaf or something?”

The girls’ bawdiness made Mani Yaso’s cheeks turn red. He looked indignantly at Temir as if to say “What are they doing here?”

“They aren’t my girls,” Temir’s ruddy face turned a deeper red. “Some guys I work with asked me to pick them up on the way. They’re fun girls. They talk to you and sing to make time pass faster.”

“Why aren’t we yours, Temir-*baike*?”

“Don’t you like us?”

“I just don’t use you. That’s what I meant.”

“Well who do you use? A cow?” Both girls had vulgar laughs.

His feelings hurt, Temir turned to them and shook his finger, “Mind your own business and don’t act stupid.” In a softer voice, he added, “Why don’t you sing the *dzhigit* a song?”

The girls reacted by laughing even harder. Then they turned their sights on Mani Yaso.

Nobody knows how long Mani Yaso would have been able to endure the girls’ shallow jokes, for to his relief, men in masks halted their truck at the next intersection of the tunnels. They waved for the truck to turn into a dark section of tunnel and then ordered them to stay there.

The girls raised a protest. “Don’t you dare keep us here while we’re working!”

“If this truck’s stopping, then take us with you!”

The men in masks turned around, looked the girls over with amusement and, after brief discussion, decided to take them along.

The girls stuck their tongues out and made faces at Mani Yaso in retaliation for his ignoring them. Then they made sure to lift up their dresses and show him their thighs as they jumped out of the cab.

Temir leaped out and hurried after them. “Hold on! Where are you going? I’m supposed to hand you to Choturu!”

“Who gives a shit about Choturu? Or about you, Temir-*baike*! And we don’t give a shit about the sucker riding with you, either! He thinks he’s so big! Mr. Special! He’s just a piece of shit!”

The fat, muscular gun-toting fanatic guards of the Dark Empire were checking the paperwork for hundreds of trucks and following them to the border.

“Why did they stop us this time?” Mani Yaso asked Temir when they were a little ways off.

“I bet the boss’ dope just came through. That damned dope gets the green light everywhere in the Empire. Never stops anywhere.”

“Do you mean opium?”

“Different stuff. They even export marijuana from Kyrgyzstan. But mostly it’s Afghan opium.”

Temir felt awkward with Mani Yaso, as if the young traveler’s seriousness had awoken his sleeping conscience. He was convinced by Mani Yaso’s stern, unflappable reaction to the prostitutes’ open advances.

Trying to justify the girls and himself as well, he said, “If you think about it, what are those girls doing wrong? There aren’t any jobs around so there’s no money. You have to have money to go to school. So this is how they get along.”

“I wonder if their parents know about it.”

“I doubt it. They probably believe their precious offspring when they say they have jobs somewhere.”

“Sounds like things aren’t so easy in Kyrgyzstan, are they, *baike*?”

“Capitalism. The wild kind. You can’t do anything about it. The rich are very rich and the poor are very poor. Most of the people don’t have anything but holes in their pockets. Everybody’s mad at the family.”

“The family?”

“I mean the *azho*’s family. We call our head of state the *azho*. Our *azho* is an educated man, but he’s too soft. Unfortunately, he is ruled by his wife and daughter, and both of them are greedy beyond belief. Lately they’ve infected him with their greed. They just grab all of the people’s wealth without any pangs of conscience whatsoever. And they get rid of anybody they don’t like. That’s how things are, little brother Mani Yaso. I’ll give you one example. I’ll tell you something that happened to me, if you want to listen.”

“I’ll listen. There isn’t much else to do down here in the dark.”

“I used to know a man named Samat Kadyrov. He was just your average Ph.D. studying physics and math. After thirty years of hard work he made a discovery of global importance. In 1998, physicists from America, Germany, Belarus, France, Switzerland and Ukraine voted unanimously to endorse his theory at an international conference in St. Petersburg. The congress sent a congratulatory telegram to Kyrgyzstan that said ‘Kadyrov is a great scientist that all of humanity can be proud of.’ Even the head of state sent him a letter of congratulations. The *azho* was very pleased and proud, so they decided that the congress would hold its next conference in Bishkek. The *azho* invited Kadyrov in and told him he would support his research so that the whole world would recognize him as a great scientist. He was a liar...”

“He didn’t hold the conference?”

“He did, but at the end of it the *azho* threw him to the lions. Just listen. Back then I was a graduate student of Kadyrov’s. I couldn’t do my research on theology and religious dogma without physics. That’s why I asked him to take me on. So one fine day Kadyrov got a letter from the government. It said that they had invited theoretical physicists from around the world to the international conference and asked him to give a talk about his discovery.

“Kadyrov had a very quiet personality. Actually, he was a very wise, reserved man. He lived right across from the city market. You know where that is.”

“This is my first trip here as an adult, *baike*.”

“I keep forgetting! I’m starting to feel like you really are my brother. So anyway, Samat-*baike* gave me the a job to do. He said ‘Take this invitation and take it to the conference organizers. Write down the names of all the international guests who are coming. Write down each name. Ask them if the *azho* will be speaking. If he is, then find out what about.’

“I did just what he asked. Then I gave him a list of the people who were invited to the conference. He read the list and then, without lifting his head, began to laugh without a sound. It was actually more like silent weeping. He kept his head down and didn’t show me his face. Then he calmed down and said, ‘They have invited all the top orthodoxy to Bishkek so they can attack me together. It’s clear as day. And how does our *azho* plan to defend me, I wonder? That will be interesting to see!’

“‘See here? The *azho* comes right after you.’ I handed Samat-*baike* a copy of the *azho*’s speech. Then I read it to him from beginning to end. He had already lost most of his sight. When he needed to write, he used a ruler to write against, and he couldn’t read what he had just written. But that didn’t upset him. He said ‘It’s a good thing my eyes are blind. At least I don’t have to see abomination on earth today. My mind just holds onto my own concept of the structure of the universe.’ That’s what that wisest of men said.”

“How did he plan to read his paper at the conference?”

“I went onstage with him to read his paper. He stood next to me. I read his lectures at the university for him the same way.”

“I’ve never heard of anything like that before.”

“Well, I convinced Samat Kadyrov to go to the conference. The hall was filled to overflowing. We stood together at the podium. I read his paper and then I began showing video clips of his calculations and formulas. After his paper was over, Samat-*baike* wanted to leave the stage and walk away from the whole conference. He couldn’t see anything, but he could feel the aura in the hall. But I held on to him and wouldn’t let him go. I made him sit back down. I still regret making him stay.

“Our *azho* was the next to read. He had his usual artificial smile on his fat, shiny face. And all of a sudden he started reading a speech that wasn’t anything like the one we had seen.”

“How so?”

“He said that Kadyrov’s theory was unfounded and wrong.”

“Really? That’s hard to believe. How could the *azho* really do that?”

“Well that’s exactly what he did. I found out later that his son and daughter had a lot to do with it.”

“How did Samat-*baike* take it? Did the stress kill him?”

"It sure did. High blood pressure. He didn't last long. It was about half a year later that he peacefully left this world."

Mani Yaso looked sadly at Temir and thought for a long time. Then he asked, "Can I see a picture of Samat Kadyrov somewhere?"

"That won't be hard. We can visit his house if you want. I've also got a book with a picture of him."

"What happened to his theory?"

"It's making headway, but slowly. A theory is just a theory without experiments to prove it, and there's no money for any of that."

"How much money would it take?"

"I heard that the Russian Academy of Sciences calculated that it would take two hundred million dollars. But you know, proof of his theory is starting to turn up lots of places. Samat Kadyrov's star will rise someday, brother Mani Yaso!"

"I think so, too. What happened to the *azho* after that?"

"He's as happy as you please. I guess his conscience doesn't bother him. Apparently he got a nice big chunk of cash in an envelope from Kadyrov's opponents. They also threatened to close his children's accounts in foreign banks if the *azho* supported Samat."

"Who did you say threatened him?"

"Those same physicists! They have influence in lots of countries. If they want to, those bald-heads can tell kings what to do."

"Do you think so? How much do you think your *azho* was paid to betray a scientist from his own country?"

"I don't know about that, brother. Maybe a lot, maybe not so much. Around here people grab whatever they can, even if it isn't a lot."

"But how can he look the people in the eye?"

"The *azho*? He doesn't look them in the eye. Never. He's always locked away in his offices and his residences. Now he's sending his peons around the country because he wants to get elected for another term, even though he's already been in office as long as the constitution allows. It isn't really the poor fool's fault. It's his family that wants it. His daughter's the worst. She's a real maniac for power..."

Temir's story was interrupted when the lights in the tunnel went out. He hit the brakes. Four men with flashlights and orange arm bands surrounded the truck.

One of them yanked the door opened and yelled at Temir, "Get out! We're the People's Front. Open the truck!"

"I don't have the key. The boss has it. I'm hauling lumber."

"Break the lock!" the man with the flashlight said to another. They were apparently prepared for this turn of events. The second man ripped off the seal and began prying off the lock with a crowbar. As soon as the door opened they all leaned forward. There was a massive piece of red granite in the middle of the truck. The material that had covered it had fallen off and lay nearby. When they held their flashlights closer to the stone they caught sight of the image of a winged woman in flight. All of the men fell silent.

Temir was the first to speak. "Mother Umai?!" he said in amazement.

"Mother Umai?" the first man from the People's Front asked. It wasn't clear who, exactly, he was asking.

The younger Kyrgyz did not understand. Children of their time who lacked any national feeling, they stared with curiosity at the amazing image that was created long ago by an unknown master.

“Is this your lumber?” the People’s Front man snarled at Temir.

Temir, who was a scholar of culture, history and Kyrgyz sacred objects, lost his power of speech when he saw Mother Umai in the back of his truck. How was it possible? What was this unique artifact, which had rested for thousands of years out of sight in the Saimalu Tash²⁵ reserve on top of Tenir-Too, higher than a snowcock can fly, doing in the back of his truck?

“Now hear the decision of the People’s Front,” one of the men said, poking his finger at Temir. “Whoever arranged to sell this stone to foreign traders will be prosecuted. You are one of them!”

“That is no stone. It’s Mother Umai, the deity who protects all Kyrgyz,” Temir croaked.

“Even better! You can tell the story in court about how you wanted to sell your own mother!”

“No court can hand out punishment for this kind of sacrilege, brother! The people must be their judges!” Temir was upset and didn’t understand that he was being accused of being complicit in the sale. The People’s Front members, however, did not register the utter shock on his face. They thought he was just another driver for the Dark Empire and began to get mad.

“You talk too much! Why do the people have to judge you? Are you a really special thief or something?”

Temir backed off immediately. “I get you, brother.”

“Start your truck!” the man yelled at him. “We’re going above-ground.”

Temir couldn’t decide what to do, but just then he heard Mani Yaso’s voice behind his head. It said, “Turn the truck on.”

That heartened Temir and he strode to his cab. But before he could get behind the wheel, a bright light came on in the tunnel and the truck and all the People’s Front men were surrounded by armed guards of the Dark Empire. The People’s Front militia was outnumbered and outgunned. The men in masks handcuffed the four People’s Front members, shoved them into a covered truck and drove off. Their commander stayed behind.

He got in Temir’s face, “Who told you to stop for those assholes?” he yelled. Then suddenly he punched Temir hard in the face with his huge fist. Nearly falling over, Temir put his hand to his burning cheek. Blood streamed from his mouth and nose.

“Get in your truck, dumb ass! Cross the border and hand over your cargo or you’ll catch a bullet in your stupid brain!”

While Temir was swallowing the sweet and sour taste of blood with his saliva, Mani Yaso appeared beside him. He had been somewhere nearby in the astral world the whole time.

Mani Yaso’s sudden appearance out of nowhere scared the armed guard. “Who’s that?” He was about to strike out at Mani Yaso when he fell on the ground at Temir’s feet.

“Can you drive?” Mani Yaso asked, holding Temir by the arm.

²⁵ *Saimalu Tash* – (Kyrgyz) “embroidered rocks,” the name of an archaeological site in Kyrgyzstan.

"I guess so."

"Then go. Don't stop at any checkpoints. I know what's going on."

"They won't let us through."

"Just drive and don't stop. Floor it!"

Temir hit the gas and the truck sped away, rattling loudly down the rocky road. Now that Mani Yaso knew what special cargo they were carrying, he sent stable, high-frequency delta waves through the body of the truck. When it raced at top speed past checkpoints, the men in masks were hypnotized and powerless to move. All they could do was watch with wide eyes at the truck blew past.

Finally a huge, locked gate, impregnable as a citadel, loomed in front of them at the border. There were at least fifteen armed men in black uniforms and masks guarding the gate. They had to stop.

Mani Yaso got out of the truck and walked over to the guards, who were prepared to shoot him full of holes if anything went wrong.

"Halt!" one of the armed guards ordered.

"Om mani padme hum!" Mani Yaso greeted them with his hands raised.

The guards did not understand the meaning of the Tibetan phrase. No sooner did they decide that he was surrendering, than their bodies went so limp that they could barely hold their machine guns. Then a hypnotic force clouded their minds.

"Is there a gate that will take us above ground into Kyrgyzstan?" Mani Yaso asked.

Only one of the armed guards was able to weakly point one finger.

"Then open it," Mani Yaso requested.

The guard walked over to a yellow gate that looked like part of the wall, even under close scrutiny.

When the gate opened, Mani Yaso issued the guards an order. "Lock all the gates that cross the border and give me the keys."

Like sleepwalkers, the men did as Mani Yaso said. By this time a fresh group of trucks had appeared.

"Hey! Get your jalopy out of the way!" someone yelled from an SUV.

Temir opened his door. He was about to say "I won't move it!" when his voice caught in his throat. The man he was talking to was the *azho's* son-in-law, and he could see the angry face of the *azho* next to him.

Meanwhile, Mani Yaso had decided that the hypnosis he had used on the masked guards was not enough, so he used Carlos Castaneda's Latin American method of brainwashing and tied them with a magic thought: *We will not let any trucks cross the border. If necessary, we will die fighting.*

On that day, the world was enjoying the false sense of security that had become the norm over the past few years. The sun shone brightly and seemed to be enjoying itself as it shared its living warmth with everything and everyone.

The month of March was drawing to a close. The rolling valleys had dried out after the winter moisture, and blue-eyed wildflowers dotted the rocky southern cliffs like beads scattered on a turquoise carpet.

The pleasant spring world embraced the truck when it rocketed out from underground, but the beauty had no effect on Temir and Mani Yaso. They were imprisoned by their dogged worries. Temir's eyes shone with agitation, his nostrils flared and contracted, and his lips were dry.

He reproached himself aloud. "I just wanted to feed myself, but I ended up working with the fat asses who are fleecing the country and even wanted to sell our most sacred artifact, Mother Umai!"

"Yes. You became an accomplice," Mani Yaso agreed.

"What should I do know? Tell me what you think, brother."

"Didn't you say that the people are angry at the *azho* and his family?"

"Of course they are. Everyone knows about the Dark Empire. But there's no proof. He's never been caught red-handed. And anyone who goes against them will end up like those People's Front men. You can scream all you want – it won't do any good. People here are beaten-down and don't care anymore. Even if I tell everyone what the *azho*'s children are doing in the Dark Empire, nobody will stand up. They're all cowards!"

"Where can we meet some of these cowards?" Mani Yaso asked. "We can show them the proof you're holding."

"Mother Umai?"

"Of course! Isn't that the best proof there is? Remember what you said to the men in masks? 'The people must be their judges!'"

"Then we'll head into the capital. But I'm worried that most people don't know who Mother Umai is. They'll laugh at us. It's been a long time since the Kyrgyz knew anything about their roots."

"Just drive. While you're driving, I'll tell you the story of Humai-mu from Chinese Tibetan mythology. This myth belonged to a people they called the 'Hyrhys.' Maybe it will have an effect. It's a wise, instructive story that is read throughout Asia, where people safeguard it in their memories and pass it down from generation to generation. Here's how the story goes."

Long, long ago, there was an evil ruler by the name of Kankor, who saddled his fiery steed Apakai, gathered together an innumerable host, and began attacking peaceful people and destroying them without pity. When he had killed everyone in the valleys, he moved up into the mountains and conquered the nomadic Hyrhys people. He widowed their women and took the young men without moustaches as his slaves, but despite all his cruelty, a fire still burned in their proud hearts and there was hope in their eyes. This made Kankor furious.

"Find the reason for this! Why are my slaves walking around with shining eyes?" he raged. His peons kept their eyes open day and night, watching the Hyrhys. They hoped by cunning and wiliness to uncover the secret to their unbroken souls, but their efforts were in vain.

However, there is a spoonful of tar in every barrel of honey. Kankor's men finally found a traitor who sold them the secret of the Hyrhys for a fistful of oat flour.

He told them that a wise mother named Umai had taken her ten sons and hidden in an unreachable cave against a high, smooth cliff. Their hideaway was called the golden eagle's nest. There was no way any man could reach the cave – not by climbing up from the bottom, and not by lowering a rope from the top of the cliff. Only the

magician Kumar, who hunted with eagles, knew how to reach the cave, and he was the father of the ten children.

On the day he died at the hands of his enemies, his last words to his kin were, "If just one of my ten children survives, he will be sure to save you. Always hope."

Mother Umai were left in the care of Kumar's eagles, whom he had always loved. The hunter had carried them in his pockets and nurtured them when they were tiny. Then he had trained them with persistence, teaching them the skills of the hunt. Now the eagles fed Mother Umai and Kumar's sons.

The bloodthirsty Kankar sat for days at a time staring up at the cliff. His eyes filled with blood and his chest heaved, for he wanted to get at Mother Umai and her sons so he could disembowel them, but he could not figure out how to do it. Finally he decided to use the powers of the black sorcerer Albarys, who in those days was a hermit deep in the Tenir-Too mountains. Kankor's peons found the magician and brought him to their master.

Kankor began trying to convince Albarys. "If you cast a spell on Kumar's ten sons and make them come down, I will give you a rich yurt and you will ride a pure-blood Argamak²⁶. I will praise the name of Albarys over the whole earth."

The black sorcerer gave in to Kankor's wishes. Each day he stood at the foot of the cliff and cast a spell over the sons, making their hearts beat faster and weakening their minds.

He called to them, "Jump to me, dear boy! Jump! I will catch you in my arms. You will be a prince and marry a beautiful girl. Don't be a coward. Jump!"

The mother tried her best to save her sons, but each day another one of her sons jumped from the cliff and died. Finally she had only one son left.

Mother Umai cried until she had no tears left and her heart was broken. She constantly watched her youngest, never taking her eyes off him. But when she turned around to pick something up, her youngest son fell from the edge of the cliff like a baby bird without feathers.

Mother Umai gave a terrible scream and jumped after her son. Mountains both near and far returned her cry like a host of voices that seemed to echo around the world.

The black sorcerer was so pleased that he hit his fist on his chest as he waited for them to hit the ground. The bloodthirsty Kankor was beside himself with joy and threw his cap high into the air.

Seeing with his own eyes all that passed, the Creator was moved to mercy in the name of justice. As the mother fell to certain death, he gave her wings.

With her new wings, Mother Umai caught her son by the arms before he hit the ground and flew off with him.

Kankor was furious with Albarys. "You failed to keep your promise! You'll have no tunduk²⁷ over your head and no horse under your saddle!"

Albarys had longed to have a yurt and a horse, and when he realized they were lost he put a curse on Mother Umai and all her people: "If you Hyrhys survive on the earth, may your men be slaves, your women slaves and widows, and may your children die in the womb before they ever see the light!"

²⁶ Argamak – a Central Asian breed of horse

²⁷ Tunduk – (Kyrgyz) The hole in the top of a yurt through which sunlight enters.

Mother Umai is long gone, leaving only her image on the cliff rock, but to this day she still flies over the land of the Hyrhys and visits each home where they are expecting a child. She heals every unborn child on whom the curse has fallen and helps them be born healthy and unharmed.

While Mani Yaso and Temir were making their way out of the Dark Empire, there was a spirit of rebellion in the central square of the capital. Despite Temir's conviction that the people were too peaceful to be incited to insurrection, a large crowd of two or three hundred people gathered in the square waving signs that said "Punish officials who shot their own people at Aflatun-Too!" "We need truth!" "We need justice!" The crowd walked to the House of Parliament and then dispersed. No one came out of the government's citadel to read their signs or listen to their demands.

Temir and Mani Yaso brought the granite block with Mother Umai's image to the square and told everyone who was there that the *azho's* children had wanted to sell the Mother Umai relic abroad. Then Mani Yaso recounted the sorrowful tale of Mother Umai.

The people began shouting and protesting. Over the next few days even more angry people made their way to the square.

State-controlled newspapers began publishing disinformation to the effect that Mother Umai was not leaving the country to be sold, but to be restored. The articles caused doubt among the protestors. Most of them trusted the press and began arguing with those who didn't. They remained deaf, even when they were told about the doings in the Dark Empire.

Temir's voice wavered and the muscles in his face twitched. "Brother Mani Yaso! You said you know what's going on. Why don't you do something to get us out of this dead end? These poor, defenseless people are your kin! You've seen how the *azho's* family treats them! Why can't we destroy the *azho*? Greed has caused him to lose all common sense. He is in the power of black magic! You've seen it ten times if you've seen it once! He deserves to be punished. Why don't you put a curse on the family that created the Dark Empire to rob the people?"

"You are right to be angry, brother Temir. There is plenty of cause. But I am not Kankor or Albarys. I will not just kill someone outright. The people are still not fully aware. Their minds must mature so that their ears can hear and their eyes can see. I will work on the people's awareness. Give me some time."

The *azho's* daughter, his firstborn, whom the people called "princess," left her room in a soft, fluffy yellow robe. She wasn't wearing anything under it. She headed to the sitting room, which had large windows and furniture upholstered with snow white leather. A strange guest was waiting for her there.

When the girl came in, Mani Yaso greeted her with a bow. The princess acknowledged him with a polite nod and walked softly to a plush chair by the window. She was in the flower of womanhood and lovely as a blooming lotus. Her graceful

posture accentuated her sense of her own worth. There was a triumphant smile on her face.

Mani Yaso found himself admiring the girl's elegance.

"I'm sorry our first meeting was in the office of the Head of National Security. Just looking at his office makes me feel sick. You can't talk in a place like that," she said, noting with pleasure that Mani Yaso was staring at her in delight. "And the old man always gets on my nerves. He's just a backward fool. My father keeps him on, even though my mother and I are against it. We've told him he absolutely must fire the man so he doesn't get in our way in the upcoming elections. By the way, did you know that we invited you to come from Beijing for just that reason?"

"For what reason did you say, *hanum*?"

"The people are begging my father to run for another term, but he says he doesn't want to. He says it would be against the law to run for a fourth term. Good Lord, what kind of reason is that? The people's will is the law. We're organizing initiative groups and collecting signatures so that Father can have another term."

"What do you want me to do, *hanum*?"

"Put pressure on my father. Make him listen to the people and do what they want. Otherwise the whole country will suffer because of his stubbornness. I'm a bit of a parapsychologist myself, Mani Yaso. I read your Tolerance mantra on the internet and found it very interesting. As soon as I saw your picture I was exciting. You're a Kyrgyz. I personally invited you to Bishkek for reasons of state security. Here's the main thing: a group of short-sighted politicians calling themselves the opposition are trying to incite the people and destroy our peace. Do something to quiet them. We heard about how you helped Tibet's Leader. Now I want to ask you to save your country from power-hungry insurgents."

"Thank you for your invitation, *hanum*. I would not have come to Kyrgyzstan so soon if it weren't for you. I am glad to see the country where I was born. I have read the history of the Kyrgyz people in many Chinese sources. Today's Kyrgyz, just like all modern peoples, are nothing like their ancient ancestors. I'm sorry to say we have become petty..."

"So you don't like the Kyrgyz you've met?" the girl asked with a laugh.

While listening to the *azho*'s daughter, Mani Yaso became convinced of her vanity. He gave a thin smile and said everything that was in his heart. "This is a small country, but there is much injustice here. I have been inside the Dark Empire. I cannot understand your plan to sell abroad our holy Mother Umai, the mother who blesses all Kyrgyz children. But worst of all, the officials who shot ordinary citizens in Aflatun-Too have not been punished. When I was on the other side of the world I could hear the weeping and moaning coming from the mountains of Kyrgyzstan."

His denunciations came as a complete surprise to the girl, and her face darkened. She grabbed the neck of her robe, which she had let fall open to reveal the matte, milky white skin of her neck and the upper part of her breasts, and pulled it shut. Her embarrassment soon passed, however, and she sat up straight and proud with a look of sharp displeasure in her eyes.

At that moment Mani Yaso managed to catch the rhythm of her breathing. He directed a telepathic wave into her mind to increase her already ambitious desire for

power. He acted in the spirit of the Chinese saying, “To destroy men of power who have forgotten the meaning of justice, one must fan the flames of ambition in their children.”

Before long, the people of Kyrgyzstan were treated to an obvious piece of public relations in the form of a romantic soap opera called “A Worthy Daughter.” The star of the series was a popular and highly paid television actress invited from Russia.

The very next day, the people of Kyrgyzstan opened their evening papers to find an article expounding the view that monarchy was a centuries-old traditional form of democracy for the Kyrgyz – “The Creator has entrusted the ruling of the nation to our *azho* and his children.”

Articles in the same tone written by both famous and unknown political analysts began appearing all over the place. Out of nowhere, a new party appeared, calling itself Forward! Organized and sponsored by people already in the government, the new party unanimously chose the princess as its candidate for vice president, to be her father’s right hand. Strangely, all her opponents were removed from the ballots – some of them were arrested, others feared for their lives and left the country.

Elated by all of this, the *azho*’s daughter spoke sharply to her mother, “Father is out of the loop. It’s time for us to replace him before someone else does it. Don’t you see that?”

“I know, honey,” her mother agreed. Then she gave her some advice. “Take your tone of voice down a notch.” She couldn’t help standing up for her husband. “Your father’s always been a weak man. He got his weakness with his mother’s milk. Let him stay where he is a little longer. I had a good dream, thank God. A snow white falcon landed on your shoulder and your brother was riding a winged horse. When I woke up, my heart was beating so fast I thought it would jump out of my chest.”

“I’ve heard enough about your dreams, Mama. Now tell Father to take a vacation. There’s no time to wait. We need to bring the country into line. And we also need to teach a lesson to all the people who want to grab power.”

The mother, who had always been proud of her daughter – “She’s just like me. Energetic. She does what she says she’ll do and never gives up when she wants something” – was terrified to realize that her daughter had become much harsher and crueler woman than she ever was.

She tried to advise her, “Be more careful, dear. You shouldn’t be so power-hungry and stubborn. A lot of people are looking at you with unfriendly eyes and saying poisonous things. Don’t be in a rush. We need time to think.”

“Mama, you need to listen to me and stop talking nonsense!”

There are many reasons why people fall ill, and each case is unique. Some people catch colds, some get infections, others have genetic disorders or fall victim to stress.

Temir fell ill.

After his last trip through the Dark Empire and everything that took place on the central square, his soul broke down after seeing his hopes dashed. He had just begun to believe that justice would reign when he fell into deep disappointment. His head was empty and his heart was full of bitter sorrow that after Mani Yaso told the Kyrgyz people about their sacred Mother Umai, they did not rise in protest. They did not criticize the

azho's children, but believed their lies about the artifact's restoration. The Kyrgyz did not understand what they were told about Mother Umai and how she was admired by all the peoples of Asia.

Apathy strengthened its hold on the hearts of the Kyrgyz and clouded their reason. It seemed that no one could cure them of that illness. Mani Yaso, the only person Temir believed in, had visited his parents for just a few days and was in a hurry to leave Kyrgyzstan, but before he left, he promised his friend, "Soon your people will change and the country will work itself out. Your leader has forgotten about justice because of his beloved daughter and wife, but retribution awaits him."

Where was the retribution? There was no sign of it to be seen. In fact, under cover of their father's throne the son and daughter were once again preparing to sell Mother Umai.

Temir had been lying on one side for a long time. Just when he decided to roll over onto his other side, he heard someone's footsteps outside his door.

"May I come in, Temir-*baike*?"

It was Mani Yaso's voice. Temir shuddered. He tried to sit up, but dropped his head back on his pillow.

"Come in, come in," he said in a cold, indifferent voice.

"You're sick, *baike*. I know you're sick. That's why I hurried to you. Stand up. It's time for you to lift your head."

"Where do you want me to go?"

"To the people. There are lots of people in the square. Tell them your story. The *azho*'s family have all lost their minds. They can't control their hunger for wealth and power, and that makes them do stupid things. The people are angry and gathering in the square, more and more every minute. That was my first goal, brother Temir. The people have woken up. Their eyes are open! Last time, when we told them about the tunnels and the secret passages used to ship cargo they listened to us like zombies, but they didn't understand. Now their eyes are really open. They are ready to listen to you."

Temir smiled ironically. "Me? Didn't you see how they reacted to me last time? My words fell like a hot poker on a dead man."

Without a word, Mani Yaso bent down to Temir, took him by the arm, helped him stand up and led him to the door.

"The sun is up, brother Temir. Lift your head and go outside. Now I will reach my second goal. I will take heat from the sun's rays and light a fire in that cold, closed, hopeless heart of yours. I left what I was doing and hurried here just for that. You have to have fire in your heart for the people to believe you and follow you in the fight for justice. Others will catch the fire in your heart and the number of people who agree with you and follow you will increase. People will flow into the square like a raging river. They will surge like the sea before a storm. Voices speaking the truth will become a great symphony and sound the alarm bells. People will be ready to overturn mountains. Only then will the people possess the strength for victory. Get up, brother Temir! Stand up straight and look bravely at the rising sun!"

Mani Yaso held Temir's arm and took him outside. At dawn that day the holy Sun – God of the Universe – looked down from behind the high Alatau with a special, wonderful beauty.

"Hello, my friend Sun!"

Traveling through Semitic and Muslim nations where fighting and war had sown discord, Mani Yaso anxiously checked the internet every day for news from Kyrgyzstan. Soon it came:

The first elected president of the mountainous, Central Asian nation of Kyrgyzstan has fled the country after a popular uprising against his family's unjust, nepotistic rule. The country's new leaders are a younger generation of patriots who have the people's trust.

Mani Yaso remembered the *azho's* daughter, who destroyed her father's career as his country's leader.

Once again he was astonished by the infallibility of ancient Chinese wisdom, wisdom created by a great people and safeguarded by them over the centuries as food for the soul.

The months flew by and the Kyrgyz saw their memorable, life-changing year draw to a close. Sadly, Aflatun-Too did not stop weeping and Alatau kept groaning. During Kalagia when Mani Yaso listened closely to the voice of the Earth, he could clearly hear broken, heartrending voices coming from his Kyrgyz home. Unable to bear it any longer, Mani Yaso called Bishkek.

“Brother Temir, the Kyrgyz people are not at peace. Your country's aura is still dark red. The mountains are still moaning. You and your friends have no peace in your souls. There is one consolation: the coals of a great fire still burn in your hearts and will continue to burn. I trust that if you are faced with walking the long, hard road to truth again, the coals will once again burst into flame. I believe in you. But there is one thing that makes me sad, brother Temir. I see that you and your people have lost your ancient spiritual foundations, brother Temir. If you don't mind, I'm sending you words of warning from an ancient sage, the poet Buk. Just like Humai-Mu, people all over Asia still see this song as a collection of teachings:

*Floods will wash away the green mountains.
Beauty will fade. Be vigilant!
Chiefs will lead their people into trouble,
Camps will vanish. Be vigilant!
Whoever burns his soul with the poison of treachery
Will become a traitor. Be vigilant!
Whoever fails to guard his honor and dignity
Will desecrate words. Be vigilant!*

*Floods will wash away the cool mountains.
Customs will die. Be vigilant!
Merit and conscience will be ignored,
Covenants will be broken. Be vigilant!*

*Old men will lose trust
By hiding the truth and lying. Be vigilant!
After losing their belief in the truth,
People will suffer. Be vigilant!*

*Floods will wash away the crimson mountains.
The fields will be bare stubble. Be vigilant!
In the struggle for profit young men will be lost,
Homes will be empty. Be vigilant!
The one who sells the plains and the mountains
Will escape punishment. Be vigilant!
The one who brings trouble to his own Kyrgyz
Will hide away. Be vigilant!*

*Floods will wash away the eagles' mountains.
Watch out, or you will be a tul²⁸. Be vigilant!
Without your kin, you will be enslaved
When the enemy attacks. Be vigilant!
If you sell your health and strength
You will never be rich. Be vigilant!
Stronger people will come,
And you will be their slave. Be vigilant!
Take heed!*

Chapter Nineteen

“Ladies and Gentlemen! Have you ever noticed something strange about tree branches? You’re standing on a branch, and just as you’re about to pull up to the next branch, the one you’re standing on breaks with a crack and you go flying out of the tree with your axe in your hand.

“Now, it doesn’t happen often, but it’s dangerous when it does. Have people drawn any conclusions from that? Perhaps they have. We can’t really say. People are intuitively cautious, even if they are sure of their safety. But returning to tree branches, I want to emphasize that only the branch knows when it will break, and it doesn’t warn anyone.

“That kind of seemingly simple yet mysterious phenomena is the reason we’re here today at Moscow’s Brain Research Institute.

“As you can see from the program, our international conference is sponsored and funded by UNESCO. We did all the organizational work ourselves. Twenty-seven official guests from around the world were invited to this conference, which is unprecedented in the history of science. Look around the hall and you will see true prophets, yogis, sorcerers, telepathists and psychics from India, China, Tibet, Nepal, Africa, Europe, the Americas and southern and northern Russia. I am sorry to say that our long-time friend, the 14th Dalai Lama, was unable to attend due to an illness. We were also unable to find another of our invited guests, the boy Lama Bahadur from Nepal, who

²⁸ Tul – (Kyrgyz) Deceased person’s funerary image.

disappeared after a forty-day meditation and hasn't been seen since. If we receive any information about him during the conference we will be sure to let you know.

"It is no secret that while all of you here today, the neurophysiologists, geneticists, biologists and other scientists, have been skeptical about humans having any mystical powers, now most of you are beginning to study the human phenomenon and the secrets of the universe in the astral world and in super-humans. And you aren't just looking. You are already finding scientific proof. I believe the audio and video recordings and scientific papers you presented during the first half of our conference are proof of that, aren't they?"

"I just want to take the time to mention one thing. The esteemed Dr. Bruce Miller, who came here all the way from California, proved conclusively that he has found the "seat of genius" in the left hemisphere of the human brain, as well as a detector in the right hemisphere that constantly impedes the work of the seat of genius.

"I believe that by going further with Dr. Miller's work we can find the paths to scientific explanations for the unique abilities of the super-humans sitting here with us today. And what's most important, we will find ways to develop and discover those abilities. That is the key!"

The moderator, Yuri Kiselyov, who was the director of the Moscow Brain Research Institute, gave a long pause to allow Dr. Miller's supporters time to applaud.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! We are now reaching the most interesting part of our conference. After a coffee break you will be introduced to these psychics. First off we will be speaking with Natalia Demina, the x-ray girl from Russia. You can find the room number and time for Demina in your programs. Now I'd like to invite you to take a break for coffee."

Mani Yaso took a seat at a table with the Tibetan and Indian delegates he had met at the hotel in Moscow. There were five elderly monks; all of them experienced professionals who had traveled the world. Each of them was very good at what he did. At the very least they could stop their hearts from beating or move glasses on a table with the energy in their palms.

The men put their palms together in front of their hearts and showed their respect for Mani Yaso, who had been invited to the conference as "Arhat Milarepa." All of the men knew perfectly well who Milarepa was, and they knew that Mani Yaso was his current incarnation.

Many books had been published on the great yogi Milarepa. It wasn't just monks from Asia who knew about him. The entire European occult world knew Milarepa. And when the moderator, Kiselyov, had introduced all the guests he had paid special attention to Mani Yaso and Natasha Demina.

"These two young people represent a biologically new form of human life – the indigo children," he had emphasized. After that, Mani Yaso and Natasha became a source of interest for all the conference's guests.

One of the guests, a lanky man with long, grey curling hair in the style of a European count, wearing a high-collared jacket and a cravat, came over to Mani Yaso several times. Each time he smiled and bowed politely and then walked off with a dignified air. During earlier coffee breaks, the man had gone out of his way several times to express his interest in the young *arhat*. Mani Yaso was instantly impressed by the impressive man's aura.

This time, when Mani Yaso answered him with a courteous bow, he took a list of conference participants from his pocket and pointed to the name “Count of St. Germain²⁹” in the first line.

Then the man spoke to him in fluent Han. “Great yogi Milarepa, we bow to your reincarnation.”

Mani Yaso blushed at the man’s fervent praise. He was embarrassed and did not know how to answer the count. Looking at the man’s face, he could not say how old he was. He could have been forty or fifty, or he could have been the same age as Mani Yaso.

The young man decided to answer prudently to avoid a *faux pas*. “Your Lordship, I consider meeting you in the wheel of life to be one of the most important events in my fate.”

“Saint Milarepa, with your permission, I would like to talk briefly with you in private.”

They removed themselves to a far corner and sat down in a pair of armchairs.

The Count of St. Germain took a diamond-ringed mirror from his breast pocket and handed it to Mani Yaso with the words, “Look into this mirror and silently repeat the phrase ‘Who is looking for me right now?’”

Mani Yaso followed his advice, and the face of a beautiful young woman appeared in the mirror. He did not know who she was, and the mirror gave no indication.

“What a charming girl. It’s a good thing she’s the only one who appeared. What would you have done if you had seen hundreds of girls smiling back at you, each one lovelier than the first? The Count of St. Germain laughed merrily at Mani Yaso’s surprise.

“Now repeat it again – ‘Who is looking for me right now?’”

Intrigued by the strange mirror, Mani Yaso repeated the magic words. In an instant he saw two men with European features standing outside the Kosmos hotel.

“Oh, those are my people. I put them there,” the count said with a friendly smile. “They are following you because we have important business to discuss with you.”

“I knew about the existence of this miraculous mirror, but I never thought I’d actually see it.”

“This mirror belonged to Michel Nostradamus. I am his reincarnation. Just as you are the reincarnation of the holy Milarepa, I once lived as Nostradamus. The memories are still fresh in my soul of how I talked eye to eye with Jesus Christ, or the prophet Isaiah, as you call him. I went so far as to warn him, ‘Watch out. Don’t let those Roman pigs catch you.’”

Milarepa looked at the count in surprise. “Then you...”

“Yes. I am currently on my sixth turn on the circle of life. I lived as Wolf Messing until 1974, earning money by giving shows and eventually losing my clairvoyance. Now I live as the Count of St. Germain and travel around the globe. Things are bad, Saint Milarepa. I am terrified when I look into my mirror, because Michel Nostradamus’ predictions about the earth suffering from more frequent disasters are coming true. Your reincarnation is proof, Saint Milarepa. Nostradamus’ *Centuries* mention your coming, but he gave the date 2133. You came 120 years early.”

²⁹ *Count of St. Germain* – From time to time, articles appear in the European press on St. Germain, a phenomenal individual who speaks many languages and drinks the “water of immortality,” living for thousands of years under the names of various well-known individuals.

“You’ll have to excuse me, but I find it impossible to believe that such a great prophet as Michel Nostradamus paid any attention to my appearance on earth.”

“I don’t see anyone but you, yet. Moreover, the *Centuries* hint at it: ‘When a ball of fire approaches the earth, the gates of Shambhala will open. The holy Shantamani stone will come into the possession of men.’ Even though I am the reincarnation of Nostradamus, I do not have all of the prophet’s ability. That is why I live under the name of Count de St. Germain. My only advantage is that I have the familial mirror of Nostradamus. It was after looking into my mirror that I told Catherine de Medici, God rest her soul, about the coming of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre. ‘Your Majesty,’ I told her, ‘blood will soon flow like a river through Paris and there will be a huge fire.’ You can read about it in the bloody queen’s diary.

“By the way, no one writes about me better than the poet Alexander Pushkin. I suppose you’ve read his story ‘Queen of Hearts?’” The count watched Mani Yaso so closely that the young man became uncomfortable.

“I’ve only read Pushkin’s poetry.”

“If you want to learn more about me, read the story. It’s all the truth. But listen, Saint Milarepa, I must talk to you no later than today. It’s crucial. The fates of two billion people hang in the balance...”

Chapter Twenty

Right after Mani Yaso demonstrated the vision of his third eye and his face-reading powers, he bowed to the count’s demand and, before the end of the Moscow conference, flew with him to Paris.

The count was anxious. “Today is the thirtieth. Azazello’s day. This is the day he usually goes to the pyramid to pray.” Then he turned to his driver, “Step on it!”

Soon they found themselves in the center of Paris. They stopped by the famous Passage Richelieu.

“We’ll have to walk from here,” the count said.

He walked quickly ahead, with Mani Yaso following in silence. They made their way deeper into the electrical brightness of the tunnel. It had been just a week since Mani Yaso met this strange man, who had lived for so many centuries under different names, but his head was already spinning from the excess of information the man had given him. Much of it he did not understand, and he was forced to ask questions each time. This time was the same: he had no idea where they were going and why they were hurrying through the empty tunnel.

He decided to give in to curiosity. “Why does it anger Christians when an author writes a book proving that Christ was a mortal man? All the founders of religions were mere mortals in the beginning. Look at the Shakyamuni Buddha, Mohammed, Zarathustra. And before Christ, the Jews bowed down before mortals like Mithra, ‘the sun of the son.’ Mithra was born on December 25, and when he died, he was wrapped in a cloth and buried at the foot of a mountain. Three days after his death, he was resurrected and ascended to heaven. Isn’t that the case?”

“Absolutely! Christ was, in fact, also a mortal born on earth. But people did not call him a prophet. They called him the son of God, especially after his words from the

cross: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' That was putting it strongly, wasn't it?"

"Didn't you say you were there on Golgotha?"

"Of course! What happened, happened. Not all that much time has passed since then – just two and a half thousand years, no more. But billions of Christians have believed in Christ the Savior and entrusted their souls to him. I support that, because I can see that religion is the only thing that has any power to rein in people's destructive powers and temper their souls. That's why I am busy racing around the world. I believe that Christ must remain their God. And I also believe that you won't be against that, Saint Milarepa!"

The Count of St. Germain turned back to look at Mani Yaso. He was in such a hurry that he kept tripping, but he was still a step ahead of the young man with him.

When they came out of the tunnel, they faced an enormous building of shining, mirrored glass.

"This is the Louvre pyramid," the count said as he stopped. He could barely catch his breath. Mani Yaso looked at the pyramid and noticed that its inner structure was reminiscent of the supports of a Kyrgyz yurt. There were revolving doors in the south face of the pyramid.

The Count of St. Germain and Mani Yaso went in and walked down a staircase into the depths of the pyramid. As they walked down, the air grew cooler.

When they reached what seemed to be the base of the pyramid, there was a hallway on their right. They took it and came out into a large, airy hall. To his surprise, Mani Yaso saw two more glass pyramids, one of them hanging upside down. The other pyramid was directly under it, but right side up. So the first pyramid was hanging upside down, while the second one came out of the ground, and their points were touching. Mani Yaso could not figure out the riddle right off.

The Count of St. Germain took him by the arm and led him to the left. It was then that Mani Yaso noticed three people in European dress without head coverings. They were praying and crossing themselves at the place where the two pyramids met.

"They are praying to Mary Magdalene. The man in the middle is Harvard professor Robert Langdon. He's the one we're looking for," the count whispered. "He used to come here alone, but it looks like he brought two of his fellows with him. Just look how serious they are! They want to raise the fallen flag of the Priory of Sion³⁰! Not long ago, their last Master, the Louvre curator Jacques Saunière, was shot right here in the museum. That American professor who's crossing himself over there wants to take his place. Let's let them finish praying. Then we can talk to them."

Mani Yaso noticed that the count could not stop trembling. He took him by the arm and held him briefly to his chest.

"They may not want to talk with us," he said, giving voice to his doubts.

"That's why I invited you here, Saint Milarepa. I am positive that they will turn away from us. They have done it to me several times. They do not want to hear my conclusions."

³⁰ *Priory of Sion – a European secret society organized in 1099. In 1975, a list and some ancient manuscripts called Secret Dossiers were discovered in the National Library in Paris. The dossiers included a list of members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo and Leonardo da Vinci. (Taken from Dan Brown's book The Da Vinci Code.)*

"I'm not sure they'll stay just because of me."

"I know you have a very strong delta wave that can reach a frequency of four waves per second. I'm asking you to use it. Use hypnosis if you have to. Otherwise our efforts will be wasted, Saint Mila!" He stopped. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to call you by your familiar name, the one your parents gave you a thousand years ago when you were a child."

"I like the name, your lordship."

"I think they are finished praying."

Professor Robert Langdon had noticed out of the corner of his eye while praying that the Count of St. Germain and a young man were standing nearby. When the men finished their prayers, they immediately went around the smaller pyramid and hurried toward the exit. The count and Mani Yaso hurried after them.

"Professor Langdon, this young man is the reincarnation of Milarepa, the great *arhat* of the East. I am sure you've heard of him..."

The professor replied curtly, "I'm sorry, but I just specialize in Christian religious symbols. I don't have anything to do with Asia, so there's no reason for us to talk. Now if you'll excuse me..." He looked quickly to his followers in hopes of leaving with no further delay, but the other two men stood frozen. No sooner did the professor tell them, "Let's go," then he lost control over himself. He looked helplessly at Mani Yaso and the Count of St. Germain.

The count grabbed the initiative. "Don't refuse to talk to us, Professor. It's time to answer for what you have done, sowing discord in the souls of Christians around the world. Can't you see? Can't you hear the massive demonstrations against you?"

Professor Langdon's face crumpled in pain. He looked like he was about to cry.

"How many times have I told you? The protests aren't about me! I'm a character in a novel! People are protesting against Dan Brown, the man who created me. Go complain to the author!"

"Your novelist did what he did, and know God only knows where he's hiding! But that hasn't stopped you from continuing with your sinister business. So who should we stop? You, for attracting new members and doing all you can to resurrect the Priory from the ashes, or the blasphemer who turned himself into an outcast?"

After listening to the two opponents argue, Mani Yaso decided he would cautiously interrupt.

He turned to Professor Langdon, "Professor, is it possible that the churches do not understand the final goal of the Priory of Sion?"

"Truth and justice! The church has guarded those two sacred concepts for two thousand years! If they had died out, we would have had to come to peace with that. But Truth, that damned force, is alive. Like an innocent child, again and again it tells us what is, no matter how many centuries have passed. It knows nothing of evil or hypocrisy! It cries and wails loud enough to make your heart bleed, that damned Truth!"

Professor Langdon looked at Mani Yaso as he spoke with a theatricality that belonged on the stage.

"No matter what truth it is, it can't be the real truth until the majority of people accept it," the Count of St. Germain said to Mani Yaso, whispering so that the professor wouldn't hear him.

But Professor Langdon heard the count's words and turned to him. "Are you talking about your iniquitous alteration of the results? You, who helped the two-faced Roman emperor, the one they call Constantine the Great, order the composition of a new gospel and put it up for a vote by the city's merchants? You, who then fixed the results of the shameful affair? And even then, you only won by four votes."

"You there," the professor turned to Mani Yaso, "Saint Milarepa, answer me this: is it just to deny a fact many centuries later and issue an absurd statement that it never happened? Answer me!"

The Professor's question was one that tormented his soul. Despite the strong delta waves that shackled him, he took a step toward Mani Yaso and then stepped back. Clearly the author Dan Brown had created a literary character that was prepared to sacrifice his life for the truth. But isn't it the case that characters are sometimes larger than their own authors?

Professor Langdon was upset to the point that if he didn't get an answer to his question, he was going to give up the ghost right there in front of Mani Yaso. That's how you fight for the Truth! Even one hundred times, one thousand times stronger and braver than that, with unwavering heroism. Even by giving up your life if necessary.

Mani Yaso's Tibetan education had demanded the same thing of him, for Truth is an eternal substance that is born once and never dies, never disappears, never grows old, is never forgotten, and never loses its value. The Truth cannot be destroyed!

Mani Yaso's nerves were under great pressure, but somewhere in the bottom of his heart he felt scared. There was the Truth facing him, and it was demanding justice from him!

"Many Parisians live with the mistaken notion that their city sits only above ground. They are unaware that what you could call another Paris sits below the surface. Even the River Seine, which flows through Paris, has an underground counterpart. The underground river does not ripple or shine in the sun, but the roar of its torrential current is intimidating in the dark. The streets in the underground Paris have the same names as those above ground. Here, for example, is Rue des Petits Champs, and there is Rue de Richelieu," the Count of St. Germain told his guest. Then he showed Mani Yaso his underground apartments in the center of Paris, opening one door after another into the many rooms.

"I'm sick of living on earth for thousands of years. The longer I'm here, the more I need peace and quiet."

"When was this building built?" Mani Yaso asked.

"It's completely new. Construction of the first Paris metro began in 1900, and the underground streets were laid at the same time. I bought this building in 1915 because a Christian church in my honor, also called St. Germain, was built that same year right above it – up there on the surface. It was just yesterday, in 1950, that I renovated the building using my own design plans. At the end of every century I redo several rooms in a contemporary style. By the way, which room would you like to be yours? Come along, I'll show you around. Here's a small room with a hall in the eclectic style. But if you want to sleep in a modern European room I can show you one."

"I'll stay here, if you don't mind," Mani Yaso said. The room was neat, bright and simple. It suited him.

"Wonderful. Then have a seat. I'll take another ten minutes of your time, and then we can have a rest. I've tired you out excessively, haven't I, my dear friend Milarepa?"

"I'm always ready to listen, your lordship."

"You read everything in Professor Langdon's face. I'd appreciate it if you could tell me what he was thinking when we talked to him at the pyramid. That's it – I promise!"

Mani Yaso looked adoringly at the count, but he wavered – should he tell him or not? In the past he had made the mistake of telling one man's thoughts to another, but he had promised himself he would never do anything so ill-advised again. Such actions usually harm a person's private, inner world, and he did not want to be a criminal.

But now Mani Yaso took into consideration the fact that the Count of St. Germain was a unique individual worthy of the highest respect, and he was facing a complex problem that required openness and clarity.

"For some reason Professor Langdon kept recalling the name Francois Mitterand," he said.

"Exactly. Then it's true. Francois Mitterand is the key, God rest his soul! It was the deceased president who built those glass pyramids under the Louvre. I will tell you the greatest of secrets, my dear friend Milarepa! Now I know for sure that Mitterand was a member of the Priory of Sion. The society worships the divine female, or Mary Magdalene, even putting her above Christ. According to the Priory, it is the female chalice that gives life, not the male phallus. Women give birth to children. Christ was also born of a woman, so we should all bow down to the female chalice. They also teach that we must bow down to Mary Magdalene, whose name and sanctity were soiled by Christians who came along much later than Christ. Those Christians were the ones who trampled over justice. The recently deceased president of France secretly joined their mission. I suspected it during my last few meetings and talks with Mitterand. I felt that he was hiding some secret. That was why he was so close. Not at all talkative. It's a shame I can't read minds like you do, my trusty friend Mila..."

The changing of night and day went unnoticed, of course, in the Count of St. Germain's underground apartments, and no golden rays of sunlight ever streamed through his windows. The count kept track of nightfall and the beginning of the next day by the sounds of the trains in the tunnel that passed one hundred meters from his home. Once he got used to their rhythm, the count no longer had to consult his watch. He even turned off his alarm clocks.

Today, so as not to wake Mani Yaso he decided to stay in bed instead of getting up as usual. He had a guest in his home. A special guest. Although his guest was young, he had walked many hard roads and was tired. He had wanted to stay in a hotel, but the count had talked him into staying with him. For that reason, he had told his housekeeper the night before that she should not serve coffee until he rang.

The count dozed off again. When he woke, the hands of the clock showed nine. He got up in a hurry and looked into Mani Yaso's room. It looked to him like the young

man was sleeping sweetly. In a little while he peeked in again and noticed that Mani Yaso was lying in exactly the same pose he had been in the last time. The count looked closely. Mani Yaso was absolutely still and his breathing was faint. The Count of St. Germain had seen much in his long life, but this time he was seized with fear. He ran to Mani Yaso. Sure enough, it was only the young man's shell on the bed. His soul was gone. The count saw that immediately. He supposed that the *arhat* had left his body and gone to seek counsel from his *yidams* – perhaps from the Shakyamuni Buddha, or his previous incarnation, Jetsun Milarepa, or his teacher, Lama Tsu. He had to reach a positive decision following the advice of his wise teachers.

The Count of St. Germain stayed in his underground home until lunchtime. When Mani Yaso still did not come back, he began to lose his patience. Worried, he repeatedly checked on the young man's body. As time passed, the count's face grew sunken and his always neatly coiffed hair became disheveled. Seeing his somber condition, his Spanish housekeeper grew alarmed.

She could not help asking, "Senor, is your guest well?"

"Let him sleep, let him sleep," the count answered before shutting the door tight.

Suddenly he had a thought: "What if Mani Yaso left the underground house and cannot find his way back?"

The Count of St. Germain hurried up to the light. There was an ordinary church service going on and the church was full of people. The count concentrated on looking for Mani Yaso.

Then he heard his housekeeper's voice behind him, "Senor, your guest has gotten up and is washing!"

"He's washing?" The count raced downstairs. Mani Yaso was brushing his hair in front of the mirror.

"Mais monsieur, I was about to start looking for you on the internet!"

"I know I was late, your lordship! I needed some time. I spent the night in Tibet, in Shambhala. The cold is already setting in there and there's snow on the mountains. Winter is early this year."

"So is Tibet immune to the greenhouse effect that has earthlings so scared?"

"No, it isn't! Winter may come early, but that's unusual. And it sometimes even rains in December. The summers aren't really like summers, either. You can see white frost on the ground at night in July..."

Barely listening to Mani Yaso, the count turned to his housekeeper, "Ysida, bring my light! And some coffee, quickly! We'll take our lunch right away if you can do it! Hurry!" Then he disappeared into his room to change.

"The BBC is reporting that two more Catholic churches in London have been closed because they didn't have enough worshippers. Christianity has not suffered such a blow before, not even in the Middle Ages! What terrible news!" the count told Mani Yaso when they were together again in the dining room. The young man's heart ached at the news. He felt helpless to do anything about the religious crisis.

"What can I do?" he thought to himself. "How can I stop the decay of religion that is taking place around the world? People are losing their minds! If this catastrophic trend continues at the same pace, then the great flood will seem like nothing in comparison..."

What the Count of St. Germain wanted was obvious. He wanted to use Mani Yaso's magical power to save Christianity and stop Professor Langdon from finding the Holy Grail. Now the count began expounding his opinions with his usual stubbornness, although there was also an element of fear – he was afraid that the young man would refuse.

“First off, we have to stop the brainless professor. Everything else can wait. If he finds the Holy Grail, then Jewish texts say that the blasphemers will go so far as to call Christ a homosexual!”

“Don't worry. Your professor has already been stopped.” Mani Yaso suddenly announced.

“But how?”

“I did three hours of my Tolerance mantra with him and erased his desire to find the Holy Grail. He will not come back to the pyramid. When I told him, ‘Truth is dear, but the faith of millions is dearer still,’ Professor Langdon screamed at me and called me an unjust barbarian.”

“Mon dieu! When did you find time to meet with him?”

“I just came from there. Everything happened just as the Shakyamuni Buddha forewarned. The great one told me, ‘The longer you live, even if it is an upright and truthful life, the more sins will accumulate on your innocent head.’ You see, I stopped Professor Langdon, even though he was searching for the Truth. That's already a huge sin!

“But at the same time, I heard the Buddha's voice in the Kalagia: ‘If there is no other way, then the value of Truth is measured by the yardstick of human life.’”

“I am extremely grateful to you, Mila! Now we need to talk to Dan Brown, the author of that scandalous book. For the Christians to be pacified, he must admit his mistake!”

Mani Yaso found himself smiling. “I wholeheartedly agree with you, your esteemed lordship! But I'm afraid there are three things that can never be brought back: a previous life, a bullet from a gun, and a word from the mouth. I think you know that very well, your lordship. With your permission, I will return to the conference in Moscow today. We have already missed two days. If you decide to come, I'll see you there...”

The Count of St. Germain did not want to part with Mani Yaso. Fidgeting with the button of his coat, he made a sincere confession, “We need to stay together at all times.”

When Mani Yaso arrived in Moscow, the Brain Research Institute was surrounded by police. Almost the entire block was cordoned off with red tape, and the conference guests, more angry than scared, were hastily leaving for their hotels. The reason for the confusion was an anonymous telephone caller who had said there was a bomb in the conference hall.

Often when calls of the sort were placed to organizations around Moscow, they turned out to be false alarms, so the director of the institute did not immediately take the unpleasant call seriously. But finally his apprehension got the best of him and he hurried out to tell the police what had happened.

A bomb squad had arrived and evacuated people from the building. Now the guests stood along the lines of red tape and grumbled.

“Do not come any closer! Get out of the area!” police announced through loudspeakers.

Just then, there came a terrible roar. The first-floor windows of the renowned institute, which had kept many secrets inside its thick walls for almost a century, exploded with the sound of flying shards of glass. Then, as the horrified people looked on, the three-story wing of the institute where its laboratory and archive were housed shuddered and split in two before crumbling to the ground in a thick cloud of dark gray smoke and dust. The onlookers were in shock. Female employees of the institute covered their faces and cried.

One woman cried out “It was terrorists!” The reaction was immediate. There were angry shouts as people scrambled away from the building.

A woman’s hysterical voice rose above the noise. “Stalin! Stalin’s brain! Josef Vissarionovich’s brain! The terrorists attacked you! Damn them all to hell!”

Her lips went blue with hate and she started to faint, but several men standing nearby caught her. One of them was an Asian with a beard. After recovering and straightening the scarf that covered her hair, the woman suddenly gave him a rude shove.

“Get your hands off me, *basurman*³¹! All of you together aren’t worth Stalin’s brain! Where is he now! We should burn you all!”

By the next day, all the details of the terrible event had been picked up by the Russian media and other media outlets around the world. Radio and television anchors gave hourly updates with details about the explosion. The focus of the reports was that terrorists had blown up the building where the brains of Stalin, Kirov, Mayakovsky, Bely, Bagritsky, Gorky and Michurin were held. In that one instant, humanity had lost the carefully guarded brains that had once tried to build communism.

Only a few newspapers mentioned that the terrorist attack came at 3:30 pm, right at the time when the conference guests were planning to visit the wing where the brains were kept.

The goal of the terror attack was to kill everyone who was in the remarkable laboratory. One bomb would have taken out all the world’s psychics. That was the terrible plan.

Certain members of the liberal press were asking the question: “Excuse us, but who needs that kind of senseless cruelty? Who stood to gain from the attack?”

It was the conference organizers who suffered the most from the attack. They were forced to quickly change the venue for the meeting. They wanted to move to a conference room at the Kosmos hotel, but the FSB nixed that plan and told the organizing committee to rent a private motel on the edge of town. The end of the conference would have to be held in secret.

“Our only consolation is that nobody died,” said the day’s moderator, Indian astrophysicist Michael Sanjay. “But the explosion has rocked the world. As usual, no

³¹ *Basurman* – meaning “infidel” in contemporary Russian; originally *basurman* was a neutral word for Muslim.

group has claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack. If you visit the Institute's internet website, you'll find a lot of messages that should make us all think. The general gist of the messages is that psychics, mind readers and other sorcerers with special powers ought to be able to get the better of the criminals who attacked us."

The Count of St. Germain spoke up. "They're asking the right question," he said as he flipped his badge. He had just flown in from Paris and was seated next to Mani Yaso.

"Then I'll be happy to give you the floor, your esteemed lordship. Please come up to the microphone," Sanjay said, sincerely pleased. He put his arm around the count when he reached the podium.

The count took his famed mirror from his breast pocket and, after looking into it, announced, "I see the terrorists. There are two of them. One has an Arab face and a beard. The other is a European. He's balding and wears glasses. They are eating together at a café. The sign on the café says 'San Diego.'"

An FSB captain who had been sitting unobtrusively in the back row jumped up. "Are they in Moscow?" he asked.

"I can't see anything that identifies the city..."

"Can I look into your mirror?" the captain asked, making his way to the podium with long strides.

The count couldn't help but laugh: "If I thought you could see anything in it, I would be happy to give it to the Russian FSB."

The next day, a representative from UNESCO made an announcement that went off like another bomb. "Last night FSB agents arrested the terrorists. The most astonishing thing about the whole affair is that the balding man in glasses that the Count of St. Germain saw in his mirror turned out to be Mr. Luchkov, the head of the Brain Research Institute lab."

Everyone in the packed hall froze. Then they all began shouting.

"Why Luchkov? Has he lost his mind?"

"When they questioned him for the first time he said that he wanted to free humanity from the brains of tyrants and open the door to free evolution."

This was more than the guests could take in right away, and the hall again fell silent. The great thinkers were confused. They turned the information this way and that, but they could not find a way to reconcile their own restless thoughts with the thoughts in the long-dead brains kept in the lab.

An old man's gravelly voice broke the total silence. "Luchkov isn't capable of this. The bearded man must have made him do it! He brainwashed Luchkov!"

"Settle down and listen to what the bearded man said! In his confession, he wrote: '*Jihad* on all prophets and sorcerers who raise their hands against the sacred works of Allah. Holy Islam will not stand for them! And a double *jihad* on the *kharifs* who betrayed our faith! One of them is among you, but unfortunately death did not find him. Allah will punish all *kharifs*!'"

The hall was quieting down again when a voice from the back asked, "Who is the *kharif* who didn't get killed?"

Nobody answered. Sanjay, the moderator, felt it was his duty to relieve the tension, so he said, "I think it wouldn't be right for us to try to find out who the individual is right now. Every person has the right to follow the religion he chooses."

Everyone in the hall seemed to agree with the moderator. Animated discussions broke out, but people kept their voices down.

Suddenly Mani Yaso raised his badge and stood up. "May I say a word, sir?"

"Of course, Saint Milarepa! You have the floor!"

When Mani Yaso went to the podium dressed in a long robe that emphasized his tall, youthful figure, and with his jet-black hair falling to his broad shoulders, the whole hall seemed to be more dignified. Hundreds of eyes gazed up at him. Everyone at the conference knew that he was an extraordinary young man. Many of them had talked in private about the phenomenon of a reincarnation that comes once every thousand years. The media in Moscow reported on him constantly.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I am the one who betrayed Islam. Here I am. The great nation of Russia and the Brain Research Institute have both suffered from the treachery of terror. We are all in shock. I believe that terrorist acts are motivated by more or less just anger, misunderstanding and brutality. I could explain each of those three ideas, but that's not why I am at the podium.

"If you will allow me, I want to speak for the conference and ask the FSB to set up a video link with this fanatical Muslim terrorist. I want to propose an experiment. You can be the impartial witnesses. I will go to the terrorist and say a few words to him. You will hear his answer for yourselves," Mani Yaso said. His listeners were intrigued.

In less than half an hour, with the permission of the FSB and assistance from UNESCO, a video camera was set up in the terrorist's cell.

Mani Yaso and the terrorist met face to face.

"How awful! It was that terrible Ben Laden who tried to blow us up!" shouted Natasha Demina, the "x-ray girl."

"Forgive me," said a theologian sitting next to her. He pressed her hand. "You can see that he isn't Ben Laden. The beard may be similar, but he's a completely different person."

"I wasn't talking about his appearance! I was talking about his mind. Inside he's just the same as Ben Laden!"

"If that's the case, then I apologize."

Silence again descended in the hall. All eyes were on the screen. Mani Yaso turned to the terrorist, who was sitting in front of him with his head down.

"God did not create man. Man created God. Do you understand that?"

Shocked by what he heard, the terrorist froze for a few seconds. Then his head snapped up. His eyes bulged in fury and he leaned toward Mani Yaso. "A *jihad* on you! Damn you! How can you say that man created God?"

He tried to find something on the floor that he could throw at his hated enemy, but he forgot that his hands were cuffed behind his back. He managed to shove Mani Yaso with his shoulder.

Mani Yaso turned to the camera. "Ladies and gentlemen, you are witnesses." His powers held the furious terrorist by the back of the head. "As you have authorized, I will spend some time working with this man. After that we will meet again via this video link."

Three hours flew by, and the conference hall was once again filled with people eager to see proof of Saint Milarepa's superpowers.

Mani Yaso reappeared on the screen. With him was the bearded terrorist, who looked less ferocious. This time he was not handcuffed.

Mani Yaso repeated his question. "God did not create man. Man created God. Do you understand that?"

Everyone in the hall waited expectantly to hear the terrorist's answer. This time he did not raise his head. He just turned to the side a bit and answered in a low, faint voice, "That remains to be proven. You are a person who does not believe in God."

"I do believe! I believe in a God created by man, for that is the Truth!"

"You renounced Islam!"

"That was my path. I was born a Muslim in Kyrgyzstan. I grew up and studied at a monastery in Tibet, where I learned and absorbed the teachings of the Buddha. Just the other day in Paris I did a service to the Christian religion. When I travel through Muslim countries I call people to tolerance and restraint. Most importantly, I am working to start a global movement for Islamic pacifism³². I said Islamic pacifism! If we don't do this, there will be no peace on earth.

"God's first commandment is to be restrained, conscientious and honest. That is written in the Koran. I am trying to erase the alter egos of those who have given their minds and souls to *jihad*."

"What does that mean? Do you follow all religions at once?"

"The prophet Mohammed said that the Islamic faith is the faith of Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus."

"That's a lie! He never said anything like that!"

"Read the Koran, sura 13."

"The terrorist looked at Mani Yaso with distrust."

Suddenly someone in the hall called out, "I bet you hypnotized that crook!"

"There was no hypnosis. I went through my Tolerance mantra with him. You can see the result. You see that now he is capable of carrying on a normal conversation."

"How can you have a conversation with them? They aren't human! They should all be destroyed! Those bearded terrorists deserve nothing but death!" a man in the middle of the hall shouted. He stood up. His hands were shaking. The people sitting near him pulled on his sleeve and forced him to sit down.

The moderator, Sanjay, smiled sadly. "It's a good thing that due process was established before we came along."

The screen went black, and in a few minutes Mani Yaso appeared in the hall to weak applause.

This upset the Count of St. Germain, who went to the podium and addressed everyone in the hall, "I saw you give a standing ovation to a psychic who moved a glass across a table with his eyes. But when Saint Milarepa just showed you how to solve the most important problem – a problem that is leading humanity to the very edge, I see that few of you understand what you saw. That is a great pity. When have you ever seen someone change a damn ego once it got hold of a person's soul? Answer me, ladies and gentlemen!"

"I want to ask you a question, your lordship. What was the point in altering that bearded scoundrel's ego? He's already committed a terrorist act!"

³² *Islamic pacifism – the idea of calling on the entire Islamic world to renounce all war, including terrorism.*

The count turned sharply toward the voice. "First of all," he said, trembling all over, "I want you to notice the effect of the mantra. It changed his ego! And secondly, in order to prevent the next terrorist attack, all of us should help spread the mantra and the idea of Islamic pacifism around the world. What would the result of that be? Answer my question, sir?"

"What can I say? Islamic pacifism is nonsense. That's like demanding that the sun rise in the west instead of in the east."

"That's a lie! The idea was reborn and its rebirth was arranged by Time itself. In order that the idea may come to life, Time has created along with it the tool for its attainment. That tool is Saint Milarepa's Tolerance mantra, which you just witnessed for yourselves. His mantra is beginning to work in Muslim countries. Tell me, when have you heard of such a thing before?"

"Really? We'll see about that, your lordship..."

Chapter Twenty One

Over half a century passed. Its passage was imperceptible. As the years of Mani Yaso's busy life flew by and were gone forever, they were full of both troubles and success. Many nations came to call him Saint Milarepa or just Milarepa. He grew accustomed to it. Only his friend the Count of St. Germain called him Mila, the name of his childhood. Sometimes he addressed him as *arhat*.

One morning after drinking their morning coffee together, the friends found themselves standing in front of the big mirror in the count's hall.

The count threw up his hands. "Oh, my! That's what happens when one stands in front of a mirror. I've never noticed your graying hair before. Your head is almost as gray as mine."

Mani Yaso laughed. "What did you expect? Look how many years we've been side by side. It's natural that we're starting to look like each other."

"But you are several thousand years my junior. When we met for the first time your hair shone like basalt. Do you remember that first occult conference in Moscow? I couldn't take my eyes off your wonderful hair."

"Lots of things have happened since then, and everything leaves its mark. Whenever anything happens, that's another thousand silver hairs!"

"I've noticed that, Mila. I wish you wouldn't worry so about your Tolerance mantra. As far as I know, around five percent of the earth's population follows your mantra. That's nothing to sneeze at!"

"It's a drop in the ocean."

The count sighed. "What of it? It's a drop, but a big one. You have prepared at least one hundred million people to take with you to Sirius. That is an incredible feat for someone living under the sign of the impaled devil of the zodiac."

"In the East they call our times *Kali Yuga*³³."

While they talked, the plasma-screen televisions in several of the count's rooms showed weather forecasts for the next few days.

Then the Kyoto Program forecast came on: "The earth's aura is changing each day. The forecast for next week shows its dark red aura darkening by one-seventh due to

³³ *Kali Yuga* – (Hindi) "Age of Kali," or age of vice.

increasing aggression among people, mainly because of the recent Third World War in Asia.”

The demographics service of the World Parliament made an even more worrisome announcement: “Over the last quarter, the level of the world ocean rose 0.7 centimeters, which means that four million more coastal residents than last week will have to be resettled. Large cities facing evacuation include Washington, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. In Europe, cities to be evacuated include Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, Madrid...”

After these unpleasant forecasts, an attractive female virtual announcer with pearly white teeth continued her report on the number of spacecraft collisions throughout the universe, including the number of astronauts and travelers who burned up in space and the astronomical cost of the damage to humanity.

The virtual beauty retained her placid smile as she reported that the Asians overtaking the planet were committing terrorist strikes against the 300 Committee and had declared a Fourth World War.

When the next report appeared – about the mystery immune disorder ravaging earthlings living in temporary refugee camps on the moon, Mars and Venus, as a result of which several hundred newly arrived earthlings had died – the Count of St. Germain turned off the television and raised his eyebrows at Milarepa.

“You are very upset. Are you in a hurry?”

“I’m glad you turned it off.”

“We are supposed to be at a World Parliament meeting this afternoon. Will you be going to the Himalayas?”

“No, I won’t,” Milarepa said decisively. “I need to go to Tibet. Today is the day when I listen to Kalagia. I can’t do that here in Europe. These days the voice of Shambhala can only be heard in Tibet.”

“The earth is festering. It has become an apple of contention for its inhabitants. There is discord on every continent. We are watching our planet be split up into sections. By the way, the issue of Tibet will be up for discussion for the third time today. The British are insisting on settling it. They say they were associated with Tibet some time in the past.”

“The British? Don’t they want the Alps or the Carpathians?”

“No one will let them do that.”

“At the last meeting it was decided that ten million settlers from Great Britain would go there.”

“The Germans and French appealed that decision, even threatening to use military force if necessary.”

Mani Yaso was annoyed. “Whenever some little thing happens people immediately threaten to use military force. Even without that, the mountains are already dying. We thought that the fighting would end once national borders were eliminated. Now we see where that got us. The borders are gone, and the concept of the state is on its way to being forgotten. The religions seem to be finding peace. But despite it all, new fights break out every day. Now Kyrgyzstan and Tibet, my two homelands, are the source of the latest big scandal. My brothers have taken the land of Belgium and now they apparently want to go back to their Alatau.”

After finishing his coffee, he stood and turned to the count, "It is our tradition to look into your mirror."

The Count of St. Germain looked into the mirror first and said, "These are the men waiting for us in the Himalayas. I can't make sense of the next image. I see people lying stretched out on the ground looking up at the sky. It isn't clear where they are. It seems to be a camp of some kind."

Mani Yaso grew animated. "Let me see." He looked into the mirror. What he saw excited him. "Those are my friends, the Dropas! They must have heard the signal coming to them from Sirius. They are celebrating!"

"Do you mean the signal that the Russian radio telescope picked up?"

"Yes. The Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico picked it up, as well."

The count laughed. "I suppose the universe is full of all sorts of beeping, but you're talking about the beeping you've heard since you were a boy."

Trying to improve his friend's mood, the count put his arm around Mani Yaso's shoulder. "Have a good trip. You're always in a good mood after you see the Leader's daughter Seleng in Tibet. That I know for sure."

Milarepa smiled warmly. "She's a good person and she has a fine mind," he said. "Well, I'll be on my way, my dear friend St. Germain! Keep an eye out for news from me. I think something important is about to happen. My heart feels it..."

The Count of St. Germain spent the night in his underground house and, the next morning, was in attendance at the meeting of the World Parliament. The supersonic jet flew four hours from Paris to the city of Himalaya at the top of the world.

The road from the airport to the parliament building, however, took an hour and always caused the count to lose his temper. The serpentine road wound its way right up under the clouds at dizzying angles. The count was late for an important meeting again. Today the parliament was to discuss his and Milarepa's proposal to evacuate earthlings to other planets.

Many such proposals had been made, especially by researchers, engineers and astronauts. The times were such that anyone who came up with a solution to the crisis on earth immediately sent it to the scientific arm of the World Parliament. However, the members of parliament were bureaucrats for the most part, men who argued until they were hoarse but could not decide which of the proposals was the best.

The *arhat* Milarepa and the Count of St. Germain had expounded their forecasts in detail in an article entitled "Jesus Christ is late. We have to take his place." The article was published online and evoked sharply conflicting reactions. Many people were not receptive to the authors' new viewpoint on building a universal world order based on the principle of a unified space. They were also shocked by what seemed like a naïve, implausible theory of gravitational corridors between the planets of the cosmos.

"And it isn't coming from just anywhere! It's coming from our so-called superhumans!" the members of parliament exclaimed. But time passed, and they decided they might as well invite the authors to discuss the unusual project with them.

The conversation got off to a fairly lively and professional start with adherents of Einstein's theory of relativity – astronomers, physicists, astrophysicists and astrologers – but then the members of parliament gradually began taking over, turning the talk to how

to finance the idea. That turned out to be an extremely contentious issue. When they sat down for the same thing for a fourth time, the *arhat* Milarepa felt he understood their system of babbling. He politely excused himself and left the meeting of the World Parliament.

That is why the Count of St. Germain arrived at the meeting of the last powers of on the tormented earth alone, without his project's co-author, without Milarepa...

Chapter Twenty Two

When he arrived in Tibet, Milarepa went straight to Lake Manas. It was the middle of a calm, moonless night, but he felt a strange apprehension coming from the lake, a lake that had reflected the great firmament for thousands of years.

He squatted down on the lakeshore, rolled his sleeves up to his elbows and splashed his face with icy water from his cupped hands. Then he turned to face the Shakyamuni monastery and spent the rest of the night in meditation. Following the commands of his *yidam*, the Buddha, Milarepa prayed silently and repeated the sacred word "manas" one hundred and eight times. This was the time when he expected to hear the voice of Shambhala. He sat with his legs folded under him, but within a quarter of an hour he had to straighten them. His left knee had been hit by a stray bullet twenty years ago during a shootout with slave traders who sold young Afghan men and women, and now it ached unbearably. That stray bullet had bothered him all his life. Thankfully, the pain receded when he was absorbed in his day-to-day affairs. It was the same today: as soon as Milarepa began hearing Kalagia, the voice of Shambhala, the pain left on its own and the astral sounds flooded his whole mind.

The inconsolable tears the Dropas had shed for many centuries of remembering their homeland had dried up. Not a single eye was wet. They had lain for so long without the tiniest movement, staring up at Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky, that their bodies had hardened like wood.

"Om mani padme hum!" Milarepa said as he approached one of the first prostrate Dropas.

"Saint Milarepa!" Lurgan-La cried out in joy. He jumped right up.

The two friends embraced after a long parting, and then Lurgan-La took Milarepa to his home, where he closed the door and turned to face Milarepa. The leader's face was pale and covered with red spots; his eyes radiated happiness and worry.

He shared his conjecture with his friend. "I think we are receiving a sign from our homeland."

"What sign?"

"Saint Milarepa, you told me that when you were seven years old you were captivated by the squeaking of a swing in the Uch Kuduk courtyard. Do you remember?"

"I'll never forget it."

"We have a girl here who hears strange sounds. In the way you count years, she is seven years old. She draws all the time. We have a heap of them."

"Of what?"

“Her pictures.”

“May I see them?”

“We’ve been waiting to show them to you. Come with me,” Lurgan-La took Milarepa by the arm and guided him around the copper bowl of fragrant, burning *menep* to some shelves against the wall. He took down a stack of papers and spread them out. Each sheet of paper showed one mountain and one lake. The top of the mountain was shaped like a pyramid, but the glacier covering it was black instead of white. The lake was set in a valley between several peaks, and its rippling water cascaded over its edges.

“That’s all there is,” Lurgan-La said apologetically, adding, “She doesn’t draw anything else. It’s been five months now.”

“She’s been drawing the same thing for five months?”

“All the time.”

“How do you interpret her drawings?”

“I have no idea. And the girl can’t say anything that makes sense. Whenever we try to get an answer out of her, she starts crying.”

“Let’s go.”

Lurgan-La took Milarepa to the house next door.

“There’s a strange thing about the girl. We don’t really know where she came from or who gave birth to her,” Lurgan-La said. He felt ashamed for not knowing.”

The girl really did look nothing like the Dropas. A lovely, soft child with a sad but focused little face, she sat alone in the room drawing the same mountain and the same lake with her colored pencils.

Milarepa greeted her quietly. “Om mani padme hum.” He bowed politely.

When the girl lifted her head and Milarepa saw her big eyes, black as black currants and rimmed with long lashes, he stopped in his tracks. Her wonderful eyes felt very familiar to him.

Then it came to him. The girl looked like Shoala from his distant childhood, the girl who had sat next to him in fourth grade.

When she got older, Shoala had given herself over to her religion with a fervor that seemed like obsession. On his trips home, Milarepa had put a lot of effort into freeing her from the web of religious fanaticism. She had been extremely grateful to him, and soon she married the man she loved.

Mani Yaso was touched when Shoala came to him, her eyes shining, and said “Adilet, I’m happy.”

He always held an image of Shoala, the spirited schoolgirl, not the grown woman, in a secret corner of his heart. Bright memories of those days long passed in the life of little Adilet burst into Mani Yaso’s soul with a spark of nostalgia. He wondered at the way his fate had played out.

“Does she talk?” he whispered to Lurgan-La. The girl must have heard his question, for she cast a proud look at the stranger.

Lurgan-La did not want to offend the girl. He gave her a cajoling smile and said, “Our precious Kua-Kua talks, but very little. She’s said perhaps five words since she learned to talk. Isn’t that right, Kua?”

The girl gave him a blank look.

Milarepa bent down to the girl and smiled. “What kind of signals is our little Kua-Kua hearing from Sirius?”

She turned away, saying nothing.

Lurgan-La signaled to Milarepa that they should go.

"In the last few years our holy Byan Har River has overflowed its banks many times. When the river is high and raging, the water makes a peculiar sound. None of us can hear it except Kua-Kua. She always yells "Nool! Nool!" and runs back and forth along the bank. She keeps running until she faints. That's when we are able to carry her home."

"Nool?"

"Nool. That is the name of our far-away home. In our language the word means "Shining." You call it the star Sirius. Sirius is as bright to us as your sun is to you, and Nool is its third planet. Your astronomers have not discovered it yet."

"I see. It all comes together, my dear Lurgan-La!"

Seized with youthful excitement, Milarepa hugged Lurgan-La's tall, skinny figure and did a little dance.

"God willing, you will fly back to Nool! It seems that Kua-Kua was born as a bearer of great tidings for the whole universe!"

Lurgan-La had not indulged in emotions of any sort for a long time, but now he became animated.

"Is that true? Then there's no chaos in the arrangement of our planet, your earth and all the astral bodies we can't even see! They are all in the same field, in the same magnetic plane, all revolving around the North Star – it's just like that Asian scientist proved, the one name Samat Kadyrov. So it's true after all! There is a gravitational link between the planets. We heard on the radio that American astrophysicists have accepted Kadyrov's theory."

"He's Kyrgyz. My kinsman."

"Who?"

"We call him 'Samat in the sky.' Yes, my esteemed Lurgan-La, let's go take another look at Kua-Kua's drawings."

The first time they entered the room, Milarepa had noticed something unusual in the drawings, perhaps the very miracle he had hoped for."

Now as he studied them closely, his surprise grew. He heard blood rushing in his ears. The simple drawings, done by the hand of a child, revealed the innermost secret of the Universe, a secret that scholars, travelers and even tyrants like Hitler and Stalin had tried to unravel. The secret was a door leading into the underground city of Shambhala. Called "the tower"³⁴, it stood at the foot of Little Kailash, which is to the left of Great Kailash.

Oh, Creator! What is this mystery of yours that no mind can comprehend? Who moves the tiny fingers of this girl who has barely learned to hold a pencil? What age are we living in, that a mortal can grasp the creation of the Council of Prophets in Shambhala, the council that has always watched the fate of humans? And how can the mind take in such mysteries?

Milarepa was distracted from his contemplation by the voice of Lurgan-La. "Saint Milarepa, what does this mean? Kua-Kua calls this black mountain Zaiya. Why does she say that? And why is the mountain black?"

³⁴ Tower – A four-sided stone door situated so high that no one can reach it. Satellite pictures and expedition journals refer to it as "the tower."

“What does “zaiya” mean in your language?” Milarepa asked.

“It means wind or tempest.”

Milarepa laughed triumphantly. “So it’s a tempest! A tornado! It’s a tornado of spinning air that shoots into the sky. Wonderful! A natural corridor. A gravitational corridor, to be more precise! It’s the corridor I’ve been searching for my whole life!”

“But the picture doesn’t show a corridor. It shows a mountain, Saint Milarepa! And it’s a black mountain!”

“The black mountain is the first signal that Shambhala sends to people on earth. Do you see that the mountain is shaped like a pyramid? It is Mount Kailash in the Himalayas! There is a specially placed cube right on the very top. Look at the picture. They call it the ‘bellybutton of Shambhala.’ The melting glacier at the top of Kailash has never melted before. That’s a sign that the warming process on earth cannot be turned back. Kua-Kua made the mountain black, without the glacier – that’s the first sign. But there’s more. The melting ice from Kailash is flowing into Lake Manas. I spent the night on the shore of the lake. More water flows into it every day, and soon the water will overflow. It looks just like Kua-Kua’s picture. That’s the second of the three signs! Let’s go look at Kailash!”

Milarepa jumped up.

“Can you see it from here?” Lurgan-La asked as he hurried after him.

“You can’t miss it.”

For over half a century, the necropolis where Lama Tsu sat in *samadhi* was one of the holiest sites in the Buddhist world. Sadly, after a while the place began to attract tourists interested in the occult, visited more by tourists than by true pilgrims.

Thousands of Tibetans began turning the place into a source of income. Now it was surrounded by convenient hotels, restaurants and cafes with bright lights and loud music, and invitingly cool parks and pools.

Quiet temples and monasteries stood in a row some ways off from all the entertainment.

It became more difficult for Milarepa to perform his pilgrimage two or three times a year to the place that was so sacred and dear to him. Although he gave the administration of the tourist center advance notice of when he was planning to come, so great was their ravenous desire to lighten the wallets of as many tourists as possible that they never closed the doors to Lama Tsu’s mausoleum until the very last second.

Today was no different.

When Milarepa got down on his knees in front of Lama Tsu’s sarcophagus, something worried him. The waves that usually emanated from Lama Tsu body apparently were no match for the noise around them. He could not feel them.

Milarepa waited six days in a row for them to appear. On the seventh day he finally began to sense the vibrating energy.

Only then did he address his teacher. “I have come, Father. I head the voice of Kalagia. I found the three signs it spoke of. I have decided to tie my fate to the Dropas, even though I do not know what that will bring.”

When he finished, Milarepa held on to his throbbing knee and waited nervously for an answer. There was a great weight on his heart. It was obvious to him that his dear Lama Tsu was losing his spiritual powers as he sat, year after year, on the line between life and death. Fighting the heartache and the physical ache in his knee, Milarepa stubbornly sat and waited. Finally the bioenergy carried one feeling to Adilet's mind: "the third letter."

Lama Tsu's third letter was short like the others:

My son Yaso!

I am guilty of a mistake that I made when I was young. When I was living in the cave and translating the Kalachakra from Sanskrit into New Tibetan, I left out several pieces of the text. At that time I did not understand how wrong that was. Only after many years of living did my experience open my eyes. The people of the earth need the complete texts, without even the smallest omissions. Here is one of the texts I omitted:

"Nothing in the world is dead. There is life on every planet in the universe, but it takes different forms. On some planets there are mountains, relics of soil and stone, that stand in eternal silence. On other planets, millions of types of bacteria peacefully co-exist in a mixture of ice and moisture.

The planet Earth spun for four million years without humans, and it will continue to spin without them. Our coming to Earth and our departure from it are incomparably wonderful, but that is a very short and therefore sad period.

A planet called Nool shines in the sky. Its inhabitants can live up to eight hundred years, and then their souls turn into trees that eternally bear fruit. Our teacher, the enlightened Shakyamuni Buddha, dreamed of this.

When the bodies of those who live on Sirius touch the soil, they live on in the form of minerals. When the young pass on, their souls bloom as flowers."

These are the additions I must give you to the ancient texts, my dear son Mani Yaso. Farewell!

In order to feel all the meaning of his teacher's additions, Milarepa re-read the letter two or three times and then put it in his breast pocket, only to take it out again quickly. He read the last lines of Lama Tsu's letter again and wondered uneasily "Why does he say farewell?"

Over the course of a few months, the valleys and foothills of the Bayan Har filled with amazing birds that appeared out of nowhere. They weren't chukars, grouse or snowcocks. They looked more like a species of blackbird. Some had red beaks, black wings and white tails; others had black beaks, yellow wings and blue tails; all of them had bright coloration. The branches of the tall junipers, meadow-wort, current and rose bushes that grew on the slopes and in the valleys sagged almost to the ground under the weight of the strange birds.

The birds' appearance was an odd mystery to the adults, especially the tourists, but the children took it as a miraculous holiday, running races with the birds as they flew low and smooth along the ground. Kua-Kua usually avoided other children, but now she

ran faster than all of them, as if she had sprouted invisible wings. Her eyes shone like two merry stars. With childlike simplicity, and sometimes with joyous energy, she made up all manner of complicated dances with the birds.

Meanwhile, Milarepa, the Count of St. Germain and Lurgan-La of the Dropas opened Kailash's stone door to Shambhala using compressed sound and began making their way down the legendary city's central tunnel. At first the tunnel, built of massive slabs of metal, took them downward until they reached the "city of the dead." Then it led them back up.

They had to stop and rest every ten or fifteen meters. It was clear that many of the ancient wooden pipes connecting the underground city with the fresh air of the outside world had become clogged.

As he wiped streams of sweat from his long neck with a handkerchief, the Count of St. Germain expressed his annoyance to Milarepa. "We're underground. We don't know our bearings, and our compass doesn't work here. I suspect it won't be easy to find Kailash."

"Even if the compass worked and even if we find Kailash, that won't do us any good. Our first goal is to find the Shantamani stone."

The count gave a skeptical laugh and then laughed, more out of worry than because of the carbon dioxide. "If we can't find a giant mountain, how can we ever find a stone the size of your palm?"

"We're following our intuition. When I was young I followed this labyrinth of tunnels to my *yidam*. I think I remember some of it. But even if we make a mistake, I'm confident that the voice of Kalagia will give us a sign. We aren't following this path out of our own free will. We are doing the will of the Great Mystery, my friend Germain!"

On the fifth day, they entered the pantheon where the enormous bodies of the giants lay. From there, they passed the enormously tall sculpture of the Shakyamuni Buddha holding their breath. When they came into the tunnel with veins of gold in the walls, they saw a great sapphire door.

Milarepa turned to Lurgan-La in excitement. "We weren't wrong," he said. Then he took off his backpack and put it by the door. Of the three of them, Lurgan-La had the biggest hopes for the trip, and it made him jumpy.

The count had even whispered to Milarepa, "If our luck runs out and we don't find it, I think the disappointment might kill him."

It took a long time to open the sapphire door, but as soon as they went into the white marble room and took the shining silver *dorzh*³⁵ out of its granite chest, they dropped to the ground, too excited to breathe.

Lurgan-La broke the solemn silence. "Great Milarepa, this is one of the five signs, isn't it? The Shantamani chest?"

"Shantamani is the stone inside, not the chest," Milarepa answered. He began warming the *dorzh* between his palms, enveloping it with his delta waves. After some time the chest broke cleanly into two halves.

³⁵ *Dorzh* – one of the holiest objects in Tibetan Buddhism. Shaped like a dumbbell.

For the first time in the history of earth's civilization, a human hand held the much sought after Shantamani stone, the stone described in every book about the astral world. And the year was not 2133 or 2145, as predicted in Nostradamus' *Centuries*, but 120 years earlier! In the 2060s!

In the astral legends of the Lemurians and Atlanteans, and later of the Cro-Magnons, it is said that when life on earth comes to an end, the only route for humans to evacuate to other planets is inscribed on the Shantamani stone as a map of the gravitational corridors between planets.

At the end of the week, when Lurgan-La, Milarepa and the Count of St. Germain returned from Kailash, they found chaos in the Dropas' camp in the Bayan Har Mountains. It was all Kua-Kua's fault. Early one morning before the sun was up, the little girl ran through the streets yelling "Menep! Menep!" over and over. The sleeping Dropas wouldn't have heard her tiny voice if it hadn't been for the loud barking of the dogs that raced along with her. That woke them up and they heard the girl, but still they did not take it as a sign of a miracle. Menep was just an herb that they burned in every house for its pleasing scent.

The Dropas stared in surprise at the girl as she ran, for they had long ago forgotten the traditions and the arts of their ancestors from their far-off home.

This was the scene chief Lurgan-La, the Count of St. Germain and Milarepa found when they reached the village. While they tried to hide their feelings, their faces shone and their eyes radiated joy. Even Lurgan-La's face, which was usually gray, had turned scarlet from the elation that threatened to break his heart.

When they had been back in the underground city of sacred Shambhala, making their way through its complex labyrinth as they searched for the Shantamani stone and then the holy of holies – the bellybutton of Kailash, its gravitational corridor – they had sworn not to tell anyone yet about what they found. If the information they had found were broadcast around the world, it would create an incredible sensation and lead to consequences that were hard to predict.

The Count of St. Germain turned to Milarepa, who was behind him. "If the World Parliament found out about the corridor they would try to take control of it."

"That's obvious."

"They would set themselves up to decide who gets to go to Sirius and who doesn't."

"That's even more obvious, my friend."

"I suspect that the parliament members would forget about the Tolerance mantra and fly off to Sirius with the frozen people from the cryogenic labs³⁶."

"And they'd take their earthly egos with them. That's the danger. They would spread the earth disease on virginal, uninfected planets!"

"Then what should we do?" the count wondered.

"I'm convinced that no one will be able to fly without menep."

"Scientists will find a way to get around using the herb!"

³⁶ People who voluntarily allowed scientists to freeze them in order to bring them back to life in the future.

“And we will find a way to keep that from happening, my friend. We don’t have any choice.”

Just then Kua-Kua ran across their path, still yelling “Menep! Menep!” Other children followed her, with dogs both large and small racing around them. There were even some curious tourists bringing up the rear.”

The noisy, motley crowd moved further away and disappeared behind a hill, still calling “Menep!” The girl’s voice merged with the songs of birds and a host of other sounds filling all the valleys of the Bayan Har.

As luck would have it, that night the esteemed Panchen of the Jokang temple in Lhasa, Rector Busmen, came to visit the Dropas. He was already an old man with a white beard. When he saw Milarepa, he immediately thought he recognized him and started in his direction, but then he hesitated, as if in doubt.

“My teacher, I wish you purity and peace of mind,” Milarepa said with a respectful bow. That was Busmen’s traditional greeting. When the Panchen heard this, he opened his arms wide.

Lama Busmen had spent his whole life studying the traditions of the Dropas and their kinsman, the Dogon of Africa. For him, *menep* was more than a fragrant herb. As Doctor Osendovsky had explained in detail in his book, the herb could be used to dry out the human body and reduce its weight. First, the body must be placed in a tea made from the herb, and then it could be dried using special techniques. Then another herb was used to turn the person into a living mummy and the power of a mantra removed his need for food or oxygen. After this treatment, neither cold nor heat could harm the person. The body would be able to fly between the planets like a speck of dust in a great hall, and it would remember all that the person saw and heard during the flight.

During the last days of preparations for the trip to Sirius, the young Dropas suddenly revolted, even though they had always cried with their elders as they looked up at their far-off home. They had seen their kinsmen turn into mummies after being bathed in *menep*, but perhaps that was just their excuse, and the real reason was that they had been affected by the age in which they lived.

The Bayan Har mountains had turned into a tourist destination over the past few years. Hundreds of campgrounds, nightclubs and concert halls sprung up. On almost every corner there were cafes and restaurants where music played day and night. But, most interesting for the young Dropas, the area filled with people who walked around completely naked. Nudists. The hot weather made it appealing to emulate the nudists. The more foolish of the young Dropas renounced clothing.

Young women and girls shaved their bodies and their silicon breasts shook like inflated balloons. Men, on the other hand, stopped shaving and let hair cover their bodies. Such was the fashionable lifestyle on all the earth. Another cause for the flourishing nudism was the fact that men and women stopped coming together to build family nests. The sexes lost all interest in each other, for each person lived with a gorgeous lover on his or her pocket-sized display or engaged in sexual play with an android husband or wife. When women gave birth to children, they did it without fathers using artificial insemination.

The young Dropas were bewitched by the music and dancing in the nightclubs. They were naïve and meek, without excessive egos, and this type of entertainment seemed like a fairytale world that dragged them in with its dancing and music from quantum computers.

In the end, the brave team of people ready to turn themselves into mummies and fly to Nool numbered just around a hundred, among them the Count of St. Germain, Lama Busmen, and a determined, curious Russian ophthalmologist and traveler named Ernst Muldashev.

“Let me ask you one thing. Who guarantees that we’ll get our interference³⁷, esteemed *arhat* Milarepa?” Muldashev asked in a half-joking, half-serious voice before he got into his *menep* bath.

“You are a firm believer in God,” Milarepa answered with a laugh.

“We have a saying in Russian: *Put your faith in God and keep your eyes open.*”

“A sensible saying. But we are convinced in the permanent nature of the universe’s natural laws. That’s what we have grown accustomed to calling God. So God will help you.”

“I can’t understand why you’re sending us while you stay here on earth. I just can’t believe it, Saint Milarepa.”

“What can I do, brother Ernest? We were all disappointed to find that *menep* has no effect on me or Kua-Kua. I feel very bad for her. She hasn’t had a long life as I have.”

“I don’t get that either. What did the child ever do wrong?”

“Lama Busmen knows. She was born to an unwed Tibetan girl who worked in a laboratory in Lhasa. The girl left her baby out here. Even though Shambhala used Kua-Kua to give us the astral signs, *menep* has no effect on her at all. I know that bastardy is a sin of the parents, but now the little child is suffering for it.”

“Do you think that’s the only reason?”

“What other sin could the child have?”

“How odd. On the face of it, this is very strange and unfair, Saint Milarepa.”

“I know. You call me a saint, but I did not pass the *menep* test either, brother Ernest.”

“The most surprising thing is that your friend the Count of St. Germain, who has lived such a long life, and Lama Busmen and I all turned out to be sinless. I am more surprised about those two and myself. I guess I’m an angel!” He laughed.

“Your ego is fine. That’s what matters, brother Ernest.”

“What about yours?”

“Don’t be so surprised. When I was young I fell into the trap of power. I practiced black magic.”

On June 22, the shortest night of the earthly year, Saint Milarepa took close to one hundred mummies to the top of Kailash in tourist helicopters and put them in the cube at the very top of the mountain.

³⁷ In physics, this is the name given to the law of addition, which states that two points in the same line will converge. It is on the basis of this law that a gravitational corridor should open at the predicted time, creating a natural convergence between Earth and Sirius-3.

He sat in the dead silence and pitch black with his back against the stone wall his arms around his knees.

The three true friends he had met in his life, as well as the Dropas, with whom he had lived in friendship for almost half a century, were all right there, each wrapped in a cocoon of material made of *menep*, each lying in *Samadhi*. Once they reached Nool, their hearts would begin to beat again and their faces would break into smiles...

Milarepa sat like that until dawn. The ceiling of the Cube did not open. It did not open on the second night. Only on the third night, long after midnight, did he hear the piercing sound of Kalagia and see the top of Kailash open up. Above the mountain the sky was cloudy and starless. A small hole was supposed to appear in the dark sky, and Milarepa would see first the limitless universe, and then the corridor linking the top of Kailash with Nool. Inside the corridor the air was supposed to begin turning, slowly at first, and then faster and faster until it became a tornado and lifted the mummies.

Milarepa sat and waited for that moment. He sat with his arms around his knees and stared up into the sky.

Wasn't this night, this moment, the most fitting time to talk with the gods? A critical time had come when the almighties would interfere in the fate of humans. Milarepa waited to hear a marvelous voice from the sky, but for some reason Tengri-sky was quiet. Silence. Impossible! If it was true that the future of his earth children lay on other planets, and if God could see that future, if all that had happened so far on Kailash was not in vain, then Milarepa should receive a sign. He should hear something.

It did not happen. The gods did not speak. The angels, however, did. Again Milarepa heard the voice of Shambhala, the Kalagia.

"Hey there you! Most esteemed one!" the voice said. "Besides the four prophets you know of, who supported you so faithfully and for so long? Who sacrificed himself, taking on your sins, and was crucified on the cross? Who made a place for your soul in heaven and ordered the souls of the ancestors to support you? Who refrained from destroying you and instead resurrected you and made you immortal, returning you to the wheel of life again and again?"

"Despite all that, your soul met and became entwined with the devil and you could not free yourself of him. You indulged Azazello so often that he found an eternal home in your heart! He became your alter ego. You failed to heed all the warnings of the angels and prophets.

"Son of man, can you hear me? Your fate is solely in the hands of Great Nature and the God who created her. Only after them do you have any say in things, for it was Great Nature who bestowed on you the gift of the world's greatest power – your mind. She also gave you the swiftest of your desires – your dream. Those are the two underpinnings that will keep you from falling on your way to your great fate in the universe.

"But, son of man, first you must decide who is your enemy and who is your friend. Do that first, and then search tirelessly for your path."

A Special Chapter

It dawned on him. A stretch of time from Milarepa's childhood suddenly rose up before him in all clarity and detail, especially one particular day that brought so much joy and sorrow into his carefree life.

That hot afternoon was one of the most peaceful and bright days on earth, because children were playing together without a care in the world. A band of boys had abandoned the lifeless mirrors of the city pools for their usual haunt, a beloved stretch of the river on the outskirts of town.

Some of them were playing *alchiki*, using river stones for game pieces. Others lay on the sandy bank and watched the game. A little further on a few boys were sunning their naked bodies in the warm grass. It was no fun to run or lie in wet underwear that stuck to the body, so they wrung out their clothes and hung them on buckthorn bushes to dry.

A light breeze carrying the scent of warm grasses and herbs fluttered down from the nearby hills to caress the naked boys.

"Hey! There's a puppy in the river!" one of them yelled. All heads turned toward the water.

The current was carrying a tiny puppy that looked to be no more than a week old. The little creature's head bobbed in and out of the water.

The boys who had been playing *alchiki* ran to save the puppy, followed by the boys who had been sunning themselves in the sand.

Flowing swiftly, the current carried the puppy further away. The boys could not get closer to the water because of the prickly buckthorn bushes growing along the bank like a fence. They all ran downstream to the next small inlet, which thankfully wasn't very far.

The first one to get there and catch the puppy was the oldest boy, who was nine. The poor puppy had swallowed so much water that its stomach was round as a ball.

"Here. Talk to him. Who threw him in the river?" the puppy's rescuer asked, handing him to Adilet, who had just run up. The puppy was shaking, but it didn't make a sound. There was only a flash of complaint in its half-closed eyes.

"He can't talk yet," Adilet said as he pressed the trembling little creature to his chest.

"Then give him here!" the rescuer said and grabbed the puppy.

"Hey! Those calves are chewing on our pants!" someone yelled.

The boys turned and saw that the calves that had been grazing nearby were calmly chewing on the shirts and pants they had left out to dry.

Losing all interest in the puppy, the pack of boys raced back to save their clothes. The wet puppy had been tossed on the grass without any pity. It probably had no idea what had happened to it. The youngest boy, Adilet, turned back and picked up the puppy. According to the laws of childhood, the puppy ought to belong to the strongest boy in the band, the one who had pulled it from the water.

However, the rescuer had not exercised his right, and none of the other boys were interested, either. They were upset at having to pull their chewed-on pants and shirts out of the calves' mouths. Some of their clothes had been reduced to torn rags.

The ones who were left without clothes became the laughingstock of the others. Even the boys who just had one pants leg were laughing at them.

Adilet kept the puppy. He put on his half-chewed pants and wandered home hungry and with a hungry puppy in his arms.

His grandmother was sitting by the door. "Just look at you! What happened to your pants? Your little peter's hanging out!" she cried. Gently cradling the sleeping puppy, Adilet bent over to see if what she said was true. His grandmother was right. He carefully laid the puppy down and tied the waistband of his pants tighter to cover the place his grandmother had seen. He was almost seven years old, and his father, Salamat, supposed that the puppy was six or seven days old. His father took an immediate dislike to the puppy.

"Get that thing out of here! It'll never make it, anyway!" Salamat ordered his son. The boy frowned. He did not want to let go of the poor creature.

His father said no more about it and left the two alone, assuming that nature would take its course and sooner or later the dog would get sick and die and cease to be an issue. But it didn't happen that way.

At first, the family didn't take to the puppy. It sensed their hostility and would only let Adilet touch it. One day it tried to rub up against Salamat's legs, but it got a swift kick and from then on kept its distance from him.

Salamat realized that he had hurt the dog's feelings and wanted to make up with it. Two or three times he tried to pet it, but the dog always slunk away. Attempts to feed the dog were equally unsuccessful. The puppy wouldn't even look at the food Salamat gave it.

"That damn dog's full of himself," Salamat said, surprised. He left off trying to get in the animal's good graces.

Grandmother named the dog Moinok. Adilet liked the name, because the white band of fur around the gray dog's neck looked just like a collar.

Their other dog Rem, who was as big as a calf, guarded the property at night. He took a friendly attitude toward his tiny relation, even patting him like a father.

Before two months had passed, Moinok was racing around the yard with his tail spinning, ignoring even Rem.

Most surprising, as soon as he learned to bark he started barking at Salamat, whom he considered his number one enemy. This won the man's heart.

"Well look at that! That Goddamn dog's so smart he holds a grudge. He hasn't forgotten how I kicked him that time!" Salamat loved it. The puppy had a mind of its own and earned its master's respect.

Nature must have decreed that adults will love and admire any young one, whether human or puppy, who has a desire to live and always pushes onward.

Moinok was so in love with life that he seemed bursting with energy. His fur became shiny, as if he'd been rubbed with clarified butter. When he played with Rem, who was elderly and clumsy, Moinok sometimes made him so tired that the old dog retreated to his doghouse. The whole family eventually came to love and respect Moinok for his strong will to live, and not just to live, but to live energetically.

When Adilet came home from school, he would always see Moinok far off in the distance, waiting for him at their gate. When the dog saw Adilet, he would jump up and race as fast as he could to meet him.

Adilet felt that Moinok was like a friend his own age. He enjoyed explaining things to the puppy, telling him what things one could do and what things one must never

do. Moinok listened to him and wagged his tail, looking into the boy's eyes with love, agreeing with him, sniffing at him.

One day when Moinok met Adilet on the way home from school, he kept glancing away from his boy with guilty eyes.

"Look at me, Moinok!" Adilet said sternly, but the dog looked away stubbornly. "You've done something, haven't you?" Adilet knew it. While they walked him Moinok asked for forgiveness several times. He almost threw himself at Adilet's feet. Adilet grew worried.

As it turned out, Moinok had been very bad... Aisada had just recently put the whole family's winter shoes in a big box, and he dragged the shoes out and spread them all over the yard. Salamat's big canvas boots, Aisada's felt boots and lots of other shoes lay like dead soldiers on the field of battle.

Luckily, his parents spent all day in their garden and hadn't seen what Moinok had done. Adilet threw down his backpack, shook his finger at the puppy and hurriedly began putting the scattered shoes away. Moinok began to help, picking up shoes and boots with his teeth and putting them back in the box. He probably would have done it all himself if someone had told him what to do.

As the mischievous puppy grew up, he created even more fun in the yard. Adilet taught him many things, and that was a help to his grandmother.

"Moinok, bring me my galoshes!" she would call when her knees hurt and it was hard to stand up.

Sometimes she gave the impression that Moinok was not just a dog – he was a member of her family, almost like another child. The dog loved it. He made sure to be wherever the grownups, always squirming around their legs and looking at them as if to say "Do you want me to drag anything else over here?"

Life continued at its usual pace. One morning Moinok wouldn't touch his food. Nobody noticed at first. But he acted weak all day, and in the evening he ignored his dish again. That made Adilet concerned, and when Aisada took a close look at Moinok she decided that their pet was sick. She told her husband. Over the past few months Salamat had become attached to Moinok, and even harbored the hope that he would eventually take Rem's place. After Adilet left for school the next morning, Salamat took the dog to the veterinarian.

"Either your puppy swallowed something or he's having a bout of colic," the veterinarian said. "There are cellophane threads in his feces." He gave Salamat some medicine for Moinok, but it didn't help. Two days later Moinok was even weaker. He began throwing up. Adilet was heartsick over his friend. As soon as school was out, he raced home and held him. The whole family was upset.

Salamat and Adilet took Moinok to the city vet clinic, where he was given a terrible diagnosis: lung cancer. When they came home, Adilet stayed up all night holding his puppy. His friend kept his sad eyes on Adilet and would look at no one else. Even though Salamat drifted off and began to snore sometimes, he was up most of the night, as well. They had to wait until morning to take Moinok back to the clinic.

After a complete set of tests and a careful examination of Moinok, the veterinarians reached an even more serious diagnosis: the dog's kidneys were failing. Toxins were building up in his system because the kidneys couldn't eliminate them.

When they heard this, Salamat sighed heavily and Adilet's eyes filled with tears.

On the way home, Adilet said “Papa, let’s take him to our own vet. The one who treats our cows.”

On this one occasion, the preternaturally stubborn Salamat fulfilled his son’s request without protest. There was, however, a disagreement. Salamat wanted to keep quiet about their trip to the veterinary clinic and not mention the diagnosis. Adilet, on the other hand, said that they should come clean about everything. The father gave in this time, too.

“Nonsense!” said the veterinarian after hearing their story. He gave Moinok some antibiotics, and in a few days the puppy really was better.

“Your friend will live now,” Salamat told his son in a fit of optimism. Adilet’s mood improved.

Even so, the imperturbable veterinarian had warned them, “It’s too early to get excited. Your dog will need a lot more treatment.”

The vet gave Moinok daily injections of water under one of his shoulder because the dog was getting dehydrated. Strangely, the patient refused to drink water.

When the vet was doing the injections, Adilet always got as far as he could from Moinok. He feared needles more than anything on earth. The puppy winced at the first injection, but he never reacted to them after that.

Moinok would need a lot of injections, so Salamat tried to administer one on his own by holding the dog between his knees. He must have done it better than the vet, because the dog didn’t move a hair. Adilet couldn’t watch the needle as it thrust into his friend’s body. The course of the illness was harder on Adilet than on Moinok.

The round of injections helped. After Moinok was treated for anemia, he seemed to be completely healed. In addition to the injections, they gave him several different vitamins, as well as sodium bicarbonate to reduce the acidity of his blood. The vet had also insisted that they give the dog several more rounds of antibiotics against poisoning.

Moinok was putting on weight and getting stronger. He played and jumped like before, ran around the yard and rubbed up against his people, but the vet still said it was too early for relief. The poison was still in Moinok’s system. He kept prescribing new medicines.

Moinok was apparently fed up by the lengthy course of treatment and he began running away from the needle, almost as if he wanted to show how healthy he was. When they finally caught him, he wouldn’t sit still for even a second. Everyone felt much better.

The calm did not last for long. Moinok’s owners’ happy faces fell again. One morning when Adilet went to the doghouse, Moinok was gone. The whole family went looking for him. They found him wedged the firewood piled up next to the barn, where he had gotten stuck during the night.

Moinok looked up at Adilet without his usual joy, and his eyes were cloudy.

“Papa! Moinok’s over here!” Adilet yelled, almost crying.

Salamat was already tired of worrying and caring for the dog. It was only for his son’s sake that he had spent the last six months fretting about the dog.

“He’s going to die now. Don’t get your hopes up,” he told his son. Adilet ignored this and began begging him to take Moinok to the vet.

“Goddamnit, why can’t he just get better or go ahead and die?” Salamt burst out in frustration. Then he turned and walked off toward the vet’s office with Adilet running behind, holding Moinok to his chest.

After receiving a new dose of antibiotics and vitamin B from the vet, by that afternoon the dog was running around again.

Soon Moinok began walking with Adilet to school and meeting him there after classes. One day while he was waiting, a pack of dogs attacked him. By the time Adilet found him, he was unrecognizable under a layer of blood and dirt. The other dogs were also Adilet's friends, but they were just dogs – no one could force them to make peace. Adilet had to start leaving Moinok tied to his doghouse.

Every day he tied the dog up, and every day his friend met him in the school yard as if he hadn't even seen a rope.

"Papa, who's untying Moinok?"

"You should hear him barking and whining. It's enough to make you cut your ears off."

"Please don't let him go. I'm afraid the big dogs will chew him up again."

"Let them chew him up so he can die. He isn't long for this world anyway."

"But he's fine, Papa!"

"His days are numbered! He's got a serious problem. Goddamnit, I thought he'd take Rem's place. He could have been a good dog."

Adilet found his father's heartless words upsetting. He kept both eyes on Moinok. For about another month, he and Moinok played together as before. Then the dog fell ill again, this time on a Sunday.

He was weak that morning and stayed stretched out on the porch with his eyes closed. He wouldn't touch his food. He wouldn't even look at the bone Adilet bought him as a treat. Moinok didn't want anything.

"Papa, can we take him to the vet?" Adilet asked.

"Take him yourself. I've already spent all my money on him, Goddamnit!"

Adilet was in a hurry, so he didn't stop to argue with his father. He took Moinok to the veterinarian on his own. The dog could barely walk, but he still stopped at every tree, sniffed it, lifted his leg and pissed over the signs left by other dogs. Even after his urine was all gone, he still lifted his leg and tried to mark the trees. Finally Adilet had to pick him up.

When the vet saw Adilet carrying Moinok, he scratched his head and said, "He's not going to make it."

"*Baike*, please give him a shot. My father will pay."

"Your father already owes me a lot. Why don't you let me put him to sleep?"

"No! Please make him better."

"I can't! His kidneys have already failed."

Adilet did not know what to say. Then he put his friend on the floor and began rifling through his pockets. His father, mother and grandmother always lightened their pockets by giving him their small change after they sold their milk. He put the money together and handed it to the vet.

The vet laughed sadly. "You're a stubborn guy. Okay. I'll give him another injection, but it won't help. Put your money away."

The vitamin B injection made Moinok feel better. He perked up while they watched him. The vet seemed to be just as pleased as Adilet.

"That's one tough dog," the man said.

After that, Moinok was the family's hero and chief adornment for another three days. Elated, Adilet put his whole heart into playing with the dog. The wise animal was in pain, but he didn't show it. There was just a hint of exhaustion and sickness in his eyes. Adilet noticed, and his heart fell. On the fourth day, Moinok fell prostrate again. This time there was saliva dripping from his mouth.

Salamat was furious. "Goddamn it! He just keeps living! I'll take him to the vet tomorrow and have him put down! That's what I'll do!"

His father's word cut into Adilet's heart. The boy lay awake until midnight, giving free rein to his tears. He finally realized that illness is a monster that doesn't let go of its victim. When it goes hunting for a mortal being, it always finds it.

After midnight, Adilet got out of bed quietly, took Moinok from the cardboard box his father had shoved him in, and hid him in the haystack where they always played hide and seek. Then he went to bed and slept until morning.

When Salamat saw the empty box, he kicked it several times in anger and began yelling, "Where is that damn animal!?"

"Don't yell!" Aisada rebuked him. "Let the boy sleep."

Adilet slept late that day. When he woke late in the morning and went to the corner of the haystack where he had hidden his puppy in the night, it was empty. He felt like the dog was somewhere nearby, so he turned the whole haystack upside down, softly calling "Moinok? Moinok?" He didn't find his friend.

Adilet never forgot his little dog. His eyes could still see him, and his loud barking still rang in his ears – arf-arf-arf! Sometimes he could clearly hear his friend's voice, and he was never sure if it was a dream or not.

Moinok is still on Earth! Or perhaps he lives up in the sky? On the morning the puppy disappeared, the sky was clear without a single cloud. The sky saw everything.

That raises a question: will Adilet's friend Moinok fly away in the morning with the Dropas, or will he remain on the Earth with Adilet? It must be one or the other.

Epilogue

Exactly one week after the day of expectation on top of Mount Kailash, space stations began relaying urgent messages that they were picking up extremely rare gravitational phenomena in a spinning field around the North Star. Almost every observatory on Earth reporting seeing a column of light pointed up into the sky. All the data was immediately sent to research centers of the World Parliament.

Meanwhile, Milarepa left the belly button of Kailash in a contented frame of mind and made his way to Bayan Hara Ula, where wild music had been booming since first thing in the morning.

Seemingly aware that they were living their final years, people writhed and twisted in devilish dances. Milarepa approached a group and silently observed them.

The auras of many of them were muddy brown, and so the mass of dancing heads swam together like a dark liquid seething in a pot.

Milarepa knew that these strange, irrational people had not appeared out of nowhere. They were the fruit of the efforts of many people on Earth, and their kind was filling all the inhabited continents. These people were not fighting for their happiness or

the happiness of others. No, they were not fighters. But they would never let someone else beat them. In that way they were like powerful Sumo wrestlers.

Suddenly someone touched his little finger. When Milarepa looked down, he was startled with joy. It was Kua-Kua. In her he found an image of far-off childhood, of little Shoala who sat next to him in school. They were her eyes, shining like black currents.

Smiling broadly, Milarepa bent down and picked up Kua-Kua.

Suddenly someone turned off the loud music. A naked girl in a black mask broke away from the group of dancers.

Facing Milarepa, she screamed, "I'm telling you that your God doesn't have the right to end the world now!"

"I wish that were so, dear. But we don't have the power to criticize God."

"God ought to protect the happiness of each person. Even if the Earth is sinful, I found true love here. The kind of love you find once in a thousand years! I won't find a love like that on our Sirius! I don't even believe there is any love there!"

"You should believe it, my dear. Let go of the Azazello in your hearts, you and your beloved. Wash yourselves with the herb *menep* and fly away to Nool, where there is a different kind of love. In that place, loving hearts know nothing of betrayal. With each rebirth your love will be reborn, again and again..."

At the end of the day, when the thick fog in the Bayan Har Mountains grew deep red, a little Dropa boy with big eyes finally lagged behind Milarepa as he walked up toward Shambhala. There was annoyance in the little boy's eyes. The distance between them grew, as Milarepa carried Kua-Kua up into the fog. The boy could no longer see her eyes, which shone like beads. As the boy watched the big man carry off the girl who had tossed her ball right to him that day as they were playing "Bride and Groom," his annoyance swelled into anger. Milarepa felt the anger through his back, but he decided not to turn around.

"He threw a rock at us," Kua-Kua announced happily. She gave a clear, childish laugh.

Without slowing his pace, Milarepa answered, "We're walking uphill. The rock won't reach us."

The End