

# TIBETAN TALE OF LOVE AND MAGIC



Alexandra David-Neel

*Tibetan Tale  
of  
Love and Magic*



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Translated from the French by  
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# *Foreword*

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**I** have hesitated a long time, in fact for several years, before deciding to publish this book because of the particularly horrific nature of the events described in chapter IV and even more so in chapter VI. Once more back in Asia I recently had the opportunity, whilst visiting the holy Five Peak Mountain near the Mongolian border, of meeting some Tibetan lamas who had gone there on a pilgrimage. Two of them came from the province of Gyarong. We happened to talk about sorcerers and Böns, of whom there are quite a few in Gyarong. I have personally witnessed a strange phenomenon there, in one of their monasteries (see: *Au pays des Brigands-Gentilshommes*, Plon, Paris). These monks told me that although they knew many perfectly respectable white Böns, they had also heard of certain black Böns who engage in strange and cruel magical practices. And, to my great surprise, they mentioned the hollow table with the heavy lid, underneath which live men are left to starve to death and putrefy, thereby producing an elixir of immortality. It was in that region that the hero of this autobiographical story which is the subject of this book claimed to have actually seen it. No doubt he was not the only one to have set eyes upon this macabre spectacle and at any rate what these pilgrim lamas told me forced me to conclude that rumours about this do exist but that they are only whispered for fear of the Bön sorcerers. This chance confirmation of what had been told to me in confidence dispelled my doubts regarding the ethnological interest of this publication.

The circumstances under which I received the material for this present work are clearly described in the prologue. The reader will of course understand that the narrator of this autobiography only told me the essential facts. The peculiar state of mind which made him tell the events of his earlier life ruled out any form of digression. My host was gripped by emotions which caused him to remember and re-live the drama he had played a part in, and he was in no state to describe to me the places where these events had taken place nor to explain the beliefs and customs which form the background to the story. He knew that most of the regions in which he had lived were well known to me and furthermore he took me for a Tibetan.

If I had reproduced the story briefly, the way it was told to me, many parts would have been unintelligible to strangers unfamiliar with Tibet and its inhabitants. I therefore decided to write this book in the form of a novel in order to be able to describe the scenery as well as the ideological background and thus to surround its characters with the physical and mental setting in which they moved and which influenced them. However, throughout the following pages, the reader should remember that this story has been lived.

*Riwotse Nga*  
*August 1937*





# *Prologue*

---

**W**hilst travelling in the province of Daishin, I had stopped off for a few days near the residence of a rich headman, Garab by name, who owned herds as well as fields, which is not an uncommon combination in that region.

I was in no particular hurry to continue my journey, since I was well received by my host. I was also enjoying the material comfort of good and plentiful meals, the peace and security afforded by the proximity of the herdsmen guarding the animals, as well as the beauty of the scenery and the conversation of my host.

There was a further reason why I had stayed on a little longer. When Garab learned that my companion, the lama Yongden (my adopted son and helper who travels with me) belonged to the Khagyud-Karmapa sect,<sup>1</sup> he had requested him to perform a rite for driving away evil spirits. Such requests are common in Tibet and I had therefore not thought anything of it. However, a few days later, it became clear to me that he had very particular reasons for making this request.

Garab was a rich landowner and livestock holder; he was tall and his complexion was somewhat dark for a Tibetan. His gestures, which were few and precise, indicated that he was used to exercising authority. His magnificent fiery black eyes contrasted with the lofty detached calm of his manner. Sometimes when he was walking along he would stop suddenly and stand still for a long time looking at something in the distance - I did not know what - and then again he would sit by himself for hours, absorbed in what might have been pious meditation had he been a religious man, but he was not.

Intrigued by his not very mongolian appearance, I had ventured to ask the name of his native land. My curiosity seemed to displease him, yet he had answered; 'I am from Ngari, far from here.'

Ngari is a large Tibetan province which borders the Himalayas in the south; across the mountain passes lies India. Intermarriages have produced racial mixtures of a kind rarely seen in other parts of Tibet. His somewhat unusual appearance could thus be explained, but how had he come to settle so far away from his native province? I was eager to know, but in view of the displeasure which my first question

had caused I did not dare to ask further.

One evening, as my adopted son the lama Yongden and I remained sitting in front of the chieftain's tent drinking with him until long after sunset, the muffled sound of a galloping horse came across the grassland. Our host listened attentively. 'A horse and rider ... the animal is heavily laden,' he said, recognising with the fine ear of a *dokpa* (farmer) that it was not a runaway horse but that someone was riding it.

A few moments later a man leapt to the ground in front of us and helped a girl who had been riding pillion to dismount from the horse, which was panting and steaming with sweat.

'I need two fast and sturdy horses,' he said hurriedly to our host. 'I shall leave mine with you - it is young and worth a good price - after a few days rest it will be in perfect condition - I have money - I shall pay whatever you ask in addition.'

'We can talk about that tomorrow,' answered Garab. 'The night is falling. You can stay here and I shall have your horse looked after.'

'Thank you,' replied the traveller, 'but we must go on immediately.' And as the chieftain looked at him silently he added: 'We are being pursued. We must reach an encampment where I have friends by tomorrow morning and it is a long way from here.' And after a few moments of hesitation he added: 'I am abducting her ... she is willing.'

Garab was still looking at him in silence. His face remained impassive but his fiery eyes began to sparkle. 'Are you going of your own free will?' he asked the girl. 'If you want to stay here, say so without fear. You will be safe.'

'I want to go with him' she answered, drawing close to her companion.

In the twilight this man and woman, standing there clutching one another, their faces drawn with fatigue, formed a tragic picture.

'Sit down,' said our host, 'and have some tea and something to eat while the horses are being fetched.'

He called some men, spoke to them in a low voice, and they went off running to another part of the camp. A little while later they came back leading two horses, one of which was already saddled. They put the traveller's saddle onto the other

one, and strapped two large saddle bags over it. <sup>2</sup>

‘There you are,’ said the chieftain simply. ‘They are fine horses, and you will be able to make good speed right through the night.’

‘How much do I owe you?’ asked the fugitive.

‘Nothing’ replied Garab, ‘the horse you are leaving behind is valuable – I can tell at a glance – so it is a straight exchange for one of the horses. The other is a present for her.’ He pointed at the girl.

‘That is terribly kind ...’ began the man. ‘Go quickly,’ ordered the generous host, peremptorily, cutting him short.

In less than a minute the two were in their saddles. ‘There are provisions in your saddle bags,’ called Garab as they were leaving. With a kick of their heels in the bellies of their mounts (the Tibetan do not use spurs), the lovers sped off towards the horizon where the stars seemed to touch the earth.

Silence reigned once more over the plain. Our host went to sit by an open fire which had been lit, and remained a long time deep in thought. In the flickering light of the fire his face had taken on a strange expression which I had not seen before. Suddenly he hailed a servant and ordered him to bring spirits. He drank several bowls in quick succession and then fell back into his reverie.

I had seen the horses he had supplied to the runaways only briefly, but it was clear that their market value was quite substantial. What motive had my host for giving one of them as a present to a complete stranger? I could not stop myself from trying to find out.

‘You have shown yourself extremely generous towards these lovers,’ I said. ‘I have lived through that,’ he murmured thoughtfully.

What had this cold and distant man lived through? A love story? ... A drama? What could explain this sudden manifestation of sympathy for this couple in distress?

That night we did not sleep. By the campfire, silent and all ears, we listened to an extraordinary story which our host, because of the emotional upheaval he had experienced, relived and told aloud, probably without being fully aware that anyone was listening.

PART ONE

# Sowing the Seeds of the Future

## *Chapter One*

---

**S**urrounded by distant mountain chains, the vast empty desert plateau stretched under a uniform bright blue sky. There were no birds in the air and no sign suggesting the presence of human beings or animals. The silence was absolute. It was the roof of the world, the last refuge of genies and spirits who flee from man the builder of cities, the enemy of nature.

However, on this day, apart from the invisible beings who may have been haunting that high region, a narrow ravine in the mountains surrounding the plateau sheltered some fifty hard-faced men on horseback, clad in thick sheepskin robes and wearing pointed felt hats which had once been white but were now brown from dirt.

In front of them, at the mouth of the ravine, their young chieftain was lying in wait, the side of his horse pressed against the steep mountainside, difficult to see, even from nearby, amongst the high tufts of grass irregularly spaced on the brownish ground.

Time went by; men and horses, no doubt used to long waits, hardly moved. Their chief, his gaze fixed on a point on the opposite side of the plateau, was as motionless as a statue.

Suddenly his brows wrinkled with the effort to see better. Far away, in the direction in which he was looking, a dark spot, barely visible, had just appeared at the foot of the mountains. Gradually it became larger, began to move, and one could make out a troupe of beings in motion: men or animals. Without causing his mount to move and without turning around, the chieftain raised his hand. A quiet murmur passed through his companions and then silence was restored.

The dark spot spread out more and more; it had ceased to be attached to the mountain and was moving towards the empty space. A few moments later the riders and baggage-laden mules of a large caravan could be discerned, moving towards one of the outlets of the plateau.

When the caravan came close to the place from which it was being watched, the chief raised his rifle quickly over his head and with a loud cry rushed in full gallop towards the travellers. With wild clamour his men galloped out of the gorge behind him.

Before the people in the caravan knew what was happening,

the robbers surrounded them, firing their rifles. Terrified by the noise, the beasts of burden broke loose and fled in all directions, dropping the sacks and bales they were carrying all over the place, tripping over their broken harnesses and neighing with fright.

It is the usual tactic of Tibetan highwaymen to provoke this panic amongst the animals of a caravan, knowing that it confuses their victims and paralyses their defense. Once their account with the members of the caravan is settled, the malefactors always manage to find the animals which by then have calmed down, as well as the packages which have been dropped. However, if the merchants in the caravan are prepared for adventures of this kind and well armed, the attackers can meet with fierce resistance. Shots are exchanged and there will be wounded and sometimes dead on both sides.

On this occasion the travellers were only gentle pilgrims on their way to Lhasa to bring offerings to the Dalai Lama and to obtain his blessings.

Well informed by their spies, the robbers knew the value of these offerings: good horses and mules, heavy silver ingots and precious Chinese silks in considerable quantities. They were also aware of the fact that those entrusted with guarding them would be unable to defend them effectively.

Their assumptions proved correct. The moment the bandits appeared the unfortunate pilgrims realised that the loss of their possessions was inevitable. The feeble resistance they put up did not last long and the men with their heads hanging, the women crying, waited for the robbers to state their terms. As always on such occasions, it was only a question of settling minor details. The travellers did not have to fear for their lives - all Tibetans abhor murder and only commit it as a last resort. The highwaymen, those whom I have called elsewhere<sup>3</sup> 'gentlemen of the highways', are no exception. These 'brave-hearted' men are nearly always religious believers and they don't harm their victims unless they refuse to submit meekly to being stripped of their possessions.

The baggage of the pilgrims, their horses and mules, as well as the jewellery and money they carry, become the property of the robbers, but the latter will leave them enough food to

enable them to reach the nearest inhabited region. They will also leave them a few beasts of burden, the least valuable ones, to carry the provisions.

Within an hour all was settled and the mournful group of pilgrims went on their way on foot, going back across the plateau in the direction from which they had come. These poor people were only concerned with the problem of getting back to their home country - to continue their journey without provisions and without money could only have been undertaken by hardy and determined individuals, and most of the unhappy travellers were well-to-do people and not used to hardships and privations. Apart from that, their pilgrimage had lost its purpose. The gifts they were taking to Lhasa had been taken away from them and one does not present oneself empty-handed before a Dalai Lama.

The brigands hurriedly gathered the scattered animals and bales, reloaded the latter onto the mules and attached the bridles of the captured horses, which were now riderless, to their own saddles. The division of the booty would take place later, in safety, far from where it had been seized.

The malefactors were about to move off when a girl got up from behind a little hillock, took a few steps forward, and stood before them. She could only be one of the pilgrims from the caravan - why had she not gone with her companions?

When they recovered from their surprise the men became angry and bombarded her with questions: What did she want? A boon? Was she trying to get back some piece of jewellery that had been taken from her? Had she been wearing any jewellery at the time of the attack? How could one be sure? After all, none of them had bothered to look at the faces of those from whom they had taken necklaces and earrings! She was a liar! An impudent liar! She would be punished. She could go all alone and try to catch up with her friends who were already far away.

They were all shouting at once, without rhyme or reason, whatever came into their heads.

The girl did not move and stood like a statue, deaf to their insults and threats.

She was very tall, beautiful and grave, waiting with her eyes fixed upon the chief. He rode up to her.



'Why did you not go with the others? How come they did not take you with them?' he asked.

'I hid,' she answered.

'You hid! Why? Are you spying on us? Are you crazy? You have been told. It will be the worse for you if you don't manage to catch up with your people. Be off!'

The girl did not move.

'Do you hear me? Be off!' repeated the chief.

'You are the one I have seen in my dreams,' she said softly, as if in rapture.

'What!' exclaimed the young robber, whilst those of his men who had heard this amazing statement burst into noisy laughter.

The chief remained serious. He frowned and asked in a harsh tone: 'What do you want?'

'Take me with you,' begged the girl in a low voice.

He considered her for a moment and then, without answering, he rode in a sharp trot to the head of his band. 'Put her on a horse and one of you take her in tow,' he ordered over his shoulder as he moved off.

The column of brigands got under way. Cheered by the acquisition of rich booty and amused by the singular good fortune which had come the way of their chief, they exchanged coarse jokes interspersed with bursts of laughter. Steadfast on her mount (all Tibetans are used to riding), her face impassive, the strange girl did not seem to hear anything or to be aware of her surroundings.

The robbers rode on without halt until after midnight. Then, after travelling along a winding path, they reached the heart of the mountains and the chief called a halt in a grassy valley with a little stream. The camp was quickly set up and surrounded by sentries. All that had to be done was to stack the stolen bales, tie up the animals which had been taken from the pilgrims, and light a fire. After drinking a few bowls of tea and eating two or three balls of barley flour, the men would sleep in the open, wrapped in their fur robes and using their saddles as pillows. The days of feasting and celebrating the success of the expedition would come later.

\* \* \* \* \*

The love life of the young chieftain was not unduly encumbered with romance. The men of his profession have not much time for it and he was even rougher than is usual amongst his kind. Having eaten his frugal meal without haste, he got up and said simply: 'You wanted to come - well, come then.' And without waiting for her he went to the place he had chosen for spending the rest of the night.

Docile and silent, she followed him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sitting on the blanket which had been their bed, the chief thought over with amazement the new sensations he had experienced. This audacious bandit was like a healthy young animal and had never found sensual experiences disconcerting. He had gone with women with the same simplicity with which the stallions in his herds went after mares. Partly out of fear and partly because they were attracted to the magnificent male that he was, the girls and women amongst the nomads had always yielded to him without difficulty and the brief contacts he had with them never left any deep impression upon him.

... In what way then was she so different from the others? He felt too numb to think properly about it. He relived the thrills and pangs, the sting which had bitten his flesh and caused him to gasp. He was still in the shadow of the upheaval which was produced in him by the confused mixture of his voluptuous and violent impressions. A fantastic animal seemed to have arisen in his inmost being, to be taking possession of him and stretching its fiery limbs into his and introducing its head into his ... Was he going mad?...

He took hold of himself and looked at his new mistress who was lying beside him. The russet light of the waning moon gave her features an unearthly quality.

The Tibetans believe that it happens that female demons, Sindongmas, for their own amusement, give themselves as lovers to humans in order to torture and devour them in the end. Being reasonable and down-to-earth, he had laughed at these tales. And yet...

'What's your name?' he asked abruptly.

'Detchema' (the bringer of joy),<sup>4</sup> answered the pilgrim.

‘You live up to your name,’ exclaimed the chief. ‘You certainly give pleasure – at least to me! Have you given pleasure like that to many others before?’

‘You know that I was a virgin,’ said the girl quietly.

The young man did not answer. He was sure of it. He had asked the question trying to appear disparaging and detached in order to hide his emotions.

‘My name is Garab,’ (perfect joy)<sup>5</sup> he continued. ‘Our names go together as well as our bodies, don’t you think, Detchema?’

He leaned over her and embraced her passionately.

\* \* \* \* \*

The following day was spent making an inventory of the booty and dividing it amongst the men and discussing how best to trade the articles which were to be sold. Horses, mules and provisions presented no problem. Tibetan brigands are not penniless vagrants, but established farmers and owners of herds who gather from time to time to go on expeditions which they consider a noble sport and proof of the virility of brave men ‘with a stout heart’.<sup>6</sup> Each one of these ‘heroes’ has his tents high up in the mountains or he lives in the valley as a farmer. The sacks of grain or flour which are his share will be added to the general stocks of food for his family, and the animals he acquires will be added to his herds for the time being, until they are taken, together with others, to be sold at some distant market.

But on this occasion the booty also comprised silks, silver and gold in ingots, and a number of valuable articles and curios for which the rustic robbers had no use. This part could only be sold or bartered at a major trading centre where such transactions are an everyday occurrence, and it would have to be far enough away for the local magistrates to be unable to trace the origin of the goods (and therefore they would not be tempted to confiscate the goods under the pretext of doing justice).

The discussion went on for a long time and when midnight came they still had not found a solution which satisfied all of them. It was time for dinner.

‘Bring me some tea, down-there,’ said Garab to one of his

men who acted as his batman during campaigns. 'Down-there' was the place where he had spent the night with Detchema. She had stayed behind while he presided over the meeting of his band.

Dried meat<sup>7</sup> and roasted barley flour (tsampa) were taken from Garab's saddle bags and put out before him together with a large pot of tea.

'Eat to your heart's content,'<sup>8</sup> said the chief to the young woman. She smiled at him. The familiar and necessary act of eating brought her out of the dreamworld into which the sight of the bold bandit had thrown her, and back to earth.

'Are you alright?' asked Garab. She nodded. 'You can't be accused of being garrulous,' remarked the chief, laughing. 'Have you thought about what you are going to do now? You won't be able to catch up with your friends the pilgrims any more. How will you get back to your country? Is it a long way from here? How long had you been travelling when I stopped you? Are your father and mother alive? You regret what you have done, don't you? You would like to get back to your people.'

'No,' answered Detchema, 'I want to stay with you.'

'At present I can't see that you can do much else unless you want to starve to death in the Shang Thangs,'<sup>9</sup> rejoined the chief, trying to appear indifferent. But his curiosity would not accept the silence of his companion.

'Why did you want to come with me?' he carried on. 'You could not have loved me. Presumably you had never seen me.'

'I had seen you in my dreams.'

'Yes, so you said. You saw me in your dreams! What dreams? When you were sleeping?'

'Sometimes, but more often when I was awake. You were riding through the solitude, sitting straight in your saddle, looking into the distance at things which I could not see. I madly wanted to run towards you. Suddenly I would feel myself lifted off the ground, onto your horse, and carried off in full gallop across the Shang Thang deserts. Sometimes it would happen that someone would speak to me and then the vision would vanish and I would feel terribly alone and empty, as if part of me had gone away with the horse and rider.'

‘Where did you think I was taking you when I rode off with you?’

‘I did not think about anything. The ride had no destination that I am aware of. It was just the wind blowing in my face, the noise of the little stones under the horse’s hooves, the mountains and lakes which would suddenly appear before us and disappear again behind us, your body which felt warm and firm under your robe, and the beating of our hearts.’

Garab thought for a while. ‘I am alone,’ he said finally, ‘I have no family, no wife. If you wanted to, you could be mine ... at least for a while. My tent is large, I have herds and servants to look after the animals. In five or six days we could reach the region of the tribe amongst which I live.’

‘Five or six days ... ’ repeated Detchema, deep in thought, ‘... and then?’

‘Then, I told you, you would live in my tent. You would not want anything. Food is always plentiful and you will not have to work.’

‘In my home there is also enough to eat and I have never had to work,’ declared the young woman with pride.

‘Really! So your parents are rich? Who is your father?’

‘He is dead.’

‘And your mother?’

‘She lives with her brother. She owns land which she leases and she has money invested in business.’

‘And what does your uncle do?’

‘He is a merchant.’

‘Where?’

‘At Dirgi.’

Garab had the impression that Detchema was lying.

‘The pilgrims with whom you were travelling did not come from Dirgi,’ he commented. ‘They were Mongolians.’

‘Yes, Mongolians from Ta Koure and from the Alachan.’

‘Then how did you come to be with them?’

‘I had met them.’

‘Where? And how did you happen to be on the route that they were travelling?’

‘I was travelling with merchants.’

‘With merchants! Your mother and uncle let you travel with merchants!’ ‘I had run away.’

‘Why?’

‘I was looking for you ... I met these merchants when I was already far from Dirgi. I told them I had been on a pilgrimage to Lhasa with my sister who was a nun, that she had died on the way and that I was trying to continue the journey by myself so that the merit of the pilgrimage would help the soul of my sister. They offered to take me with them and let me ride one of their mules. Along the way I was always looking in all directions, hoping that you would appear, like in my visions, but this time in reality. We had been travelling a few days when the men explained to me that I would have to be their communal wife until the end of the journey, so during the night I ran away, taking a little sack of tsampa with me.

‘I ran to get away from the camp as quickly as possible. For two days I hid in a ravine. Then I carried on walking. The merchants must have been far away by then and I was no longer afraid of being recaptured by them, but I ran out of tsampa. I wandered without knowing where I was going, but I was sure that I would meet you sooner or later. I managed to dig up *toumas*<sup>10</sup> and in the marshes I crossed I found algae to eat ... and then I saw the caravan coming. I repeated to the pilgrims what I had already told to the merchants: that my sister, who was a nun, had died whilst we were on our way to Lhasa. They gave me food and took me with them and then at last I found you.’

Garab still wondered how much truth there was in this extraordinary story. Perhaps she was an out and out liar. He was inclined to think so but refrained from saying so to his mistress. If she was anxious that he should not find out her identity and where she came from, he was not that keen to know. He reasoned that his ignorance in the matter released him from responsibility and would avoid unpleasantness with the girl’s family if by chance they were influential and should find Detchema with him.

As he remained silent, Detchema continued the conversation.

‘What will you do when you get back home?’

'I shall live as a *dokpa* (herdsman) until other business calls me away.'

'Business? Do you mean trade or business like yesterday?'

Garab laughed. 'Sometimes the one, sometimes the other. You have seen me at work, so I don't need to explain. I am a *djagspa* (highwayman) chief. That does not seem to worry you.'

'I admire you,' whispered Detchema quietly but with fervour. 'You looked so beautiful when you came galloping out of that ravine at the head of your men. You will take me with you when you go away on business, won't you?'

'Take you with me! Have you ever heard of *djagspas* taking women on their expeditions!? That is the business of men - a woman's place is at home. Five days march from here and you will see my home. If you like it you will stay and if you don't ... you will have to find yourself somebody else.' He made a gesture indicating the vastness of the plateaus and valleys which stretch out beyond the mountain range which surrounded their camp.

'Five days!' repeated Detchema again.

'Is that too long for you? Are you tired?'

'I am never tired,' protested the young woman, almost angrily. 'Five days is too little. Now that I have found you I don't want to leave you. I would like to ride off with you, far, far away for days and months and camp every night in the open under the stars, like we did yesterday.' Detchema had lowered her voice and was speaking again in the passionate tone in which she had described her dreams of vertiginous rides clutching the hero she had been waiting for.

The bewitching sound of her voice and the memory of the voluptuous sensations of the night before rekindled Garab's desire. The scenes she described began to take life in his imagination. He could see her riding beside him day after day in the vast solitudes where nothing would take her attention away from him, or his from her. He could see those nights, camping under the stars, when she would be his completely. The taste of her flesh came back to him and his fingers burned when they remembered the feel of her body.

To take Detchema the 'bringer of joy' to his tent and subject her to the curious scrutiny of the herdsmen of his tribe

as well as that of his own servants, would that not break the spell and bring the wonderful adventure which he had lived since the previous night to a premature end? The young chief was vaguely aware that in his tent Detchema would cease to be the bewitching Detchema whom he had held in his arms. She had run away from home, so she said. Perhaps they had also tried to imprison her in a home, tent or house and she, fairy or demon, could only live free and in the open.

Detchema! Detchema! Bringer of joy! Her voice gave rise to wonderful visions. Days and nights along the trail, across the mountains. The soul of the vagabond which lived in Garab's heart felt exultant and enthusiastic. This vision had to become reality.

'My men are waiting for me,' he said, as he got up. 'We have to hold council. I shall come back to you as soon as I am free.'

\* \* \* \* \*

The discussion about the part of the booty that was to be sold had begun in the morning but had been broken off at meal time without any decision having been reached. Neither Garab nor his men had been able to draw up a really satisfactory plan. But under the influence of the new feelings which were stirring inside him a host of ideas started coming into his mind.

Why, he said to himself, should he not personally take charge of the sale of the stolen goods? He could take just a few men with him and disguised as peaceful merchants they could travel to Lhasa. So many traders from different parts of the world bring all kinds of wares there that amongst such a crowd they and their business would not attract any particular attention. Also, their goods would fetch a better price in Lhasa than elsewhere. Profitability and prudence were in favour of it; his companions would certainly approve the idea. And if he took Detchema with him on this journey he could easily convince them that the presence of a woman amongst them would help to show that they were peaceful and honest folk. To make their party seem even more respectable, they could say that his pious wife had taken the opportunity of her husband's business trip to make a pilgrimage to the holy city. The idea of



a counterfeit pilgrimage appealed to the brigand - why not make a reality of it?

A superstitious fear had got hold of Garab. He was too happy. During the preceding months a number of expeditions had been extremely profitable and the value of the property they had appropriated the night before was far greater than from any previous enterprise. And then he had got Detchema. Such persistent good luck was dangerous. He had to sacrifice something belonging to him, of his own free will, lest fate impose the sacrifice upon him. (This is a common belief in Tibet.) Some misfortune would strike him - either his possessions or him personally. His profession was a risky one; a bullet could wound him mortally in the course of an encounter. Or else he might lose Detchema.

Travel, nights of love, to banish misfortune, the envy of the gods and the malice of demons, the necessity of atoning for the sins committed during ten years as a highwayman. All these ideas were whirling around in the head of the chief as he walked slowly to where the meeting was going to take place.

Garab and all the people of his kind believed in the stories and the many superstitions which make up the religion of the ordinary Tibetan. Normally he did not worry too much about them, but they had come to the forefront and were dominating his thoughts.

'Friends,' he began, as soon as he sat down on the grass close to his men, 'do you realise that yesterday we committed a grave sin? Obviously we are not leading a good life but until now we had only attacked merchants who were trying to get richer. We had the same desire and we had as much right to achieve it as they. What we own, we did not steal slyly, like cowards; we fought for it and some of us got wounded in the process and poor Tobden got killed last year. We are not misers. We never refuse alms to the needy and we contribute generously to the needs of the members of the clergy who read the Holy Scriptures and celebrate religious rites in our various camps. In other words, if we are not altogether white, we are not altogether black either.

'But yesterday we were dealing with pious travellers. Everything they were carrying was intended as an offering to

the Dalai Lama. As far as the pilgrims are concerned, we did not harm them. The intention which they had of making their offerings acquires the same merit as to actually make them. The good effect, both in this life and in those that follow, is exactly the same, and therefore the harm which we have inflicted upon them is minimal. If you think about it carefully, by shortening their journey we have even saved them a lot of hardship and fatigue and their health will be the better for it. Therefore don't let us worry ourselves on their account.

'What matters is the fact that all the things we took were intended for sacred use. Are we going to sell them for our profit? That would amount to religious theft, a heinous crime. I confess that it frightens me. Its consequences in this world and the other ones can be terrible. I also think that good luck has been faithful to us for a very long time.'

Being mainly concerned with himself, Garab forgot the wounded and the dead from the previous expeditions, and his companions were also preoccupied only with their own advantage and consequently did not think about them either.

'This persistent good luck makes me feel uneasy,' continued the chief. 'You know that it attracts misfortune. Should we tempt fate by enriching ourselves even further? Personally I doubt that this would be wise. I think it would be proper to make a sacrifice, to renounce part of our profit, in order to ensure that we may safely enjoy the rest.'

'And now an exceptional opportunity is presenting itself to us to pay for our past sins and even to expiate future ones by offering magnificent gifts to the Dalai Lama. Shall we ever again be in a position to have so many things at our disposal which are exactly suitable to offer in homage to him, seeing that they were chosen for precisely that purpose? Why don't we set aside a part of what we have acquired in order to make a highly meritorious gift which should secure us the benediction of the Precious Protector (the Dalai Lama) which would guard us against all evil in our dangerous profession?'

'I have spoken. Let each one of you think about it and voice his opinion freely.'

Garab spoke with ease and as all Tibetans appreciate eloquence it is rare for a good speaker to fail to win his

audience over. It did not occur to any of his listeners that all these careful considerations which showed concern for profit and prudence in the business affairs of this world as well as pious concern for their spiritual welfare might have arisen in the mind of the speaker because of his dalliance with his new mistress. He was, in any case, completely sincere and his companions shared the beliefs which lay at the base of his propositions without any reservations. His plans were enthusiastically approved and adopted.

Of the fifty-two men who formed his band, twenty were chosen to accompany their leader on the journey to Lhasa.

They would light lamps on the altars of the gods, perform the prescribed genuflexions for their own benefit, and would, by proxy, obtain the blessing of the Dalai Lama for those of their companions who were returning home. The merit would be the same for all of them, just as they would share equally in the revenue from the sale of the articles which they were going to dispose of. All were well satisfied and those who were about to go to Lhasa changed their rough sheepskin clothes for cloth garments which they had taken from the pilgrims and put on hats with fur earmuffs and with gold braid bands. They selected the best boots in the loot, and in a trice they began to look like smartly dressed merchants.

They were all well armed, just in case, and ready to defend their property valiantly if perchance some scoundrels should aspire to relieve them of it. With the change of their outward appearance and the new destination of their journey across the country, came a sudden transformation of their attitude - a greedy and devout merchant's soul had entered each one. They began to look with disdain upon their companions who were staying behind and had retained their appearance of herdsmen or vagabonds as if they belonged to a different caste somewhat beneath them.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Detchema, we are only going to stay here one more day to give us time to get ready. The day after tomorrow we shall break camp before dawn.'

'And in five days you will be home.'

'Who knows...' replied Garab evasively. 'Look what I have brought you. He laid before her a woman's dress in dark blue cloth and a bright red silk shirt.

'Do you like them?' he asked her. And before she had time to answer he added: 'and there is more to come.'

From the pocket (amphag) which is formed on the chest by the large robe which Tibetans wear with a belt, he produced a long agate and coral necklace with one of those locketts which Tibetans wear as an ornament hanging from the neck. This one was made of gold and set with turquoises.

'Are you happy?' he asked again.

'Oh! Wonderful!' exclaimed Detchema, beside herself with joy.

'I have another surprise for you,' continued Garab happily, 'but it must wait until the day after tomorrow.'

They ate together at the end of the day. Detchema kept on looking at and touching her jewellery and her lovely dress; she also wondered about the surprise. What could it be? More jewellery, a bale of Chinese silk for making a dress more beautiful than the one he had given her already, or a pretty mule which would trot gently and which her lover was going to give her as a present.

And then the night fell; the stars were shining in the sky like a fairy procession. Detchema felt the hot lips of the young chief pressing upon hers. Everything to do with this world faded from her mind. The two of them were one ardent desire.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the chilly air before daybreak horses and mules were snorting and shaking their bells ready to start out. The men who were going to split up were taking their leave of one another and noisily exchanged the many wishes commonly used in Tibet.

Detchema was in her saddle, close to Garab, in the party of pseudo-merchants.

'We are off!' shouted the chief, and leaning towards her he said very softly: 'Detchema, the promised surprise: we are going to Lhasa ... more than a month of travel! Are you happy, darling?'

A violent wave of boundless joy took hold of the young woman. She shuddered violently and her hand jerked so hard on the bridle she was holding that her mount reared up. Detchema lost her balance and Garab grabbed her firmly around the waist, thus keeping her in her saddle. The usually good tempered mule calmed down quickly but the handsome adventurer kept his arm around his mistress and so, riding together and holding each other tight for some time, the two of them rode off towards their strange destiny.



## *Chapter Two*

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**T**he origins of the handsome chief who was riding off at the head of his caravan, a triumphant smile on his lips, were very humble and, at the same time, extraordinarily romantic. His deceased mother had been the slave-servant (a mild form of slavery still exists in Tibet) of a wealthy landowner, and as for his father, nobody, not even the woman who had conceived him, knew anything about him.

Lagspa was a rich man, happy to see his wealth grow, and enjoyed his prosperity. But on the other hand he was very distressed because his wife was barren. He had already spent considerable sums of money on offerings to the deities, in gifts to monasteries, and in alms, when a wandering ascetic advised him to go with his wife on a pilgrimage to the most holy place in the world: the Khang Tise,<sup>11</sup> assuring him that this would be an infallible way for him to obtain an heir.

The travelling ascetic had an imposing appearance, he spoke with confidence, and Lagspa was inclined to follow his advice. Nevertheless it is a long way from the Hor Kanze region where he lived to the holy mountain and one has to cross Tibet from one end to the other.

The couple's desire to have a son prevailed, however, over all other considerations regarding the length and difficulty of the journey.

They set out together with three menservants and Nierki, a young slave-servant who was Tchösdon's personal maid.

Motivated by a profound faith, the couple performed the prescribed devotional practices in the temples around the mountain several times over. They also did the tour around the mountain, stopping along the way by the caves which, according to legend, had been visited by some god or inhabited by a holy hermit, hoping that one of them would appear miraculously to announce that their wishes would be granted.

Although the four servants were not asking for a favour of the same magnitude - the three men were fathers and young Nierki was not yet married - their fervour did not lag behind that of their masters. They also burnt incense sticks and lit lamps and spent hours in the holy caves reciting 'Aum mani padme hum!' thousands and thousands of times.

All the required devotional practices having been duly



performed, Lagspa, Tchösdon and their retainers set off on the return journey. They had got about halfway home when Tchösdon announced to her husband that, without a shadow of doubt, the hoped for miracle had happened. She was going to be a mother. The miracle had even been a double one because soon afterwards Nierki noticed that she too was pregnant.

The enlargement of Tchösdon's belly was due to natural causes but her servant's was shrouded in mystery. The three menservants were honest and reliable and denied flatly having had anything to do with Nierki, and she confirmed what they said.

Under cross-examination by her masters, she told an amazing story. She had fallen asleep one night in one of the caves whilst reciting 'mani'<sup>12</sup> The contact of hands touching her had woken her up and she had seen, lying beside her, the Grand God of the Khang Tise. He was almost naked, a tiger skin around his waist, his face was a spale as the moon, and a necklace of thick roudrach<sup>13</sup> beads hung over his chest. She was paralysed by a mixture of awe and terror. Even had she wanted to, she would not have been able to scream or try to run away. Who would think of resisting a god?

Lagspa was devout, reasonably credulous and he would have readily believed that a god in a golden halo might have appeared to his wife or to himself in order to graciously announce that through his power their union was going to be blessed. But that a god should have bothered personally to make a virgin girl pregnant seemed to him a suspect miracle. It was true of course that such events were told about in the holy legends, and he preferred not to doubt them, but these miracles had happened a very long time ago and he could hardly believe that they would be repeated nowadays and in connection with his servant.

However the girl had always been well behaved and she seemed to believe sincerely in the story she told. Her account must therefore be true. Only instead of the Grand God of the Kailas whom the Hindus worship, the skeptic and reasonable Lagspa saw one of the followers of this god: one of those yogins who cover their nakedness with a tiger or leopard skin, wear roudrach necklaces and rub ashes on their faces which

makes them 'pale as the moon' and look like their god as he is depicted on the images.

The innocent Nierki had been taken in by one of these lewd pseudo-saints who wander around in cemeteries, eat the flesh of corpses and indulge in the most disgusting practices. Should one tell her? Should one soil her imagination which had remained pure and substitute shame and remorse in lieu of her childish dream? Lagspa was a decent man and thought that would be ill advised. He pretended to accept the story about the supernatural paternity and spoke to his servants about it confidentially, telling them not to let on about this mysterious affair and to say, when they got back home, that Nierki had got married and that her husband had died shortly after their wedding. The three men promised to do as they were told, but thought to themselves that the father of the future baby might well be their master himself who, in his eagerness to have a son, had tried to make doubly sure.

Nierki herself was strictly forbidden ever to mention her night of love with a god. She was also to say that she had been widowed soon after her wedding. But in Lagspa's home and in the neighbourhood everybody would believe, as did the three servants, that the rich master was the father.

Soon after their return home, the two women went into labour within a few days of each other and each one gave birth to a son. Lagspa chose the name Garab ('perfect joy' or 'perfectly happy') for the son of his servant as a good omen, thinking that it might bring luck to the poor little fatherless child.

There were no remarkable events in Garab's childhood. Being of the same age as his master's son he was at first his playmate and later on to some extent his fellow student when Lagspa hired a chaplain<sup>14</sup> to be a tutor to the boys as well as performing his religious functions.

Garab learnt to read, write and keep accounts much more quickly than his co-disciple. He was superior in every respect: in looks, strength and skill, as well as in intelligence, and Lagspa, in spite of his natural kindness and the concern which he had for the fatherless child, ended up by taking umbrage - this slave's son was eclipsing his heir! He stopped his

lessons and sent him to work in the fields. But by this time Garab had already learnt all that his master could teach, which was not a great deal.

From an early age Garab had also manifested violent tendencies and shown himself opinionated and fiercely proud, which did not become the son of a slave, a slave himself. While his slavery was a mild one, he belonged nevertheless to a master who could do with him as he pleased. (But his master does not have the right to sell him. The slave and his descendants remain with the family to whom they belong.)

He had questioned his mother several times about his father and she had obediently repeated what she had been told to say: that she had been widowed. As he grew up, however, he overheard certain remarks concerning himself which agreed with the particular kindness which Lagspa was showing towards him and he questioned Nierki again, cross-examining her harshly.

'You are not a widow, that's a lie. Lagspa is my father, isn't he? And so if you are his second wife (polygamy is allowed and legal in Tibet) and I his son, why are we living in the servants' quarters instead of living in his house together with his first wife and my brother?'

Poor Nierki was alarmed by the boldness of the boy and could not keep quiet any longer. She told him about the marvellous adventure which had happened to her at the foot of the sacred mountain. No, he was not the son of the owner and had no right to live in his house, but his father greatly surpassed the rich Lagspa in nobility and power. His father was the Grand God of the Kailas.

From this tale which was told through tears, Garab noted only one thing: he was not the owner's son. As for being the son of a god, the idea was ridiculous. He thought his mother must have been a little mad.

Garab was just eighteen when his mother died. The day after the funeral he went up to his master's room and questioned him straight away:

'Am I your son as everybody suspects? If it is so, it would be honest to tell me, don't you think? And to accord me the position of a son or to help me to establish myself elsewhere

in a befitting manner. I have no wish to remain a servant.'

The harsh tone of the boy displeased Lagspa. 'You are not my son and I owe you nothing,' he replied coldly. 'Did your mother tell you that she had been my mistress?'

'No. She told me an absurd story about a god.'

'That story was real and a fact to her. You would be sinning against her memory if you formed a bad opinion about her.'

He then told him the whole story about the pilgrimage to the Khang Tise and conveyed his personal opinion as to what kind of man had fathered him.

'And now that you have been told about your origins, remember that I have always treated you well. I would like to continue to do so but you must also remember that your mother was not a free woman. She belonged to my house just as her parents had belonged to my parents and you also belong to me. So don't get crazy ideas into your head. It is not up to you to go elsewhere or to establish yourself. You will stay here and perform the tasks which are given to you with a good heart. You will not go hungry, you will be dressed in a befitting way, and you will be assured of a shelter in your old age.'

When the master had finished he remained silent and Garab left the room without a word of salute.

Decidely, I shall have to talk to him, thought Lagspa when he had gone. The boy is becoming insolent. He will have to be taken down a peg, a light beating, administered in public, might be indicated. I shall think about it tomorrow.

But the next morning when he woke up Lagspa found a terse note stuck to his bedroom door.

'Uncle <sup>15</sup> Lagspa,' Garab had written, 'my ideas are too different from yours for me to carry on living under your roof. Work merits a wage. My mother has served you all her life and I gather from you that her parents had done likewise for your parents. As for myself, I have been of service to you on a number of occasions. You will therefore no doubt agree that it is only fair that I should recompense myself, although very modestly, for the labour of my family since your father and you omitted to do so.'

Garab had left during the night on his master's best horse with two large saddlebags full of provisions.

When the sun rose, the fugitive was already far away. The day promised to be fine and hot, the air was brisk, and Garab experienced a powerful feeling of joy which he had never known before. He was free! There was an end to all those tedious tasks, an end to submission and to being the tool of somebody else's will! Garab inhaled the fresh air of the high regions, he filled his lungs with it and was intoxicated by it and cast the look of a conqueror over the surrounding countryside.

For the moment he had no goal, he had not made any plan. His flight, although it had been conceived in the dark depths of his subconscious a long time ago, had been made on the spur of the moment, and not having thought anything out he remained undecided as to what course to take.

Throughout the night his only concern had been to get as far away from Lagspa's house as possible. He still had to get away but the direction in which he went was his choice.

Garab tried to figure out what would be going on in Lagspa's mind. He would certainly assume that the son of his deceased slave was penniless and would therefore try to sell the valuable horse which he had taken at the earliest opportunity. And, in order to get the best possible price and to be beyond his master's reach, he would have to make for one of the large Chinese trading centres. Garab used to mix with the Chinese soldiers stationed in the region and had learnt enough of their language from them to get by without an interpreter in any situation which did not require a large vocabulary. Lagspa was aware of this and Garab reasoned therefore that he would have inquiries made along the highway to Dartsido.<sup>16</sup> He would therefore avoid this direction. Having decided on this he took the first path which led northwards through forests.

Garab had indeed no money, but the contents of the large saddlebags which he had stuffed full with dried meat, tsampa, butter and tea would keep him going for several weeks. He had plenty of time and it was better to use the horse to get further away than to sell it in a hurry.

Several days went by and Garab was riding through the mountains, enjoying the new feeling of complete freedom to the full. In the clearings and desert pastures where he rested,

the grass was plentiful at this time of year and his horse found plenty to eat there.

This horse, a magnificent black creature, was only four years old. It had been born at Lagspa's. When Nagpo (that was the name of the horse) was only a playful foal and Garab an unruly lad, the two had often frolicked together in the fields. Garab was not sentimental but he felt a vague need to love and to be loved which he had not been able to satisfy with any of the people around him. His mother had been a simple and timid person with a limited horizon. She had certainly loved him but she had never shown him much affection either in deed or word, something the boy had a deep need for without being consciously aware of it. Lagspa had been a kind master, but reserved, and his son a somewhat selfish playmate. Nagpo, who used to come up to him neighing and rubbing his nose against Garab's chest, had given him a warmer and more lively feeling of affection which had struck chords deep inside him that the others had never been able to reach. A kind of bond had thus developed between the boy and the colt and the solitude strengthened this friendship between the runaway servant and the horse he had stolen. To sell Nagpo! Garab began to get a painful feeling when he thought about it. Sometimes, waking up during the night, he would go and put his arms around the horse's head, embracing his companion who was tethered nearby in some thicket which was concealing the pair of them.

And yet, what could he do, once he ran out of food? One can't very well beg alms riding an expensive horse. And where did the path he was following lead to? Since he had left the main highway he had seen only two tiny hamlets and had avoided them by cutting through the forest.

Right from the start he had rejected the idea of becoming a servant again. From the sale of Nagpo he would get enough money to engage in a little business of his own or to go into partnership with an established merchant. But his mind was made up. The decision that he would not sell Nagpo became more and more final. So what could he do?

These thoughts cast a shadow over his happiness as he continued riding without a specific destination. Garab was crossing a bare mountain region when he noticed in the

distance a group of six men on horseback who were armed and travelling without baggage. They were coming towards him. There was little doubt: they were robbers. The countryside offered no shelter where he could have hidden. In any case he had been seen and the bandits were hurrying towards him. Garab stopped his horse.

A sudden idea flashed into his head. He saw in the men who were riding towards him his destiny, coming to claim him.

He waited for them, his heart beating violently, but outwardly calm, astride his mount with a slightly haughty smile playing about his mouth.

'Dismount! Hand over your horse and don't try to hide your money!' shouted the robbers as they came up to him.

Garab's smile was defiant.

'My horse would be more useful to you with me riding it,' he replied. 'I have no money but I expect to have some before long. Do you understand, comrades?' and looking all six of them over he added, 'I was looking for you.'

The bandits were stupefied. Who was this extraordinary traveller?

'Where do you come from?'

'Amongst "braves" one does not ask questions,' replied Garab calmly.

'Does this horse belong to you?'

'Just like yours belong to you, seeing that you are riding them.'

'Did you steal it?'

'Let us say earned, or borrowed, whichever you prefer.'

The ruffians burst out laughing. 'You seem to have a sense of humour,' said the one who seemed to be their leader. 'And did you say you were looking for us?'

'I just told you I want to make my fortune. I am looking for bold companions. I don't know yet whether you fit the bill.'

'You are tall and strong but you are very young. Have you already taken part in raids?'

'You can judge that for yourselves when you see me at work.'

'What! ... you want to join our band ... a complete stranger!'

‘We can get to know one another and talk business. I have some very fine tea. Let us light a fire, sit down and drink some tea. It will no doubt bring us inspiration.’

The brigands were overwhelmed by this calm boldness. They assumed that this traveller had been a member of some band operating in another region which had broken up after a defeat or for other reasons. He was hale and hearty and made of the stuff that highwaymen are made of.

In the subsequent conversation Garab succeeded in creating a favourable impression whilst carefully evading all questions regarding his personal background and adventures. The men he had encountered were common marauders. Their limited intelligence was no match for Garab’s. In the end they invited him to join them.

Garab accepted. It meant he could keep Nagpo and whilst waiting for an opportunity to start to ‘earn’ or ‘borrow’ his fortune, one of the robbers offered to put him up at his home in a mountain village.

The brigands had made their decision about Garab so quickly because they were thinking of attacking a convoy which was due to pass along their route six or seven days hence. The business at hand seemed rather risky. The merchants and their servants would be many and well armed, and the band, six members of which had taken Garab on, consisted of only eleven men altogether. A twelfth companion, especially one as brave and resolute as the stranger seemed to be, would be a useful reinforcement.

A few days later, Garab made a brilliant debut in a career which, while it might not have been chosen deliberately, had been accepted without qualm or regret and with a light heart, indeed almost gladly. Very soon he was to take a liking to this dangerous profession and distinguish himself in it.

Three successful raids in which he took part provided him with a little capital and he took his leave of his first companions at arms on a friendly basis. Although they had never suspected his real identity he preferred to get further away from the country where he had spent his childhood. Large and well-armed bands were operating at that time in the region around the sources of the Yellow River. Garab went in that direction.



He succeeded in overcoming the suspicions of the farmer-bandits of that country and established himself amongst them.

For three years he operated in the northern Tibetan desert regions through which rich caravans of Mongolian pilgrims and Chinese merchants used to travel at that time. His courage and his skill made him stand out. His fortune increased; he had his own tents in the encampment and his herds were grazing on the plains.

And then one day, the bandits, who were generally successful, ran into fiercer resistance than they had bargained for. Unknown to them two caravans had joined together for the crossing of the dangerous region. There were some good shots amongst the travellers: four bandits were killed, others injured and their chief knocked from his horse, struck by a fatal bullet. His fall came after the already serious losses and threw the bandits into panic and confusion.

They beat a hasty retreat when Garab, catching up with the fleeing men and overtaking them, barred their way. With violent gestures he pointed out to them the booty which they were giving up, rekindled their greed, hurling abuse at them and deriding their cowardice he stirred their blood, and finally rallied them in full fighting spirit back into battle.

This time the members of the caravan could not withstand the impact of this demoniac horde. The bandits won the victory and the booty.

The following day, after having held council, the men unanimously chose Garab to succeed their chief who had been killed in the battle.



## *Chapter Three*

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**L**hassa lies on a plain at the foot of the Potala which raises the steep mass of the palace-fortress covered with golden roofs towards the clouds.

No Tibetan traveller enters the Holy City without a deep feeling of respectful awe. This mysterious and hidden city, which has remained inviolate under the protection of the highest mountains in the world, is to millions of Asians what Rome, Jerusalem or Mecca are to the mystics of other races. And even more than that. While the character of other holy cities is due to historical events, that of Lhassa is due to occult reasons. This 'land of the Gods'<sup>1</sup> is bathed in a special atmosphere and borders on a world which is different from the one that we perceive without ordinary senses. From the bare mountains which surround the vast valley in which the low white houses appear like a crowd kneeling in prayer, strange airs waft down and hang about, transforming beings and objects insidiously, penetrating them, and suffusing them with a new spirit or quality, for periods of days, or of centuries. Lhassa is not just a place where miracles happen: Lhassa is a miracle.

Garab and his companions entered Lhassa and came immediately under its spell, and in the way one puts on new clothes they put on new personalities. Nothing remained of the rough bandits who strip their victims. The men who went in search of lodging through the streets of the Tibetan capital were now serious and respectable merchants moved by piety.

Except at the time of the major festivals during the first months of the year,<sup>2</sup> lodgings are plentiful in Lhassa and when well-dressed people arrive riding fine horses and carrying bales of merchandise, offers from innkeepers at the service of such clients are plentiful. Garab and his men were soon settled on the outskirts of the town in a house with a large courtyard and big stables. As a precaution, those of his men who were acting as servants would stay in a building next to the stables. These knights of the road did not intend to give the local thieves the slightest chance to steal the animals which they had acquired. Some others who, because of their good appearance, had been chosen to act the superior roles of associates of the merchant, accountants and secretaries would have a large room together

on the first floor of the house, and the principal 'merchant', Garab, with his 'wife' would occupy a separate room.

The day after their arrival they all rested. Garab ordered a large meal from a restaurant with as much liquor as was necessary to create a happy atmosphere but not enough to befuddle the senses of his companions. It was necessary to be on one's guard; one careless remark, made in a state of intoxication, could have disastrous consequences. Since he had been in charge of them, Garab had acquired considerable influence over his men. They recognised his superior intelligence and experience had shown them that obedience to his orders, which always had a sound basis, was profitable for them as well as ensuring their safety. And Garab had decided that at Lhasa they would all be temperate, without excessive austerity. Nobody was to swagger around the town at night, the 'servants' would mount guard on their possessions, and furthermore they were all to behave piously without overdoing it in a manner that might attract attention, and to conduct themselves in a proper way, befitting honest and prosperous business people.

News travels fast in Lhasa where the people are garrulous. The arrival of a rich merchant is soon known, and Garab and his men had only been one day in town when, on the following morning, a cacophony of discordant voices started up outside their door and greeted them while they were having their breakfast. They were the *rogyapas* who, in accordance with an old custom had come to claim the tax which they levy from all travellers of any consequence that enter Lhasa.<sup>3</sup>

These *rogyapas* form a special caste which is considered impure. They are not allowed to live in the town itself or to enter the houses of honourable citizens. Their main function is the removal of animal carcasses and the dead bodies of humans to the place where they are cut into pieces and fed to the vultures. The impudence of the members of this fraternity, which has now been somewhat brought under control, was at one time boundless. The travellers who refused to yield to their demands found themselves pursued by gangs of these coarse individuals and insulted or even assaulted and manhandled by

them every time they appeared in the streets, and were thus forced either to give in to their demands or leave the town.

Garab was well informed on this subject and hastened to send an amount of money to these extortionists which would satisfy them without attracting attention to himself through excessive generosity. The clamour stopped immediately and the *rogyapas* withdrew.

In the course of the same morning, the 'secretary' began the necessary proceedings for obtaining an audience with the Dalai Lama.

When a very large party of pilgrims arrives in Lhasa, it is usual for the Lama King to receive them in solemn audience. Sitting cross-legged on a high throne, he is surrounded by his court: the members of his council, the *shapeys*<sup>4</sup> sitting on carpets; the other dignitaries, household staff, bodyguards and servants remain standing.

Very often a more or less large number of the faithful unite in order to gather by subscription the required sum for obtaining such an audience. Nobody is admitted free at these receptions. The request for the audience is made in the name of the one who has contributed the largest amount, and he can then bring along as many relatives, friends and even strangers as he likes. It often happens that poor pilgrims are allowed to join the audience simply by slipping the head of the group a small sum of money.

The offering is in this case placed in a single lot at the foot of the throne by the principal donor at the head of the procession. The others follow him in single file, each one stopping for a brief moment, hands pressed together and head bowed, before the Dalai Lama while he touches their head with a kind of feather duster which consists of a handle and a bunch of multicoloured ribbons.

They say that the beneficial aura which emanates from the Dalai Lama flows through the stem which he holds in his hand and then through the ribbons which are attached to it in such a way as to enter the person who is touched by them.

The ceremony is the same for pilgrims who bring individual presents of greater value. In this case each one deposits his offering before the throne and the secretaries and accountants

on duty immediately record the money and objects which have been donated.

There is yet another kind of audience, less pompous but more exclusive, which is reserved for important people and donors of exceptional generosity. In Tibetan this audience is known as *zimetchung*, which means 'chamber', because the visitors are received in the private apartment of the Dalai Lama.<sup>5</sup>

Garab, out of prudence as well as vanity, applied for the favour of an audience of this kind. He was fearful of mingling with a crowd which might contain people who knew one of them. They might even come across a member of one of the caravans they had attacked. The private audience presented no such risk, it took place in an intimate kind of atmosphere. The Dalai Lama would only have two or three members of his entourage around him and it was quite certain that neither they nor the Dalai Lama himself had ever seen Garab or any of his men. And furthermore the pride of the bandit chief, the son of an unknown father and a slave-servant, found a certain satisfaction in this reception which was more exclusive than the march-past of the common faithful.

The man to whom Garab had given the title of secretary was a clever chap with a rudimentary education which enabled him to read and write a few words when the need arose. Before the under-chamberlain whose duty it was to deal with requests for private audiences, he skilfully passed over the question of the identity of his master: a wealthy merchant, established near the Chinese border, he said, and began immediately to enumerate the presents he intended to offer in token of his veneration of the Precious Protector in order to obtain his benediction for himself and his employees who were present at Lhasa, as well as for those who had remained at the seat of his business.

Just as one does not present oneself empty-handed before a grand lama, one can't approach their chamberlains without suitable presents either, and in order to get through as far as a chamberlain it is equally indispensable to show oneself generous towards their underlings of various ranks. The 'secretary' was well acquainted with this custom and satisfied it liberally, and thus he did not encounter any difficulties in accomplishing

his mission. The date of the audience was fixed for eight days hence: an auspicious date, the 15th of the lunar month, the day of the full moon.

In the meantime, Garab and his men dealt with the sale of their booty, keeping only their mounts and enough mules to carry their baggage during their return journey. The rogues were lucky in their dealings and got rid of their stock at prices which would have been favourable even for real merchants who had paid for what they were selling. The benediction of the Dalai Lama was working in advance.

On the appointed day, Garab and his men performed what they considered exceptional toilet preparations. They washed their hands and their faces and put on the best clothes which they had taken from the pilgrims. Some of them put an earring on their right ear, others put a large jade ring onto their index finger. Finally when the hour came they were all full of the gravity of their action and departed for Norbouling, the usual residence of the Dalai Lama,<sup>6</sup> which is outside the town and surrounded by gardens.

Detchema, dressed in a peacock blue brocade robe and wearing all the jewellery which Garab had kept as her part of the booty, rode with her eyes lowered modestly and demurely beside her 'husband'.

At Norbouling the party of scoundrels waited in a corner of the gardens for a long time before being brought into the presence of the Dalai Lama. The pious frame of mind of the visitors suffered as a result and dissipated little by little, giving way to a feeling of apprehensiveness.

They were in the lion's den. The Precious Protector, the Omniscient One<sup>7</sup> could, at the slightest suspicion that they were impostors, have them tortured and executed. As well as being the incarnation of the more than divine Chenresigs, whose compassion is infinite, he is also the absolute temporal ruler of Tibet.

Garab sensed fear gaining a hold on his companions. If under its influence one of them forgot himself, he could give them all away and they would be lost.

'We are being kept waiting a very long time,' remarked one of his men.



Pretending through gestures that they were discussing points of etiquette, the chief assembled his men around him and said in a low but firm voice:

‘The Omniscient One cannot possibly suspect who we are, nor where these presents came from. And he will never know.’

Wisdom spoke from Garab’s lips. Clearly, all necessary precautions had been taken.

‘We should think about the merit that we are going to acquire,’ suggested the ‘secretary’. A fresh wave of religious sentiment passed reassuringly through their worried minds. All was well; the Omniscient One would never know.

The absurdity of this ignorance of the ‘omniscient one’ whom they were about to dupe whilst venerating him did not strike any of the brigands. Just as for most of their compatriots, this term of ‘omniscient one’ had lost its proper meaning and had become an ordinary honorary title, like majesty. What Garab had said is repeated daily by Tibetans regarding the abuse of powers by the authorities and the other evils from which they suffer: ‘The Omniscient One does not know’!

And indeed the ‘Omniscient One’ did not know, or if he did he did not let on about it because of his incomparable compassion for the sinners prostrated at his feet. He accepted the pieces of Chinese silk, the turquoises, the ingots of silver, the rifles, saddles, carpets and the large mules which were led into view from where he was sitting.

Someone who gave such munificent gifts deserved more than the mere touching with the lama’s feather duster. The Dalai Lama decided to speak to him. To his questions, Garab replied ambiguously with his head bowed. He said the seat of his business was in Sinkaitze,<sup>8</sup> a place too far away for its name to be familiar to the Dalai Lama or those around him. As for his business, he said that he bought various articles here and there, depending on the circumstances, and then sold them at a profit.

Garab explained these things in a soft and timid voice, suggesting the innocence of a pure heart.

‘Be blessed, my son,’ pronounced the Dalai Lama, ‘you, your wife, your servants who are here and those who have remained at home. May you enjoy a long life, free from sickness, and may your business prosper more and more.’

The procession of their small party of only 23 began. The ribbons of the feather duster touched the head of each one in turn. The audience was over. The 'Omniscient One' had suspected nothing. He had wished them a long life and success in their 'business'. They could now look forward to splendid expeditions and unprecedented booty!

\* \* \* \* \*

The sensual frenzy of Garab and Detchema had not declined in the course of their journey. Nevertheless, the heavy mystical atmosphere in which they had been immersed at Lhasa had temporarily had the same effect upon them as on their companions. The audience with the Dalai Lama marked the end of this lull. When they got back to their inn, the two lovers seemed to wake from a dream: an exchange of looks between them was enough and their passions flared up more violently than before.

\* \* \* \* \*

During their journey to Lhasa the thought of returning had never clearly entered their minds. They had lived totally absorbed in the sensations of the flesh, being concerned with nothing beyond the memory of their sensations of the night before and the anticipation of the ones their next stop would bring. But during the night which followed the audience at Norboulung the thought of their departure, which had been fixed for the second day hence, arose abruptly before them.

They were going to retrace their steps, travelling back towards Garab's tents, his rustic abode. Both of them had feared taking their marvellous love adventure there, and that same apprehension again arose in their minds. The life in the encampment would necessarily break the continuous intimacy which had been the source of their pleasure. The management of the herds, business affairs and the expeditions in which a woman could not take part would occupy the time of the young chief. They would be separated for hours, days or weeks at a time. Absence would do its work and slowly erode the ecstasy of their burning desire. Why did their travels have to end and thus herald the end of the happiest days of their lives!

Dawn found them in each other's arms, pensive and a little sad. Throughout the long return journey which lay before them they would see nothing but the hateful end ahead of them.

During this last day of their stay at Lhasa, Garab had several things to attend to as well as supervising the preparations for their departure. The night before he had ordered his breakfast to be brought in at daybreak and one of his men entered the room carrying a large pot of buttered tea.

'Chief,' said the man, 'we will have to buy tsampa (barley flour) and butter. Last night after you had gone to bed three pilgrims came by begging alms for their journey to the Khang Tise. Tsöndu thought it would be the right thing to do to give them a large quantity of provisions. These alms will bring us good fortune on our return journey. You won't blame Tsöndu for this, will you?'

'He did right,' declared Garab. 'Go and buy what is necessary to replenish our sacks of provisions. You will put it all on my personal account but the merit will be shared by all of us.'

'That was well spoken,' said the man, with satisfaction. 'I will go and tell Tsöndu.' And with that he left the room.

'Is the Khang Tise far from here?' asked Detchema. 'Have you been there?'

'I have not been there,' answered Garab, 'but according to what my mother told me that is where my present existence began.'

'How so?' asked Detchema with curiosity. Her lover did not reply. He was thinking. The strange story about his divine father which his mother had told him and the more prosaic but also more plausible version which his ex-master Lagspa had put forward came back into his mind. Whatever his origin was, it was at the Khang Tise that he had been conceived, and suddenly the connection between himself and the sacred mountain struck his mind. He began to feel a desire to see the place where, through circumstances which he could never really know, that which had become Garab had begun its existence in this world - Garab, the rich owner of herds and bandit chief. The thoughts followed one another forming a rapid train in his mind. To see the Khang Tise would

necessitate a long journey, a very long one, lasting several months. There was nothing to stop him from going on a pilgrimage to the Khang Tise with Detchema. Why should he resign himself to their happiness shortly coming to an end when there was a plausible reason which gave him the means to prolong it?

‘I have to go out right now,’ he said to the young woman. ‘I have business to attend to. I will see you soon, my beloved.’ He embraced her and left abruptly.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Tibet nobody undertakes anything of any consequence without consulting a seer. Garab had gone in search of such a one in order to find out whether he ought to follow his impulse and change his travel plans.

Soon afterwards, Detchema also went out in her turn in order to find a fortune teller who would reveal what the future had in store for her in the country to which her lover was taking her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Garab went directly to the temple of the *Jowo*<sup>9</sup>. He prostrated himself before the statue of the Lord, laid a long white silk scarf before it, and begged to be enlightened as to the path he should choose in order to avoid any mishaps in the course of his journey.

The sacristans were already busy filling the offering bowls on the altars with fresh water. Garab approached one of them, paid him the price for having one hundred and eight little lamps lit before the *Jowo*, and explained to him that he was a merchant, about to return to his home country, and required a *mo* (oracle) to be done for him to find out whether the date fixed for his departure was auspicious. The sacristan saw a well-dressed man of good appearance before him and assumed that he could afford to pay a substantial fee. He therefore advised him to go to a very famous seer Lama who lived at the Monastery of Rites (*gyud*).

As it was too early in the morning to request to be admitted into the presence of this personage, Garab attended first of all

to the business which he had to conclude with the merchants, and when the hour seemed appropriate, he went to the monastery of rites. Having given generously to the underlings to whom he had to apply in the first instance, they received him well and passed his request on to their master with a favourable report. Garab was soon admitted into the presence of the lama.

The bandit had approached the 'Omniscient One' at Norboulung without undue worry, and being preoccupied with the idea of a pilgrimage to the Khang Tise, he was only concerned with finding out whether the circumstances were favourable for the successful accomplishment of this journey or whether it would be better to desist. The idea that his dealings with a seer could be dangerous had not occurred to him. But when he entered the dimly lit room of the lama and saw the latter fix his gaze upon him and felt at the same time the eyes of all the wonderworking saints, all the terrifying deities and all the subjugated demons whose images decorated the walls of the chamber, looking at him, Garab was suddenly gripped by terror. Was he not giving himself up foolishly? Flight was impossible. The only thing left to him was to brazen it out. With an effort of will the bandit took hold of himself and formulated his question.

He said that the business which had brought him to Lhasa being finished, he was about to return to his homeland when the desire had come to him to change his plans and go on a pilgrimage to the holy mountain, the Khang Tise. Should he follow this desire, or would it be better not to yield to it.

Was the seer listening? Garab only felt the lama's gaze upon him which seemed to penetrate to the depths of his being.

The silence continued and Garab stiffened to stop himself screaming in terror. At last the lama spoke:

'I don't need to ask any questions or to consult books of oracles on your behalf,' he said. 'I can clearly see your turbulent past around you. It is heavy with causes which are having effects over which you have no control. These, not your own desire, are attracting you to the Khang Tise. Go there if you think that you want to. Like a thin, fine thread I can see the link which still exists between you and your country of origin. A puff of wind would be enough to break it. Around you the

tempest is rising. You have caused suffering, you will suffer.'

The audience was over. The lama beckoned his visitor to him.

'Take your money back,' he said.

This was the offering which Garab had given, together with a white scarf, to the servant of the seer. In accordance with the custom, this man had laid it and the scarf on a table in front of the divan upon which his master was sitting.

In such a case, the refusal to accept the offering is tantamount to a malediction by the lama.

Terrified, Garab prostrated himself, unable to utter a word.

'Get up,' said the seer. 'You will give this money to the poor, I shall keep the scarf.'

His voice was gentle and calm. If he refused the money, he was nevertheless accepting the scarf offered with it. The gift was not entirely rejected. Garab had not been cursed.

Once outside the monastery, the bandit threw the coins to the beggars who were passing along the road. All his joy had collapsed. He had no doubt that the seer had seen through him. He had spared him a curse, but he had predicted misfortune. What form would the misfortune take? Garab could not imagine. The terror which he had experienced when he had felt himself 'found out' had clouded his mind. The words of the oracle were reverberating through his head and he could not make any proper sense of them - he was drawn to the Khang Tise ... the bond which linked him with the Khang Tise was in danger of being broken. Garab did not want it to break. Perhaps the merit attached to a pilgrimage to the Khang Tise would avert the danger which threatened him. Perhaps it would be a means of appeasing the storm which was rising around him before it could reach him... Garab tried to pin his hopes on this idea.

The young chief suddenly felt terribly weary and broken in spirit. In the anxious confusion of his mind one thing appeared to be certain: his happy days as a victorious brigand were over.

He would go to the Khang Tise, following the inclination which was driving him there and which he had believed to be his desire. If the pilgrimage only delayed the menacing storm, if it only gave him a respite, it would no doubt enable him to

keep Detchema to himself longer, and that was the only thing which mattered.

\* \* \* \* \*

Detchema, who wanted to know what the future held for her in Garab's homeland, simply asked the innkeeper's wife to recommend a fortune teller, and was sent to a *mopa* whose large clientele came mainly from the lay middle class of the Lhassapas.

When the young woman was brought into his presence, she offered a scarf and some money and was at once asked to be silent, to formulate the question she wanted to ask in her mind, and to concentrate her mind firmly upon it without allowing herself to be distracted by any other thought.

Detchema was sitting opposite the divan on which the fortune teller was squatting. A narrow table stood between them. She did as she had been told to do.

...What will become of my love affair? she thought. What should I expect of the future?...

After some time the fortune teller chanted something and took three little dice out of a bag dangling from a thick book which was blackish from long use. He shook them in his hand before throwing them onto the table, intoned another prayer, and then looked up in the book the number which the dice had shown.

It just gave the words 'laugther of fury - abyss'. The fortune teller read them slowly in a grave tone of voice, and dismissed his client without saing anything further.

Detchema found herself back in the street, dumbfounded and without realising exactly how she had got out of the fortune teller's house. As she began to regain her mental faculties she tried somehow to find feasible interpretations for this cryptic reply. She could not find one, but however veiled the oracle was, its character was clearly menacing.

Whose anger did she have to fear and what was this abyss?

Detchema went to the temple of the Jowo, where Garab had been in the morning, and as she was walking along a sudden illumination came to her: she thought she understood the meaning of the strange oracle.

It described the outcome of her love affair and this outcome was hell. Without any doubt it was hell. The 'laughter' was the spiteful sneers of the demoniac beings welcoming her arrival. The 'abyss' was the bottomless pit which leads to the lower worlds, into which she would fall and where she would suffer the torment of the damned for perhaps thousands of years before dying there and being reborn (the lamaists do not believe in everlasting suffering) into a better world.

This terrifying prospect was clearly before her mind's eye and she also understood the underlying causes. She realised that her crime was not her love of Garab. The crime for which she was going to be punished was her selfishness through which she had abandoned her benefactors to a miserable fate in order to live out the love-dream which had haunted her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Orphaned at the age of three, Detchema had been brought up by her paternal grandparents. As her father had been their only child, they had showered all their affection upon her. They were well-to-do farmers and had given her a happy childhood. Then her grandfather became ill and was unable to work the fields for several years. Little by little the family ran into debt. When the farmer recovered from his illness his strength was nevertheless depleted by the long sickness and he was not able to put enough work into the farm to get it out of debt. One field after another had to be sold and the old couple went rapidly towards destitution.

And then, one day when she had gone with some friends to a monastery to take part in a religious play, the son of the governor of the province noticed Detchema. He was struck by the young girl's exceptional beauty and decided to make her his wife without giving the matter any further thought. When he informed his father of his intention, the latter raised no objections. Detchema's family was respectable and her grandparents would not exact as much bride money<sup>10</sup> as an official of a rank similar to his own would demand in return for giving his daughter. It would fulfil the young man's desire, it was perfectly respectable, and it would save money. The governor sent one of his brothers (it is the custom to make requests for



marriage through a relative or friend as intermediary) to the old farmer and the conditions of the marriage were soon settled. The debts of the grandparents would be settled in full, and the governor would appoint a reliable man to manage the farm. The buildings which had been neglected for some years would be repaired and put in good order. The old couple would remain in their home, would no longer have to work, and would receive the produce of what remained of their estate as well as an allowance which would enable them to live comfortably.

The two old people congratulated themselves on their luck, which had come like a reward, they thought, for the affectionate care which they had bestowed on the little orphan. For her, too, this marriage with the son of a high official and into a noble and rich family was an unexpected piece of good fortune. It had, of course, not occurred to these good people to consult Detchema to find out whether she shared their view regarding this marriage. It is not customary in Tibet to do so. They simply announced to Detchema that she was to have the honour of becoming the daughter-in-law of the governor and that she would live in luxury - certain that she would be even more pleased about it than they were themselves.

But Detchema had not been pleased. Since childhood the young girl had been given to day-dreaming like the men of her village were given to drink, in order to indulge in pleasant sensations. Little inclined towards physical activity, she used to spend a large portion of her time visualising romantic stories in which she was the heroine.

The details of these stories arose in her head spontaneously and simultaneously excited and satisfied her thirst for emotional experience. Under the influence of her precocious sensuality, love soon became the sole theme of these stories. The image of an exceptional lover - handsome, bold and passionate - began to haunt Detchem's mind. Gradually the force of this obsession gathered momentum, the appearance of the hero became well defined and did not change any more; he had acquired a definite personality.

Unconsciously, Detchema was practicing, in her own way, an exercise similar to the one which the occult masters give to

their disciples in order to lead them to the discovery that the entire world - such as they perceive it - is but a creation of the mind. Through a continued concentration of her thoughts, she was creating a phantom<sup>11</sup>. Little by little, the fantastic lover broke through the threshold which divides dream and reality. At times, even without her evoking him, he became almost as visible and tangible as the people around the farm. She heard his voice, felt his arms around her, and would let him carry her away on vertiginous rides.

Detchema was superstitious like all the people of her country. She had heard many stories of apparitions and, like most Tibetans, she did not draw a sharp dividing line between what is 'possible' and 'impossible', between 'this world' and the 'other worlds' which border on it. The belief in the reality of the man who appeared to her took root in her and from then on she lived awaiting his coming.

The happy news which her grandparents brought dumbfounded her. The figure of the hero who occupied all her thoughts rose abruptly between her and her prospective husband. Without thinking about the harm she would inflict upon the good old people who cherished her by leaving them at the point when her marriage would ensure the comfort of their old age, she left the farm whilst they were asleep, and running away through the night she had gone on the mad search for the lover whom she had created.

And she had found him. There are strange mysteries.

\* \* \* \* \*

Prostrating herself again and again before the statue of the Jowo, Detchema realised her ingratitude. She was assailed by remorse. What had become of the good old people who had doted on her so much? Would the governor not have held them responsible for her flight? Instead of the help which they were expecting from him he might have imposed a heavy fine on them, thus ruining them completely.

Detchema was not hard hearted. She regretted the wrong she had done and swore to amend it as best she could. She would give up Garab, because any connection between her very pious grandparents and a bandit chief was impossible. She would

return to her country, she would work, and try to earn enough to maintain the two old people.

This was where her duty lay and also the means of escaping the tortures of hell which she otherwise deserved. As soon as she got back to Garab, she would confess to him her guilty secret about running away from her parental home and she would tell him that she wanted to return.

In tears, Detchema continued her prostrations. Then she paid the sacristan to have some lamps lit on the altar, made the wish that she would find her grandparents in good health and that she would be able to help them in the future, and left the temple.

When Detchema got back to the inn, Garab was still out. He arrived at mealtime and went immediately to eat with his men. Detchema's food was served to her in her room, and she decided to tell him as soon as he got upstairs.

The chief had made up his mind. He was going to go to the Khang Tise with Detchema. All that was necessary was to give his companions a plausible explanation for the abrupt change of plan on the evening before the day fixed for their departure. But in spite of the confusion into which the seer had thrown him, the astute bandit had already thought of that.

'I have unexpected news for you,' he said, to his men as soon as they sat down to eat. 'As is the custom before going on a journey, I went to a seer this morning to find out whether the conditions are favourable. I did not go to any old fortune teller, but consulted a famous lama at the monastery of magic rites. The consultation was expensive, but I was seeking advice which we could take without hesitation. And to my great surprise the seer told me that I should go to the Khang Tise.'

The end of this speech was met with exclamations of surprise, but none of the brigands in any way suspected that the chief might have personal reasons for changing the arrangements which he had made, and that he was therefore changing the meaning of what the seer had told him. These 'seers' who are gifted with special faculties which enable them to see beyond are liable to give the most disconcerting advice. Tibetans are used to hearing apparently incoherent oracles from their lips. The pseudo-merchants assumed that the one whom Garab had consulted must have had very deep reasons for his advice.

‘Do we all have to go to the Khang Tise?’ asked one of them.

‘No,’ replied Garab. ‘The lama’s advice applies only to me. I would be afraid to ignore the words of this wise master in case it attracted misfortune upon our journey. You can go without me. I would like just two of you to accompany me. How would you feel about it, Tsöndu, and you, Goring?’

‘We would be delighted!’ replied the two men together.

‘It’s a unique opportunity for us to visit the most holy of places of pilgrimage,’ said Goring.

The other men felt the same. Some of them envied the luck of their two companions.

‘And your lovely lady, chief?’ ventured Tsöndu jokingly.

They all burst out laughing.

‘We don’t think that Garab would care to entrust her to us,’ said one of those who were going back home.

‘I have no such intention,’ replied Garab, also laughing.

There was general hilarity and some coarse but harmless jokes were made before the chief called for silence in order to carry on with business. Everyone’s share in the money realised from the sale of the booty had already been settled. Only the division of the animals and provisions amongst the travellers returning home and the four pilgrims going to the Khang Tise remained to be settled. But Garab also wanted to leave his men with precise instructions for their conduct during his absence.

‘Until my return,’ he told them, ‘you will be peaceful herdsmen and you will do nothing except look after your animals. You will all return to your tents and you are not to leave them. And in particular: no expeditions. I absolutely forbid it. This last expedition has been exceptionally profitable. It must have attracted a lot of attention to us. These pilgrims were people of rank. They will have raised quite a hue and cry about their misadventure all along the route and when they got back home.

‘In the north, in China, there is a Moslem general who is after us. I have heard about this several times from travellers. He would love to augment his cavalry with our horses and pay his troops liberally with our cattle and our sheep. We must be careful. Let us lie low for a while until the expedition from which we have just reaped such benefit is forgotten.

‘It is even possible that my journey to the Khang Tise will

be useful for our business. Our exploits are becoming too well known. The caravans are making detours in order to avoid passing through our country. This is a nuisance. And there is this threat from the Chinese side: the soldiers of the Moslem general. I don't like all this. Perhaps we could find a new and profitable territory near the Khang Tise or along the routes which lead to it. I shall know better when I have had a chance to study the terrain, and perhaps it is in order to enable me to do this that our guardian deities have shown to the seer that I should undertake this journey.

'Fifty or sixty of us could go and establish ourselves in those regions for two or three years. Pretexts such as pilgrimages or business could easily be found. Who would know where they had gone? One can do profitable work in a few years along routes which are frequented by merchants and rich pilgrims. Do we have brothers in arms there? Would they fight us or would we make an alliance with them which would be to our mutual advantage? All this needs to be investigated.'

A murmur of admiration passed amongst the men. How well their chief had spoken! How intelligent he was! With the help of the gods, the seer might well have discovered where good luck was waiting for them.

Tired of the silence they had to keep whilst Garab was speaking to them in a low voice, so as not to be overheard by the people from the inn, the rascals broke out in loud praise for their chief.

A decision as important as the one he had just taken had to be celebrated with a few bowls of alcohol. One of the bandits opened the door of the room, called a servant, and ordered jugs of liquor.

Having drunk, they busied themselves with dividing the provisions and the camping gear and repacking it in accordance with their new destinations. This work took up several hours and then Garab had to go back into town to make some additional purchases.

The imminence of his departure upon a kind of unpremeditated adventure made him feel excited. All that he had said to his companions had been almost in good faith. The exact meaning of the words of the seer had become distorted in his

mind and, without being fully aware of it, he had mingled them with his own thoughts. Alone, walking through the town, a sense of the reality came back to him: in truth he was going to the Khang Tise in order to prolong this voluptuous affair with Detchema and protect it from anything which might disturb it. This realisation of his true feelings brought back the apprehensions he had had after visiting the seer. Something had finished for him: a period of his life had come to an end and he had forebodings about what lay ahead.

The afternoon went by without Garab finding time to tell Detchema what was in store for her. He knew that she would be happy about it and did not want to shorten the pleasure he would have in seeing her happiness. It was better to wait and tell her the news when they could be together for the whole night.

Detchema was not worried about his long absence. She realised that the chief of a party of some twenty men had a lot to do the day before their departure. She also preferred being alone in order to work out how to go about putting into action the plans which her remorse and her fear of the sufferings of the damned had put into her head.

Her native village was very far from the region where she had met Garab and his band, and in order to get there she would have to cross a vast uninhabited region, through which travellers only ventured in large parties. How would she go about it? Pretending to be unwell, she had given orders that she was not to be disturbed. She would wait for nighttime in order to speak to her lover.

The night came and all became quiet. Garab's men went to bed early in order to be ready to leave at cock-crow. The chief went upstairs to his mistress and when he got there he could no longer maintain the self-restraint which he had imposed upon himself and rushed up to Detchema, took her in his arms and exclaimed, full of joy:

'We are not going home. Tomorrow the two of us are going to leave in order to travel for months and months the way you like it. We are going to the Khang Tise! Tell me that you love me!'

'I ... listen ... I have got to tell you...' babbled Detchema.

But Garab did not hear her. Taking her emotion and her incoherent words as a sign of her delight, he grasped her passionately.

The pale light of the dawn filtered through the thin paper of the window. Detchema had said nothing to Garab about the resolution which she had made the day before and Garab had not mentioned anything about his unease. As a hurricane sweeps away bits of straw lying on a path, so the burst of passion during the night of love had cleared away the feelings of impending misfortune, remorse and even the terror of hell itself from their souls.





PART TWO

# The Harvest

## *Chapter Four*

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**F**or the last eight days Garab and his companions had been camping at the foot of the holy mountain. Under the pretext that after such a long journey they all needed a rest, the chief was in no hurry to accomplish the task which is obligatory to all pilgrims: to make a tour around the mountain, on the summit of which *Mahadeva*, the greatest of the gods, holds his court.

Those who are initiated into the esoteric doctrines of Hindu mysticism conceive this fantastic court as an image of the world, a magical and illusory projection of the thought of the god who is sitting alone in meditation on the inaccessible snowy peak. Others, who have penetrated even deeper into the symbolism of the legend, visualise the light of their own consciousness on top of the radiant summit, endlessly creating, destroying and recreating the universe, with its gods, demons, beings and innumerable forms. They murmur in a low voice the creed of the great Vedanta mystics: 'Siva aham!' - I am Siva, I am the Great God (*Mahadeva*).

But Garab was ignorant of the profound wisdom of India and he had never frequented the sages of his own country. To him, as it had been to his mother, the Khang Tise was the dwelling place of hordes of genies, fairies and demons who were the retainers of a terrifying god residing at the summit, clad in a tiger skin and adorned with a long necklace made from human skulls.

Garab tarried, he did not know why. He seemed to be held by invisible bonds. His days passed wandering around without aim, examining places with an anxious curiosity, as if he was expecting to make some discovery. The mystery surrounding his birth occupied his mind and he looked with interest at the yogins who had come there from Nepal or from the north of India and he scrutinised their ash-covered faces trying to guess their ages, imagining that one of them might be his father.

His father! ... He had hardly thought about him since the day when he had questioned his master, the farmer Lagspa, about him. The vague desire he had felt at Lhasa to see the place where he had been conceived had been only in relation to the physical aspects of the locality. Garab had felt no sympathy for the unknown man who one night had approached a young

servant and taken advantage of her innocence. But now, since his arrival at the foot of the Khang Tise, it seemed as if undefinable memories were arising from within, memories of a past to which he was only linked through the seed which had given him his body.

A strange feeling hung over the simple bandit, and he felt himself drawn towards an unknown goal by a force whose nature he did not understand. He tried in vain to shake off the vague cloud which hung over him. Day by day it became more powerful, driving his love for Detchema into the background. Several times she had asked him if they could move on. She thought that the air of the place was unhealthy, she had been sleeping badly and waking up exhausted.

Three paths are available to the pilgrim for travelling around the mountain. The lower path, which is relatively easy to traverse, the middle one which is more difficult, and the highest of the three, which scales steep precipices upon which only surefooted mountaineers dare to venture. The merit acquired by the faithful is proportional to the fatigue and difficulties they brave. The blessings attached to the accomplishment of the highest path are of a much higher order than those which accrue to the common devotee who contents himself with walking around the foot of the mountain. (Detchema's religious ambition did not go beyond this minimum of merit.)

However, in spite of her repeated urging, Garab, who was normally eager to satisfy his mistress's every wish, would not give a definite answer about their departure. First thing in the morning he would wander off, nobody knew where. His men assumed that he was performing secret religious rites in order to bring good luck to their future raids. As they had replenished their provisions several times along the way, they had plenty of food, and when a Tibetan has enough to eat it is rare that he worries about anything else. Detchema's impatience therefore found no support from her travel companions.

A certain physical lassitude following several months of passionate love making, or perhaps the peculiar state of mind he was in, had caused Garab to discontinue the physical relationship with his mistress. Frequently he would stay awake

during the night, not knowing why, stirred by a powerful restlessness.

One night, as he lay awake in the dark, he vaguely noticed Detchema moving under her bed covers. She appeared to be struggling or fighting. Her movements lasted only a few moments and then she sighed and went back to sleep. A bad dream, thought Garab. Two days went by and the same thing happened again, but this time the struggle was longer and more violent. She cried out.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Garab, moving closer to her and taking her hand. ‘Are you ill?’

‘Why don’t you defend me?’ babbled Detchema, only half awake. ‘Were you asleep? Did you see him go?’

‘Who?’

Detchema came fully to her senses. ‘What did I say?’ she asked, in an uneasy tone of voice.

Garab realised that she was not answering frankly.

‘You screamed,’ he said quietly, ‘and then you muttered something unintelligible. Are you not well? ... Perhaps you have indigestion or you slept in a bad position.’

‘Yes, perhaps,’ said the young woman.

‘Try to go back to sleep,’ advised Garab. And then he got back under his covers, quite close to her in their little tent but without reassuring her by holding her in his arms. He was curious and he wanted to know.

The next day, at dusk, he was sitting with his back against a rock, some distance from his camp, thinking about how Detchema had behaved and wondering if the coming night would bring a similar event, when he distinctly felt a pressure on him as if something was enveloping him and trying to penetrate into him. It was still reasonably light and he could see things around him quite clearly. He was alone and nothing visible touched him, but the gentle yet powerful pressure persisted.

With an instinctive reaction, normal amongst the people of his country, Garab pulled the short sabre which he was wearing in accordance with custom from its sheath on his belt, and leapt up with one bound. That which held him let go. Free, Garab walked back towards his camp, but with a vague feeling that something accompanied him.

He had no doubt that one of the demons haunting the neighbourhood had attached itself to him and his mistress in order to harm them. He thought it would be best to leave this place as soon as possible. He had tarried too long with aimless pursuits and fallen into the trap which this demon had set to detain him. The next day they would continue their journey. However, when he got back to the camp he did not tell Detchema about his decision. He did not want to talk aloud about his departure, hoping (as Tibetans do) thus to keep the demon who was attacking him and his mistress misinformed about his plans, and thereby prevent him from following them. How would he go about it? He was going to think the matter over.

Towards the middle of the night a sudden chill awoke him. Puffs of wind were coming into the tent and the half-open curtains were flapping softly.

The waning moon was throwing a russet light through the opening and Garab could discern a human form: that of a Hindu yogin, whose ash-covered face appeared sallow and whose lips were glued ghoulishly to those of Detchema.

Instantly Garab was up, but, faster than he, the fantastic visitor had already taken flight. Garab saw the curtains of the tent opening a little wider and then falling back. When he got outside, the area around the tent appeared to be absolutely deserted. He walked around the tents several times and explored the immediate neighbourhood without finding any visible or audible sign suggesting the presence of a living soul.

In the tent, Detchema had not stirred and when her lover returned she appeared to be sleeping peacefully.

'Did you sleep well?' asked Garab when she got up in the morning.

'Did you not have any dreams?' insisted Garab. 'The gods sometimes send them to pilgrims in holy places.'

'No,' she replied again, but her voice was trembling.

Garab did not ask any further questions. He was sure that he had not been dreaming. He had seen the yogin and he had rushed out of the tent to look for him. Who was this sinister intruder? Was the figure he had seen an illusory form assumed by the demon whom he had sensed roaming around and whose

grasp he had felt? Or was this a real yogin who was an expert magician and able to make himself invisible in order to elude pursuers - or perhaps one capable of projecting an etheric double at a distance which could behave like a real person?

Whatever his nature, the nocturnal visitor was evidently motivated by lascivious intentions. Detchema's agitation during the previous nights, her scream, and the words 'Did you see him leave?' which she had muttered, showed that she had already perceived this abominable entity on several occasions. Why had she not mentioned it to him? Why her reticence and her denials? Was it possible that she had not woken at all when he leapt up so suddenly in pursuit of the apparition? Was it possible that she had not felt the touch of its lips upon hers?

Garab was reluctant to accept the implications of the sequence of events before him: his mistress's struggle to repel the lascivious advances which she had been subjected to during her sleep, their repetition, and then her acceptance of them ... perhaps even with pleasure. Had Detchema come to prefer the caresses of this demonic lover to his? A violent rage arose in him at this thought.

Then suddenly he remembered the strange story his mother had told him regarding the way in which he had been conceived and which he had not believed. Could it really be that in this place beings from other worlds assault the women of the human race?

Now another feeling also mingled with his anger: the desire to unravel this mystery and to find out to whom he owed his life.

He stayed awake the following night, the one after that, and one more, without anything untoward happening.

Was the yogin not going to come back? Did he no longer desire Detchema? Garab reproached himself for staying in this place where malefic forces were at work. After all, had he not decided to leave when the appearance of the phantom lover persuaded him to stay on, throwing all caution to the wind in order to satisfy his curiosity. He reproached himself for keeping his mistress in this place, using her as bait for the demoniacal being which he wanted to see again, to catch, to know. He condemned himself, but he did not leave.

Four days went by uneventfully. On the evening of the fourth day, Garab and Detchema had their meal as usual with their two companions near the fire which was burning in the open air between three large stones which supported the pot in which the tea was boiling. When the meal was finished, Detchema went back to the tent nearby which she shared with Garab, while he stayed talking with the two men.

When they had finished talking, Garab got up and went towards his tent. Night was falling, spreading a bluish veil over the surrounding countryside, but it was sufficiently bright to see nearby objects quite clearly.

Garab lifted the curtain of the tent and stood petrified. The yogin was there, standing, with his back to the entrance. Also standing, with her back against the rear canvas, Detchema was looking at him, wide-eyed, silent, rigid, waiting. Her face was deadly pale and horror as well as desire were written upon it. She remained motionless as the yogin came closer. Slowly he put one arm forward and then the other and took her by the shoulders. At this point Garab forgot his curiosity and his desire to investigate, and rushed at the odious entity. The latter turned his sallow face towards him and instantly the young chief felt his mouth gripped by the ghoulish lips of the monster. He struggled, trying to shake off the dreadful creature, but his hands encountered only thin air, while he could feel the horrible suction increasing, drawing out his vital forces from deep inside him.

Nevertheless he continued fighting, trying to get out of the tent, hoping to be able to get help from his men whom he could not call because of the mouth stuck to his. In his efforts he knocked over a few objects and the noise attracted the attention of the men who had remained by the fire.

Goring came to find out whether something had been broken or the chief needed him, and was horrified to see Garab fighting, apparently in great anguish, although he could see no adversary before him.

At his shouts Tsöndu came running, and Garab saw the form of the yogin dissolve and at the same time the terrifying contact of those murderous lips ceased. When the men entered the tent, Detchema had fainted.

Garab did not have to give any explanation. His companions had immediately formed an opinion regarding this strange incident. The region was haunted by demons and one of them had tried to kill their chief.

The expected order came at once: 'We are leaving immediately.'

'Of course,' replied the two men.

The campfire was rekindled. In its light the baggage was tied up and loaded on to the animals. Less than an hour after the sinister fight the travellers were on their way.

For two days they made only brief stops, fleeing with troubled minds and anxious only to get out of the reach of the dangerous demon who had attacked Garab. He had not mentioned anything about Detchema to his companions.

Towards the end of the second day the fugitives arrived within sight of a camp of herdsmen. The proximity of human beings, the familiar sight of herds grazing around large black tents exactly like the ones in their home country, eased their minds. They stopped near the camp and Garab impressed upon Detchema and his two companions not to breathe a word which could arouse the suspicions of the herdsmen about the attack which they had suffered. If they heard the story, the owners of the herds would certainly fear that demons might have followed the travellers; they would prevent them from camping on their pastures and might even ill-treat them.

In the meantime Garab pursued his plan. He still wanted to find out about the mystery of the yogin and above all he wanted to protect himself and Detchema against further attacks. Was leaving the place where these attacks had taken place enough to be safe from further ones? Garab doubted it. He too believed that demons follow those to whom they have become attached. He wanted to consult a competent lama who knew about phantoms of the kind which had attacked him and to learn from him what kind of entity it was that he had seen in the shape of a Hindu ascetic. If necessary, he would have both Detchema and himself exorcised. Detchema in particular, since he had noticed perverse desires in her. During their brief stops he had resumed their physical relationship with undiminished desire, but this had now become tainted with jealous rage.



Garab thought he could sense that while he was holding her in his arms his mistress thought about the embraces of the other, and while this idea made him madly jealous it also fanned his desire for her to a desperate pitch.

The day after his arrival, Garab went to the tents of the herdsmen, under the pretext of buying butter. He posed as a merchant from the far away land of Kham, who had come on a pilgrimage to the Khang Tise with his wife and friends. He said he had had dreams which made him concerned about his business affairs which he had left in the hands of an associate, and he wished to consult a seer lama about them. Was there one in the vicinity, he asked them.

A *ngagspa*,<sup>1</sup> he was told, lived near a neighbouring camp a day's journey towards the north. The herdsmen of the region thought very highly of him.

Certain *ngagspas* of modest or even almost vulgar appearance, who live like common peasants, are nevertheless sometimes expert magicians, thought Garab, and he decided to try his luck with the one who had been recommended to him: a certain Houshog Wangdzin.

The little group of travellers went on their way and from the description which had been given to them they found Wangdzin without any difficulty.

He indeed possessed a considerable gift of clairvoyance. Having listened carefully to Garab's account, he went into a long and deep meditation. Then, by means of barley grains, he marked out a diagram on the ground and told Garab to throw first a white stone on to it, then a black stone, and thirdly a spotted one. After that he considered the areas of the diagram upon which the stones had fallen, and at last he said:

'In your case it is neither a question of demons nor of magicians. The entity which has attached itself to you and which has appeared to you is a stranger to Tibet. I cannot see any link between it and myself, and consequently I cannot exercise any influence over it. You must consult a Hindu ascetic who is versed in the secret science of his country. He could no doubt give you useful advice. However, you must be careful. Don't confide what you have told me to the first pilgrim you meet wearing an orange cloth and a roudrach

necklace or carrying a trident in his hand. A good many of these self-styled holy men are miserable imposters. They would deceive you whilst pretending to enlighten you. Even worse, you would risk coming into contact with an individual practicing some kind of low sorcery and whose habitual companions are evil spirits, and you might become their victim.'

'But what am I to do?' asked Garab desperately. 'One of those demons has already tormented me and you tell me that I am in danger of being attacked by more of these evil spirits! And, apart from that, how can I approach one of these yogins from India when I don't speak their language?'

'I think I can help you,' replied Wangdzin. 'You must go and consult a Nepalese ascetic who has been living as a hermit on the slopes of the Khang Tise for more than ten years. Before settling there he lived amongst the sherpas of the frontier region. He speaks Tibetan fluently. I saw him when he arrived in this region and he was my guest for a few days. I also went to pay my respects to him last year. He is a great yogin who understands the secret nature of things and he possesses supernormal powers. I shall give you a guide who will take you to the entrance of the valley above which his hermitage lies. When you have reached this valley you must address a respectful prayer to him. He will hear you and if he is prepared to see you he will guide you by means of signs. Look out for such signs and don't let yourself be led astray.'

'Going up the valley you will see a brilliant white mountain chain in the north. From there on, be careful. When you stop with your companions let no one bring any blade of grass to his lips whilst sitting down. Within sight of these mountains grow two special kinds of grass which ordinary people cannot distinguish from the common types, and they possess strange properties.'

'One of these herbs is a fatal aphrodisiac.<sup>2</sup> Those who eat it go mad. Under the influence of its poison their vital energy escapes, their arteries become empty, and finally they die in agonies comparable to those of hell.'

'The other type of herb gives those who chew it a vision of the painful worlds<sup>3</sup> and their unfortunate inhabitants.'

‘A monk who came to the Khang Tise with a party of pilgrims stopped with his friends in a place where this herb grows. After finishing his meal, sitting on the ground, he absent mindedly picked some blades of grass around him and chewed them. At once he saw a chasm opening before him. The shock made him spit out the grass which he held between his teeth and the vision vanished as suddenly as it had appeared. This monk knew by hearsay of the existence of this herb with miraculous properties. He realised that it was the grass which had enabled him to see the entrance to hell and he regretted terribly having lost the opportunity to contemplate the mysteries of these worlds, normally invisible to humans. He tried to find the bits of grass which he had spat out, or other ones, but all his efforts were in vain.

‘When his companions continued their journey he refused to go with them, determined to continue his search. He remained there for several years, built himself a hut, and spent all his time examining the grass and testing blades of it. Little by little his mind became disturbed and by the time he died he was completely mad.

‘Behind the white mountains there is a real chasm which leads down into secret depths, but in order to perceive it one must be endowed with superhuman vision. Anyone who is not a powerful *naldjorpa* (Tibetan yogin) should avoid venturing into these regions or he would be the worse for it.

‘Be on your way tomorrow morning. It takes four days to reach the hermitage of the venerable ascetic. When you see him you must offer him your “body, speech and mind”.’<sup>4</sup>

‘We are going to see a holy anchorite,’ announced Garab when he got back to his companions. ‘His blessing will drive away the demons and preserve us from all evil.’

And he advised them to refrain carefully from picking grass or bits of straw for picking their teeth because the ngagspa Wangdzin had warned him that poisonous varieties of grass grew in this part of the world.

The guide whom Wangdzin had provided stopped at the entrance to a valley, reminded Garab that he must address a prayer to the yogin so that the latter might show him the way

which led to the hermitage, prostrated himself as a sign of his veneration for the holy ascetic, and returned.

At first the travellers went up the valley which was bounded on both sides by steep slopes upon which no trace of a path was to be seen. After a few hours march they saw in the distance a glistening line of snowy peaks pointing skywards. They were the white mountains that Wangdzin had spoken about. Should they go further? Perhaps they had already gone past the path leading to the hermitage. However, as no sign had appeared to them, they continued on their way. The mountain chain came more clearly into view and it was uniformly white, but the whiteness was different from the whiteness of snow.

Suddenly a bird gave a strident scream. They all turned in its direction. Upon a rock, a bird was flapping its wings. It gave a few more cries in the same fashion and then it flew up and sat upon a rock higher up and resumed its cries and flapping of wings. No path was visible on that side but the slope could be climbed without difficulty. Garab thought the bird might have been sent by the hermit and took a few steps in its direction. At that, the gracious creature again flapped its wings, flew up and perched upon a rock a little higher up.

Garab no longer hesitated.

‘Camp here,’ he said to his companions. ‘I will try my luck and see where this bird leads me.’

From rock to rock the bird guided Garab, higher and higher up the slope of the mountain. For a while Detchema and the two men were able to follow him with their eyes as he went further and further and then they lost sight of him. For a while they could still hear the cries of the bird in the distance and finally they too died away.

Garab prostrated himself before the hermit, an old man of robust appearance, naked except for a piece of yellow-orange cotton worn as a short *dhoti*.<sup>5</sup>

‘What brings you here, my son? What do you want from me?’ asked the hermit benevolently. ‘But first of all, who are you?’

Garab frankly admitted everything to do with the lowly condition of his mother and his birth from an unknown father, but said nothing further.

‘These things happened a very long time ago,’ remarked the old man. ‘And since? What brought you to the Kailas? Pilgrimage? You are not alone, you have companions and horses in the valley. You are rich. Where did your wealth come from?’

Garab guessed that the hermit was questioning him in order to test his truthfulness and that he had already read him and knew all about him.

‘You know all this, *jowo gomchen* (Lord Hermit),’ he said humbly. ‘I am a great sinner.’

‘It is not for me to show you the right way,’ declared the hermit. ‘Later on you will meet a hermit from your own country who will attempt it. When that time comes, try to profit from his instructions. You have been frightened by visions, have you not? Listen to me carefully.’

‘You are the son of a man from India. Your father was one of those *Bhairavis* of dissolute morals who practice a demoniacal form of magic in order to postpone indefinitely the onset of old age, to counteract the wear and tear of their bodies, and to attain immortality.’

‘You must realise that a magician who is skilled in this cursed science can capture the vital breath of beings by sucking it from their mouths, and that by means of an even more mysterious process the energy which sustains all forms of life can be absorbed by a man, at the expense of the woman, during sexual intercourse.’

‘This is a great secret which is made use of by criminal initiates, who leave many victims because the women who become their prey die within a short space of time.’

‘But very few of these human demons sustain for long the effort which is necessary for their success. In order for the purpose of the rite to be achieved, the practitioner must be able to remain detached and overcome any desire to taste sensual pleasure. Men of impure and cruel nature, driven by selfish motives, are scarcely capable of such a severe discipline. Most of them succumb sooner or later to the demands of their senses and at that moment they are lost. The vitality which they have extracted from others escapes from all the pores of their body and soon they perish miserably.’

‘Thus your father died because he gave you the life energy which he should have retained within himself.

‘He died far from his native land and, as he had no descendants apart from you, there was no one to perform the rites for him which procure for the discarnate spirit the new body that he needs in order to enter the world of his ancestors.<sup>6</sup> Unable to obtain the necessary elements to constitute this new body, the spirit of your father became a phantom which retained the thirst for the sensations which he had experienced while alive and the evil instincts which had animated him. He tried to maintain the existence of his subtle “double” and to feed it by means of the practices which he had indulged in during his life.

‘When you arrived at the Kailas, your thoughts were concentrated on your conception in this place and upon the person who fathered you, and thereby magnetically attracted the discarnate spirit, who still retained the memory of the act which led to his downfall. He recognised his blood and attached himself to you, wanting to take back the life which he had given to you at the expense of his own. Your sensual love for the woman who is with you also nourished the cruel and violent sensuality which was still in him. He wanted to possess your mistress in order to appropriate her own vital force and that part of her psychic energy which you have been able to communicate to her. You were both to become his victims, but I shall save you.

‘The funeral rites which are customary in India cannot be celebrated under the present circumstances. It will have to suffice to perform the essential part of them. Whilst as a *sannyasin*<sup>7</sup> I have renounced all religious practices, nevertheless I have the right to perform them in my capacity as a Brahmin. I will do so on your behalf tomorrow.’

The hermit then gave Garab some cakes of flour for his evening meal and invited him to stay the night in his hut.

The following morning the yogin prepared some rice balls and then, having called the spirit of the departed one, he offered them to him, recommending that he take strength for crossing the rivers and mountain passes which he would encounter on his journey to the world of his ancestors, imploring him not to stray from the right path, lest he get lost.

‘My son,’ he then said to Garab, ‘your father wants something from you. Give it to him so that he may not take more.’

He ordered him to pull a few threads out of his robe and a few hairs from his head and to place them with the offerings, saying: ‘Here is a garment for you, O father, take nothing more from me for your needs.’<sup>8</sup>

And when all was finished the hermit threw the rice balls, the threads and the hairs into the fire.

‘Nothing of this must remain around my home,’ he said.

He then ordered Garab to make a broom of grass and to sweep the place where the offerings had been laid out carefully, as well as the surrounding area. It was necessary to wipe away all traces left by the offerings as well as those left by the ghost, who had come in order to steal their subtle essence, so that the phantom would not be able to recognise the place and thus be tempted to return there instead of going directly on his way to the world of his ancestors where he would rest until he would be reborn once more, in happy, mediocre or painful conditions, depending on the actions which he had performed in his previous life.

‘You have nothing more to fear from the phantom yogin, my son,’ said the hermit to Garab as they parted, ‘but you have to fear the consequences of your own past actions. I repeat: you will one day come across the road to salvation. Try to recognise it then and don’t turn away from it.’

During the following weeks the chief and his companions made the tour around the mountain, and then they left the Khang Tise, returning eastwards towards the far away land of Kham.





## *Chapter Five*

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‘Until my return you will all be peaceful herdsmen and you will concern yourselves with nothing but your herds. In particular, no raids. Let us wait until the one from which we have just reaped the benefit is forgotten. In China a Moslem chief is after us and would be only too happy to have an excuse for attacking our tribes and to appropriate our livestock. Be sure you tell the others. Great caution is necessary if we don’t want to bring misfortune upon ourselves.’

Thus Garab had exhorted his companions before he parted from them in Lhasa and they had not failed to report his words to their friends when they got back to their respective encampments. They had all praised the wisdom of the orders of the chief and for several months they had been carried out to the letter. But time went by and Garab did not return. Why was he thus delayed? Had he met with an accident? Was he ill?... or dead, perhaps? He had spoken of his intention to see if there might be a good territory to operate in, in the regions that he would be passing through. Perhaps he had found one and formed a new band and perhaps he was getting richer whilst they remained inactive in their tents, like women, foolishly letting convoys of merchants who were travelling through the region pass by in front of their noses.

These ideas were hazy at first in the minds of the herdsmen bandits, but gradually as time went by, they took root. At first they expressed them timidly, amongst friends, and then little by little they were discussed in the council of chiefs and elders. Their greed, tempted by the passage of caravans, became difficult to restrain and one of them, who was secretly jealous of Garab, played on it with propositions in the hope of taking the place of the absent chief, if he could carry out a profitable raid. The day came when the bandits could no longer restrain their predatory instincts and decided to reorganise their band under the leadership of Dawa, the man who was impatient to become chief.

Two caravans were known to be approaching. One of them carried merchandise from China to the land of Ga and would pass close to the twin lakes Kyara and Nora (the Tibetan names of the lakes marked Oring and Noring on the maps). The other one was the annual caravan of the Tibetans from

Amdo who go to sell their horses and mules in Lhasa. The herd they were escorting numbered more than three hundred head. As usual, the Tibetans crossed the vast grassland to the east of the bandit encampments through Tsaidam and Hor Nagchuka.

At a few weeks interval both caravans were attacked. The people from Amdo defended themselves virorously, the robbers were only able to get hold of a small portion of the animals in the caravan and left two dead on the battlefield. On the other hand, one of the Chinese merchants on their way to Ga drowned in a torrent whilst trying to flee when his convoy was attacked, and of the three wounded in the caravan from Amdo, one died on the way as his companions were carrying him with them towards central Tibet.

The uproar caused by these two raids, which came after a period of relative calm, aroused public opinion, both in the Chinese border regions and in Tibet. On both sides the merchants felt threatened by the bandits and demanded their punishment. The Moslem general had been planning an expedition against the herdsmen-robbers for a long time because it was likely to be profitable for his troops who were not always paid regularly. He was delighted to be given the opportunity to appear to be doing it for the sake of justice and in order to ensure the safety of honest travellers. His men, mostly Chinese from Turcoman, who were all brave and well trained, fell upon the encampments and had no difficulty in overcoming the poorly organised resistance which was put up against them. A large number of the herdsmen died in the battle or whilst fleeing pursued by the soldiers, and all prisoners were put to death.

Garab's success over a period of ten years or so as a bold brigand had brought him to the attention of the muslim general a long time ago and the latter had therefore given orders to the officers in charge of the expedition to get hold of him, dead or alive, and to send him his head which he wanted to display in a border town frequented by the herdsmen in order to intimidate those who might feel tempted to emulate his exploits.

The Moslem Chinese expected to see the famous bandit at

the head of his men organising the defence of the encampments. But at this time the chief was quietly returning from the Khang Tise without having the slightest idea what was happening to his friends.

The description of Garab which had been given by several of his former victims did not at all fit the appearance of Dawa, the actual chief and the initiator of the ill-advised and imprudent attacks which had unleashed the terrible reprisals which Garab had feared. Dawa had been wounded and taken prisoner and was savagely beaten. Yielding in pain, he told those who were interrogating him that Garab had left a long time ago with his wife and two companions for the Khang Tise and that in all probability all four should be back before long. After giving this information, the unhappy man was battered to death.

When the expedition was completed, the bulk of the troops returned to their quarters leading the herds of the vanquished with them. Those belonging to Garab were amongst them. A few military posts in strategic positions across the country were responsible for preventing the dispersed tribesmen from forming new bands. The description of Garab's party was carefully passed on throughout the region with the order that anyone who saw him should apprehend the brigand, and then calm and silence descended once more over the vast plateaux which had resounded for a brief moment with the noise of battle.

On his journey to Lhasa, Garab had crossed the desert plateaux which extend to the north of Hor Nagchuka. It was in these parts that he had attacked the caravan of Mongolian pilgrims, amongst whom Detchema had been. But returning from the far away Khang Tise after months of travel through the solitude, and still with the strange drama which had taken place at the foot of the sacred mountain weighing on his mind, Garab preferred to follow a route through more inhabited regions. It was thus that, having gone from Lhasa to Giamda, he had taken a more northerly direction heading for Tcherku (the Tibetan name of the Chinese outpost shown as Jakyendo on the maps), which was only about ten days march from his home camping ground.

It was not far from Nantchen (the residence of the native

chief of the land of Ga), shortly after leaving the territory which is ruled by the Lhasa government, that the travellers learnt of the events which had taken place a few months previously amongst the herdsmen, their friends.

A villager coming in the opposite direction stopped when he saw them and exclaimed in surprise:

‘May the holy lamas protect us! Is that you, chief Garab?’

‘It’s me all right,’ answered Garab calmly.

‘What are you doing here?’

‘I am returning from a pilgrimage to the Khang Tise and I am going home.’

‘Home! ... So you know nothing?’

And the man quickly told everything he had heard about the Moslem military expedition, the massacre of the herdsmen and the complete ruin of those who had managed to escape. He also told Garab that there were soldiers at Nantchen, that there was a price on his head, and that the fact that he was travelling with a woman and two men was known and would help to identify him. He advised the ex-chief to re-cross the Tibetan frontier as quickly as possible and, above all, while still on Chinese territory not to keep his female companion near him as she would attract attention to him.

This said, the peasant assured Garab that he would not tell anyone that he had met him and hastened to leave him, as he did not wish to compromise himself in case a passer-by should see him in his company.

‘We must split up,’ declared Goring as soon as the man had gone. ‘If they are looking for a party of four, a lone rider is not going to attract any special attention. As for Detchema, she cannot remain with any of us, her presence would give us away. For the sake of our safety as well as her own, she must completely change her appearance. She should take off her jewellery - the chief can keep it hidden upon his person if he does not consider it too risky - she should dirty her pretty dress so that it looks like an old garment. Above all, she should cut her hair off. That would render her unrecognisable and she could pass for a nun going on a pilgrimage. Nobody would try to make a connection between her and us. She could cross the frontier without being noticed. Apart from that, she is not from

here and nobody knows her. If she is not seen with us, who would guess that she is your wife? Even if this was discovered she could say that you have abandoned her. That would not sound very surprising to those who know you ... you have left more than one ... In any case Detchema is not in danger of being shot, whilst as for us...'

'Let us separate then,' replied Garab. 'Perhaps that is in fact the wisest thing to do. But as for Detchema, that is my concern alone and I am not going to leave her.'

Detchema was crying. 'However,' she said, 'if it is necessary for the sake of your safety, Garab, go without me. But as for cutting my hair! I could never do that. It is not absolutely necessary. I can go off on foot and go a different way from yours. I shall meet you anywhere you like. I shall hide my jewellery under my robe, I shall roll it in the dust to make it dirty and I shall carry a blanket and provisions on my back. I shall be taken for a village girl on her way to visit relatives who live far away. We are still close to the border. In two days I shall have crossed it. I shall probably not encounter any soldiers on the way. If I did, they would not know who I am ... and, as Goring says, even if they found out that I am your wife they would not kill me.'

'No, they would not kill you!' exclaimed Garab in a rage. 'They would...' The idea that Detchema, who had been a virgin and who, he was sure, had never known anybody apart from him, could serve for the entertainment of lascivious ruffians, drove him mad. Since he had suspected the young woman of having enjoyed the horrible caresses of the demoniacal phantom at the Khang Tise, Garab had maintained a tantalising suspicion regarding her, and was always on the look-out.

Detchema, he reasoned, must realise what would happen to her if she fell into the hands of the soldiers and they knew that she was the wife of the wanted bandit. She seemed to resign herself to it very readily. Perhaps she was even expecting to derive pleasure from it!

He uttered a terrible oath. He was furious and shaking from head to foot with rage.

'We ought to get away from this path,' observed Tsöndu,

who had noted the growing agitation of the chief with concern. 'We have just met somebody and been recognised, we should not let that happen again. We should hide ourselves until evening. Between now and then we shall have ample time to seriously consider what to do.'

The wisdom of this advice was obvious. The four riders turned their mounts and soon afterwards, finding a large winding ravine which opened into the side of the mountain, well above the road, they dismounted and led their mounts by the bridle in order to help them climb the steep slope which led up to it. Once there, they took cover in a bend of the ravine and held council.

The unexpected situation in which they found themselves would have appeared extremely serious to anybody other than bold adventurers. They were ruined, separated from their people and would have to go into a prolonged exile and very soon earn their living. But all this did not really frighten them. Their only serious concern was their beloved chief, who had led them to so many profitable victories and whose life was threatened. As for themselves, all they had to do was to return to Tibetan territory without being recognised, and this did not appear to present undue difficulties if their party divided up as Goring had suggested.

Garab proceeded to divide the food and money which remained in the sacks. To the pleas of his two companions, who implored him to part from Detchema, he replied with absolute refusal and they finally had to give up insisting.

Goring and Tsöndu then declared that they would each take separate routes across the mountain passes towards the east and leave to their chief, who was much more threatened than they, the shortest and easiest path which involved retracing their steps. Garab knew the way well, after all he had just come that way, and would be able to find the ford which had to be crossed at the frontier, even during the night.

If he had been alone, Garab would not have accepted the advantage which was being offered to him, but he thought about Detchema, about the soldiers and all the others - Chinese or Tibetan - who would want to take her if he was not there any more. And to prevent *that* the audacious brigand,

who did not normally value his life too highly, wanted to live at any price.

At nightfall the four travellers brought their horses back on to the path and separated, after wishing each other good luck.

That very night Garab and Detchema had to cross open spaces in order to reach by morning the wooded gorges where they could hide until the next evening.

The nocturnal ride of the two lovers went by without incident. The day began to dawn when they reached the dangerous region which was covered in forests and where they had decided to stop. According to Garab's reckoning they could, if they set off at sunset and pressed on, reach the ford before darkness.

This ford was the only one for a long distance, across the river which formed in this region the frontier between the territories belonging to China and the Lhasa government respectively. The water, which everywhere else is hemmed in and deep, at this point reaches a vast plateau onto which several valleys give. The fugitives had to reach this point without running into trouble.

At sunrise a torrential rain began to fall and it did not stop until late in the afternoon. From all sides torrents were pouring down the mountains and into the valleys and even tiny streams started to overflow. When Garab and Detchema reached the plateau they found that the river was flooding over its banks. Its muddy waters were rushing turbulently between boulders which lay scattered at random on the banks and in the river bed. The ford was still far from the place they had reached, but it was clear that the water would be too deep and the current too strong to attempt a crossing. It would take half a day, no doubt, for the river to go down sufficiently for the riders to attempt crossing the ford. It would also be necessary to make certain that the force of the current had not shifted the position of the ford, which frequently happens with severe floods. And this was something which could only be done in daylight. The fugitives looked at each other in silence, disconcerted by the unexpected events which were hindering their plans.

However the seriousness of their situation must not be exaggerated. It was certain that Garab was not being looked for



actively. Several months had elapsed since the Moslem expedition. No doubt the excitement had died down considerably. Dawa had stated that Garab's return to the country was probable and should be soon, but that did not mean that it was certain. The chief might have heard about what had happened at home when he was still far away, and in that case he would certainly avoid coming near the place. To be safe it was enough to avoid being seen. And even if people who did not know him met him, they would not dream of associating a traveller going towards Tibet with the bandit chief who should be arriving in the opposite direction, from Tibet.

With these arguments Garab was trying to reassure his companion, who looked very worried. Nevertheless he did not think it wise to stay too long in this open region.

'Perhaps we should go back and hide again in the woods until the water subsides,' he said. 'If it does not rain any more the level will fall considerably during the night. On the other hand, as it will be dark soon, we could continue on as far as the ford. At dawn I shall investigate it.'

Detchema looked at the sky and the horizon. Thick black clouds were drifting very low and a wall of fog was approaching slowly from the other side of the plateau.

'The river will not go down,' she said. 'It is going to continue raining through the night.' And then suddenly her eyes were caught by a point in the distance and she tried to make out clearly what it was. 'Garab!' she exclaimed. 'Look, down there ... Two men on horseback. They are not wearing robes, they are not country people ... they are soldiers! They are coming this way!'

'Yes, I see them,' answered Garab. 'They may have seen us also. If not they will spot us soon. We can no longer go back. That would appear odd to them. Let us carry on, on our way. These soldiers are returning from a tour of inspection or from hunting and they are going to take the path along which we have come. Let's not delay. We shall be out of sight before they get here.'

'But we can't cross the river!'

'No, indeed, but let's go on and get further away from them. We can decide what to do later.'

As he spoke, Garab had put his horse into a trot and went off, following the river. As he had said, Detchema and he would be a long way off by the time the soldiers who were coming from the other side of the plateau and were crossing it diagonally would reach the spot where they had just stopped for a few minutes.

But then the two riders changed their course - evidently they wanted to catch up with the travellers whom they had seen. Why? Very probably, the idea that before them was the man whose head could earn them a substantial reward had not crossed their minds. No doubt they were making a tour of inspection along the frontier, where spies are frequent, and they simply wanted to interrogate the couple travelling late at night in bad weather.

The vision of Detchema held in arms other than his own which plagued his mind suddenly arose again before Garab and upset his otherwise sound judgement. Forgetting all the reassuring thoughts he had voiced a moment ago, he lost his head, whipped Detchema's horse into a gallop, and galloped himself behind her.

This sudden change of pace had to appear suspicious to the soldiers. In turn, they went off in full gallop and the chase began. The soldiers were now making directly for Garab and his companion, who were still following the bank of the river, and were rapidly closing in on them. The chief took the rifle which he had been carrying across his shoulder and, being a crack shot, aimed at the nearest rider without slowing down his horse. Hit in the chest, the man fell from his horse. The other soldier dismounted when he reached his comrade and spent a few minutes examining the body lying on the ground. He must have died immediately, because instead of staying as he would have done if he had only been wounded, to look after him and to take him to the nearest army camp, his companion jumped back into the saddle and continued the chase.

Whether he had been recognised or not, Garab was now the murderer of a soldier and only flight could save his life.

On the opposite bank, the trees came right up to the edge of the water. From the appearance of the countryside it seemed to Garab that he was near to the ford. But how could he find its

exact position in the semi-darkness with this foaming, turbulent water which was rushing with thunderous noise through the rocks?

A shot rang out, the soldier had fired. The bullet whistled past Garab without hitting him. He half turned in his saddle and fired back. The soldier gave a scream and put his hand to his shoulder, but continued riding. At this moment shouts could be heard, coming from the distance through the fog. Men were coming. The wounded man answered them, yelling at them in Chinese. Garab realised that a detachment was combing the region. The two soldiers who had chased him were scouts and the others had heard the shots and were coming to their help. There was only one thing left for the fugitives to do - to cross the frontier river under the cover of the growing darkness.

'Detchema! Beloved! This may be the end or it may be our salvation. Come!' shouted Garab, beside himself.

Taking her horse by the bridle, he led it over the flooded ground towards the middle of the current. By an extraordinary coincidence they were in fact on the ford which was being swept by the furious rush of the water. From moment to moment their horses swam desperately, carried by the current and then, finding their feet again, stumbled on the rocks rolling in the floodwaters. The lovers were nevertheless nearing the opposite bank when Detchema's horse fell. The jolt threw her into the river and the fierce current carried her away immediately. Before Garab, who was hampered by the horse which was struggling in its efforts to get up again, had a chance to make any move to hold his friend, nothing could be seen of her any more except her two little hands whirling in the turbulent eddies between the rocks.

Like a madman, without knowing what he was doing, Garab leapt from his horse onto a flat rock which was sticking partly out of the water, and from there onto another one which was almost touching dry land. The crazy idea came to him that he could run along the water's edge, overtake the current, and catch Detchema as she was passing.

At that moment a shot came from the opposite bank. Garab was hit between the shoulders and rolled behind the rock upon which he had stood upright for a brief moment.

Even thicker banks of fog spread rapidly over the river and its surroundings, mingling with the darkness. It was impossible to see anything at more than two paces. Where Garab had fallen, the water was in fact quite shallow and the current, broken by a ridge of rocks, could barely be felt. With the help of the darkness it was sufficient for the fugitive to remain lying still not to be discovered.

Vaguely, through the roar of the water, Garab heard the sound of voices and then of hooves disappearing in the distance. He was saved.

The tension which had confused his mind went, and he began to think clearly again.

Did the soldiers who had chased him and the others who had come to their assistance know who he was? Did they think that he had been carried away by the current when he had fallen from the rock? Had they been able to see him fall in the fog? Did they think that he was dead, and would they come back the next day to look for his body in the daylight in order to cut the head off and send it, preserved in salt, to their chief, to earn the promised reward? And in the course of their search, would they find Detchema?

Detchema! He had to find her, dead or alive. How she had been swept away, supernaturally light in the stream of water! The picture of her two little hands whirling like butterflies above the turbulent waters was engraved in his memory. It was going to stay there forever.

Detchema!

Garab felt a thin warm stream run down his back. Was his wound serious? He was not suffering much pain, but his head was spinning. A great weakness came over him and his thoughts became muddled. He tried to get a grip on himself. 'I must get out of the water,' he thought. He got up with difficulty and staggered slowly forward. A few minutes later his hands touched bushes and, grasping them, he knew he was in Tibetan territory.

He took a few more steps. The idea of following the edge of the river downstream, to look for Detchema, still haunted him. And then a veil passed over his eyes. Everything went dark. He slid to the foot of a tree and lost consciousness.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the first light of dawn, two men on horseback, one old, the other young, followed a path which wound itself along between the forests and the river on the Tibetan bank. They had passed the night in a neighbouring village and were on their way to a distant monastery of Bön doctors of which the older of the two travellers was a member. <sup>1</sup> This man, Migmar by name, was the maternal uncle of his young companion, who was called Anag. Anag's father and mother had died recently during an epidemic and Migmar, believing that the medical profession would be suitable to assure his nephew a comfortable livelihood, had gone to fetch him to take him to the monastery, where he would be taught the art of healing by means of medicaments as well as by means of magical practices.

The two were talking about the havoc caused by the rain and the flood of the night before when their conversation was interrupted by the neighing of a horse. A saddled horse came out of the woods in front of them and greeted their mounts. The owner of the animal was nowhere to be seen.

'This horse must have run away when its master dismounted,' said Migmar to his nephew. 'Get down and tie it to a tree. The traveller to whom it belongs will be looking for it and we will no doubt meet him. It's better if the horse does not stray any further away.'

Anag was about to do as he had been told, when another horse appeared, also fully harnessed, wandering here and there amongst the coppices.

'Isn't that strange!' shouted the young man. 'Another horse!'

'There must be several travellers around here,' replied Migmar. 'If one horse has the habit of breaking loose in order to roam at large, more often than not any others which are poorly tied up will follow suit. One of these capricious animals amongst a whole lot of others can cause a great deal of trouble during a journey.'

'Try to catch the other one and tie it up also. We will call out to the people who will be looking for their mounts. This is a service which travellers should render one another.'

Migmar dismounted, and when Anag had tied up the stray horses near their own he started calling into the forest with all the might of his lungs. There was no answer.

‘They may be far from here,’ said Migmar. ‘The water has fallen a lot but the roar of the river is probably covering your voice. Let us wait a little longer.’

Anag continued calling, moving in different directions into the forest. Suddenly he gave a startled cry and shouted: ‘Uncle Migmar! Uncle Migmar! Come here! There is a dead body!’

Migmar came running. At the foot of the tree where he had fallen the night before, Garab was still lying on the muddy ground. As the two men bent over him they could hear faint moaning.

‘He is not dead, Uncle,’ exclaimed Anag.

‘He does not appear to be far from it,’ answered Migmar, who had knelt down and began to examine Garab with professional calm.

‘He must have been caught by the sudden flood last night and the high water carried him here,’ said Anag.

‘Do be quiet,’ ordered his uncle abruptly. ‘The river did not come up to where we are and this man was not drowned. Well, well ... I say...’

Migmar had removed Garab’s muddy robe and discovered his wound. ‘We are dealing with a criminal matter, my boy,’ he said in a low voice. ‘This unfortunate man has been shot in the back. He must be the owner of one of the horses we have caught. His companion who was riding the other one is probably also lying somewhere amongst these trees. They must have been attacked by bandits. We had better not hang around here. Let us make no noise, the robbers may still be lurking in the neighbourhood. But why did they not take the horses? This is the odd.’

‘Perhaps the two travellers had an argument and a fight broke out between them,’ suggested the younger man.

‘And they both wounded each other,’ continued Migmar. ‘That is possible. Let us look for the other one.’

The two men carried Garab to a clearing surrounded by thickets where he could not be seen by passers by, should there be any. There Migmar washed and dressed the wound hastily and then uncle and nephew searched the woods for some time without finding any trace of a second traveller.

‘We can’t delay any further,’ said Migmar, ‘it could be

dangerous. The other man may have fallen into the river. We will take the injured man along with us. He is completely unconscious. We will lay him between our baggage sacks on one of our horses. I shall ride one of the ones which we have found.'

'Shall we take the other one also?'

'Of course! One does not leave valuable animals like these on the road. If the wounded man regains consciousness and recovers and wants the horses I shall have a chat with him. Did you see what is in the saddle bags?'

The bags contained money, food and wet clothes.

'These people crossed the river, or tried to,' muttered the doctor pensively.

'We shall leave the wounded man in the next village on our way,' said Anag, as if this was obvious.

'Not so,' replied his uncle sharply. 'We shall take him to the monastery where he will be well looked after ... if he survives the journey,' he muttered between his teeth.

'Don't breathe a word to anybody about this,' continued Migmar. 'As far as anybody is concerned the sick man is our friend who injured himself seriously falling from his horse in the mountains. The four horses belong to us. Do you understand? If you disobey and talk to people on the way about this, it will be the worse for you.' The old doctor gave his nephew such a hard look that the young man shivered.

'I have no intention of disobeying you, uncle,' he answered submissively. 'You know better than I the right thing to do.' But Anag wondered if he had not made a mistake by going with his uncle, who suddenly appeared very autocratic, even a little awesome.

The two horses are a good catch for me, thought Migmar to himself, and dead or alive the body of this man might be useful to our Grand Master. The doctor did not, however, dwell on this last idea; the mental picture of this 'Grand Master' had just given him, in a detached way, an uneasy feeling like the one his nephew had just experienced: the blood in his veins seemed to be running cold.

Migmar and Anag placed sacks with clothing onto one of their horses, laid the still unconscious Garab, wrapped in a

blanket, onto them and tied him securely onto the animal. Anag tied the bridle of the horse carrying the wounded man to the saddle of the one he was riding - it was Detchema's. The doctor mounted Garab's horse while his own walked ahead of him, laden with provisions. Thus the travellers continued their journey towards the far-away monastery of the Bön doctors.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fate had been even kinder to Detchema than to Garab. She came unscathed out of the accident which could have cost her her life. Having fallen into the water not far from the bank, she had been carried through a succession of whirlpools along the water's edge instead of being dragged by the torrential current into the middle of the river.

Finally, some hundred yards downstream the current threw her, half-suffocated and badly bruised, but safe and sound, into a little pool formed by a recess of the river bank.

The situation in which she found herself was nevertheless quite critical. The water in the little pool came up to her knees. Behind her the rock which formed the edge of the river was slippery and rose vertically well above her head. As far as she could tell in the dark, it was impossible to climb out. To her left and right she was hemmed in by the flood water. All it needed was for the rain to start again and raise the level of the water and she would be drowned. Fortunately for her the heavy fog remained without dissolving into rain. As the hours went by, Detchema felt the level of the water, in which she stood, go down. Towards mid-morning the little pool had dried out completely and it became possible to reach the bank a little way upstream, by jumping from rock to rock and wading through shallow pools. Detchema was glad to get out of her precarious refuge and to a safe place.

Throughout this tragic night, the young woman had never stopped thinking about Garab. What had become of him? Being a better rider than she, he had probably got through the ford without accident. No doubt he would assume that she was dead. Perhaps, instead of getting away, he would look for her body and risk being seen. If they knew that the escaped man was the famous bandit whose head was worth a lot of money



and not just an ordinary spy or smuggler, then greed might induce the soldiers to cross the frontier to capture him even on Tibetan territory. In order to avoid this danger, she had to find Garab as quickly as possible.

With these thoughts whirling around in her mind, Detchema ran through the forest. She reached the ford, which was clearly visible now that the water had receded. It was very near the spot where Garab had reached the shore. Detchema passed the very spot where he had fallen down unconscious, but nothing inside her told her of what had happened. The flood of thoughts and ideas rushing through her mind no doubt prevented her from picking up the subtle vibrations which the suffering of her lover might have left in the atmosphere of the place.

To continue in this direction is pointless, thought Detchema. Garab did not remain near the ford. If he is searching for my body he is obviously doing so downstream from where I fell. I must turn around and follow the course of the river.

She walked for a long time feeling neither fatigue nor hunger. Of Garab she found no trace. As her mind began to function again in a reasonable manner, she recalled the circumstances of the accident of the night before. Garab and she had been riding. What had become of the horses? Hers had fallen and might have been drowned. But Garab's? It would have been strange if the same accident had happened to both their mounts. In any case at the time when she had fallen the two horses were too close to the bank of the river to imagine that they had, free of riders, recrossed the deep and torrential water of their own accord in order to return to the other side.

If he was convinced that she was dead, and fearing pursuit, would Garab have fled on his horse during the night or at dawn? This was possible.

Whilst considering this idea, Detchema let her eyes wander over the river and saw, caught on a sharp rock, something blueish which was flapping in the wind. One might have taken it for a bird, but for an instant a ray of sunlight coming through the foliage produced a shiny ring around this indefinable object. Curious, the young woman went towards it right to the water's edge and gave a scream of despair. The strange object

was Garab's hat, which had a wide blue and gold ribbon around it. Garab had dropped it when he jumped off his horse after Detchema's fall. It had been carried along by the current and caught by a sharp protrusion of the rock which was covered by water at the time.

Not knowing what had happened, Detchema saw in this hat, so strangely poised in the middle of the river, a certain sign that Garab was dead; the chief and his horse had been drowned.

The ancestral superstitions and the remorse which she had felt in Lhasa came back with fresh force and tormented the poor girl's mind. The dream, for which she had so selfishly sacrificed her grandparents had come true, but the punishment for her crime had struck the one she loved.

To the memories of her sins of old came that of the more recent events. It was in order to please her that Garab had undertaken the trip to Lhasa; had he returned directly to his encampment he would still be a rich and powerful chief. And because he had been in Lhasa, he had played that irreverent comedy before the Dalai Lama. The 'Omniscient One' couldn't have been fooled by it. He knew who those false merchants were who were prostrating themselves before him and whence the offerings came which were being presented to him. Whilst Garab had hoped to obtain his blessing by trickery the punishment for his imposture had started from afar; his herds had become the prey of the Chinese soldiers and now he had perished miserably.

She was doubly responsible for his death. She should have insisted on Garab fleeing without her. Perhaps the fact that he was travelling with a woman had, after all, aroused the suspicions of the two soldiers who had spotted them. She should have pleaded with him to let her go disguised as a nun, as Goring had advised. Oh! Why had she refused to cut her hair off?! No doubt it was because she had been so obstinate on this point, so loath to look ugly, that Garab had taken her along in order to save her that sacrifice.

Her hair! She hated it now. The man of her dreams, the lover whose mere presence made her flesh tingle, the bold chief for whom she wanted to be beautiful, was dead. She no longer

wanted to be beautiful, she would cut off her cursed hair. No man had ever touched her before Garab, and no one would ever touch her again, seeing that he was no more. She would go into a convent.

Prey to a feverish agitation, her reason disturbed by despair, Detchema alternately wept, sitting with her head in her hands, and dashed around beating herself against trees and rocks, or fell to her knees, prostrating herself in the mud.

Suddenly she made a resolution. In accordance with Tibetan custom she carried, in a case on her belt, her eating utensils consisting of two sticks and a long narrow knife. The poor woman grabbed the latter and began cutting away at her hair furiously. It was thick, and long use had blunted the blade of her knife. Chopping away desperately, Detchema let her long black tresses fall at her feet. Within a few minutes her head had become a sorry sight, almost shaven in parts and with tufts of hair of different lengths sticking up elsewhere.

When she had finished her sad handiwork, she picked up the hair which lay on the ground, tied it into a bundle and, aiming at the rock on which Garab's hat, splashed by the waves, seemed to look almost defiant, she threw her hair as an offering towards it.

'For you, Garab, my love, my life!'

The sacrifice was made. The blood in her veins seemed to run ice cold. Detchema's agitation lessened and slow tears began to run down her cheeks. A last time she looked at the poor, wet, misshapen hat. A sharp wind had begun to blow and was tugging on it with grim determination. Detchema pressed her hands together, raised them towards the hat, and solemnly performed the three ritual prostrations in its direction, as one does before the statues of deities in the temples. Then she turned away and went through the forest where the evening shadows were beginning to lengthen.

Perched on the tip of the rock and beaten by wind and weather, Garab's hat obstinately refused to fall off.

It was already dark when Detchema knocked on the door of an isolated farmhouse. The woman who opened the door recoiled in terror, almost believing her to be an apparition of a demon. Clad in a muddy and still wet robe, disfigured by her

ravaged hair, the person who stood there hardly resembled the pretty girl whose love had betwilted Garab.

Lying in order to explain her extraordinary appearance, Detchema told the farmer's wife that she had been travelling with her father. They had been going on a pilgrimage together. Not knowing the country, they had been surprised and cut off by the flood and the old man had been carried away by the torrent.

This story seemed plausible. Drownings during crossings of flooded rivers occur frequently in Tibet. The desire to avoid her lover's body being mutilated made Detchema change the facts. If, she thought, the soldiers hear that a young man, in the company of a woman, died trying to cross the ford, they will identify him as the man who was pursued by two of their comrades and who killed one of them, and they would then be convinced that the fugitive was Garab and they would start searching for his body in order to cut its head off. And the people who lived along the river would also be driven by greed and try to get hold of his head, once they knew that it was worth a lot of money.

The poor bereaved woman had not been able to invent a better story. But why was her hair in such a state?

'I made a vow in order that my father may obtain a happy rebirth in the Western Paradise of Great Beatitude,' (*Nub Devachan*) replied Detchema. 'I cut my hair myself as a token of this vow. I am going to become a nun.'

Such filial piety moved the good farmer's wife.

'You are not married?' she asked.

'I am a widow,' declared Detchema sadly.

'So young! What a shame! And your father has just been drowned! Yes, you do well to turn yourself towards religion. This world is full of misery, but Buddha has shown a way which leads beyond suffering.'

Having dried her robe and eaten a bowl of soup, she fell asleep, totally exhausted.

At daybreak she left the farm, with some travelling provisions, making for a convent which her hostess had described to her the night before. It was only about a day's march away.

The same evening she repeated to the Mother Superior of

the convent the story she had invented about a supposed pilgrimage and the death of her father, and handed her the jewellery which she had kept hidden under her robe. It was to be sold and she wished to offer a part of the proceeds to the convent, the rest would pay for burning lamps on the altars - for the wellbeing of her father in another world, she said, dedicating them in thought to Garab.

The following day Detchema's head was properly shaven and eight days later she received the minor ordination of a novice.



## *Chapter Six*

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**S**o Sa Ling is a monastery of modest appearance. Situated upon a mountain ridge not very high above the valley, it has nothing of the air of arrogance or lofty detachment shown by many lamaist monasteries which are perched on high peaks, surrounded by clouds. The colours of the huge figures painted on the monumental door set into the wall which frames the outer enclosure had once been bright, with reds and greens predominating. The sun and the rain of many years have caused the pictures of fantastic beings, painted by an artist long departed into other worlds, to fade and to peel so that the brown, cracked wood shows through in places. This decay, which is frankly displayed to the onlooker, helps to give the entrance to the monastery an unpretentious and homely air.

The feeling of confidence which a strange traveller might feel when approaching So Sa Ling was, however, liable to fade as soon as he had passed through the old delapidated doors. He now found himself in a courtyard, one side of which was formed by massive dark grey stone buildings. In front of him was a high wall forming a second enclosure. Set into this wall, at the opposite corner to where the buildings stood, was a single low and narrow door. Another wall, a few feet behind this door, prevented one from seeing into this second enclosure, even when the little door was open. The buildings next to the entrance were the hospital. In the second enclosure were the temple and the quarters of the monks, but these were never seen by the majority of the sick people who were treated at So Sa Ling.

So Sa Ling means 'place of healing'. Since time immemorial doctors have resided there. They belonged to the old religion of the country - a kind of shamanism, mixed at the higher levels with philosophy and magic, the followers of which call themselves Böns. The story goes that the founder of this line of physicians was a Chinese who established himself in this place more than a thousand years ago, but this is somewhat legendary. Furthermore, some people maintained that the Chinese mage still lived at So Sa Ling, invisible to all but a few chosen disciples. These disciples were also endowed with a prodigious longevity and remained, like their master, invisible to the vulgar people.



They were excellent healers and as they combined the art of medicine with the more secret science of ritual magic, the doctors of So Sa Ling enjoyed a high reputation. From far away, patients were brought to them with ailments which had proved intractable, and most of them returned home cured. However, in spite of the good they did, the feelings of love and respect which the monks inspired amongst the people in the surrounding country were not without reservation. The rumours which circulated about them helped to produce a good deal of fear. It was a vague fear, of nothing specific, and had no tangible basis. These Böns knew better than the lamas how to subjugate the demons that cause diseases<sup>1</sup> and to rescue their victims from their clutches, but the predominantly Buddhist population did not altogether trust these Böns. Their skill was too great to be purely human and appeared to have a supernatural element. Yet, unlike the sacristans of most Tibetan monasteries, who try to impress visitors with accounts of the many wonders and prodigies which take place in their respective temples, the monks of So Sa Ling never spoke of miracles. But their reserve on the subject only helped to strengthen the public belief in their occult powers and to increase the peculiar awe which they inspired.

At the back of the second enclosure, the temple which also served as assembly hall for the members of the order took up the entire width of the mountain ridge, which was rather narrow. The temple backed onto a high rock wall, which was smooth and vertical. Beyond it, a tangled group of peaks, closely packed together, rose up to the jagged ridge of the mountain range. There was no way through this group of peaks leading to the top of the mountain. Nevertheless, faint lights had occasionally been seen coming from between them. The good people from the villages did not doubt that the inaccessible region was the refuge of spirits and deities and assumed that the physicians of So Sa Ling knew all about them.

It was to this strange monastery that Migmar, with the help of his newpew, Anag, had brought Garab.

Throughout the journey, Garab had been mostly in a coma. He came round occasionally but was delirious and totally unaware of his surroundings. This state continued during the

first few weeks of his stay in a little room at the hospital, until one morning he woke up more or less lucid and looked with astonishment at Anag who was near him.

Anticipating the questions which he was going to be asked, the latter, in accordance with Migmar's instructions, said quickly:

'You have been wounded. My uncle who is a doctor has been looking after you. My name is Anag. You are in a gompa (monastery).' Then he hurriedly left the room because his uncle had told him to give no further information to the patient.

Garab recovered slowly; soon he felt cramped in his little room and the courtyard outside it. He informed Migmar that he would like to go about outside in order to get used to walking again, because he would, thanks to the good care he had received, soon be leaving the monastery, completely cured.

Migmar listened and smiled. 'Don't overestimate your strength, my friend,' he said, 'you have not recovered by a long way. You must not leave the monastery. The rule about this is strict: our patients do not go through the door until they are completely cured. If they leave without the permission of the doctor in charge of them, they are not allowed to return. Tell me, why are you in such a hurry?'

The reason Garab was anxious to leave the hospital, which Migmar's words had just showed him to be a prison, was the thought of Detchema. She had been drowned - of that he had little doubt. He could still see her little hands twirling in the turbulent water and disappearing into the dark. Even if the soldier's bullet had not hit him at that moment, would he have been able to save her? Reasoning more calmly now than at the time of the dreadful accident, he doubted it. Nevertheless, unexpected miracles do happen. He would have to consult a seer. From what he had gathered from the conversations which he had had with Anag (unbeknown to Migmar), he was inclined to believe that there must be one amongst the monks of So Sa Ling.

Anag had taken a liking to the bandit chief. He did not know about his profession but he suspected that the wounded man was a bold adventurer and deep down he admired and envied him.

Migmar's nephew did not like it at So Sa Ling. His uncle was stern and authoritarian and kept him under strict control. Anag, who was young and lively, suffered under the many restrictions which were imposed on his liberty. He was rarely allowed to go as far as the neighbouring villages, and when he did go it was in order to accompany monks who had business there. If they went to get provisions, he would have to carry the sacks they had filled, and if one of the doctors went to visit a patient, he would have to carry the ritual instruments and medical preparations. Anag would try to take advantage of these occasions to get away, however briefly, from the close supervision which weighed on him, to go and have a bowl of spirits or beer and a chat with the villagers.

One particular day he was sitting near the hearth in the kitchen of a farm. The sons of the house questioned him:

'Are you a newcomer with the Böns?'

'Yes.'

'What do you do?'

'I am the nephew of Doctor Migmar; he has brought me along to teach me medicine.'

'Ah! You will become one of those who stay in the hospital. Have you seen the others, those who chant the service in the temple? Have you seen the abbot?'

'No, I am not yet admitted to the assemblies; I am only a novice.'

'Have you heard that their god appears behind the altar on certain days?'

'No.'

'Maybe it is not true. A boy from here told stories about it. He used to go to the monastery quite often. His parents worked on land belonging to the Böns and he used to bring them grain and other things. We don't know exactly what he saw or what he heard, but his curiosity did not do him any good. Those people from So Sa Ling do good, but it is better to keep one's distance from them.'

'It was the day of the annual feast when the temple is open to everybody. All the people from the surrounding neighbourhood who are Böns worship at So Sa Ling, and the young man, whose family belongs to that religion, had gone along with

them. But he was not very drawn to religion - he preferred drink.

‘Long after dark he went to see one of his friends. He was very excited and a little drunk. He said to him: “I have found out something strange about my masters, the lords of So Sa Ling. The old abbot has beaten me several times when I did not deserve it. He is a terrible, mean old man, and I wanted to play him a trick. So when there were a lot of people moving about in front of the altar, I managed to hide between the flags and banners which are in front of the door to the dark and secret place between the altar and the big rock, and when the abbot came to propitate the god, I crept in behind him. I wanted to upset something in the arrangement of the offerings, without his noticing, and then make my escape. Then, when he would have spoken the words which make the god come, the god would have appeared and seen that everything in the magic circle was not as it should be - he would have beaten that nasty old abbot much harder than the old bastard had ever beaten me.

“But the ‘Grand Bön’ stayed in front of the circle of offerings without giving me a chance to touch anything, and then he went, closed the door and locked me in. I was a prisoner. Was the god going to come? I was very glad that I had not managed to touch the offerings. Perhaps he would not harm me. But I badly wanted to get out. It was a horrible moment ... give me another drink ...”

‘He had already had a lot to drink, but he had several more bowls of spirits,’ and then he continued:

“I got out, since I am here, but not the way I got in. Oh! It was tough! I shall tell you ... I shall tell you about it tomorrow.’

‘His speech became slurred and he was almost falling asleep. Even so, he managed to get home. But the next day, as he was on his way to a neighbouring village, his horse must have bolted and thrown him. His body was found lying on the stones in a dried-out river bed. His skull was broken.’

‘It’s an odd story, isn’t it? The poor chap was mad. One should never fool around with the gods - nor with the Böns of So Sa Ling. You seem a nice fellow; you are young. Be careful!’

A few days later when Anag was alone with Garab, he repeated the conversation to him. Garab shared the opinion of the peasant. One should not fool around with the gods nor, certainly, with those who have dealings with them. And going back in his own mind he began to think, as Detchema had done, about the charade he had enacted in Lhasa before the 'Omniscient One'. Was the misfortune which had struck him not a punishment? Was he not responsible for Detchema's death? ...

The idea of consulting a seer became firmer in his mind. This abbot who called up a god must possess the means of obtaining an oracle. He decided to seek a consultation with him.

Garab confided his plan to Anag, and the young man advised him to take the advice of his uncle on the subject. 'However,' he added, 'think carefully about it. This abbot sounds like a dangerous man to me, and for my part I don't ever want to set eyes upon him. I am not going to be a monk here, whether my uncle likes it or not.'

'Where do you want to go?'

'Listen, when you leave So Sa Ling, I would like to go with you.'

Garab began to laugh. 'What would you do with me? Look after my herds? I have none left. They have been stolen.'

'How was that ... by brigands?'

'Well, as far as I am concerned they were brigands.'

'You never told me how you came to be wounded.'

'You have never told me where I am, here.'

'My uncle forbade me.'

'So?'

Anag hesitated. 'Behind the first mountain chain towards the south runs the great Giamo nu Chu (*Saluen*) river. Seeing that I have answered you, will you take me with you?'

'I shall think about it. But I must really consult a seer. I am not frightened of the abbot.'

Migmar seemed in no hurry to introduce his patient to the abbot. Garab had been careful to hold his tongue about what Anag had told him and the advice he had given him. He simply expressed his wish to consult a seer.

‘I shall think about it,’ replied Migmar.

A few days later, Migmar came back and informed Garab that he was to move from his room in the hospital and would now live in the second enclosure, whilst the abbot would try to obtain for him an oracle from the guardian deity of So Sa Ling. This arrangement did not please Garab, but he did not see how he could refuse if he wanted to hear the oracle. Towards evening he saw Anag in the courtyard and called him over to tell him what had been decided.

‘Oh! I don’t like it,’ said the young man upon hearing this news. ‘Believe me, don’t fall into the clutches of the abbot.’

‘But what can you have against him? You have never seen him. One must not judge people from the tales of peasants.’

‘No, perhaps not. Nevertheless I am afraid for you. I have heard my uncle say to one of his colleagues that you are an interesting subject. Interesting to whom? And for what? The idea of your going into the other enclosure makes me uneasy. Have you really made your mind up about it?’

‘I have.’

‘Very well, so have I. The day after tomorrow I have to accompany one of the elders who is going to pick up some silver. He will put the ingots into his saddlebags and I shall have butter, dried meat and anything else that is given to us in mine. On the way home we are going to travel through a forest. I shall let the elder go ahead as respect demands. And then suddenly I shall say “Reverend Sir, your horse is limping. What is wrong with its left foot? Perhaps a stone has got stuck under its shoe. Please dismount so I can have a look. The animal might seriously damage its hoof.”

‘I know he will believe me, he will dismount and when he is on the ground I shall jump onto his horse, keeping the bridle of mine firmly around my arm. And hop! ... try and catch me.’

‘You want to steal his silver?’

‘You have understood.’

‘And then?’

‘I shall see. I am not stupid.’

‘And the deity and the abbot?’

‘I am afraid of them for your sake, because you are in their reach. I shall soon put a good distance between them and

myself. And then I shall find a lama. I shall tell him that an evil Bön has put a curse on me and he will give me a charm to protect me.'

'That's the stuff that brigands are made of!' exclaimed Garab, laughing. 'You remind me of my youth.'

He had said too much. Anag looked at him inquisitively.

'Were you ...?' he asked shyly.

'Well, yes. I was chief of a band and quite famous. Believe me! The bullet which wounded me came from a soldier.'

'Bandit chief! Oh! I had a feeling that you were something special,' exclaimed Anag, overcome with excitement. 'Bandit chief! You will take me into your band when you go on raids again ... Promise me!'

'I am not going to work the highways any more, my boy. There is too much sadness in me. My spirit is broken. The girl I loved with all my heart and soul is dead, I am almost sure of it. That's what I want to see the seer about. She was drowned at the time that I was wounded.'

'Oh! A woman!' answered Anag with youthful lightheartedness. 'That's terribly sad, of course, but you will get over it, chief. There are others.'

'You are too young to understand, Anag. For me there is no other.'

'I am less worried about you now that I know who you are, friend Garab. Neither an old Bön nor his god can have power over a djagspa (bandit) chief! We shall meet again. Let us make the wish together that we will meet again.'

'With all my heart,' said Garab. They took each other by the hand and remained silent for a few moments, concentrating their thoughts on the desire for a reunion. And then Anag left the room.

\* \* \* \* \*

Garab had crossed the low, narrow door to the second enclosure. Inside he saw buildings of grey stone similar to the hospital buildings, and at the back of the courtyard, built against the steep rock, stood a little temple, devoid of architectural pretensions. There was nothing about its plain appearance to inspire fear; it just exuded a heavy, oppressive

gloom and Garab was immediately affected by its depressing influence. The cell which was allocated to him had an opening, without a door, leading to one occupied by an old monk who did not speak to him as he entered.

Garab who was used to galloping across the vast solitudes, felt ill at ease, more so than he had done in the hospital. Day by day his strength was coming back to him and he began to feel a powerful need for exercise and the open air.

'I shan't stay long in here,' he thought, as he went to sleep in the evening. His old neighbour had not spoken a word to him.

The next day and the one after, the following week and the succeeding ones, went by in the same silence, the same inactivity. A monk regularly brought three meals a day but never spoke a word. Garab tried to question him but only got a smile for an answer, and the monk indicated by putting his hand over his mouth that he had been ordered to remain silent. Garab turned back to his companion and asked him some questions but the old man did not even seem to have heard him. And as for Doctor Migmar, there was no sign of him.

Sometimes Garab tried to walk about in the courtyard or to go into the temple when he saw the members of the order gather there for their service. By gestures he was given to understand that he must remain in his cubicle. The ex-chief felt himself becoming ill again. His strength seemed to wane and he felt strange and unwell. At last, one day, Migmar reappeared.

'I have been away,' he said simply. But Garab did not believe him. 'You will see the abbot tomorrow,' he added, and then left.

At long last! thought Garab, I shall know whether, by a miracle, Detchema escaped death, and whether it is worth my while to go on living.

A series of dark corridors led to the abbot's quarters. The room into which Garab was led was windowless and lit only by the little butter lamps which stood on a narrow altar. The abbot was sitting, cross-legged, on a divan.

Garab made the usual prostrations and then looked anxiously at the man from whom he was expecting the answer which would decide the rest of his life.



He saw an extraordinary face, completely calm like that of a statue. No wrinkles creased the yellowish skin, and yet it gave the impression of an age that surpassed any estimate of the antiquity of the one who possessed this disconcerting physiognomy.

‘You may sit down,’ said the abbot to Garab, directing him with his eyes to a square rug placed on the floor of the chamber.

His voice was as strange as his face: a voice without any timbre or inflection, it was more like something produced by a machine than by a living creature. Garab felt uncomfortable. He had not anticipated this.

‘Doctor Migmar found you unconscious and wounded. He healed you. You have never confided in him how you received this injury nor who you are. Today you are requesting an oracle. I have the right to know your identity and everything about you. Don’t try to lie. I have means of knowing the truth. Apart from that, your past behaviour and the good and bad actions you have done, do not interest me in themselves. Good and Evil are meaningless distinctions drawn by short-sighted inferior minds. For a long time I have not bothered about them. What I wanted to study was the quality of your physical and psychic substance. I have done so since the day that Doctor Migmar brought you to So Sa Long. I did not have to see you for this purpose. Every being, every thing, exudes emanations which modify the nature of the environment which it forms part of. If a grain of salt falls into a bowl of pure water it will impart a salty flavour to it, and it is not necessary to see the grain of salt to know, when tasting it, that salt has been added to the water. Don’t try to understand me. The most elementary principles of the science involved here are well above your intellectual capacity.’

As the abbot finished speaking, Garab was amazed to see some little incense sticks on the altar light up by themselves. A strange odour, which did not in any way resemble that of Tibetan incense, spread through the little room. The ex-bandit chief felt himself go dizzy. The abbot remained silent and motionless, his eyes fixed upon him.

‘Your Reverence,’ babbled Garab, ‘I am a criminal. My life

has been spent roaming the countryside as a bandit chief ...'

'That is enough,' interrupted the Bön, 'I know all that. What of it? There is no need to ask me any questions. The oracle is given. Listen!'

The strange scent became stronger, Garab could feel it suffocating him. The fixed expressionless eyes of the abbot had become two thin beams of cold light which attached themselves to the ex-bandit and were tearing him apart like blades of steel.

'Listen,' repeated the icy voice, 'everything that was your life is dead!'

'Detchema!' Garab called out.

'All is dead,' repeated the abbot.

Garab never knew how he got out of the Bön master's room. He vaguely remembered a feeling like being hit over the head. He must have lost consciousness. He was far from having recovered his strength.

When he came around he was alone and the cell he was in was not the one he had been living in.

'The abbot informed me that you were very shaken by the oracle,' said Migmar when he came to see Garab the next day. 'That is a pity, because in your still frail state of health emotional upheavals are not good. Life in this world is a fabric of unpleasant vicissitudes. It is wise to prepare oneself for a happier one in a better world,' he added sententiously.

Migmar had never preached religion to Garab, and Garab was astonished.

'You are right,' he answered, 'our lamas say the same thing.'

'There is no real difference between the Bönns and the lamas in their profound doctrines. The differences exist only in the popular religion, in the minds of the vulgar.'

'I did not know that. I know very little about religious matters.'

'I understand. Most people are like you. But you could learn.'

'Well, yes ... I am sure ... I could ...,' answered Garab vaguely.

And the conversation ended there.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the following days Garab was to have an experience which would lead him into an unexpected series of adventures.

He was now allowed to walk about in the courtyard and to speak to the monks that he encountered there. Plunged into his sad reflections and wondering what he would do when he left So Sa Ling, and thinking that day could not be far away, Garab did not make overmuch use of this last permission. Most of the time he was content to pace up and down the courtyard or to sit in it in silence.

One afternoon, as he was thus walking between the monastic buildings which surrounded the vast courtyard, he noticed at the entrance to one of them a man whose unusual appearance struck him. He was clad like the other monks, but his face showed him to be of Hindu origin, without any doubt.

Curiosity and a certain sympathy born out of the racial link which he knew he had with the stranger drew Garab to him.

'I did not know that there was a stranger living here,' he said as an opening remark. 'I am not from here either.'

'One can see that a little bit,' answered the Hindu, smiling.

'My name is Garab,' continued the ex-chief. 'I have been ill and have been a patient here.'

'My name is Ram Prasad,' said the stranger. But he omitted to say what had brought him to So Sa Ling.

Garab remained silent, not knowing what to say.

'Come in, if you would like to,' said Ram Prasad, politely, perhaps guessing the desire of the other.

Daily conversations followed the first, and a brotherly friendship arose between the two men. Ram's revelations opened a world of ideas to the amazed Garab, the existence of which he had not suspected, and Ram listened with interest and amusement to Garab's descriptions of the adventurous life of bandits in the pursuit of caravans. Garab also confided to his new friend the nightmare he had lived at the Khang Tise, and his story seemed to fascinate the Hindu.

'There you came into contact with a great mystery,' he said. 'Ordinary men speak of life, death and rebirth without knowing what they are talking about. Life can only be explained in terms of death, and death by means of life. The

two are aspects of the same reality, which only appear different to the ignorant. It is this reality which one must get at.

‘I have been questioning the masters of my country for twenty years. I have practised many forms of magic, even those which are dreadful and lead to the edge of the precipice of ultimate dissolution, but I have never yet encountered anyone who had plunged himself over that precipice and had come out triumphant, conscious and having gone beyond life and death.

‘I consider you my racial brother. Aryan blood flows in your veins and your father, even if he used the science he had mastered for evil, was an initiate. In order to safeguard you against the risks you might run through ignorance, I will tell you what I have discovered. The ordinary monks who live here practice or study medicine and have no idea about this.

‘The abbot is a sorcerer who aspires to become a real magician, but he is a long way from it and the path which he follows does not lead to the acquisition of real powers. He has tried to penetrate my thoughts and plans but I noticed his attempt. I am an expert at covering my mind with an impenetrable veil: he was not able to lift it.

‘Nevertheless a mystery does exist at So Sa Ling. I sensed it from far away and I was attracted towards it. I want to discover it at any price. That is why I came here, pretending to be a doctor wishing to study the medical science of the Böns, but they are only half taken-in by my stratagem. I have to be careful all the time because they are skilled in the art of handling certain occult forces and able to severely chastise anyone who tries to fool them.

‘The abbot and a few others are in search of the secret of immortality. The man you saw has lived several centuries, but although he has managed to prolong his life well beyond the ordinary span, he is not immortal.

‘By what method do they think that they can become free of death? I am sure that they have one and that is the great secret which they hide under the cover of this monastery hospital and medical college. I must know this method. But whatever it may be, in the hands of these Böns it will remain ineffective. These monks will not conquer death because they believe in death.

‘Death is something one must throw oneself into, watch it perform its work of destruction, and deny it. Every atom of matter which it destroys one must transform into an energy thousands and thousands of times more alive than the substance which disappears. Life is a subtle force. The gross material forms which we call beings and things are only illusory appearances in the imagination of the blind who perceive nothing of reality except distorted shadows.

‘You see, my friend, I want to learn what they know at So Sa Ling, as I have learnt elsewhere what others know. Perhaps I would be able to get better results from their method than they do themselves.

‘I suspect them of practising, in a different way, the cursed art of which your father was a pastmaster, and to want to nourish and increase their vitality by drawing on the vitality of others. The abbot tried to do so at my expense; I felt it and parried it. Be careful yourself. Don’t tarry too long in this place.

‘The path which leads to immortality, as I told you, is quite different. One must completely dissolve the perishable, annihilate it, in order to free the indestructable energy - and that is something which I doubt that any of these sorcerers would dare to attempt.’

Garab listened spellbound to these propositions of which he understood nothing, but added to the instinctive sympathy which he had felt for the Hindu right from the start there was now a tremendous admiration. All Tibetans revere learning and sages, and this stranger, who held long discourses upon profound mysteries, seemed to his rustic listener to be like one of those masters, learned in the secret sciences, who are worshipped in Tibet.

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Time went by imperceptibly, as it does for all those whose uniform existence does not contain days which are marked by outstanding events. Ram Prasad read books on medicine and questioned the doctors at the hospital. Garab himself had sought permission to learn the rudiments of the art of healing as a means of prolonging his stay at So Sa Ling. He still felt he

should get away from this awesome place, but the presence of Ram made him want to stay on.

The clear judgement and common sense of the ex-bandit was not impaired by the admiration he had conceived for the Hindu. He admitted that the latter was infinitely superior to him in intelligence and learning, but he had doubts about his prudence. He had the feeling that danger was insidiously approaching his friend, drawing its net tighter around him day by day. When he had acquainted Ram with his fears, the latter had replied that he would be careful and that he was able to defend himself. Garab said nothing, for fear of offending the Hindu by appearing to doubt his occult powers, but he promised himself that he would keep a watchful eye on his rash friend, knowing that in certain circumstances the help of a pair of strong arms can effectively enhance the powers of a magician.

For this reason Garab resigned himself to becoming a medical orderly at So Sa Ling, and Migmar had conveyed the approval which the abbot had given to his decision.

A year went by, and then eighteen months. Suddenly, one day, the abbot sent for Garab, who found himself again confronted by the impressive man in the semi-darkness of the little room with the strange odour wafting around him.

‘Your conduct has been worthy of praise,’ declared the toneless voice which had once pronounced the devastating oracle confirming Detchema’s death.

‘By devoting yourself to the service of others you prepare the way towards your complete purification and you will avoid the consequences of your past crimes which could render your future life miserable.

‘I have decided to perform for your spiritual welfare the rite which will cleanse you of the defilements which still cling to you.’

The abbot clapped his hands. A monk entered, carrying in his hand a cock with its feet tied together and a copper tray. The Bön then stepped down from his high divan and ordered Garab to stand in the middle of the room. Taking the cock by its feet in one hand and the tray in the other, he began to ‘sweep’ Garab slowly from top to bottom, using the bird as a

kind of duster or brush and holding the tray underneath the cock as if to collect an invisible dust.

During this ceremony the abbot and his acolyte chanted alternately in a sombre tone in a language Garab did not understand. After some time, the abbot let the cock fall on the floor. The animal gave a cry and struggled, flapping its wings.

‘Untie its feet,’ ordered the Grand Bön. The assistant obeyed. The cock got up and tried to run away. The monk seemed alarmed and looked at his superior. The latter fixed his icy look upon Garab. There was a long silence.

‘I wanted this proof,’ said the abbot at last. ‘I knew the result beforehand. You must realise, my son, that by means of this rite the impurities which cling to an individual pass into the cock who dies as a result. If he does not die, this means that he has not absorbed any impurities. And if he has not been able to absorb any impurities, this is due to the fact that the Life itself of the individual has taken them with it upon leaving the body, which can go on existing for a while like an empty shell.’<sup>2</sup>

‘Your life is finished. Your present activities are just the continuation of impulses which originate from before. It is like the potter’s wheel which continues turning after the potter’s foot has stopped imparting movement to it.

‘What use is it, then, to insist on continuing a phantom life, devoid of soul, such as yours? Rather make a sacrifice of it which is useful to others and by means of which you will acquire a great deal of merit which you can share with those whom you have loved.

‘Come!’

He made a sign; the monk opened a little door hidden behind a curtain. The abbot went out and Garab followed.

The door opened on to a little yard upon which the sun was shining.

‘Lift your right arm in such a way that the line of your wrist, when you hold your hand horizontally, comes up to the level of your eyebrows,’ said the Grand Bön. ‘Look carefully at the place where your hand joins onto your arm. You will see this junction getting thinner and thinner, becoming threadlike and finally dividing, so that the continuity between hand and arm is

broken. This is the sure proof that the life of an individual is finished, that it has left the body which can go on existing but only for a limited time.

‘Look at your wrist!’

Garab obeyed. With terror he watched the line of his wrist getting thinner, becoming threadlike, losing its solidity and turning into something nebulous and transparent – but the line, however tenuous, did not break; it remained continuous.

‘My hand remains joined to my arm,’ he babbled.

‘Look harder.’ The sharp rays emanating from the fixed eyes of the abbot were directed towards him and pierced him painfully.

‘Look harder!’

‘My hand does not separate! It holds ... It still holds!’ yelled Garab. ‘I am alive! ... well alive!’

‘The attachment of this fantasy which you take for yourself to its empty shell is causing your illusion. Return to your room, do not go out any more, and repeat the experiment over and over again. When you have recognised the truth, if you wisely decide to let go of the few days of existence that this body which is not you can hope for, let me know; I shall see you again then. Go!’

‘Lock yourself in your room,’ was what the Grand Bön had said, but Garab reacted with all his strength against the ideas of death which had been suggested to him and ran to the room of his friend. It was empty.

The idea that a diabolical scheme was being hatched against Ram and against himself immediately came to Garab’s mind. They were trying to prevent him from letting his friend know what had taken place between the abbot and himself. They wanted him to lock himself in his room, and Ram had been removed.

For what purpose? Ram had to be notified. He had to know if he came back to his room that Garab was calling him urgently. Perhaps there was still time to avert the peril which was in the air.

Hastily, by means of a piece of charcoal taken from the fireplace, Garab drew lightly, in a corner of the room which Ram had previously designated for this purpose, a circle inside



a square. As he did so he recited a magic formula his friend had taught him. Circle and square would constitute magic defences which would hide the secret sign signifying 'Come at once, danger' from the clairvoyance of the abbot.

Then Garab left, acting completely calmly, and as he encountered a monk who seemed to be strolling in the yard he said to him: 'I wanted to let Ram know that I am going to remain in my room in meditation for a few days, but he was not in. Do you know where he is?'

'I think he has gone away. I think he went with one of the doctors. I am not sure,' answered the monk evasively.

What had only been a vague idea in Garab's mind became a certainty. The danger he had felt looming was now imminent. But what shape would it take?

The Böns had been able to discover the plans of the Hindu, but perhaps they would not consider an immediate attempt upon his life. As for himself, the abbot had tried to convince him that his life was more or less finished and had exhorted him to sacrifice his remaining days. To sacrifice them how? He had given no hint, but he had not had him assassinated, although that would have been quite feasible.

Perhaps a sacrifice would be suggested to Ram Prasad in a similar way, but he would probably not be assassinated either. The Böns must have reasons for abstaining from such crimes. Like himself, Ram would return to his room, he would see the sign in the corner of the wall, he would respond to the call, and then they would both leave this sorcerer's den together.

He therefore had to wait for Ram's return whilst pretending to be carrying out the abbot's instructions. Garab withdrew into his room and a monk brought him his meals, as had been done during the first days of his stay in the second enclosure.

From the food brought to him, the adventurer of old took and hid enough to build up a little supply in case it became necessary to flee.

Several days went by. Garab's anxiety increased, but he did not dare to leave his cell for fear of arousing suspicion instead of allaying it. Going to Ram's room was pointless. If he had come back he would have seen the sign and hurried along. To

ask about him would serve no useful purpose; the monks would have been ordered to tell him some fabricated story. So, what was there to do?

Uncertainty and fear made Garab so nervous that he was overwrought and unable to sleep, yet he had to pretend to be in a state of profound meditation. From time to time he repeated the test which the abbot had shown him: he would look at the line linking his hand to his arm, he would watch it get thinner, become tenuous and transparent, but never did it separate. And then Garab, feeling reassured, felt his blood begin to boil, and under his breath he hurled all the many terrible maledictions contained in the rich repertoire of a bandit at the multigentarian abbot.

Ram Prasad did not return. Garab no longer thought that he would. He felt death's shadow looming over the monastery. He had to find Prasad, and he had to find him at once, otherwise it would be too late.

If Ram did not return, it was because he had never left. Garab began to feel sure of this. His friend had been hidden, imprisoned somewhere within the monastery. Certainly not in the hospital which was open to all comers, nor, probably, in the buildings of the second enclosure to which the novices had free access. That left the abbot's quarters. Garab had been there at the time of Ram's disappearance. The Hindu might have been taken there subsequently, but Garab rejected this hypothesis. He reckoned that Ram's occult powers were greater than those of the abbot, who would not have been able to hold him against his will. Was there then within the monastery a more powerful sorcerer than the old Bön whom he had met? Ram had spoken about a mystery, a mystery which he wanted to discover...

Garab was not concerned with these subtle matters. The arguments of his friend and the aims he pursued seemed far beyond his comprehension. And at times, if his admiration for the Hindu mystic had not prevented him, he would even have doubted that Ram was in full possession of his mental faculties.

So where might Ram be held?

Suddenly Garab remembered the story Anag had told about the young rustic who had been flogged too often and had conceived the bizarre plan to get his revenge by having the

abbot beaten in turn by the god whom the Böns worship. He had apparently managed to get into a secret chamber behind the altar where the abbot performed the rites for this god. Did this chamber really exist? This was possible. The lamas also place offerings for propitiating certain deities into rooms into which no one is allowed to enter, or into locked closets.

The Bön sorcerers sometimes perform blood sacrifices. Would the ones at So Sa Ling have thought of sacrificing Ram to their god in that secret chamber? The horror of this idea made it impossible for Garab to wait and think any further. As soon as the monks had retired for the night he would go in search of his friend.

When night had come, Garab curbed his impatience and waited long enough to give the inhabitants of the monastery time to go to sleep. Then, having carefully wrapped the little food he had been able to gather into a cloth, he put the parcel under his robe, tied his belt tight, and went out, crawling as far as the temple in order to prevent his tall figure from casting any suspicious shadows.

The doors of the temple were closed at night. Knowing this, Garab went to the right hand side of the building. There, between the side of the building and the wall of the enclosure was a narrow passage which allowed the daylight to enter into the interior of the building through several windows which were not very high above the ground. As usual, they were made of a frame over which paper, taking the place of glass, was glued. These kinds of structures are not very solid, and the frame, which is simply held to the wall by means of the paper stuck onto it can be easily removed. In a matter of minutes, Garab was inside.

Recalling certain details from Anag's account, he went to the left of the altar. On it the eternal lamp was burning, and its light showed the hangings between which the peasant boy claimed to have hidden. Parting them, Garab came upon a massive door set into stone pillars, closed by means of iron bars padlocked in several places. The idea of forcing it was out of the question.

So the secret chamber actually existed. It was a matter of getting into it. Garab looked at the altar. At the top of it, right

under the ceiling of the temple, a faint light filtered through the ancient wooden panelling. Was the tabernacle he was trying to enter directly behind the altar, or was it sealed off by a wall? The second hypothesis was more in keeping with the precautions that had been taken to secure the door Garab had just examined. However, one could also imagine that the respect and awe inspired by the deities, whose statues were standing on the altar, would appear to the Böns a sufficient barrier against any sacriligious attempt at intrusion into the inner sanctum of their tutelary deity, and that they had not further fortified his abode on this side.

Garab was too plagued by fear to worry too much about the gods. He climbed upon the altar, stepping on the ledges, putting his feet irreverently upon the pedestals and even the knees of the statues, and reached the top which was decorated with a group of sculptures representing the fantastic bird Garuda, his wings spread out, surrounded by dragons.

Cutting away the end of one of Garuda's wings with the strong knife which he carried in his belt, Garab managed to separate it from the rest of the ornamental sculptures. The huge bird was now only held on one side and it became easy to detach. After a short struggle Garab heard a crack; the second wing had broken. He laid the mutilated bird on the altar and put his head through the gaping hole which had been left where the massive body of the bird had been, and looked through. There was no wall at all behind the altar. The distance from it to the rock face of the mountain was little more than a pair of outstretched arms. In the recess into which he was looking, Garab could make out a little butter lamp and a few bowls of offerings standing upon a narrow table. There was no sign of Ram.

Garab hesitated about descending into this minute sanctuary of the god of So Sa Ling. He was on the wrong track. By morning the Böns would discover his forced entry into the temple, the sacriligious mutilation of the altar and the audacious curiosity of the criminal. Should he try to flee as quickly as possible in order to save his life? It would be the most prudent thing to do. It was the most sensible thing to do, but there was Ram. He could not forsake him.

As his eyes scanned the little chamber again, Garab noticed on the ground right against the rock a dark mass which he could not make out properly in the dim light of the little lamp. It might have been a heap of cloth, perhaps. Suddenly a terrifying thought came to Garab - could it be that Ram was there, bound and gagged? Ram ... or his body?

Without thinking any further, Garab put his legs through the empty space where the sculpted bird had been and, holding with both hands onto the dragons around him, he managed to push his whole body through and let himself slip down behind the altar.

The heap of cloth which he kicked over contained no victim. Garab breathed a sigh of relief. All hope of finding Ram alive was not lost, but where was he to look for him?

He was at a loss and rummaged absentmindedly with his foot in the heap of rugs, curtains and banners. A painful bump stopped him. His toes had hit against something hard.

Pushing the material aside to see what it was, he discovered a lid set into the floor and retained with a strong iron bar which prevented it from being lifted from underneath. Was this a pit, a sinister dungeon? The fear of a gruesome discovery came to Garab again. He slipped the bar out and lifted the lid. There was a hole deep enough for a man to stand more or less upright in, and from this hole came wafts of fresh air. In all likelihood this was a passage leading outside. What was there? More living quarters? A secret part of the monastery? Did it lead to the mystery which Ram had sensed?

For Garab, retracing his steps had become impossible. It was absolutely essential that he left So Sa Ling before the Böns woke up. If he had not found Ram, he would alert the people in the surrounding villages. He had learnt from Anag that they vaguely suspected the Böns of maintaining sinister relations with demons. No doubt he would have no difficulty in enlisting their help to look for the Hindu, but he still hoped to find him himself before the night was over. The discovery of this secret passage had given him fresh hope. Perhaps it was this way that Ram had been taken, willingly or by force.

He picked up the little lamp on the table with the offerings and held it over the hole. Rough steps had been hewn out of

the rock and the hole gave access to a narrow tunnel through the high rock wall against which the temple was built.

Without hesitation, Garab entered this passage, taking the lamp with him. This last precaution proved unnecessary, as the distance underground was quite short. A moment later the audacious explorer of the mysteries of So Sa Ling emerged onto the edge of a small natural plateau between the high needle-shaped peaks which, seen from the valley, appear to merge into one another at their base.

At the time, passing clouds were obscuring the light from the stars, but long practice during nocturnal marches and raids had given the ex-bandit chief the eyes of a lynx. He could easily make out a goat path winding its way though the cluster of peaks. Steps had been cut into the steep parts and some big rocks which barred the way had been cut away. As far as one could make out in the dark, the path had been constructed a long time ago. The hewn rock faces had regained their original colour and plants and shrubs grew in the cracks.

The path climbed steeply, keeping to the centre of the peaks in such a way that those walking upon it remained completely hidden at all times.

Garab walked for a long time and then, as he came around from behind a large rock, he saw in the distance before him a faint reddish light which appeared to be coming out of the ground. Had he reached his goal?

Continuing to follow the path, Garab arrived at the edge of a deep depression, a kind of little sunken plateau, closed in on all sides. Small houses stood on this plateau, and the light that had seemed to him to be coming out of the ground was from a big lantern which stood under a shelter consisting of a roof supported by pillars in the centre of the plateau.

So, apart from the accommodation in the monastery, the Böns had other dwellings: *tsham khangs*,<sup>3</sup> no doubt.

Most lamaist monasteries also have huts in more or less solitary places for the use of those amongst their members who wish to live as anchorites, but their existence is not hidden. The contemplative life of hermits is considered noble and holy by all, there is no reason why lay people should not know of it. On the contrary, it is for them an example which helps to uplift

their minds above the vulgar material interests of daily life. But Garab could not credit the Böns of So Sa Ling with anything so saintly. The residents of these carefully hidden huts were no doubt depraved people who devoted themselves to evil practices and had intercourse with demons. Was Ram being held prisoner by them?

Garab had no way of assessing how many Böns this place housed. He was strong but alone. Should he run the risk of doing battle with them? If Ram was a prisoner here, would it be possible to free him by some ruse?

Before attempting anything he had to reconnoitre in order to find out how he could get away without going back the way he had come. Garab therefore left the path which led down to the plateau and precariously climbed a ridge overlooking it. As he made his way along it he investigated, as far as this was possible in the dark, the opposite slope to the one facing the huts. It consisted of an enormous natural wall, whose real depth he could not estimate, but which seemed to fall away far into the darkness. There was no way of escape in this direction.

The ridge Garab had been following ended abruptly before him at a fissure. He had come to a narrow saddle, crossed by a path originating from the sunken plateau and continuing in the opposite direction. He advanced carefully to find out where this path from the huts led to. He did not have to go far - a door set into the rock walls of the narrow passage blocked the way. If Ram was held on this plateau he could not escape in this direction. Another way had to be found.

Although it was the end of autumn and the night would be long, Garab became worried at the amount of time which had already elapsed since he had left his cell. Until now his nocturnal escapade had served no purpose other than to endanger himself, without having been of any use to Ram.

He was prepared to attack the Böns of the plateau, but then, even if he managed to render them incapable of pursuit, he could not return to So Sa Ling and so far he had found no other way out. He started to get an awful feeling that he had fallen into a trap which he could not get out of, nor get Ram out of, if he did find him.

Garab retraced his steps. In this direction the path wound its

way up and down along a precipice, following a winding ridge. It led on to a little promontary and there, before him, Garab saw a low wall which sealed the mouth of a cave.<sup>4</sup> He had not noticed it until it was in front of him and he had almost bumped into it. What was this? Another hermitage? Was it inhabited?

Caught between the Böns of the plateau and those who might be in this cave, Garab's situation had become more dangerous than ever. But Ram! Ram! Would he not find him?

He stood still, in despair, not knowing what to do next, when he seemed to hear a groan. He immediately thought of Ram. Was his friend imprisoned in there? Was he alone? Were there guards watching him? Garab went up to the wall, heard another groan, and then he could make out a few words in a feeble voice:

'I can't any more! ... Help! ... Get me out of here! ... Mercy!...

He recognised Ram's voice. It was he who was suffering behind this wall. Who was he talking to? Groping, Garab felt a heavy door, bolted from the outside with an iron bar which was secured with padlocks. Everywhere he found the same precautions and here, as in the case of the trapdoor he had lifted up in the temple, they were not taken against those coming from So Sa Ling, but against those who might want to escape from the secret part of the mountain. The door to the cave was secured against any attempt at breaking it open from the inside. It was therefore a prison, and since the door was locked Ram was either alone in it or his companions, if he had any, were fellow victims of the Böns.

Garab pressed his face against the door and called in a low voice:

'Ram! Ram! It's me, Garab. I have come to rescue you.'

He had to repeat his call twice before the answer came, faint but with the excitement inspired by hope.

'Garab! Save me! Save me!'

Garab was desperate and wondered how he could manage to force the door or break a hole through the thick wall. Again he heard the voice of his friend. It seemed more composed.

'Garab, you cannot get in. Hide. The Grand Master of the



Böns is coming. He comes every night and stays until dawn. He will open the door ... He comes alone ... Hide, quick, hide yourself!

'I will save you, Ram, have courage!' replied Garab. 'I am going to hide.'

Never, when he had lain in ambush along the lonely trails waiting for the arrival of a caravan, had time passed so slowly for the bandit chief. He was wondering if he was not wasting precious time, if he should not have tried to remove some of the stones from the wall or to dig under it with his cutlass. Would the Grand Master of the Böns come this night? Perhaps he was a figment of the poor delirious Hindu's imagination.

He was about to do something when he saw a light appear and advance along the path down which he had come. It disappeared at times and reappeared, getting stronger and stronger, and before long one could see that it was a hand lantern. The Bön was really coming.

Garab wondered what he should do. He had to let the Bön open the door and to prevent him from closing it again. And then ... that would depend on Ram. Was he free or fettered? He had no doubt that he would be able to knock the Bön out and tie him up. He had plenty of experience in the matter. He could then lock him in the cave, take the key of the padlock, and flee with Ram. But which way? Perhaps the Hindu would know.

The Bön came closer. Lit from head to foot by the lantern, an extraordinary apparition emerged out of the darkness. The Grand Master was a tall man and so unbelievably emaciated that his long brown robe seemed to cover nothing but a skeleton. His face resembled that of the abbot of So Sa Ling up to a point, but the strangeness was much more exaggerated. The smooth skin of the abbot and his eyes with the steely look had become, in the case of the Grand Master, a thin mask, stretched like parchment over the bones of the face, the eyes remained hidden and two burning rays marked their position.

Garab was exceptionally brave, but he felt himself trembling.

The terrifying personage put his lantern on the ground, took a key from under his robe, unlocked the padlock, removed the

iron bar, and opened the door. An asphyxiating stench of putrefaction came out of it - Garab in his ambush almost cried out in horror.

The Bön picked up his lantern and entered the cave. His gestures were slow, devoid of haste and supernaturally calm. He was chanting a kind of monotonous litany.

Holding his breath, Garab moved up to the open entrance and looked inside the cave. Before doing anything, he wanted to know whether Ram was free or bound, and whether he was in a fit state to help or whether the Böns had perhaps tortured and injured him. His eyes scanned the space under the rock vault; he could see nobody except the sorcerer.

A stone structure in the shape of a large rectangular platform took up almost the entire cave, leaving only a narrow passageway around it. The top of this platform was made entirely of iron and had several large holes in it. It might have been a crude altar, dedicated to the spirit of the mountain or to some demon.

The Bön performed various gestures. He had dropped his robe and was naked: a skeleton covered with a thin skin stretched over his bones. From a ledge in the rock he took a little round ladle with a long handle and plunged it through one of the holes in the top of the platform, and appeared to draw something up. He repeated this procedure several times, pouring the contents of the ladle over different parts of his body and rubbing himself with it. During all this he continued to chant in a low voice.

But where was Ram? Garab continued wondering, full of horror and almost overcome by the stench which emanated from the cave.

The Bön again inserted the ladle into one of the holes and then, holding it carefully, he changed position: he moved around the platform, stopped near one of the corners, and leant forward.

'This is the true elixir of immortality,' he pronounced sententiously. 'The vitality of strong young men is dissolved in it. For anyone other than an initiate this substance would be lethal; for the initiate who is ready to assimilate it, it becomes a source of imperishable energy. Consider yourself blessed, my

son, to have been able to contribute to nourishing this source, which will render the Masters superior to the gods.'

To whom is he speaking? Garab asked himself. I see no one. And Ram? ... After all, he did speak to me. Am I going mad?

The sorcerer brought the ladle to his lips, he appeared to drink something, and then he leant over the platform again.

'Your eyes are still open,' he said. 'Do you not feel the great sleep coming? Have the worms not started to attack your legs? You wanted to know our secret. Now you have discovered it. Make the wish to be reborn amongst us. One day perhaps you will become a Master in your turn. In this hope, I bless you with this secret aspersion.'

He brought the ladle over the platform. Garab saw a few drops of liquid fall from it. At the same time he heard an ear-splitting scream which came from under the iron lid:

'Help me, Garab, help!'

It was Ram calling, but he could not see him. Without quite knowing what he was doing, Garab grasped the iron bar which the Bön had left leaning against the wall by the door, and rushing upon him with all his might, he hit him over the head with it. The sorcerer collapsed, stunned.

'Oh! Garab, get me out of here! ... Garab!' pleaded Ram's voice, coming from under the platform.

But he is entombed in a grave, realised Garab.

'Come here and lift the lid,' moaned the Hindu.

Garab looked at the Bön who was lying on the ground, unconscious. A little stream of blood was trickling over his forehead. Perhaps I have broken his skull, he thought to himself. He had recovered his nerve.

'I am coming,' he replied to his friend. He picked up the padlock and key which the sorcerer had left near the door on his way in, and slipped them under his robe. And then he took the lantern and without letting go of the iron bar which had served him as a weapon, he went to the corner of the platform from which Ram's voice had come.

Framed in one of the openings, the Hindu's face was visible, in a horizontal position, like that of a man lying flat on his back. Almost beside him, through another hole, he could see the face of a corpse, bluish pale, and a bit further on, through a

similar opening. Garab could make out something which must have been a head, but of which only a skull, half-emerging from the putrefying flesh, remained.

What kind of a hell was this?

'This is a hollow platform. We are lying under its lid. You must lift it, Garab,' implored his half-dead friend.

Garab put his hands on the edge of the iron plate and felt it. It was much too heavy to try to lift it. It had to be lifted in sections by several men, after removing the padlocked clamps which were set into the stonework. Garab could only try to break away the corner a little in order to prise up the lid enough to make a small passage. Using the iron bar as a lever, he began to work away furiously. Little by little the stones he was levering became loose, some of them fell out, and then one of the clamps came away so that the plate began to shift. Before his friend's body was fully exposed, Garab took him by the shoulders and pulled him through the opening which he had made.

The Hindu was completely naked and covered with a filthy stinking slime. He could hardly stand and was leaning against the wall, unable to support himself.

'I have been in there without anything to eat for more than three days.'

'What is "in there"?''

'These sorcerers place living men between two iron plates and let them die there of hunger and decompose. The dead bodies are never removed. From time to time live ones are added in. The liquid produced by the putrefying flesh is their potion of immortality. That is the mystery of So Sa Ling. I know it now. Get me out of here, Garab!'

'That is what I came for,' answered Garab, terrified. 'Put on the sorcerer's robe and let's go.'

Garab quickly picked up the robe which the Grand Master had left and helped Ram to put it on. Then he went to have another look at his victim. 'He is not dead,' he said, 'we must lock him in.'

Ram was a little steadier on his legs. He followed his rescuer who, with the aid of the lantern, replaced the bar which secured the door and locked it. For a moment the two friends

breathed the fresh night air and expelled from their lungs the stench they had been breathing.

‘Do you know a way by which we can flee?’ asked Garab.

‘No, I was brought here by night.’

‘Terrible,’ muttered the chief.

‘But you must know the way?’

‘I only know the way by which I came. We can’t return by that route.’

Garab went right around the promontory. It looked down upon a sea of darkness in which clouds were drifting. The shapes of several peaks emerged here and there out of the darkness. This is suicide, he thought, but we must try to flee. It would be better to break our necks on the rocks than to suffer in the hell these Böns have created.

He took off his large belt and tested its strength. ‘This will do for a rope,’ he said to Ram. ‘However short it may be, it will be useful. Give me your belt.’ Ram took off the one from the Bön’s robe, which he had rolled around himself. With his knife, Garab cut two strips from it which were sufficient to tie up both their robes, and tied the lantern on the remaining piece.

Then he began an inspection of the slopes around the promontory, dangling the lantern as low as the cord permitted in the places which seemed most feasible for attempting the dangerous descent. He finally decided upon a kind of ‘chimney’ in which there were some stunted trees. Where did it lead to? On to manageable slopes, or on to a precipice? It was too dark to be certain.

‘Ram!’ said Garab, very emotional, ‘don’t consider yourself saved. We are almost certainly going to our deaths. Do you think your feet will be strong enough to hold you on a slope without slipping?’

‘I don’t know,’ answered the Hindu in a low voice. ‘I am feeling very faint.’

More than three days without food! remembered Garab. Under his robe he had food to restore his friend, but delay was dangerous. Quickly Garab untied the little bag which he had brought along, took out a piece of dried meat (a very concentrated food widely used in Tibet) and put it into his

friend's mouth. 'That will stave off your hunger. I have enough for you to eat properly later,' he said to him. 'Let us go. It is high time. I will help you.'

The dangerous descent began. Garab had tied the lamp to his belt. From time to time he lowered it as far as it would go on the end of the cord to be able to see what the ground was like beneath. At nearly every step he had to turn around to help Ram, who was staggering.

After what seemed a very long time to the fugitives, they found themselves on a little cornice on top of a vertical rock wall. This time there were no plants to hold on to. The sky was turning pale. A faint light was spreading over the countryside

The Böns will wonder why their Grand Master has not come back, thought Garab. They will go to the cave to look for him. They might see us here.

It was getting light. At the bottom of the rock one could see gently sloping pastures. Salvation lay down there, but how to get there?

'Ram,' said Garab, 'this is our last chance, it is pretty slim. I shall tie you to me and I shall slide down the rock.'

'Go ahead,' answered the Hindu.

With the aid of the two belts Garab tied his friend to his chest and dug his hands into the long sleeves of his thick robe in order to avoid burning his skin during the slide. He hoped to be able to slow himself down with the friction of his boots, his back, and his hands, if possible. Alone, he reckoned he would have stood a good chance, but with Ram on his chest he doubted it.

The slide began more gently than Garab had feared. The rock was not as smooth nor as steep as it had appeared. At times he managed to slow himself down and to steer a little. It was all over very quickly. A few moments after leaving the cornice, the two fugitives fell on top of one another on to grass, both badly shaken but safe and sound.

Garab untied Ram and helped him to his feet.

'Come on! Make an effort,' he said, 'we must get away from here. This time you are really saved.'

The Hindu did not answer. He began to walk. To Garab, he

looked an extraordinary figure. It is time he had something to eat, he thought, poor chap!

They went a little way over mountain meadows before reaching forest. Ram was at the end of his tether and although he would have preferred to go further and to reach a village, Garab realised that he had to stop.

A stream flowed through a series of waterfalls down a deep ravine. For want of anywhere better, this would shelter them long enough to have a quick meal. Garab hoped that Ram would then be able to carry on walking. The Böns would certainly not follow them the way they had come, and if they thought of looking for them in this direction they would have to come all the way around the mountain from So Sa Ling and they would not be arriving just yet. That they would be looking for them, Garab was quite sure. Ram and he had discovered too dreadful a secret for the Böns to risk them revealing it. They would have to try to kill both of them.

Ram ate a little and upon Garab's entreaties he got up, but his efforts at walking were in vain.

'I shall carry you on my back as far as I can,' Garab proposed. 'If I rest from time to time we can, no doubt, reach a village or a farm. Once we are amongst people the Böns will not dare to attack us.'

'No, let us stay here,' implored the Hindu.

All Garab's protestations were in vain. He had to resign himself to remaining in the ravine. He camouflaged himself and his friend as best he could amongst some thick bushes which came up to the edge of the stream.

'Listen,' said Ram, as soon as they were settled, 'I must tell you ...

'One of the doctors came to my room. "Our Master wishes to see you," he said to me. I felt that the mystery I had sworn to uncover was coming within my reach. I wanted to speak to you, to let you know at least by means of a sign, but you were not in when I looked in through your door as I was passing. It worried me, but I did not think it wise to show it. I followed the doctor to the temple and then into the forbidden sanctuary behind the altar. When I saw the trap door and the passage

under the rock, I realised that I would not be returning to So Sa Ling. Did you come that way?’

‘Yes. I remembered what Anag had told me about the young peasant who had entered into the sanctuary.’

‘There is no other way. You must have seen the hermitages on the plateau. I was locked into one of them and the next day the Grand Master came and talked to me at length. That is the phantom figure of a man whom you knocked out: an abominable sorcerer, but also an extraordinary being. Those who live up there with him claim that he is more than a thousand years old. He never sleeps except once every twenty-five years. Then he sleeps without interruption for six months and when he wakes up he has regained the vigour of a man in the prime of life.

‘He is now getting near the end of one of these twenty-five year cycles. I understand that the return of one of these periods of sleep begins to worry him. He is afraid of going to sleep because he knows that while he has succeeded in avoiding death for such a long time, he has not become truly immortal and could, one day, not wake up again.

‘His disciples have all reached fantastic ages, although their longevity is far from approaching that of the Grand Master. They also fear death and seek to become free of it forever.

‘Their great secret, the abomination which they have hidden at So Sa Ling, perhaps for centuries, is their potion of immortality. From its prolonged use, these crazy people expect the miracle which other practices, although they have prolonged their lives fantastically, have not brought about: to make them immortal once and for all.

‘You have seen what this filthy potion consists of. I have told you: live people, not dead bodies, are laid between the two iron plates and they are squashed so tight that they can’t move at all and only their face remains exposed. And these people must not be put there by force. The rite demands that they lie down in that dreadful bath of their own free will. <sup>8</sup>

‘Of their own free will! ... I imagine that the Böns use sorcery to induce their victims to do so. I, as you know, have a purpose. I want to pass beyond death; I want to become aware of that where the illusion of being and not being ceases to exist.



The Grand Master told me that he had called me because he knew that "my life" was at its end, that it had already left me and that the appearance of life which constituted my person was also nearing its end.'

'But the abbot told me the same thing at So Sa Ling,' interrupted Garab,' and he advised me to sacrifice the little bit of apparent life I had left for the good of others in order to acquire merit.'

'It is obvious that they wanted you too for their infernal brew.'

'To prove to me that my life was really finished, the abbot made me look at my wrist. I was supposed to see my hand separate from my arm.'

'Oh! They made you look at that too.'

'Yes, but they were lying. I could look as much as I liked, my hand stayed on my arm. I am alive, fully alive, more alive probably than the monster whom we locked in the cave.'

Ram raised his head: 'But I, I saw the threadlike line of my wrist break and my hand separate from my arm. I am going to die ... I am already dead.'

'You are crazy!' cried Garab, very alarmed. 'These are lies which the Böns dish out in order to turn the heads of those whom they want to make into their victims. You are no more dead than I am, Ram.'

'I know,' answered the Hindu. And he continued: 'The sorcerers did not speak to me about the tomb in the cave, but only about huts where one meditates in darkness. Where were they, did they really exist? I felt the mystery of So Sa Ling approaching closer and closer; I could feel myself touching it. I consented to lock myself into one of those huts. One night they came to get me. Chanting magical spells and burning strange incense, they led me to the cave and ordered me to undress, and then they opened the door...

'Garab, the lid was completely removed. I saw what you were not able to see, the horror of this charnel house. Near the place they assigned to me, there was a man still alive. He made a few movements trying to get up, to get out of this tomb, but he did not have the strength. His eyes were moving about with a terrible expression of horror ... Maggots were wriggling all

over him ... Garab! I saw that. That slow death which is felt coming, savoured, analysed, defied ... conquered no doubt. The clear consciousness recreating the forces and forms which other agencies were attacking and trying to annihilate; the will to live triumphing over the habit of dying.

‘Garab, I wanted to endure that and come out victorious ... I scoffed at the sordid and stupid Böns – and I lay down.

‘When the morning came the man who was lying against me gave a few sighs, I felt a shiver run through his leg which was touching mine, and then he moved no more.

‘The Master came the following evening. He passed the night in the cave. He spoke to me; I did not reply I was studying my sensations.

‘And, little by little, horror started to creep up inside me, and it grew until it conquered me. I could think of nothing except a means of escape and I knew that there was none.

‘Garab, you came ...’

‘Try to forget, think of something else,’ advised Garab, tears in his eyes. ‘Let’s get away from here. Believe me, you will feel better when we are not alone any more. The lack of food is affecting your mind, you are feverish. Come on, try to walk a few steps. Fear nothing, I have my sabre ... I have been a bandit chief, I know how to fight. These Böns don’t frighten me.’ Poor Garab did not know what to say. He felt an infinite compassion for the Hindu whose reason seemed to have left him.

‘Listen, Garab,’ continued Ram. ‘I was a coward. I failed the test. I thought I was strong but I have been weak. Words, words; I was fooling myself with words. A few days of steadfastness and no doubt I would have triumphed. I would have known eternal existence ...

‘Who knows why those of whom I only saw the remaining bones or bits of flesh had lain down in that cave; why did the one whose last shiver I felt submit? Perhaps some of them are the ones who have penetrated the great mystery, not the base mystery of those sorcerers, but the mystery of mysteries...’

‘Garab, I ought to return, I ought to lie down in that place which I should not have left, and this time see it through to the end...’

‘For God’s sake!’ cried Garab. ‘Ram, come to your senses, you are mad!’

The Hindu did not say anything more; a violent fever made him tremble, his skin was burning hot.

The nightmare he has lived through has really unhinged him, thought Garab. Will he calm down, will he grasp that we must get away? We have already wasted so much time!

A little more time passed, and then, over the noise of the waterfall, Garab heard suspicious crackling in the forest. People were moving through the bushes, breaking little twigs or crushing them underfoot, and he could hear the rustle of dry leaves.

‘Ram,’ he whispered into his friend’s ear. ‘There are people coming. Perhaps it is the Böns.’

The steps were coming closer.

‘I have called them in thought,’ mumbled the Hindu. ‘Let them take me away. I want to return there, to take the test again and win.’

‘Shut up!’ begged Garab. ‘You are raving. Shut up! They will kill us if they find us.’

Several voices could be heard. Several men had stopped near the bushes into which the fugitives had landed when they slid down the mountain.

‘They are going to see us,’ whispered Garab in a very low voice. ‘I know what we must do; let us hide between the rocks under the waterfall, the turbulent water will hide us. We must keep only our mouths above water. They will not think of looking there and they will go away.’

Pushing his friend, who did not resist, Garab crawled with him into the middle of the torrent. At the foot of the waterfall there was a depression full of swirling water and surrounded by boulders. Hurriedly they both got into it and Garab grabbed a bundle of twigs and leaves drifting in the current and placed it over their heads, which were close together and hidden by two nearby rocks.

Several men were searching the undergrowth. From what they said, Garab realised that they were indeed Böns who had been sent to look for them. One of them passed close to the bush where he and Ram had been hiding a moment ago.

The Hindu struggled, trying to get out of Garab's grip which was holding his body under water.

'Return ... I want to return ... Let me go,' he babbled. 'I want to prove it yet ... to triumph ... I want to know ...'

'Shut up! begged Garab, horrified, fearing that the noise of the waterfall would not be sufficient to drown the voice of this lunatic.

'Let me call them ... Here! ... I am here! ... I...'

Ram had struggled free. With his chest out of the water he was calling with the strength of madness.

In a split second Garab got hold of him, gripped him by the shoulders, and pushed his head under water.

Footsteps could be heard on the pebbles at the edge of the water. Ram was struggling and Garab, lying half over him, was holding him down with all his might, listening to the steps moving away again. Ram stopped struggling.

Silence returned to the forest. Garab lifted the head of his friend. Wide open, the eyes of the Hindu looked at him transfixed, as if they had wanted to express an idea, to communicate something.

Ram! ... What had he found out, the poor dear fool, during the few minutes when his friend, beside himself and becoming the brute again who wants above all to live, had killed him after saving him?

'Ram! Ram! What have I done?' sobbed the murderer, aghast.

When evening came, Garab was still sitting at the edge of the torrent. Ram, leaning against a rock, continued to look at him with his large, rigid, black eyes, full of mystery and tenderness.

Only when darkness had hidden the dear face and stopped the silent colloquy, did the ex-bandit get up and walk away.

## *Chapter Seven*

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**A**t the eastern edge of the vast grassy solitudes of northern Tibet stands a high mountain which rises isolated out of the immense desert plateaus. The herdsmen of the region call it the Amnay Matchen, or Matchen Pumra, and believe it to be the residence of their god. In front of the high peak which is covered in eternal snow, stands a group of gigantic black cone-shaped rocks, like sentries mounting a vigilant guard, and its foot rests upon veins of gold.

Gésar of Ling, the hero of the national epic of Tibet, lived near there in his youth, and the fantastic treasures that in legends he discovered might in fact have been the gold of the Amnay Matchen.<sup>1</sup>

It was also around there that Garab had had his tents and herds at the time of his prosperity. The proud and fearless chief had often crossed these lands on his expeditions at the head of his band, and it was in these same solitudes, further west, that Detchema had come to him.

Maybe there were mysterious links, maybe it was the instinct of the wounded animal returning to its lair. After wandering around for more than a year, carrying the painful burden of the crime he had unwittingly committed, Garab had come to prostrate himself at the feet of Dordji Migyur, an ascetic who lived as a hermit on the slopes of the Amnay Matchen. The wisdom and austerity of Dordji Migyur was renowned near and far. He was said to possess supernormal faculties and powers. Many sought the honour of becoming his disciples but the hermit sent nearly all of them away, gently but firmly, and the greatest favour he would ever bestow was to allow them to remain in the vicinity of his hermitage for a period of a few weeks or months.

Dordji Migyur had received Garab's complete confession with his usual impassive calm. He had taught him some easy religious practices advising him to carry them out faithfully. He also gave him a book which told the story of the life of the Buddha and some of his discourses and, contrary to his usual practice, he had allowed him to live for an indefinite period in a more or less habitable cave<sup>2</sup> which was occasionally used by pious laymen coming to replenish the provisions of the anchorite or by visitors seeking spiritual guidance.

The friendship with the Hindu at So Sa Ling, the events during his sojourn with the Böns and especially the psychological shock caused by the death of Ram had to some extent diverted Garab's thoughts away from Detchema. At the Amnay Matchen they began to re-form themselves, pushing other preoccupations into the background. The familiar atmosphere of the northern solitudes and the similarity of the surroundings to those in which Detchema had appeared to him and to those through which he had travelled with her on horseback to the Khang Tise helped to revive the memories of his past life, the memory of his love.

Day by day the picture of Detchema grew more powerful inside him. The memories of those nights of passion they had spent together in each other's arms under the starry sky came back to him. He remembered the voluptuous sensations which had suffused his body when it was in contact with hers and the ever-returning hunger for her flesh and for the insane satisfaction she used to give him.

Since his flight from So Sa Ling Garab had not been celibate. He was a handsome male and sufficiently attractive to women that even as a poor vagabond he was never short of girls who fancied him. But none of these girls who had fallen for the magnetic flame of the large eyes of the son of a Hindu had been able to dispel the impression Detchema had left in him, even for a single moment.

After their first night of love, Garab had asked himself anxiously: what has she got that makes her so different from all others? Into his mind again came the stories people tell about daughters of demons, the Sindongmas, who play at love with human lovers.

Detchema was dead, he had seen her carried away by the torrent. And yet, something deep inside him felt that she was alive. Again he saw the turbulent water and those two little hands, whirling like butterflies, disappearing into the curtain of fog. Were those hands human or a demoniacal phantasm? Should Detchema's hands not have been submerged? Detchema! Who then was she, who set his heart pounding and made his flesh undergo torture at the mere mention of her name.

Garab was engaged at the time performing the countless

prostrations which the hermit had given him to do. He continued them to the point of exhaustion, invoking through them the benevolence of the Bodddhisatvas who dedicate themselves to the service of all beings and to alleviating their sufferings.

Garab's temperament was not suited to the contemplative life. He had only just reached the age of thirty-two and was fitter than he had ever been before. He would hardly have been able to endure the life of an anchorite which he was leading if he had not considered it as a means to a particular end.

This end was not to escape the punishment his crimes called for. Garab's soul was too proud not to despise that idea. He would have considered himself a coward if he tried to escape the consequences of his actions. He was prepared to pay the price for them, whatever it might be, but Dordji Migyur had shown him an ideal.

'Forget the past,' the hermit had told him, 'and don't dwell on the thoughts of the wrongs you have done. Remorse is a form of presumption. To indulge in it is to attribute to oneself and to one's actions an importance which they do not possess. Everything which is, everything which comes about, is the result of many causes interwoven in a thousand ways. However far one may go back into the mists of time, it is impossible to discover an origin of these causes, to conceive a cause without a cause. Thus, my son, you and your actions are but links in this eternal chain, links attached to other links to which yet further links will become attached. Turn your thoughts to the sufferings of beings during their pilgrimage through this chain of existence.

'It is because they consider it with the clairvoyant eyes of wisdom that the Bodddhisatvas,<sup>3</sup> moved by compassion, become the instructors, guides and physicians of the ignorant men who have strayed and are burning with the fire of hate and greed.

'Stop looking back, my son, and aspire to the honour of becoming the servant of these Bodddhisatvas, to follow in their footsteps, forgetting yourself and wishing to be nothing but the tool of their charity in order to sow happiness in this world which is steeped in suffering.'

Garab listened attentively. The Bodddhisatva ideal is glorified



by all Mahayanist Buddhist sects. All Tibetans know about it, and however far they may be from living up to it, they venerate it deeply. Garab was no exception. He had at times heard passing lamas preaching on this subject, but none of them had impressed him as much as Dordji Migyur.

Thus, in order to render himself capable, both in this life and in the following ones, to alleviate the sufferings of those in distress and bring happiness to those who were deprived of it, Garab, the proud ex-bandit, lived in a cave on the Amnay Matchen the austere and noble life of an anchorite.

And then, through this mysterious interaction of the manifold causes and effects which Dordji Migyur had spoken about, there came about a very ordinary incident which unleashed a series of consequences which wrenched Garab from the port of salvation where he had thought himself firmly anchored.

Two herdsmen who were lay disciples of Migyur's came to the Amnay Matchen bringing an offering of food for their Master. As usual, they wanted to leave their blankets and the saddles of their horses in the cave which was their shelter when they came to visit. Garab was living in this cave. The two men knew him; one of them had been a member of his band.

At first the herdsmen thought that Garab was hiding and they tried to reassure him. Nearly four years had gone by since the Moslem expedition, the general was occupied elsewhere and everybody knew that he would in fact no longer pay the price which had been set on the head of the ex-bandit chief. Garab could return to his companions of old without fear. They would all love to see him again and the two of them would go around and hold a collection and gather a small herd which they would present to him to enable him to start making his fortune again. They all realised that their misfortune had been due to their disobedience of his orders, and they would try to make up for the sad consequences he had suffered as a result of their disobedience.

Garab thanked them and told them that he was deeply touched by their offer. And then he explained to them that it was in no way out of fear that he was living in this cave. He could have remained in Tibetan territory where he had nothing to fear. The reason he had come to the Amnay Matchen was to

lead a holy life under the direction of the great sage and ascetic Dordji Migyur. He aspired to follow in the footsteps of the great compassionate ones, the Boddhisatvas who are always ready to sacrifice themselves for the good of others. And starting on this theme, Garab, being perfectly sincere and moving himself with his own speech, amazed his friends of old by repeating, as if he was speaking freely from his heart, one of the most moving discourses of the hermit.

The two herdsmen could not believe their ears. Could this be the tough bandit who, a few years before, had led them joyously to the attack! But the holy legends were full of stories of such conversions. They remembered Angulimala - a bandit chief like Garab - who wore around his neck a necklace made from a thousand little finger nails, torn from a thousand of his victims. And this Angulimala, upon meeting the Buddha and listening to him, had become a saint, one of those who have attained the highest degree of enlightenment: an Arhat.

Bowing their heads full of respect, the two herdsmen prostrated themselves. And then, with the palms of their hands pressed together and their heads bowed, they begged the benediction of their former chief, the famous robber of caravans.

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At the convent of Samten Ling, Detchema had gradually sunk into lethargy. The religious life made no sense to her. She could have educated herself by reading in her little cell some of the many works on Buddhist doctrines which were in the library of Samten Ling, or she could have learnt the meaning of the rites practised in the convent by asking the Mother Superior, an educated woman of good family who had taken holy orders after being widowed. But none of these things interested her. Her life was entirely spent in day-dreaming. It had occupied her youth, she had made it a reality when she had met Garab, and when his death put an end to it her life had lost all purpose. She had become silent, indifferent, and absent-minded and passively accepted both the monotony of the hours she did not know what to do with and the sad and sombre monastic garb and the renunciation of her beauty, symbolised

by her shaven head. She saw in these things solely the expiation of her ingratitude towards her grandparents who had cherished her, and her egoism which had made her run away from them in order to find the lover of her dreams. She also considered them a punishment for having loved Garab badly, for having loved him for the pleasure which he gave her and for having contributed to his end.

Thus while Garab was sitting in his cave, meditating upon the heroes of transcendental charity and elated by his enthusiasm, living intensely whilst preparing himself to follow in their footsteps, Detchema's days were passing in gloom and devoid of purpose, filled only by the menial tasks assigned to the ordinary nuns.

In the context of these tasks, it fell to Detchema from time to time to accompany a group of elderly nuns into the villages where they went to collect alms. More than two years had passed since her arrival at Samten Ling when one day she was asked to go, with two other nuns, to visit a rich and pious widow who had promised a present of tea to the order.

The farm where she had to go lay close to the river, the crossing of which had had such tragic consequences for Garab and herself.

In accordance with custom, the widow invited the nuns to spend two whole days with her, believing that she would thereby acquire merit which would provide her in her future life with even greater wealth than she enjoyed at present.

The proximity of the place where her enchanted life with Garab had come to such an abrupt end awakened Detchema's dormant energy. She suddenly felt a desire to see once more the fateful ford, the woods through which she had wandered in search of Garab, and the spot where the chief's hat had been caught on a rock as an irrefutable proof of his death.

Without saying a word to her companions for fear that they might try to stop her, Detchema left the farm at daybreak and went towards the river. A little later she met some peasants who showed her the way to the ford and she got there about the middle of the morning.

It was spring and the sun was shining but the snow on the mountains had not yet begun to melt. The rushing river which

Detchema remembered was flowing gently and the water was clear and shallow; the thundering roar of the torrent which had terrified the fugitives had become a quiet murmur.

Detchema retraced her way through the woods which had taken her to the place where she had cut her hair and vowed to live the dull and cheerless life which she now led under her monastic robe. She found the spot where she had prostrated herself before Garab's hat and there she prostrated herself again.

When she got up, her palms still pressed together, her eyes returned to the rock on which she had discovered from afar, like a bird flapping its wings, this bluish thing with a glistening ring which on closer inspection had proven to be her lover's hat, decorated with its blue and gold ribbon.

Was this an illusion? Something was still flapping between the crags of the same rock. A shapeless, greyish, discoloured rag. Fascinated, Detchema went to the edge of the water, took off her boots and waded into the river, stepping on the boulders lying in the river bed. When she reached the rock she stretched her arm out and got hold of the rag which had remained stuck there. It was a piece of felt hat and a bit of gold braided ribbon was still visible. A piece of Garab's hat which had survived there, stuck on the rough edges of the rock.

The shock Detchema felt in her heart was such that she almost fell off the stone on which she was balancing. Taking precedence and overriding all other thoughts, a certainty came to the young woman's mind. The remnant of the hat which had survived there was an infallible sign that Garab was alive.

Where was he? Detchema could not guess, but she knew she would find him. She had found the hero of her dreams when she had left everything to go in search of him. In the same way she would find him again by abandoning everything for him.

It was only a few steps back to the bank. Yet when she reached it she had already made a decision: she would not return to the farm where she had left her companions, she would not return to the convent. Putting the piece of felt, the remainder of the hat she had torn off the rock, under her robe, against her breast, Detchema went back upstream as far as the ford. There, she again took off her boots, tied her robe above

her knees, and waded through the water. She was a tall girl and her clothes hardly got wet in the crossing.

When she arrived on the opposite bank, Detchema did not feel that she was engaging upon a foolish adventure, that she was leaving a shelter where her existence was assured, that she had nothing except the robe she stood up in and that there was no certain proof that Garab was alive. Considerations of this kind do not trouble the minds of Tibetans.

The runaway had not eaten since the night before but she counted on begging and knew that the villagers don't refuse alms to a wandering nun. Thousands of pilgrims of both sexes are always travelling across Tibet, visiting the holy places and seeking the benediction of lamas who are famous for their eminent virtue and wisdom. By becoming one of them, Detchema could be sure of not attracting any particular attention and be able to survive.<sup>4</sup>

One does not travel fast on foot, especially if one stops in the villages to beg from door to door, and if one spends time chatting to the people. In any case, Detchema had not planned any route. She did not intend to reach any specific place in her travels. Just as when she had run away from her paternal home, she was wandering at random looking for the 'man of her dreams' whom she had since then found, possessed, and whom she wanted to find again.

After six months of wandering around in the neighbourhood of the river, which retained her interest for a while, and then across the province of Ga and as far as Kyerku,<sup>5</sup> Detchema had gathered information to strengthen her hopes. Nobody she had questioned could remember anybody being drowned at the time of the flood which they all remembered only too well because of the considerable havoc it had wreaked. As for executions, there had been none in any of the military posts in the region.

Although nearer to where Garab was at the time, Detchema had not picked up any clues at all. It then occurred to her that the herdsmen of the tribes amongst whom Garab had lived might have heard what had become of their chief of old. Why, with his former exploits being long forgotten, he might even have returned and re-established himself amongst them.

Detchema resumed her travels and a few more months went by before she reached the land of the Ngologs.

Apart from the men who had actually taken part in the raid upon the Mongolian caravan nearly five years before, none of the herdsmen had ever seen Detchema. They knew from hearsay that Garab had taken an exceptionally beautiful mistress with him to Lhasa and then to the Khang Tise and that he had been madly in love with her, but none of them would have thought of making any connection between that pretty girl and the wretched emaciated nun who was begging for alms in the encampments in the course of a pious pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, Detchema did not dare to ask direct questions about Garab. Perhaps the passage of time since the Moslem expedition had in fact dissipated the danger which threatened him, and she was inclined to think so, but she could not be certain and was careful to observe a degree of caution which greatly prolonged her investigations.

Finally, one day, she learnt that Garab had been seen by two herdsmen whose grazing grounds were in the east, in the direction of the Amnay Matchen. According to what they had told, Garab had become a holy hermit.

Detchema continued her journey.

As a woman and dependent on alms for her food, she could not venture across the vast uninhabited desert regions which would have been the most direct route to the Amnay Matchen. That course was only feasible for caravans. Detchema had to make many long detours in order to pass through inhabited regions. Thus, a few more months went by.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the hermitage on the Amnay Matchen, Dordji Migyur and Garab sitting at his feet were listening attentively to the account of a *dokpa* (herdsman) who had been sent by the chiefs of a tribe which was camping near the source of the yellow river.

The messenger was relating disquieting events in connection with which the herdsmen sought the advice and protection of the wise anchorite. Foreigners were going about in the land:

two men of very different appearance. One of them had light brown hair, the colour of tumas (an edible root) and blue eyes like those of the big dogs that guard the tents. The head of the other appeared to be covered with gold threads. They were both tall and the man with the golden hair seemed much younger than his companion.

These suspect travellers had with them five Mongolian servants and two Chinese ones, horses, mules, tents and provisions. The man with the golden hair spoke fluent Tibetan, his companion with the dogs' eyes generally used one of the Chinese as interpreter, but this latter said that the stranger did not speak very much Chinese either.

The *dokpas* had learnt from the Mongolian servants, two of whom also spoke Tibetan, that the two strangers had only been travelling together for a short time. The man with the dogs' eyes had met the man with the golden hair in the north-west of Tsaidam; the latter was alone, his travel companion having died, so he said, a few days before. He appeared to be very distressed. He owned a small tent, his horse, that of his dead companion, and a mule for carrying the sacks of provisions. The two strangers had spoken together in a language none of the servants could understand. And then the man with the golden hair, with his two horses and a mule, had joined the caravan of the other stranger.

Where these people came from, neither the Mongolians nor the Chinese knew. The servants had been hired in the north, not far from Sudu<sup>6</sup> by the man with the torma coloured hair; as for the man with the golden hair, nobody knew anything about him.

The two travellers did not seem to be getting along very well with one another. It happened frequently that they would talk together in a tone and with gestures which clearly showed that they were quarrelling.

The man with the dogs' eyes made the Mongolians make large holes in the ground, much against their will. He hit against the rocks with a hammer and broke bits away from them. He also gathered sand in riverbeds and shook it under water in a kind of basket, as one does when one cleans grain.

The herdsmen were very alarmed. These strangers would

upset the spirits by knocking on the rocks in which they live and they would dry out the sap of the earth by digging holes. As a result the spirits would withhold the rain and they would send diseases; the grass would no longer grow in the dried-up pastures and the animals would die of starvation.

They implored Dordji Migyur. Would he please tell them what they should do and protect them against the calamities which were threatening them.

Having explained the facts at length to the hermit, the messenger prostrated himself before him again, as he had already done on his arrival, and waited in silence.

'These men are looking for gold,' declared Dordji Migyur. 'I have seen some Chinese who came from Kansu wash the sand near here in this manner in order to extract little particles of gold. If these strangers are digging holes, it is because they want to find even more. They are trying to discover the big nuggets of pure gold which the gods have hidden underneath the Amnay Matchen. They are intended for Gésar, who must gain possession of them when he returns amongst us, in order to destroy all those of evil heart.'

'They must not find them!' cried Garab fervently.

'No, they must not!' agreed the messenger.

'The gold destined for Gésar is buried deep under the Amnay Matchen,' affirmed the hermit. 'It is difficult to get at and the gods are guarding it.'

'Please prevent these men from getting hold of it, Reverend Hermit (*jowo gomchen*). Please also prevent them from digging any more holes which dry the earth and from breaking the rocks which house the spirits. Please prevent them from harming us and our herds,' begged the herdsman, prostrating himself again.<sup>7</sup>

'I shall see to it,' promised the hermit. 'I shall invoke the gods and the spirits. In due course they will put an end to the bad actions of these foreigners. Tell your people not to worry.'

The herdsmen left the hermitage. The following day Dordji Migyur shut himself into his hut in order to perform certain secret rites, and Garab retired to the cave where he lived.

Like all Tibetans, Garab knew at least in part the legendary history of Gésar of Ling, the magician king, the great slayer of



demons and avenger of wrongs. Like all Tibetans, he also believed in the return of the hero who had left our world without dying and miraculously betaken himself to live in the realm of the gods.

Alone in his cave, he remembered certain exploits of Gésar and compared and likened them to those of the Bodhisatvas in the Buddhist scriptures, considering both to be completely authentic. In his mind the actions and motives of these superhuman personages became muddled and confused.<sup>8</sup>

He no longer distinguished properly between those who were great warriors and those who extolled transcendental goodness, and as the tendencies of an ex-bandit chief inclined towards violence he began to imagine himself practising a rough justice, without consideration for the guilty ones from whose hands the victims were to be liberated.

But whatever the confusion in his mind, one thing was clear to him: he, Garab, had nothing more in common with his former life. Whether he would become the assistant of a saint or one of Gésar's officers, he had thrown off his old self and joined the heroic ranks of the 'Protectors of Beings'.

And Detchema? ... Sometimes her image would appear amongst the visions of imperturbable sages and fighters for justice who filled Garab's mind. She would emerge slowly in the midst of these eminent personages or arise suddenly, driving the other figures into a hazy background, and remain alone in a blaze of light, beckoning and promising at the same time, with a tender mocking smile. And then Garab would fall from the heights to which he had risen into a hell in which demons, armed with red-hot tongs which nipped his flesh, were the memories of the sensations of old.

In Tibet as in India, the mystic masters, the gurus, are supposed to be able to read what goes on in the minds of those whose spiritual direction they have undertaken. Garab was convinced that Dordji Migyur could see what was going on in his mind and he waited silently for him to come to his aid. Little by little, in fact, Detchema did become more distant; she appeared less often and her memory faded. Absorbed in his glorious dreams, Garab hardly noticed this gradual disappearance of the terrible phantom of his beloved mistress. Peace

came to him, a triumphant peace which filled him with pride and satisfaction.

And then, it came to pass that one day as Garab was sitting with Migyur in front of the hermitage, the anchorite fixed his penetrating gaze upon him.

‘Has it ever happened to you,’ he asked, ‘that when you were trying to hold on to something which was going to slip through your fingers, that just as you thought you had succeeded it was dashed from your hands?’

‘Yes, once ... a dog,’ replied Garab. ‘He was being carried away by the river, he was not a good swimmer and appeared exhausted. I was only young. I had come out of the forest and was carrying a bundle of dried branches tied with a cord. I took off my belt, tied it to the cord and threw the bundle into the water, holding on to it with my belt. I was hoping that the dog which was being swept along by the current would grip the branches and that I would be able to pull him gently onto the bank. The poor animal lifted itself half out of the water onto the bundle. I thought I had saved it and then suddenly it let go and was carried away by the current.’

The hermit had remained silent and Garab had not dared to ask for an explanation. He was to understand later.

While the hermit remained in strict seclusion in his hut for the performance of his complicated rites and Garab was indulging himself in his cave, contemplating his future exploits as a benefactor of beings, the caravan of the foreigners came slowly closer to the Amnay Matchen. One evening it arrived at the foot of the mountain and pitched its tents.

The next day the head of the caravan, the man with the dogs’ eyes, allowed his men to rest and told them that he was going hunting on the morrow. He would give rifles to those whose job it would be to hunt and shoot the goats with curved horns, because he wanted to preserve their heads for his collection. The rest of the men would act as beaters.

This order was received badly. The Mongolians had heard from the herdsmen in the neighbouring camps that a holy hermit lived on the slopes of the Amnay Matchen, and places where contemplative ascetics (*gomchen*) live are considered

sacred. No act of violence must take place in such a locality and animals as well as men find asylum there.

To hunt near a hermitage was not only to commit the crime of killing but to commit it in a place sanctified by the presence of a saint and to outrage him. The Mongolians had no desire to incur the punishment such a sin would bring upon them, both in this life and those that are to come. After debating the matter for some time they decided to explain their reasons to the stranger with the golden hair who understood Tibetan.

The same day, when he went to get water from the stream, Garab noticed the tents which had been pitched the night before. He immediately ran to inform the hermit who, speaking from behind the closed door of his hut, told him:

‘Go and see what these people are doing. Find out what their plans are and let me know when you get back.’

Garab arrived at the camp just as the Mongolians were about to call on the stranger with the golden hair. His unexpected appearance aroused curiosity and they gathered around him: Who was he? Where did he come from?

‘I am not a traveller,’ replied Garab. ‘I live on the mountain, near my master, the hermit Dordji Migyur. Perhaps you have heard of him?’

They certainly knew the name of the anchorite. The herds-men near to whom they had camped in the course of their journey had told them at length about the saintliness of Dordji Migyur and about the miracles he performed. They knew that this holy man lived somewhere on the mountain, but they had no idea that they were camping right next to his hermitage. Immediately the question which every member of the lamaist faith would have asked came to their lips: Could they see Dordji Migyur? Might they receive his blessing?

‘My master has been in retreat’ for several weeks,’ replied Garab, ‘I myself do not see him and can only speak to him through the door. However if you are not allowed to enter his hut you could prostrate yourselves outside and he will give you his blessing. But tell me, friends, what are you doing here? Where do you come from and where are you going to? It has been reported to my master that you are accompanying two strangers.’

The Mongolians told Garab again all that they had told the herdsmen concerning the two travellers. They did not know any more and Garab was already familiar with all these details from the report he had heard the envoy of the herdsmen make to Dordji Migyur.

However, there was one new development, and Garab was fully informed about the intended hunt.

‘You must not lend yourselves to that,’ he cried. ‘The Lord Dordji Migyur is a devotee of the Boddhisatvas. He does not eat any animal food and never wears furs. In winter when the wild animals have difficulty in finding food some of them come to his door asking to be fed. He will even go up to the bears and though his supply of food may not be very large he always finds something to give them. It would appear that the spirits give him what he needs to enable him to exercise his charity.

‘You must realise that you would incur his malediction by killing the animals which are used to go about without fear on the mountain.’

‘We would not dream of doing it!’ exclaimed the Mongolians, whose resolution had been strengthened by Garab’s words.

They then informed him that when he arrived they had just been about to go and see the stranger with the golden hair too ask him to dissuade the head of the caravan from hunting on the mountain.

‘I shall go with you,’ said Garab immediately, eager to seize the opportunity of getting a good look at one of these foreigners about whom Dordji Migyur wanted information.

The traveller with the golden hair was sitting on the grass in front of his little tent. He was smoking a cigarette and looking straight ahead without appearing to look at anything in particular. He seemed a little surprised to see the servants advance in a tight group, but he smiled at the two Mongolians who spoke Tibetan and asked them in a friendly manner what had brought them and the others.

Made confident by the friendly reception, they explained their case. In spite of the fact that a holy hermit lived right in the vicinity, their master wanted to go hunting the next day. He wanted some of them to go and kill wild goats and others to act

as beaters. 'And we simply do not want this,' concluded the Mongolians abruptly.

In any other circumstances, they would no doubt have shown themselves less resolute, but their salvation was at stake, their destiny in lives to come. And Garab had just threatened them with the malediction of a thaumaturgic saint. How could these simple minds have braved a danger of this magnitude?

'Speak for us to our master,' they pleaded in conclusion.

'I will do so gladly,' answered the stranger, unmoved, 'but it will not serve any purpose. When he has an idea in his head all the devils from hell will not make him let go of it.'

'Ah! Who is that? I have never seen him,' he asked when he noticed Garab, who had kept himself a little aside and out of his view.

'He is a disciple of the great anchorite Dordji Migyur, whose hermitage is near to our camp. A saint of unsurpassed compassion, who miraculously feeds the wild animals in the winter. Even the bears come and eat out of his hand.'

The good people were already magnifying Garab's account. The stranger seemed interested.

'Well, well!' he said. 'I would like to talk to you, disciple of the hermit. Don't go away. I shall deliver your protest to the master,' he added, turning to the Mongolians.

The tent of the stranger with the dogs' eyes was some distance from that of his companion, but even so the waiting men could tell from the furious shouts which could be heard, that their ambassador was not being well received by their master. A few moments later, he came back, whistling through his teeth.

'I did warn you,' he said. 'he will not listen. The hunt is on for tomorrow.'

'No!' exclaimed the men, 'we are not going to hunt. He can hunt alone, if he dares.'

'Perhaps one should stop him?' ventured one of the Mongolians.

'Now, now!' said the stranger, amused. 'You will do what you think is best. This business does not concern me. I am not going to hunt; I would not wish to displease the hermit.'

And turning to Garab, he asked: 'Could I visit your master?'

'He is in retreat,' replied Garab, 'but I shall convey your request and will bring you his response.'

'In the meantime, sit down and let's talk a little. Would you like to?'

'With pleasure,' answered Garab.

'I shall bring you tea,' said one of the Mongolians. Nobody in Tibet or Mongolia believes that it is possible to talk without drinking tea.

'Who is this hermit, your master?' began the stranger.

At length and in great detail, with many repetitions and a great confusion of ideas, Garab explained the various doctrines, quoted the sayings of the sages, spoke of Boddhisatvas, of Gésar of Ling, the awaited bringer of justice, and of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future who would bring the reign of universal good will, and he concluded by saying that he wanted to become worthy of aiding those who would bring peace and happiness to all sentient beings.

The man with the golden hair had listened to him with polite attention, smiling occasionally. 'So you don't hunt goats on the mountain?' asked the stranger, returning to the subject of the moment.

'Oh, me!' said Garab lightly. 'I used to hunt a different kind of game.'

The stranger seemed to disapprove. 'Have you been a soldier?'

'Well ... well ...' said Garab in reply.

The other dismissed the veiled hint and said: 'Listen.'

He spoke. His was a beautiful speech. Garab noticed points of resemblance with the powerful sayings of Gésar, the bringer of justice, and also with the discourses on sublime devotion and infinite mercy given by the Boddhisatvas. Nevertheless, without being able to put his finger on it, he sensed that there were profound differences. Gésar's activity took place in the spheres of the gods and the demons as much as in our own; the Buddhas and Boddhisatvas had the infinite for their domain. But this stranger did not stray beyond the narrow limits of our world, as if none of the beings and things of the other worlds could reach him, as if we could not go beyond its limits.

And in truth, Garab did not really understand anything of what this sympathetic stranger was saying, in spite of the fact that he was speaking the best Lhasa Tibetan.

'I would like to see your master,' he repeated as Garab took his leave of him.

The following day the man with the dogs' eyes called his Mongolian servants and gave them his orders concerning the hunt. They made no reply, but for the rest of the day their master did not see them again. They had gone up to the hermitage of Dordji Migyur, who had opened his door to them, and listened to the hermit, fingering their rosaries in his presence.

The two Chinese had prepared the meals for the stranger, but when towards evening he had drunk more than usual in his rage and threatened to kill those who continued to disobey him, the Chinese became frightened and absconded.

When the Mongolians came back down to their tent they brought the hermit's reply to the man with the golden hair. He was expected the next day.

Rifle in hand, the head of the caravan had waited for the return of his servants. He went to their tent and repeated his orders, adding that if the next day they were not prepared to go hunting, he would know what to do.

The Mongolians made no reply, but during the night they loaded a large quantity of provisions onto some mules, took with them the rifles which had been given to them for the goat hunt, and left and camped in a fold of the mountains some distance away.

Early in the morning, the man with the golden hair, following the direction the Mongolians had given him, climbed up a slope and then followed the steep and narrow footpath to the hut of Migyur. He remained inside with him for several hours. Garab never knew what they talked about because he had not been called upon for any assistance. The hermit had only ordered him to prepare some soup as the traveller would be eating with them before his departure.

When they had finished eating, the stranger spoke to Garab: 'I have received the blessing of Jowo Dordji Migyur,' he said. 'I shall leave the camp tomorrow at dawn. As you desire to

work for the happiness of beings, would you like to come with me and replace the companion whom I have lost? Your master consents and I think he wishes it to be so. He has told me about you. I know who are are. Do you want to come?’

Garab was stupefied and looked from one to the other. ‘Where are we going?’ he asked the stranger. ‘To your country?’

‘I shall never return to my country. My place is here,’ declared the stranger.

‘The gods will guide you,’ added the hermit.

‘If you order it, I shall go, Master,’ said Garab, turning to Dordji Migyur.

‘It might be good for you to leave,’ answered the hermit dreamily. ‘Good for you and good for others ... So, leave tomorrow.’

Garab prostrated himself before his master in token of his respectful submission and he noticed that the stranger made a deep bow in taking leave and brought the hand of the hermit to his lips.

The strangeness and suddenness of the decision he had just taken left Garab dumbfounded. Something supernatural, miraculous, seemed to be at work around him, attracted by the wishes he had made in his cave.

As the man with the golden hair left the hermitage and began to walk down the path, Garab, trembling with emotion, asked him: ‘Are you a herald of Gésar, the bringer of justice, or an ambassador of Gyalwa Tchampa, the Buddha of Infinite Compassion?’

‘Perhaps both,’ he replied, smiling. And then he went off.

Like all disciples of contemplative hermits, Garab never stayed with his master without having been specifically invited to do so. About to leave him in order to go, he knew not where, with a total stranger, he would have liked to spend this last night at the Amnay Matchen at his master’s feet. He wished to hear once more before his departure some of those powerful words which had brought peace to his troubled mind, or even just to remain in silence, sitting in the hermitage, bathed in that atmosphere of infinite good will and indescribable serenity which Migyur created around him. But the master had not



ordered him to return after seeing the stranger off and so, obeying his tacit command, Garab returned to his cave.

He had spent some time absorbed in his thoughts, going over the singular vicissitudes of his existence, feeling amazed by it, and wondering towards what new events he was heading, when the thick curtain of yak skin which formed the door of his rustic abode was lifted up, and a woman stood on the threshold.

'It's me, Garab,' she said simply.

'Detchema!' yelled Garab, bringing both arms in front of himself as if to dispel a terrible apparition. 'Detchema ... you are dead!'

'No,' she replied, smiling. 'I am alive like you. I also thought that you were dead. I had seen your hat stuck on a rock in the middle of the river and it seemed certain to me that you had been drowned. I cut my hair, I became a nun. And then one day the gods brought me back to the place where we were parted. They showed me a sign. After all those months, a piece of your hat still remained caught on the rock. Neither wind nor rain had been able to dislodge it, and I understood that you had not been carried off by the messengers of Chindji (the King of the Dead). So I went in search of you, as I had done before, and, as before, I have found you. It was not possible that I would not find you. Now we will leave here together, never to be parted again.'

Detchema spoke calmly, without any dramatic emotion. She had reintegrated the dream which was her life and she continued it quite naturally, completely unaware of anything that went on outside herself. The travellers, who had been troubled for a brief moment by a thunderstorm, were about to continue their journey. The idea that there could be a different decision had not even crossed the young woman's mind; it was beyond her conception.

Almost a year had gone by since Detchema had left her companions and gone in search of her lover. Her hair had grown again and in spite of her leanness and her gathered robe, she appeared to Garab supremely beautiful. Indeed, her beauty seemed to have a singular, almost superhuman quality which made her more attractive than ever.

But against this attraction there arose in Garab the thoughts

he had been nourishing during those long hours of solitude in his cave, the memories of his conversations with Ram who had been looking for the secret of immortality and the discourses of the hermit on the sublime work of the Boddhisatvas, who sacrifice themselves in order to alleviate the sufferings of beings. Had he not dreamt of following one of those who avenge injustice or who spread happiness with open hands and an open heart to all they meet on their path? Perhaps even to become, himself, a guide or preceptor? Timidly he had forged these proud dreams. And on the following morning, at dawn, he was supposed to go ... maybe to realise them.

Garab tried to explain to Detchema that the Garab she saw before her now was not the same as the one from whom she had been parted when she was carried away by the torrent. He tried to repeat to her some of the discourses he had heard. But he could hardly succeed in convincing the young woman of things which existed in him only at a superficial level and Detchema who remained in any case what she had always been, a woman in love, understood nothing of his words.

‘I have come to take you away from here,’ she repeated obstinately. ‘You are mine, just as I am yours. Come!’

Leaning against the rock wall in a corner of the cave, she began to cry piteously.

‘I live only for you, Garab,’ she pleaded. ‘Why don’t you love me any more? What will become of me without you?’

Insidious desires arose in Garab, urging him along under the guise of superior and saintly reasons. He had made a vow to alleviate the sufferings of all beings. Was he going the right way about this ministry of charity by causing suffering to this woman who loved him? Was this not an opportunity to prove the strength of his devotion by sacrificing his own aspirations in order to mitigate a humble distress?

To see himself capable of such a renunciation could satisfy pride. And yet, the pride which Garab had nurtured in his dreams of a heroic future, rebelled inside him, evoking once more nebulous but certainly glorious horizons at the end of the road upon which he was starting out on the morrow, at dawn, with the man whose hair was the colour of sunrays, who spoke like Gésar, the slayer of demons, and like the sublime Boddhisatvas.

And Garab preached and lectured, poured out endless words and sentences echoing the confusion of his ideas and the conflict of his passions, whilst Detchema had stopped crying and had become obstinate and implacable and repeated imperiously:

‘I have come to find you and to take you back. Come!’

They had been talking thus for some time when the Chinese interpreter of the head of the caravan put his head through the curtain and said hurriedly:

‘The Mongolian servants who fled have not come back. The master is beside himself. He is going up to see the hermit. He says that he incited the Mongolians to rebel and that he is going to have it out with him. He has been drinking all day long. He has brought a loaded gun with him ... I am afraid! You must come to the hermitage with me.’

Before Garab had a chance to say a single word, a blow sent the Chinese flying into the middle of the cave, the curtain was violently pulled aside, and the stranger entered.

He gave an order to the Chinese, who answered a few words, shaking in all his limbs. The stranger repeated the order, pointing at Garab.

‘He wants me to speak to you,’ babbled the Chinese. ‘He does not know that there is a hut higher up on the mountain. He thinks that you are the hermit.’

The poor interpreter tried once more to explain to the stranger that he was making a mistake. Perhaps the Chinese did not express himself well, or perhaps the stranger, who was very drunk, did not understand. He seemed to have the idea that his interpreter was being deliberately difficult, and appeared to be on the point of violence towards him. Swifter than his master, the Chinese hurriedly slipped out and did not come back.

The stranger called him back, shouted and screamed in sheer frustration, but the terrified Chinese had vanished. His drunken rage redoubled, he came back inside, gesticulating, and then he noticed Detchema who was hiding behind a pile of sacks - food reserves belonging to Dordji Migyur. The sight of a woman changed the flow of his ideas. He sniggered, and recalling the few words of Tibetan he knew he began to jeer at the one he thought to be the holy hermit whom they all had

talked about and whom he now found in the company of a woman.

'Hee! Gomchen, djowo gomchen ... shimo, shimo ... Ho, ho!' He was staggering a little.<sup>10</sup>

'Ha, ha! Shimo!' he continued, and then suddenly he rushed at Detchema and put his arm around her, pulling her against him. His lips touched the young woman.

A violent blow of the fist flung the lecher against the rock. He staggered drunkenly. Instantly the agile bandit grabbed his rifle and a shot was heard: Garab had fired the gun point blank at the stranger's chest.

The shock which followed the frenzy of rage paralysed Garab, who stood there, gun in hand, looking at his victim lying before him.

'You see, you still love me. You have killed for me.' Detchema spoke calmly. Her caressing voice had a vague note of triumph, perhaps a little irony.

Garab started and abruptly came to his senses. The phantasmagoria of the dream, which he emerged from, was shattered, and a cruel realisation dawned upon him. In its cold, pitiless light he saw the folly in which he had indulged, which he had nurtured for so long in his retreat with his devotional prostrations and sublime wishes, deceiving himself with the aspirations he had constructed and suggested to himself. He was not interested in the happiness of other beings. He was concerned only with his own. Was it really the happiness of Detchema he was thinking about when he was considering renouncing for her his proud dreams of spiritual greatness? The falseness of the motives he had attributed to himself a moment ago sprang before his eyes. His thoughts of sacrifice were only the disguised cries of his own passions.

He had killed for himself.

And then, in front of his forbidden mistress, Garab began to laugh the uncontrollable laughter of a maniac.

# *Epilogue*

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**M**y host suddenly stopped talking and remained silent. I could imagine what he must have been like at the age of thirty-two, handsome, strong, his flesh burning with passion and his mind filled with the sudden realisation of the emptiness of his heroic vocation as a saviour of beings, castigating his pride and presumption with this bitter laughter in front of his terrified mistress.

What had become of him since? He did not say. His present prosperity and the remarks of some farmers in the region led me to believe that he had renewed relations with the stalwarts of his kind and again successfully pursued his excursions along the great highways. But what about her?

‘And then,’ I asked in a low voice. ‘Your friend?’

‘She died,’ he answered laconically.

My curiosity made me bold enough to insist. ‘She died! How? A long time later?’

‘A few weeks later. We were travelling ... a narrow path ... she slipped.’

‘Laughter of fury - abyss’ the oracle in Lhasa had predicted.

I could almost see the scene: one of those goatpaths which scale the steep slopes of the high mountain ranges, the sudden gentle push, perhaps hesitant ... the fall.

The memory of this tragic event was troubling the mind of the farmer-brigand, he was muttering under his breath.

‘A daughter of demons, definitely. She had taken me away from the Buddhas whom I wanted to serve. I was walking behind her. I was reciting the words of exorcism. She did not fall all at once ... One could have said she hovered. I remembered her little hands, whirling like butterflies over the water when she was carried away by the torrent...’

‘She clutched a bush with one hand and looked at me without saying a word. Her face had become transfigured; never has a woman of the human race looked so beautiful. I could no longer endure the light which her large motionless eyes darted at me ... She was burning me ... I made the gesture for driving away evil spirits.’

I knew this gesture. It consists of throwing stones whilst pronouncing magic formulae.

'She let go and rolled right down to the bottom of the precipice without uttering a cry. Did I say she was dead? She can't die. I feel her roaming around me. Sometimes at dusk I get a glimpse of her wandering around the pastures, as if she is spying on me, but she always eludes me when I try to catch her ... to possess her again ... and to ...'

My host got up abruptly with a violent angry movement and went off with great strides across the dark countryside.

'He is mad!' said Yongden to me.

He was far from being mad. As I had realised right from the beginning of his tale, the appearance of those lovers fleeing through the night had increased the force of the haunting which he was subject to, and had made him recall and tell aloud the dramatic story of his past life as a lover and adventurer.

The next morning the kind of intoxication Garab had been in had dissipated, but when I bade him a friendly good morning he gave me such an evil menacing look that Yongden, who happened to be near me, became frightened.

'We shall break camp this very day,' he said when I got back to my tent. 'The old bandit regrets having talked too much to us. He would like to retract what he has said, but as he knows that that is not possible, one can't tell what means he might resort to in order to silence us.'

I think that my son's caution was excessive. However this may be, we took our leave of our host and explained that after having rested for a long time we wanted to travel in long stages because we had far to go. He did not try to make us stay.

As I was busy packing some provisions which a man had brought me, one of the episodes of the story I had heard came to my mind.

'Isn't your name Anag?' I said to this man, whom I had often seen around Garab.

'Yes,' he replied, a little surprised, 'My name is Anag.'

The force of the wish made at So Sa Ling had had its effect: Garab and Anag had met again.

I have often thought about this strange story. This gentleman of the highways had killed his mistress. Not driven by vulgar jealousy, but inspired by a superstitious belief and

remorse over his spiritual downfall, which is less trivial. But to me, most interesting were the dreadful sorcerers Garab described and the stranger with the golden hair who would never return to his own country because his place was in Tibet. According to Garab's description he was young. Perhaps he still lives in the land of snows ... where? ... and for what purpose? ...

*Riwotse Nga*  
*August 1937*



# *Notes*

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# Prologue

1. The Khagyud-Karmapa are one of the oldest Tibetan sects, believed to be in possession of esoteric oral teachings passed on from master to disciple. The spiritual fathers of the sect are the Hindu Tilopa and the famous professor of the University of Nalanda, Pandit Naropa, followed by Marpa the Translator and his ascetic poet disciple Milarepa. These last two were Tibetans (10th and 11th centuries).
2. In accordance with Tibetan custom.

## PART ONE

### Chapter One

3. A. David-Neel, *Au Pays des Brigand-Gentilhommes*, Plon, Paris.
4. The Tibetan spelling of Detchema is 'bde' (joy, happiness); 'byed ma' (producer).
5. The Tibetan spelling of Garab is 'dga' (joy, pleasure); 'rab' (perfect).
6. Literal translation of the Tibetan idiom.
7. The Tibetans dry meat in the sun and carry it to eat when they are travelling. They are very fond of it.
8. Popular friendly invitation to a guest.
9. Literally: northern plateau. The name given to the vast desolate grasslands in the north of Tibet, but by extension also to any region which is uninhabited or inhabited only by herdsmen living in tents and where only grass grows.
10. An edible root which tastes like chestnuts.

### Chapter Two

11. The mountain in the southwest of Tibet which the Hindus call Kailas and on which the god Siva and his wife Parvati are believed to reside. It is a place of pilgrimage for the Tibetans as well as the Hindus. Many hermits live on its slopes.
12. The formula: *Aum mani padme hum*.
13. Roudrachs are the beans of a tree sacred to Siva. The Sivaist ascetics wear necklaces made from these beads. In the popular legends and images the god Siva is depicted very pale, with a roudrach necklace and clad in a tiger skin.
14. It is customary in Tibet for well-to-do people to entertain an amtchod or chaplain in their house, who reads every day from the holy scriptures or performs certain rituals.

15. 'Aku', a polite but familiar form of address which is widely used in Tibet without necessarily implying any blood relationship.
16. The Tibetan name of the town in the extreme west of Szechuan, which is referred to as Tachienlu on the maps.

## Chapter Three

1. Lha = god; sa = ground.
2. The first month of the Tibetan calendar begins on a movable date, depending on the moon, during our month of February.
3. The same custom exists in the jigatze. The author was honoured by such an ovation during her stay in that town. She escaped it in Lhasa because she was at that time travelling disguised as a pilgrim begging alms. See 'My Journey to Lhasa'.
4. Literally: lotus footed. Those whose feet are like lotus flowers, an honorary title.
5. The same applies at Jigatze with the Pentchen Lama (alias Tashi-Lama). The last Pentchen Lama whom the author knew personally died in November 1937.
6. The 13th Dalai Lama who reigned at that time died on 17 December 1933.
7. The Omniscient One, Tamtched Khyenpa, a title often used by the Tibetans when referring to the Dalai Lama.
8. The border region in the extreme west of the Chinese province of Szetchuan, which is inhabited by tribes of Tibetan origin. Gya: Chinese; rong: valley; gyarongpas: people (Tibetans) living in the Chinese valleys.
9. Jowo in Tibetan means Lord. This temple is the most famous one in Tibet and contains a very old statue which is supposed to represent Gautama when he was a young prince, before becoming a Buddha.
10. In Tibet it is the future husband or his parents who pay a sum of money or an equivalent in livestock or land to the girl's parents. This is considered to be compensation for the expenses they incurred in raising the girl. The honour of marrying a girl of noble or prominent family can often prove costly. It can be the same if the girl is exceptionally attractive. The idea of her parents giving money to the husband as well as their daughter appears grotesque and even offensive to Tibetans. In their plain way of speaking, Tibetans remarked to me on this subject: 'Are the girls of your country so ugly that it is necessary to pay their husbands as if they were undertaking something repugnant?'

11. On this subject, see also A. David-Neel, 'With mystics and Magicians in Tibet' and 'The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling'.

## PART TWO

### Chapter Four

1. *Ngagspa*: one who is expert in the use of secret magical formulae, a magician.
2. I have heard the same about a kind of herb which grows in the country of the Lopas, near Tsari, a famous place of pilgrimage in the southeast of Tibet.
3. Different purgatories in which one is born and in which one dies in order to be reborn in other worlds. Buddhism does not believe in eternal punishment.
4. A classic formula of respectful homage used when addressing great mystics.
5. The national dress of the Hindus. It is a piece of material of varying size and length wrapped around the waist and passed between the legs so as to form a kind of trousers.
6. This is a Hindu belief. The world of ancestors is *pitri loka*.
7. An ascetic of higher order who has relinquished all ties with this world as well as posthumous glory and rebirth in the world of the gods. *Sannyasins* are Vedantic pantheists who tend to identify with the One Being.
8. These are the words of the Hindu *sraddha* or funeral rite. The fear is that the deceased may take the life of his relatives which he is tempted to appropriate in order to perpetuate his own in the state of existence in which he lives as a phantom (or ghost) in relation to our world.

### Chapter Five

1. The Bönns are members of a religious sect which existed in Tibet before the advent of Buddhism, around the seventh century.

### Chapter Six

1. According to popular Tibetan belief, all diseases are produced by evil spirits, malignant demons, or genies who have been angered.
2. The Tibetans believe that the *namches* (consciousness), that is to say the individual itself, can sometimes depart from the body before the moment of apparent death. As soon as this '*namches*'

has left the body, the man is really dead although his body may continue for a longer or shorter time to perform all the physical and mental actions that the living person was used to. When the apparent death occurs, certain signs are supposed to show that the deceased was devoid of 'namches'. Popularly, one can hear the village lamas declare at a funeral ceremony that the deceased had 'already been dead for two or three years'. It also happens that the doctors decline to treat a patient on the grounds that their efforts would be wasted because the sick person who is consulting them has already been dead for two or three years. The esoteric masters hold theories of which the popular beliefs are caricatures.

3. Huts where monks can live in isolation in order to meditate.
4. Caves which are fitted out as hermitages are commonly found in Tibet. The author lived in one for several years. It was at 3900 metres (13,000') on a steep slope.
5. The very large robe which the Tibetans wear is tied with a belt and thus forms a large pocket over the chest in which they carry anything they want to have to hand.
6. The Chinese Tao-sse have long sought the potion which confers immortality, but they are not the only ones in the East. The Tibetans have concocted the btchud len gyi or btchud kyi len (pronounced chu ki len) and the nang mtchod (nang cho), and the Hindus have the rasayana. But all these potions are only the vulgar, distorted expression of processes which belong to the secret sciences. Thus chu ki len is not a liquid but a mystic process by means of which the universal 'nourishing sap' 'vital essence' is assimilated. There is a mass of strange doctrines on this subject which seems to go back a very long time.
7. The belts of the Tibetans are wound several times around the body and are several yards long. The best quality ones are made of a galoon (tape) 15 to 20 inches wide of tightly woven strong material, sometimes silk.
8. See in the introduction how the author had heard rumours in the province of Gyarongpas concerning this practice.

## Chapter Seven

1. See 'The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling', translation of the Tibetan national epic poem by A. David-Neel and the Lama Yongden.
2. On the subject of cave dwellings, see note
3. In Buddhism, Boddhisatvas are individuals who are very

advanced on the path of spiritual perfection and animated by an infinite compassion. In order of excellence, Bodhisattvas come directly below Buddhas and are very close to attaining the state of Buddhahood.

4. In this same manner, the author accomplished a journey across the forbidden parts of Tibet and visited Lhasa. See *My Journey to Lhasa*.
5. Kyerku or Tcherku, depending on the local pronunciation, is shown on the maps as Jerkyendo or Jakyendo, a Chinese outpost in the extreme south of the large grass deserts.
6. Local pronunciation of Suchow, a Chinese town in the north of the province of Kansu.
7. The idea that one dries up the nourishing sap of the earth by digging deeply into it and by removing the 'ter' (treasures) which are hidden in it is a common one in Tibet. About twenty years ago the government of the Dalai Lama sent some people to England to study modern sciences and their applications. Two of them became engineers: one specialised in mining, the other road and bridge building. Back in Tibet, the first one started some prospecting but the opposition was so strong that the government ordered him to stop his investigations. As he could not practise his profession he became a monk. His colleague, the road builder, did not have any better luck. The Tibetans declared that their mule paths were adequate. The only ones of the students who had come back from abroad who prospered were an electrician and a friend of his who organised the manufacture of arms and the coining of money.
8. See *The Superhuman Life of Gesar of Ling*, op cit.
9. The practice of 'retreats' (in Tibetan: tsams) is held in high esteem by lamaists. Regarding the different types of retreats and the practices of recluses, see A. David-Neel, *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* (now titled *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*), and Lama Yongden and A. David-Neel, *Le lama aux cinq sages*.
10. Hermit, Lora Hermit, woman - shimo is the word in the dialect spoken by the herdsmen in the east of the Shang Thangs. the Tibetan word for women is skyédmen (pronounced kiemen).