

JAPANESE AGENT
IN TIBET

HISAO KIMURA

as told to Scott Berry



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My Ten Years of Travel in Disguise

HISAO KIMURA

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Scott Berry*

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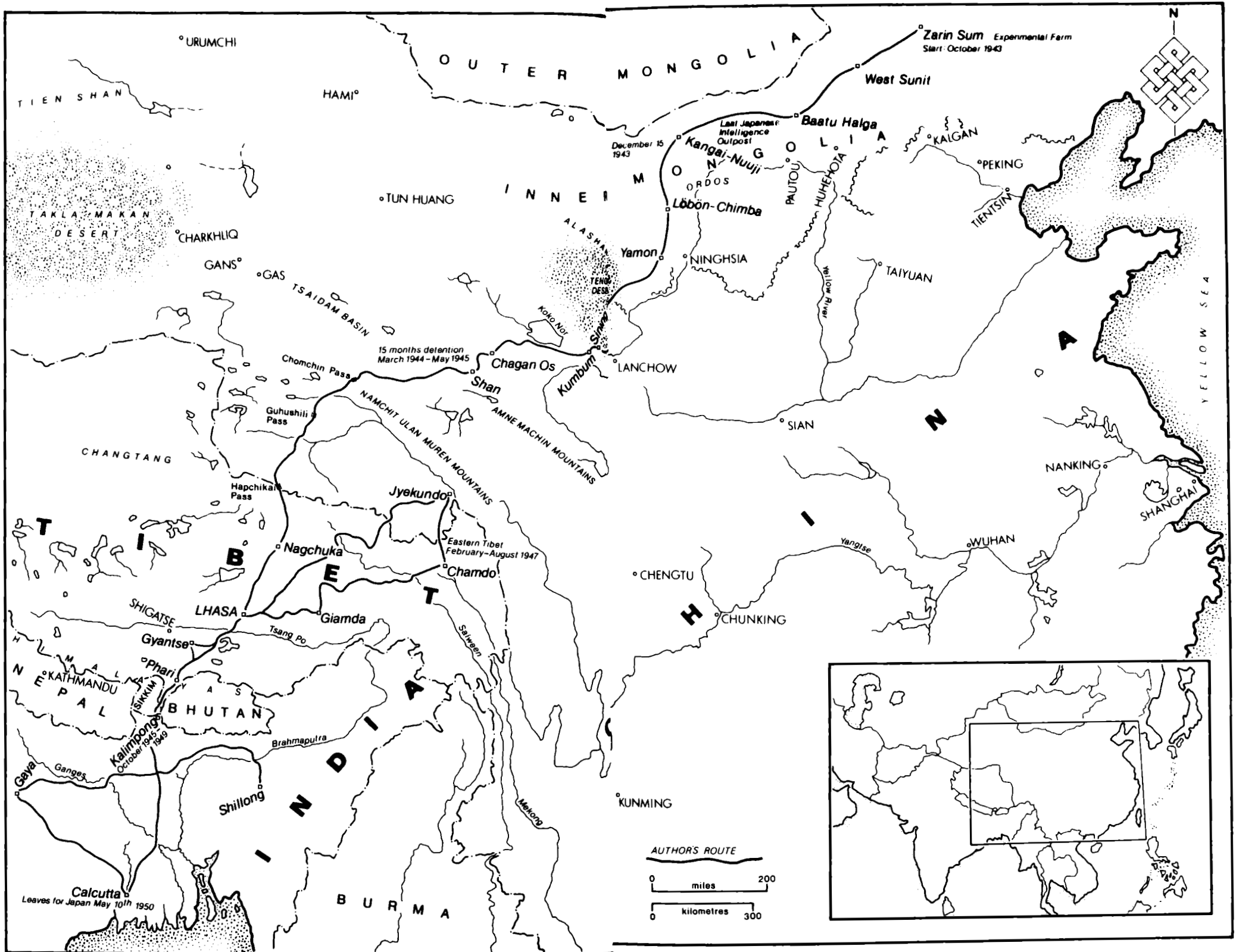
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The Author's Travels (1943-1950)

Publisher's Preface

Readers may be interested to know something of the circumstances of this book's publication. The intriguing story of Hisao Kimura's early years as an agent disguised as a Mongolian monk was first told to me by Professor Paul Hyer in the early 1970's, and again in 1977 by Heather Stoddart. From the enthusiasm of both of these scholars, it was evident that an account of those years would make fascinating reading. Ten years later, in May 1987, Peter Hopkirk telephoned to say that I should look over a manuscript that had been brought over from Tokyo by Anthony Willoughby. Besides a thoroughly good yarn, I was struck by Kimura's acute observations on daily life, and his great sympathy and affection for the Mongolians and Tibetans. Published in Japanese as long ago as 1957 (*Chibetto Senko Junen* by Mainichi Newspapers) and reprinted many times since, an English translation had in fact been prepared but had been gathering dust for some years.

Professor Kimura was anxious to see an English edition appear during his lifetime. The account as set down, however, omitted those episodes that had first interested me the most; his friendship with a group of left-wing Tibetan nationalists on the eve of the Chinese Communist conquest and his later work for British Intelligence. I was finally able to meet Professor Kimura in Tokyo in May 1988 and he agreed to include those events which thirty years earlier had been regarded, either by himself or by his publishers, as too politically sensitive to include. Kimura's myriad linguistic skills, his irrepressible good humour, and his ability to bridge a great cultural gap with ease were immediately apparent. I planned to return to Tokyo as soon as possible to record those stories. Later that year, however, Professor Kimura was introduced by Anthony Willoughby to an American writer in Tokyo, Scott Berry, who had just completed a biography of that other intrepid Japanese traveller—*Ekai Kawaguchi*—and who readily agreed to take on the task for Serindia Publications. The whole account was rewritten over the next few months and completed by August 1989.

Professor Kimura had been eagerly planning a research trip to Sinkiang together with a group of students. His many friends the world over, not least his publisher, his students and family, were shocked to hear that he had suddenly been taken ill at his favourite Mongolian restaurant in Beijing and that he was brought home to Tokyo, where he died on 9th October.

Thanks are due to Mrs Kimura for much encouragement, as well as to Anthony Willoughby and Peter Hopkirk. Hugh Richardson and Sonam Topgay Kazi, who both knew Hisao Kimura in Lhasa disguised as the Mongolian *Dawa Sangpo*, remember him with affection, and kindly agreed to look over his story. Without Scott Berry's sympathetic and able participation this tale may never have been told.

This book bears first-hand witness to the independence of Tibet and to a great living culture that is today threatened with near extinction. It is published, appropriately, on the fortieth anniversary of the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet—October 7th 1950.

Anthony Aris
September, 1990

One Face to Face with Mongolia

The first and last image was that of space, of endless windblown plains: snow-covered, parched, or brilliant-green depending on the time of year. Away from the borderlands there were no cities at all and what gathering places existed were located in the monasteries, the only permanent dwellings in the grasslands.

It was in a *khural*, a small monastery of about thirty monks, near the Outer Mongolian border that my training began in earnest one night in March of 1941, as I sat feeling very small, alone, and very frightened in a dimly-lit chapel surrounded by silent, unwashed Mongolian monks. In the background were sculptured figures with great bulging eyes, bared fangs, and lolling red tongues; some of them garlanded with necklaces of skulls or freshly severed heads. The Mongolians might regard these wrathful deities as benevolent protectors, but to me they seemed like gods of evil.

I had been given a bowl of noodles for my dinner and I tried to appear nonchalant as I shoveled them down. The eyes of the monks, staring out from their dark faces, differed from those of the deities behind them in the dim circle of light only in that they moved constantly up and down my chopsticks. Like the images they said nothing, but only stared at me, as outside the wind howled across thousands of miles of grassland, barren and dry at this time of year. My six months of intensive Mongolian language studies seemed to have done me no good at all, and every word I uttered was met with bland, uncomprehending stares.

Exhausted and still shaken from three days and 450 miles of bad roads in the back of a truck, I spread my sleeping bag and got ready for bed. No one moved. What could I do? I blew out my candle and lay

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down. Still no one moved. It was another fifteen minutes before I heard the swish of robes as the monks left, still without ever uttering a word.

Yet sleep would not come with the thought of the eerie figures all around me emitting I knew not what malevolent power. That I, lying alone and afraid in the dark, was somehow an instrument of Japanese policy seemed altogether beyond belief. Why was I here? Did I really have a place among the Mongolian people? Everything was so strange, would I ever get used to it? It was late when I drifted off, but as soon as I awoke I realized that as outlandish as my surroundings were to me, I was even more bizarre to my surroundings; for there were the monks already, in a circle around my sleeping bag, staring . . . waiting

* * *

The world looked very different to a Japanese growing up in the 1930s. Our narrow islands seemed less confining. We were lords and masters of Korea and Taiwan; Manchuria with its vast empty spaces and its mineral wealth had fallen to us in 1931; and after 1937 the entire China coast was ours.

That any of this was wrong or immoral, or that the world had moved on from the colonial era, when it was considered proper for strong nations to swallow up weak ones with impunity, occurred to few of us then, and certainly not to me. Rather, I grew up with a feeling of pride that we were somehow saving the world—or at least Asia. I was nine years old when we took Manchuria, and fourteen when we invaded China. Questioning or criticizing national policy, or even thinking much about it, was by no means encouraged in schools. Instead it was the glory of our victories and the sacred mission of our nation under the banner of the Emperor that was drilled into us. To an innocent and idealistic teenager with a sense of adventure, the possibilities seemed endless.

Strange as it seems now to think of idealism in the context of the militaristic and imperialistic Japan of the 'thirties, it was perhaps no stranger than that generations of young Europeans went off on their own 'civilizing missions' to their Asian and African colonies. There were at the time good reasons to think that we had something to offer. Ours was the only country in Asia to have not only remained uncolonized, but to have successfully conducted its own industrial revolution during that great period of change we called the Meiji Era. Why should

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we not lead the way against the evils of Western Imperialism by promoting the same pattern in other parts of Asia? It seemed the most natural thing in the world that the downtrodden nations of the East should look to us for leadership and inspiration. Conveniently forgotten were the widespread peasant rebellions of the Meiji Era and their brutal repression; unnoticed were the present rural poverty and right-wing fanaticism.

Men from my own island of Kyushu in southwestern Japan had played an important role in the early stages of the Chinese Revolution by actively aiding Sun Yat-sen. I grew up on stories about them, and while other boys might dream of donning a uniform and going off to fight for the Emperor, it was these selfless revolutionaries—helping China to be more like Japan—whom I wished to emulate. Of course patriotism and idealism were simply two sides of the same coin in those days, but I saw no contradiction in the idea of helping China struggle for greater freedom and dignity for the eventual greater glory of Japan.

I was still in middle school when we launched our all-out attack on China. Not being informed of the civilian casualties in Shanghai, or of the conduct of our soldiers at Nanking, we looked with pride on the victories of our glorious 'Emperor's Army'. My own life was directly affected only by the introduction of compulsory military training in schools, and this included the Lutheran mission school I attended. My father was a retired naval officer, so I could endure the drilling, yet I never took well to being herded about like a sheep. On the other hand I was swayed by the propaganda of the time encouraging young men to try for the Military, Naval and Air Force Academies. When I graduated from school, it seemed that the best compromise I could make between a desire for freedom and adventure and a sense of duty to serve my country, was to take the entrance examination for the Merchant Marine Academy. In retrospect it was just as well that I failed, for later when I saw a newspaper advertisement for volunteers to go to China under the auspices of the Asian Development Board, I knew that this was much more suited to my inclinations, and my adolescent enthusiasm for the Asian mainland was rekindled.

I was barely seventeen. I did not know, and certainly would not have believed anyone who told me, that those very Chinese revolutionaries whom I so admired, although split into two bitterly antagonistic parties, had now united to fight our civilizing mission. It was simply obvious to me that any opposition to us must come from the

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power-hungry or the misguided who just did not know what was good for them.

At any rate, my imagination had been drawn to a new struggle that the Japanese press was making much of. This was the attempt by the people of Inner Mongolia to gain independence from their Chinese oppressors, in which—we were told—they were being selflessly assisted by the Japanese. I was only too eager to believe that I had a positive role to play. I never felt it necessary to look closely into the policies of the Asian Development Board (or *Ko Ah In* in Japanese), which was in reality a kind of private Foreign Ministry set up by the military to circumvent civilian opposition to its policies in Asia.

I applied and was accepted along with four other volunteers. We were told to report immediately to Peking. Though my father and I were not always on the best of terms, he accompanied me north to Shimonoseki where I boarded the ferry to Pusan on the south coast of Korea. Little of that trip north through the Korean Peninsula remains in my memory, for my mind was racing ahead to the future rather than dwelling on the present. I saw nothing from the train window of how our policies operated in that unhappy country: nothing of school children being beaten or even shot for refusing to answer to Japanese names, nor anything of the blatant economic exploitation. I was blissfully unaware as well that there was mounting guerrilla resistance to our presence. No, I was simply impressed to be travelling through such a large area that we ruled. It was even an adventure to change trains across the border in Shenyang and to travel by third class, packed in a carriage with seasonal workers from Shantung across southern Manchuria to Tientsin and Peking. Here I was joined by my four fellow students, and we barely had time to get acquainted before we boarded another train and soon found ourselves in Kalgan.

Kalgan, in an arid valley along the Great Wall, almost treeless and buffeted by dusty winds, first struck me as a remote and dismal garrison town and I was surprised at the fondness shown for it by the many Japanese who lived there. This town would be my urban base for the next four years, where I would spend my semi-annual vacations. It was also the headquarters of the Zen Rin Kyokai or "The Good Neighbour Association" which would be responsible for our training. Financed by the Asian Development Board, the Good Neighbour Association was an ostensibly civilian organization which ran a number of schools and hospitals along the railway, as well as several experimental livestock farms to the north in the grasslands of Inner Mongolia.

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In some ways the Good Neighbour Association was comparable to such later American organizations as USAID or Peace Corps. Like me, most of its members were young, a bit romantic, and—at least in the outset—incredibly innocent and brimming with idealistic fervor. They were rather different from most young civilian Japanese in Manchuria and Mongolia, whose main concerns were making as much money as fast as they could and spending the greater part of it on having a good time. Though the real motive for the schools and hospitals was little more than to present a benevolent image of Japan, most of the Association's workers developed strong ties with local people, and could not help but find themselves in conflict with the military.

This part of the Sino-Mongolian borderland might be thought of as composed of railway, city, and grassland. The railways had brought about radical changes in the cities and towns: places such as Kalgan that had previously developed as centers of the old caravan trade. It was in these towns that the hides and meat of the nomads from the north were exchanged for grain from the south. Now this old trade was breaking down, giving rise to a new type of city growing up within the old market towns. Kalgan, for example, now had the kind of modern office buildings and conveniences that made the Japanese feel at home. From their bases in these old market towns Japanese trading companies, and particularly the Army-backed Great Mongolian Trading Company, were buying up the wool, hides and meat of the nomads and exporting them to Japan at great profit.

But the cities along the railway are not really Mongolia. Looking northwest from Kalgan, there is what appears to be a mountain range, but when it is climbed the traveller finds himself not among mountains, but on a plateau as flat as the lands below. This is the beginning of the grasslands, the real home of the Inner Mongolian people that extends to the Gobi Desert which divides Inner and Outer Mongolia, and it was to the grasslands that we would go after our initial training.

Most of the students in the Good Neighbour Association's schools along the railway were indigenous Chinese, Chinese Muslims, or Mongolians; but young Japanese—those of us who would be working with local people—were also trained there. Our group of five formed the second class at a school called the Ko Ah Gijuku in Suiyan, a sizable and very ancient town west of Kalgan, one of those traditional meeting places of Mongolians and Chinese.

Since all of us were studying Mongolian rather than Chinese it was natural for us to think of the town not as Suiyan, but to use the

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Mongolian name of Huhohota which means 'Blue City'. Although Mongolians are never really at home in cities, preferring their nomadic encampments or monasteries, this romantic old market town was a good place to begin our studies. There was a feeling of antiquity here, and of a continuity with days gone by. It was not hard to imagine it as the place where a high lama from Tibet had converted the Mongol chieftain Altan Khan to Buddhism in the sixteenth century and received the Mongolian title of 'Great Ocean of Wisdom' (Dalai Lama) in return. The very dust pervading the air seemed to have been there for centuries. Here shrewd Chinese Muslims, as in ages past, took time off from their Sinkiang trade to pray five times a day, while Chinese from Peking and Tientsin conducted big business in their small shops with the Mongolian nomads who camped right outside the town. These nomads were just close enough—as was the escarpment leading to the grasslands—to be mysterious and intriguing.

Here we spent our first winter, from September 1940 to March 1941 engrossed in an intensive course of study that kept us busy from morning till night. In addition to language we were learning the basics of the history and economics of Mongolia: or at least as much as the Japanese military wanted us to learn. It was at this time that I first learned how wrong it was to think of the Mongolian nomads as a people free to roam wherever they wished, for since the establishment of the Ch'ing Dynasty by the Manchus in the seventeenth century the nomads had been fragmented into 'Leagues', 'Banners', and 'Arrows'. It was the banner that defined the area in which a nomad was free to migrate, a kind of nomadic equivalent of a county. This system was instigated by the Manchus—nomads themselves—in a successful bid to stifle and contain the energy of the Mongolians, who had after all once conquered China themselves, and who were a constant thorn in the side of any dynasty.

We also began to appreciate just how vast was the area inhabited by the Mongolian peoples; stretching from Manchuria in the east to the Volga in the west, from the lands of the Buriat Mongols in Siberia south through Outer and Inner Mongolia to the Great Wall of China. Most of this area and many of these people had become part of the Mongolian People's Republic, or Outer Mongolia in 1921. We were taught that it was part of our duty to help liberate this country from its Communist oppressors, and emphasis was laid on the anti-religious campaigns of the late 'thirties which closed most of the monasteries and led to a flood of refugees. We had set up centers for these refugees

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in the grasslands and promised that we would help them to return. What we were not taught was that many of the monasteries of Outer Mongolia had been found brimming with Japanese arms, and that this was one of the main causes of the resulting religious persecution.

These studies would have been useless to us without a corresponding language ability, and it was to acquiring this that the greater part of our efforts was directed. Though I could not claim to speak any tongue other than Japanese at this stage, I was not entirely new to the study of languages, since I had attended a Lutheran mission school in Japan and had studied English under the missionaries there: not the kind of useless, theoretical, grammar-based English usually studied in Japan, but practical conversational skills. Since my American teachers had laid great stress on correct pronunciation, I was not at all surprised to find it emphasized again here by my Mongolian teachers.

Even so, the study of languages in the classroom has its limitations, and the Ko Ah Gijuku was enlightened enough to realize this. After six months it was time to sink or swim, and we were dropped into the grasslands.

It was this that led to my abrupt encounter with the soul of Mongolia at the Tsagan Tologai-in Khural. It was several days after my arrival before the curious monks there became accustomed to me, but since they were busy for most of the day with their prayers and studies I had time to take in my surroundings. The wrathful deities of my chapel seemed a little less threatening in the morning, if only because I could escape into the clean light outside. Still, nothing could be more different than the temples of Japan and Mongolia, though both these countries call themselves Buddhist.

Mongolian Buddhism comes from Tibet. It is a colourful and flamboyant faith steeped, at least to the outsider, in magic and mystery. The buildings of Tsagan Tologai-in Khural were built in Tibetan style, solid and square with the walls sloping slightly inwards, and once inside the chapels, even in the day-time, one felt part of a separate reality, cut off from the world. Outside was the material world, which here meant the boundless grasslands stretching to the horizon: inside was the realm of the gods. The colours of the wall paintings, of the pillars, of the sculptured deities themselves were strong and bright, almost garish, with reds, blues, and yellows predominating. Yet even at mid-day there was seldom much light to see them by, and much was left to the imagination as the monks sat in neat rows bundled in their dark red robes

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beating drums, blowing trumpets, and chanting in Tibetan, the liturgical language of Mongolia.

Presiding over this small society was an elderly teacher who was very strict indeed. He kept the reins of a horse ready to administer a thrashing to any of the student monks in his charge who were slack in their studies, or who fell behind in their memorization of the Tibetan scriptures. This chastisement may have been good for the soul, but the teacher's more immediate concern was the annual competition between the monks of the various banners in debating and scripture recitation; a competition that was contested as fiercely as any wrestling match or horse race. Religion is not only revered in Mongolia, it is so all-pervasive that no one finds it strange that it should be part of the rough and tumble of daily life.

Since I was not a monk myself I did not have to worry about the whip-wielding old pedagogue unless I chose to. Religion did not interest me nearly so much as did the language and the life of the nomads who were always calling at the monastery, staying for a time, then moving on again. My position here was an unusual one, but one full of possibilities that were limited only by my imagination and capacity for hard work. The Good Neighbour Association was paying for the monastery to put me up, but the responsibility for learning was mine alone. No one was assigned as my teacher, and there was no set course of study. Had I wished, I could have lived the life of a monk and studied Buddhism. The companion of my later travels, a Ko Ah Gijuku student named Nishikawa, did just this. Later when I was posing as a pilgrim monk and was several times nearly caught out because of my lack of knowledge, I had occasion to wish I had done the same. On the other hand, like some of my other colleagues I might have done nothing at all, and so wasted this opportunity to get truly close to Mongolia.

The way of life and the freedom to do just as I pleased with my time, suited me well. When I first arrived at the monastery I could express only the simplest ideas and was completely baffled by the answers I got in return; but after six months, nearly everything that was said to me came across. This did not just happen. It was a goal that I worked hard towards, all day everyday. I was also ably assisted by the motliest crew of teachers imaginable.

Once the curiosity of the older monks began to wane, their place was taken by the boy monks and the children of whatever nomadic families happened to be camped in the area. The vigil kept by the adult monks had been largely silent, but there was no problem in getting a

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reaction from these little ruffians: if my Mongolian sounded funny to them, they would laugh in my face. This good-natured laughter is what made them so valuable as teachers: adults were too polite to laugh at me. Whenever hilarity greeted some expression or mis-pronunciation of mine I knew that this was a point I would just have to keep practicing until I got it right. Their patience was endless, and they seemed as proud of my accomplishments as I was. I was not to learn until many years later that the first Japanese to reach Lhasa, the Zen monk Kawaguchi Ekai, had written of learning Tibetan in much the same way.

Pronunciation was my biggest stumbling block. Mongolian has a number of sounds made in the throat that are unlike anything in my own language, but worst of all is the 'L' sound. Few Japanese are able to pronounce even the English 'L', but the Mongolian 'L' is a far richer sound, and absolutely essential to convey any kind of meaning. At first the Japanese flapped 'R' came out naturally, but was greeted only with howls of laughter as I pointed to a fire and called it a fist. Trial and error taught me that a 'D' sound was reasonably understandable in place of 'L' since the tongue is at least in the correct position, and you only need to hold it there and let the air escape around the sides.

In addition to hours of pronunciation practice, I tried to learn from fifty to one hundred new words a day. Finding the words in the first place, and then trying to memorize them was a full time job, but no matter how hard I tried I would always forget half my new words by the next day, so that there was need for constant backtracking and revision. Still, the rewards were great as I found a new world opening up around me day by day. My motivation remained strong, and once I began to conquer the pronunciation I encountered few problems other than the vast number of new words I needed to learn, for the sentence structure is similar enough to Japanese that it was one aspect of the language that came almost naturally.

It was because of my friendship with the children that I was first able to meet and establish friendly relations with their families, and it was because of the banner system, which meant that the same people would return, that I got to know several nomad families well. Here was the beginning of a fascination that would eventually overtake me completely. What could be more appealing to a romantic imagination than the life of a desert or grassland nomad, usually on the move, confronting and overcoming every day of their lives the problems presented to them by the four seasons?

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I had arrived in late winter, the harshest time of the year when the animals are thin and weak and the food scarce. As the winter turned to spring and spring to summer, my ability to communicate grew along with the grass that fattened the animals and the people who lived off their milk. I saw the foals born in the spring and grow strong enough to withstand the following winter. Like the monks and nomads I survived largely on milk products during the summer, for no animals would be slaughtered until autumn. I watched as the women turned fresh milk into curd, whey, butter, and cheese, much of which would be dried or otherwise preserved for the winter, for all life in Mongolia is a preparation for those barren months. All of this was far more to me than the exotic and strange smelling customs of a primitive people. It was life itself: a way of life that attracted me so strongly that I wanted more than anything else to make it my own.

The only books I had with me were translations of Western works on this part of the world. One, *The Torguts* by W.L. River, told the epic saga of the Torgut Mongol tribe in the far west. Another was Peter Fleming's *News from Tartary*. Fleming and a woman companion, Ella Maillart, had travelled from Peking to Sinkiang and on to Kashmir in 1935. It had been a bold adventure, but he admitted that there had been little objective to the trip and they had travelled as outsiders. Fleming and his companion spoke only a little Chinese and no Mongolian so that they spent much of their time either bored or confused when so much was happening around them. I felt that I could do better. Even so, these books added much to my experiences with the nomads to make me feel part of a true adventure. I could not know precisely what lay ahead, but I did know that somehow it would involve travelling with these people with whom I was beginning to feel so much at home.

It was only natural that during this period I should begin to assimilate some of the traits and lifestyle of the Mongolians. I was beginning to feel that I wanted not only to communicate, but to actually live out this new culture, and so it became my goal to try to actually pass myself off as Mongolian. In a sense this is just an advanced form of language learning, for just as the language was different, everything the Mongolians did was just a little different from what came natural to me, from the way they sat on the floor to the way they held a cup and slurped up their tea. The slightest mistake or even hesitation on my part would mark me as a foreigner just as surely as would a mispronounced 'L'.

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The most difficult part when passing oneself off as a convincing Mongolian concerned calls of nature. Mongolians, like Tibetans, never use paper—or indeed anything else—and if I, as a fastidious Japanese, ever planned to get away with posing as one of them I would have to at least appear to adopt their practices. While at the monastery I was at great pains to obtain any paper I could, and used to bribe the boy monks, offering them pencils, to bring me any they could find that had no sacred writing on it. I remember they once proudly brought me some lovely soft, thick paper that I could hardly wait to use—but which afterwards left me with a horrible burning sensation that had me all but hopping up and down. I memorized but few words that day. Later, I found that the paper had been used for wrapping chilli powder.

One advantage of later posing as a monk was that at such times I could just spread my robe out around me and take care to squat over a place where there was a smooth stone available. But not in winter. Stones were no good in winter. Leaves, even if they could be found, were seldom satisfactory since the stem had a habit of breaking off and lodging in awkward places. As in language study, trial and error, led me to the the most consistently satisfactory expedient: a piece of nice round, smooth horse dung.

* * *

The year I spent in this isolated monastery taught me more than five years in a classroom could ever have done. I was perhaps a little too proud of how well I could speak Mongolian, but I could now not only conduct my daily affairs in that language, but could participate in complex discussions and take in the stories the nomads were so fond of telling. Some of their tales were merely legends, others, religious stories of an uplifting nature, but some had a real basis in fact, about distant places or banners—the very places I had only been able to read about in Japanese translations from English—or about the great religious centers, such as Kumbum in Chinghai Province, or Lhasa, holiest of cities and home of the Dalai Lama of Tibet. The more I learned, the more the language and way of life of Mongolia became part of me, the more I felt drawn into the country. More and more I hoped to travel secretly, as one of them.

But I was not yet ready for this. Not only did I need still more training, but it was now the spring of 1942. I wish that I could now say that I felt a pang of conscience or that at least that it had seemed

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distant and of little significance when the news of our surprise attack on Pearl Harbour and our advance through South-east Asia had reached me at the monastery. In all honesty, however, I have to admit to a thrill of adolescent patriotic pride; even though it meant that we were now at war, not only with China, but with the western Allies, and I was approaching twenty-one, at which age I would be liable for conscription. In a sense, it was the war that was shaping me, and the only reason that I was there at all. Yet it also circumscribed me, for I was in no way my own master.

Still, I clung fast to my dreams, and they had increasingly less to do with the war. They were all of the lands to the west, of the Torgut Mongols and their tragic flight from the Volga; of the people I would meet along the way, of the dialects I would learn and of the places I would see. More and more I felt both liberated and trapped by the life I had chosen.

Two Sacrificial Studs on the Plain of Hell

My language course was one of the first casualties of the wartime economy and the final six months of the two years were cancelled. In April 1942 I found myself assigned to an experimental farm attached to the Zarin Monastery on the border of two banners: East and West Sunit.

Perhaps 'experimental farm' conveys the wrong impression. The phrase conjures up visions of modern buildings and technicians walking around in white coats. In fact the headquarters consisted of three yurts and a couple of Mongolian tents. From appearances it could have been just another nomad camp, and no concessions to modern comfort were made for the two young Japanese workers.

There were only two features that really distinguished the farm from any other encampment. One was the wells that we had dug. When the two banners agreed to give the Good Neighbour Association some land for the farm, I think they had a little joke with us, and they stuck us out in a place called Tamchin Tal, or 'The Plain of Hell', as no water was to be found. While ground water could be found not too deep, there were no materials to shore up the sides of a well, so that when we dug, the sandy soil would just keep filling up the hole. We solved this problem with large mats of woven willow branches, bending them into cylinders, and sinking them as we dug. These wells were considered quite a novelty by the nomads, so we had plenty of visitors along with their thirsty flocks and herds. This suited our scheme perfectly since we wanted them to know what we were up to.

The other distinguishing feature of our camp was our new breed of sheep, for our real task was to improve the pedigree of Mongolian sheep. While the schools and hospitals along the railway below to the south might be said to have brought some tangible benefits to the local people, these experimental farms in the grasslands were started for an altogether different reason. Australia and the United States had stopped selling livestock to Japan even before the war started, and we

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were running low on essential items such as meat, wool, and hides. The only reason for 'improving' the Mongolian sheep therefore, was to provide more meat and wool for the Japanese war effort.

We did this by using Australian studs from Manchukuo. By the third generation the cross-bred sheep were much bigger and stronger than the native ones—in fact a grown man could ride one—and the wool was much softer and finer. By mating a first generation cross-bred female with the original stud, we could produce studs almost indistinguishable from their grandfathers. Our main task was to produce as many of these semi-studs as possible and to distribute them to important nomads. They in turn, as we then envisaged, would use them to improve their herds and sell the resulting wool to the Great Mongolian Trading Company.

It all sounded simple and straightforward, and certainly what we were doing created plenty of interest among the nomads. The only trouble was that whenever we gave away one of these hybrids that we had so proudly created, it was promptly killed and eaten before even being given a chance to put its talents to use. It seems that no one wanted his flocks contaminated by these mutant sheep.

What the planners had not taken into account was the tail. The Mongolian sheep may be an odd-looking creature, but it is extremely tough. One of its special features is its broad, flat tail. This is a Mongolian delicacy, the best part to eat, and creating sheep without it seemed to the nomads as pointless as creating camels without humps or horses without hooves. Our studs were said to have tails like dogs. Rather than let them socialize with the herds, it seemed safest to regard a new stud as a free meal, though even the meat was regarded as a little inferior.

In practice I found myself with plenty of time to continue my studies, and life on the farm seemed a natural extension of the time I had spent at the monastery. There was only one other Japanese there—besides the circuit vet who visited occasionally—a class-mate from the Ko Ah Gijuku named Nagasaka. He was the only one of the class who was shorter than me, but despite his height, he was physically very tough. He had been a star ice hockey player in Japan, so was not bothered by the cold winters, and even tried to skate on the rough and sandy Mongolian ice.

One of us was often away either on leave, or supervising matters such as mating or castration on a distant part of the farm, so we spent little time speaking Japanese. My language skills kept on improving, until at times I wondered which was really my native language, and it

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was the members of the six nomadic families living on the farm, who managed the horses, camels, cattle and sheep, to whom I felt closest. They were all families who had fallen on hard times, their own flocks and herds too small to yield any tax, and the banner office felt that the best thing to do was to fob them off on the Japanese; but we found them enthusiastic workers, and good friends as well. The people at the banner offices must have regarded our efforts with a great deal of amazement. We had taken land and people they considered worthless, and had combined them into a productive unit: with them we were able to produce worthless animals.

One of the men on the farm, who was later to become one of my closest Mongolian friends and the companion of my later travels, had come to us in a different manner from the others. His name was Danzanhairob, or Danzan for short. He was there as a sort of political detainee, and represented one of those cases where we of the Good Neighbour Association found ourselves in sharp disagreement with the military.

Danzan had formerly been a monk at a large monastery called Batugher Sume (*sume* is the Mongolian word for monastery) near Pautou. He was devoted to his mother and had left the monastery to grant her greatest wish before she died: a pilgrimage to Lhasa. After travelling several years they returned to the monastery but his mother, now very old, decided she had yet one more desire: to return to her home in Eastern Mongolia to die. Once again the dutiful son took to the road with her, he on horseback, she in a horse-drawn cart. On their way he was arrested by Japanese intelligence officers who took him for an Outer Mongolian spy.

It happened that a childhood friend of Danzan's, a venerable lama named Dorji who had studied for twelve years at the great Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, was living at a monastery just north of West Sunit, and when he heard his old friend was in trouble he came to the staff of the Good Neighbour Association to ask for help. He was known to them since he had developed a close friendship with a young worker who had been sent to his monastery to learn the language, and he got a friendly reception from the staff who argued with and cajoled the humourless military officials until Danzan was released into their custody in return for a guarantee of his good conduct. He was already on the farm when Nagasaka and I arrived.

Another source of new friends was the Outer Mongolian refugee centre not far away. The Japanese were looking after these refugees

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exceedingly well, since there were plans for an invasion of their homeland and we intended to use them as collaborators. The military was even financing a project to search for the reincarnation of Mongolia's highest Lama—the Jebtsundamba Khutughtu—a search which had been forbidden by the government of the Mongolian People's Republic. When I was working in the area I would sometimes ride over to enjoy the sound of the pure speech of the refugees and once met one of Outer Mongolia's highest Lamas, the Lama Dilowa Gegen, who was preparing to go to Tibet to search for the reincarnation.

Life on the farm was basic and down to earth. We lived exactly as the Mongolians did, sharing their food, clothing, and shelter; except that in summer we would sometimes bathe in the troughs by the wells. In winter we did without. There would have been little sense in digging toilets. It would only have been considered an odd custom, and one that would have distinguished us from our Mongolian friends and co-workers—so like everyone else we used the fields, and the dogs cleaned up after us. We let our hair grow until it could be braided into a kew, and lice throve in our clothes. In the summer we lived on fresh milk products and grain; in the autumn we gorged on fresh meat (including that delicacy, boiled sheep's tail, that was making a mockery of our work) boiled with rock salt, wild onions, and garlic; and in winter on dwindling quantities of cheese, butter, tea, dried meat and noodles.

It was a good life for a young man. In our spare time we often went for rides across the grasslands on our swift Mongolian ponies, like Ghengis Khan's soldiers conquering the world. On one of these rides I found an ancient tomb, a most unusual discovery in Mongolia where the nobles and kings of old were carefully hidden. No visible mark was ever left to disclose its whereabouts; instead, in those cruel and distant times, a camel calf was slain on the spot, for a mother camel will always remember the place where her calf has died, and go to it whenever possible, to stand silently weeping. She could then be used as a guide to the tomb whenever rituals needed to be performed for the dead nobleman. It was pure chance that led me to stumble on the tomb site and I returned to my tent with a helmet and a sword. This so unnerved the superstitious Mongolians that I was obliged to return them to where I had found them.

Our other pleasures were simple as well. I was fond of standing on top of the red cliff that divided our farm into grassland and desert, gazing off to the horizon, especially at sunset, and dreaming of what lay beyond. And then there was the changing of the seasons, when great

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herds of wild animals passed through on their migrations. We would sometimes pick up wounded young stragglers and nurse them back to health: an antelope once, another time a crane, even a wolf cub. When their herds or flocks next passed through we would release them, and the only one I was ever glad to see the back of was the wolf cub. As he grew up he became increasingly silent and stealthy, and often while I was working in my tent I would have an eerie feeling of not being alone, and would turn round to find his ominous gaze fixed on me.

Our lives became punctuated by the same rhythms that governed the lives of the nomads. Births, deaths, and weddings became major events for us. One day Danzan's mother finally died. Though she had never made it back to her home, she had been happy on the farm. We had a clinic and made a bit of a fuss over her, but after she had had a stroke it was only a matter of time. Nagasaka and I had never participated in a Mongolian funeral, so we put up the money to bring monks from a nearby monastery to perform all the proper ceremonies as the body was set out, as a final act of renunciation, for the wolves and vultures. Perhaps because of our efforts, the body was quickly consumed, indicating that a favourable rebirth awaited the spirit. Danzan was grateful, and we had broadened our horizons, so everyone was satisfied. Funeral customs, though, were one aspect of Mongolian life I never found attractive, and the thought of having my body disposed of in this way bothered me more than thoughts of actually dying. I couldn't help but notice that even the domestic dogs took part in the feast, and one of my own dogs once came home with a human arm in its mouth.

By this time there was no longer any reason to detain Danzan, and we told him he was free to go. When he replied that he preferred to stay on, we were at first innocent enough to believe that it was some personal affection for us that held him. It was, however, an attraction of a different nature, in the person of a likable girl named Tseren-tso. She was the adopted daughter of one of our families, responsible for a herd of about two thousand sheep. I liked her. Though she was a bit simple-minded she was full of fun, but at nearly thirty she seemed incredibly old to me. Danzan was about thirty-five though, so she was just right for him.

They had been sneaking into one another's tents for some time after dark. The Mongolians are not at all strict about such matters, and children born out of wedlock are accounted no great inconvenience. Young Mongolian girls are typically left in charge of flocks of sheep, so

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they grow up with few illusions, and need nothing explained to them. If a man should come riding along on a horse, and the two of you should find yourselves alone, what could be more natural? Evidently, Danzan had often arranged to be riding by Tseren-tso's flock. Once he no longer had the responsibility for his mother he decided he would like to marry, and since I had helped out with the funeral, he asked if I would lend a hand as well in the marriage negotiations.

And so I made all the arrangements with Tseren-tso's family, and paid for a feast far grander than the couple could otherwise have expected. It seemed to me part of my responsibility as head of the farm to pay for the funeral and wedding and, with no ulterior motive, I soon discovered that in Danzan I had made a loyal and steadfast friend.

As the seasons went by on the farm, it belatedly began to dawn on me that the interests of the Mongolians in wresting an existence from their unyielding environment, and the interests of the Japanese military in trying to get as many horses and as much meat and wool out of them as possible, were basically in conflict. There were good men among my countrymen, some of whom had been in Mongolia since the Russo-Japanese War, and who believed passionately in the cause of the Mongolian people, but these were not the men who formulated and carried out policy. That was dictated by the army, and all too often the officers concerned were interested in nothing but lining their own pockets.

But the rich pickings were in China and Manchuria. Officers were sent to Mongolia as punishment: in particular there were a number of disgraced younger soldiers and civilians who had taken part in the ill-fated ultra right wing coup attempt of February 26th, 1936, the so-called 2.26 Incident. They were hardly in a mood to be the most understanding of administrators. After two years of watching the callous Japanese military exploit the people I now considered almost my own, I was a very confused young man, caught between incompatible interests, my idealism flapping like a torn prayer flag in the wind. I still wanted to 'serve my country', but when I heard my Mongolian friends complain, for example, of Japanese officers demanding a tax of more horses than they could reasonably afford, I knew that this was not an idle gripe, but a matter of potential life or death.

So what could I do with my frustration? Virtually all I could do was take it out in enjoyable but ultimately ineffectual pranks. I remember in particular an official inspector, who really knew very little about anything outside Kalgan, who came up by truck to evaluate the farm. Nagasaka and I had a little party for him when he arrived, and once he

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had a drink or two inside him, he confirmed our worst suppositions. He was just one of these characters who felt himself superior to everything and everyone, especially to smelly 'natives' and those who lived liked them. It was the season for castrating sheep, and as snacks we were serving up what the unfortunates had lost during the day. Our guest obviously had no idea what they were but gobbled them up greedily, while Nagasaka and I winked at one another. I went out and doctored his truck, condemning him to spend the next day in the saddle.

Of course we were excellent riders, trying hard to equal the Mongolians on their uncomfortable and potentially lethal inverted 'V' shaped saddles. As soon as our inspector showed signs of discomfort, we took his bridle and broke into a gallop. As he fruitlessly tried to support himself on the high pummels of the saddle with his hands, we told him we were going to observe a mass castration, since he had so obviously enjoyed the fruits of the previous day's and I do not remember ever seeing anyone turn green quite so fast. This did our reputations no good in Kalgan.

Immature, of course, but there was just nothing effectual we could do. It was people of his sort who brought home to us, even living far out in the grasslands, that the struggle for 'Mongolian Independence' was largely a farce, and that we had encouraged the nationalist leader Prince De Wang simply for our own ends.

Prince De was the thirty-first descendant of Ghengis Khan, the highest ranking of the traditional nobility, and Governor of West Sunit. His nationalist movement was deeply divided between elements as diverse as the other Mongolian princes—some of whom lived in Peking and were conservative, greedy, and often rather stupid—and radical young intellectuals who had been educated in China, Outer Mongolia, or Japan. Had he had a little more time he might have been able to make his 'Autonomous Region' work, but the disunity with which he was struggling was ideal for the Japanese Army to exploit. When I was at the Ko Ah Gijuku his capital was in Huhehota, and his army—largely comprised of former bandits of questionable loyalty—was stationed there. But his government was only allowed to exist at all as long as it danced to the Japanese tune and soon all the important posts were held not by Mongolians, but by Japanese.

To me it seemed that we were throwing away a perfect chance to display the benevolence of our nation. The Mongolians often could only watch helplessly as the Chinese forced immigrant farmers onto grazing land, destroying it as pasture and thus threatening nomadic

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existence, so they had excellent reasons for wanting to throw off the Chinese yoke. Had we behaved with good will instead of greed we could have given the world a chance to admire us.

* * *

While I enjoyed the life out in the grasslands, and was proud to be there rather than in the railway towns, there was nothing to match the excitement when the twice-yearly holidays came around. It was then time to leave my lice-ridden Mongolian clothes behind, and take off for a month in Kalgan, two days' lorry ride away, which looked bigger and more sophisticated every time I saw it. The paved streets, the tall buildings with glass windows, the motorized traffic, were all wonders that took me several days to adjust to. The crowds of Chinese, Muslims, and Japanese in the streets took my breath away. The few Mongolians seemed awkward and out of place here. And then there were the nostalgically clean-smelling *tatami* mats of the Japanese inn where I stayed, where the kimono-clad maids bowed and welcomed me in my own language, making me feel like returning nobility. How I always enjoyed that long first bath, as the layers of soot and grime peeled off. And then I would change into crisp, clean clothes for a night on the town.

It was these nights on the town that let me into the secret of just why Kalgan was so popular among its Japanese residents, for here among the houses of pleasure was everything a young man could want to gratify his desires, appetites or fantasies. As I headed for that special quarter, I could easily imagine myself as Mingan, the hero of my favourite Turgot Mongolian poem.

*His beauty, like the morning gold
Burnishing the dawning sky,
Once seen by a married woman,
Her sash drops of itself;
Once seen by a maiden,
The buttons of her blouse pop off.
'Tis said that even a tottering old woman
would laughingly add,
"Son, why is it that you did not come
when I was a maiden?"*

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I may not have possessed the charms of this legendary hero, but I did have six months salary in my pocket, and a choice of Japanese, Korean, or Chinese professionals awaiting me (the Mongolians would no more think of buying and selling sex than they would of buying and selling land). While some of our countrymen might regard those of us from the grasslands, with our beards and pigtails, a little askance, the girls were always ready to welcome us. Those from Japan were all hardened pros with debts to pay off at home who had come after the big money to be made in Manchuria and Mongolia. The girls' tastes were simple: they didn't care about the length of my hair, as long as I had full pockets; and not expecting to live long anyway, I was not interested in saving money. But after a month of this debauchery I was more than ready for another spell in the grasslands, for that was where I really belonged.

It gave me a warm and welcome feeling to be with a woman who spoke my own language, but talking was not uppermost in my mind, and I really preferred the Chinese houses (I stayed away from the Korean girls because I knew that many of them had been kidnapped and forced, or tricked, into prostitution). I also liked the exotic atmosphere of these houses where the guest would first be offered opium—which I always turned down—and then the girls would come as their names were called so that a leisurely choice could be made. In the Japanese houses that I could afford the choice was made from photographs.

The only girl I ever formed any attachment towards, and whom I visited regularly was Chinese. She had found me in an obviously drunken sleep on a bridge one night in mid-winter and taken me home with her; probably saving me from freezing to death. I was happy to learn later that she was bought out and married by a rich old man.

Life was good to me. I had enjoyable if undemanding work, the excitement of becoming part of a new culture, and the sprees in town. Once I was made to feel important because of my language ability when I was asked to interpret for a high Lama, the Lama Tokan Gegen from Chinghai, whose favour the Japanese were avidly courting.

But there was, on the other hand, the constant frustration of knowing that I was not accomplishing what I had come to do, and it was probably this that spurred the restlessness that began to creep up on me. I have always been one of those who is eager to know what lies beyond the next hill, and here where the horizons were so distant my mind was free to roam a long, long way. One day a group of pilgrim

monks from far Western Mongolia, friends of Dorji, passed through on their way back from a pilgrimage to the holy mountain of Wutaishan in northwestern China. Knowing of my interest in all things Mongolian, Dorji invited me around to meet them. This was my first chance to talk with people from that part of the world I most wanted to see.

For some time my ear had been good enough to pick up regional dialects, and it was a hobby of mine to try and master them. I was pleased even to be able to understand people from so far away, and I discovered that regional variations of Mongolian, though distinct, are all mutually intelligible.

The next time I saw another of my friends, an elderly scholar-prince named Prince Khorjirjap (usually shortened to Ko Wang), I told him of my interest and he was more than happy to pass on all he could to me, and to recite old stories and songs. One of my favourite stories was that of the tragic flight of the Turgot Mongols from Czarist religious oppression in the seventeenth century. This large tribe lost four fifths of its members while battling both the night-riding Kazakh cavalry in the pay of the Czar, and the vast waterless Central Asian desert as they headed towards Sinkiang. Of course, I had already read this story, but hearing it as part of an oral tradition made it even more real. Perhaps it was in part my being Japanese that led to my admiration for these people, for we have always been drawn to those who fight to the last in hopeless causes, a trait we were to take to absurd extremes ourselves not many years later.

Even the local lama of a small monastery near the farm contributed to this restless drive westward, as if some immutable *karma* led me there. When I tried to ask him about the differences between Japanese and Mongolian Buddhism—for example why they exposed their dead for the animals and did not revere their ancestors—I was answered with: “When you go to the holy land to the west, the teaching of the Lord Buddha will be brighter than ever, and a great lama will answer that question.”

It was in this restless mood that I made one of my periodic trips to Kalgan. Sometime during this holiday my boss, Mr. Nakazawa, who was head of the Good Neighbour Association, took me to lunch. As I remember, he not only wanted to talk about my work, but also about the possibility of my being drafted as I approached twenty-one. We went to one of the better Japanese restaurants, up to the second floor *tatami* room where I would never have dared to go by myself. There, we met by chance the Deputy Head of the Investigation Section of the

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Embassy, Tsugiki Hajime, one of the ranking spymasters in Mongolia and a veteran of the 2.26 Incident.

After lunch my presence seemed more or less forgotten—I was just a twenty-year-old with a pigtail and a hangover—but I was happy enough to lounge on the mats, sip *saké* and bask in the exalted conversation of these two men who seemed so much more highly placed and important than anything I could ever aspire to be. Tsugiki was now a busy man, for our early successes in the war had so far outstripped our hopes that intelligence activities were well behind the times. We now began to show far more interest in Outer Mongolia, as well as the west and southwest as far as Tibet. A 'Sinkiang Muslim Operation' was set up with a study centre in Huhohota, where native agents were being recruited and sent out on the caravan trails. Far away in Burma a 'Tibetan Operation' had also been hastily established with the cooperation, it was rumoured, of the near-legendary travelling monk Bunkyo Aoki who had once been a close confidant of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

But the topic of the day was Japan's great coup in the secret war: the enlistment of Subhas Chandra Bose, the Bengali freedom fighter, who was organizing the 'Indian National Army' from amongst Indian soldiers taken prisoner in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma to drive the British out of India. Tsugiki was bemoaning the fact that his own operations had been able to come up with no such stunning success: and this turned the talk to something that made me prick up my ears.

The Information Department was being urged to find out about an alleged supply route to Chiang Kai-shek in Chungking by an incredibly long and roundabout way that began at a port north of Moscow and continued across the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, into the very area of Western Mongolia I myself most wanted to visit. Looking at a map, or simply at the terrain, the whole idea now seems fantastic, but Chiang and his allies were getting desperate. We controlled the entire China coast, and had cut the Burma Road as well. The only supplies to Chungking came by plane, a dangerous flight across the Himalayas 'over the hump' from India. Chiang had tried to pressure the Tibetans into opening a route through their country, but with no love for the Chinese, no stake in the struggle, and a desire to prove that they were independent, the Lhasa government insisted on retaining strict neutrality. We knew that Chiang and his allies were in just tight enough a

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corner to try something this unorthodox in spite of the tremendous logistical difficulties and costs involved.

Yet no one knew anything beyond rumours. The route was even out of range of our aircraft. How, Tsugiki wondered aloud, could he possibly get any information on an area so remote, and so far inside enemy territory? I thought I knew the answer: but I also knew better than to say anything just then. I spent the remaining days of my vacation drafting and mapping out a detailed plan for going west to find out everything the Embassy wanted to know, and submitted it to them before going back to the farm. I learned later that it was forwarded to Tokyo and reviewed at the highest levels, but was dismissed rather contemptuously. Not only was it felt that I was too young and inexperienced for such important work, but I was still liable for military service. This left me somewhat aghast at the workings of the bureaucratic mind, even in wartime, but I was to discover that sometimes face-to-face it could seem more reasonable and benign.

Even before I had heard of the supply route, in the summer of 1942, I had been called to Huhehota for conscription tests. These included a physical examination, aptitude tests, an interview with a recruiting officer, and much to my disgust, the shaving of my head (unwilling to give military barbers the satisfaction of getting their scissors into my prized pigtail, I first went to a Chinese barber). Since I was only five feet tall, I was not classified *Ko* (what the Americans called 1A) but at the top of the second group to be called up. This in a sense was the worst possible thing that could have happened. It meant that instead of immediate call-up, which at least would have forced the issue, I could have been held on reserve indefinitely breeding studs that no one wanted.

I then ran into a bit of luck in the person of the recruiting officer who interviewed me. He was a serious professional soldier; a man who believed sincerely in what he was doing and put up with no nonsense, and I think he was a bit shocked at the kind of lives he found young civilian men leading along the railway. Most worked for trading companies, and quite a few for the government, but a remarkable number worked in the pleasure business—recruiting girls for the brothels and acting as business managers. Most of the young traders and government workers seemed to live only for drink and debauchery. Of course I was hardly innocent of this when I was in Kalgan, but that was only once or twice a year.

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When he heard of the manner in which I lived, the interviewing officer was impressed. It seems that I was the only potential draftee he interviewed in this session who lived out in the grasslands, and he commented to the effect that I was doing very useful work and serving my country more effectively than I would as a soldier. Of course, I did not dwell on the sad fate of the fruits of my labours, but I think that even had he known, he would still have approved of my spartan life style in contrast to that of the others he interviewed. I suspect that it was his influence that led to the cryptic draft notice I received in January of 1943: "B-1 Engineering Corps. No need to report for duty." I was delighted and immediately re-submitted the plan for my western venture.

Feeling that there were higher hopes of success this time I began to plan while still on the Zarin Sume Farm. In these regions, where even the main trading and pilgrim routes are scarcely more than beaten paths, it would be vital to have someone who knew the way, and I immediately thought of Danzan, who had covered so much of this western route on the pilgrimage with his mother. Brimming with enthusiasm, I found his reply somewhat deflating. Not that he was not fond of me, and he certainly felt indebted to me, but he was a family man now, with Tseren-tso to think about. The couple had settled down into cozy and secure domestic comfort in Danzan's tent and were looking forward to having children. He really did not think she wanted her new husband to go off for a year or two, but he promised to talk it over with her.

Tseren-tso's reply was unequivocal: he could go, but only if she came along as well. My first reaction was that the last thing we needed was a woman, but on reflection I was struck by the thought that a family group of pilgrims would be rather less conspicuous than two Mongolian men. She was probably tougher than I was, and, after all, it would be nice to have someone to do the cooking. Yes, it was not such a bad idea. So, in the evenings I would call on them, and we would discuss our little stratagem in their tent. We decided that I would be a monk on my way to study at Drepung, and Tseren-tso would be my elder sister.

There were two potentially serious problems which I saw right away. One was that I knew so little about religion. A proper scholar-monk of my age would have spent so many years under a whip-wielding teacher that performing the essential ceremonies and reciting large chunks of the scriptures from memory would have been second nature

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to him: and, besides, he would have been able to read Tibetan. "Don't worry," Danzan assured me, "I was a monk for so many years that I can help you out of any problems." That was typical of him: happy-go-lucky, content to let tomorrow take care of itself. Now that his wife had agreed to everything, he seemed to take this trek of a year or more as casually as a trip to Kalgan.

Our other problem was that Tseren-tso was just too simple and direct to be anything but an utterly hopeless actress. Danzan had his devious side, which could be useful. He was a past-master at beating prices down, and that always takes some acting ability. But his wife could never quite get it into her head that toward her little brother the honorific terms she had used toward me as her employer were simply not appropriate, no matter how many times I told her. Even worse was her sense of humour. There was nothing Tseren-tso enjoyed more than a good earthy joke, but she continually forgot that such banter is strictly forbidden between brother and sister. This would lead to some very uncomfortable moments later on.

In September 1943 I was summoned to Kalgan, and I went full of hope that this would be for approval of my scheme which I had originally submitted more than a year before. This time I was not disappointed. I spoke with Tsugiki's superior, Mr. Yasuki who granted me a year's leave and ¥10,000 to make preparations, and who put me retroactively on the payroll of the Embassy. I knew very well that a year would not be enough for the journey I had in mind, but I was not about to put the whole project in jeopardy by asking for more. The point was to get away.

I immediately sent for the Danzans, and as soon as they arrived we set about buying camels and collecting equipment. Danzan was the man to haggle over the camels, and I took him to Prince De Wang's Kalgan mansion where my friend the scholar Prince Khorjirjap of the East Sunit Banner happened to be staying. He was not only my mentor in Mongolian customs and folklore, but he had a fine camel herd, and we got five of his best—three for riding and two for baggage—for five hundred Chinese Yuan each.

Danzan told me that I was disrupting the bargaining and said I would be better employed keeping an eye on his wife while he went about the serious business. She certainly needed an eye kept on her, for this was her first time in a city, and she was utterly bewildered by the crowds. Nor could she understand everything being based on money. In the grasslands, where Tserent-tso had spent her entire life, the land was

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there for all to use: the grass was free, as was the dung to be gathered and used as fuel. When she heard that even love was for sale her shock knew no bounds; "Do the men here not know how to ride horses?" she asked.

We would be well prepared—though no more so than any other pilgrims—with a tent, a shovel (for digging snow, or ditches around the tent), two large brass Mongolian water bottles, a leather bellows, an axe, one Mongolian kettle, matches and flint, a good supply of needles and thread, two cooking pots, several silver bowls, three felt rugs, a traditional fur-lined sleeping bag for me, summer and winter clothes and boots, cotton and textiles for trade, plenty of prayer beads for presents and lots of our most important staple foodstuffs—flour and brick tea. Completing our luggage would be 600 large silver coins (which would be delivered to us later), 20,000 yuan in Chinese money, and medicines. These latter needed special care, as carrying obviously foreign drugs would have excited suspicion. Our solution was to powder our pills and camouflage them with soot and the juice of barks and grasses. They were carried in small leather pouches and marked according to use.

We had to forego maps, compasses, and the camera that would have been so helpful, in case we were arrested and searched. Talismans and Tibetan sutras were far better suited to our purposes. Finally we completed our preparations with my disguise: just as my hair was growing out it was shaved off again; I donned a travelling monk's robe with a small silver talisman box containing a silver image of the Buddha tucked in its folds, and grasped a rosary in my hand. My name was now Dawa Sangpo and my goal the largest monastery in the world just outside of Lhasa.

Meanwhile, though I was not to learn of it until later, some of the Embassy officials were making my project more dangerous by using it as an excuse to pick up a little extra money on the side. They used the simple expedient of saying that the more native agents planted along the trail the better, drawing money for their training and upkeep, and then pocketing most of it. These unfortunate 'agents' were sent out ill-prepared and at least one was captured and tortured by the Japanese intelligence officers in the border region before admitting that he was waiting for me.

Winter was settling in by the time we left. We stopped for a few days on the farm so that my companions could put their affairs in order, and for a couple of weeks at West Sunit where I waited for Tsugiki to

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show up with my silver coins and final instructions. These instructions were to take no chances, to send back reports by way of agents planted along the way, and once I had arrived in Sinkiang to remain there as a 'sleeper', laying low and collecting information for the day when the Emperor's army would make its triumphant arrival.

We made our final departure at the end of October 1943. Our immediate goals were to make a secret crossing of the border into Ninghsia Province, and then to head for the large monastic centre of Kumbum in Chinghai. At the same time in the Pacific, on an island called Guadalcanal, Japanese forces were just suffering their first serious reverse at the hands of the Americans, but this seemed hardly worth worrying about. We were still firmly implanted from Manchuria to Burma and the Indian border, the Allies were tied up in Europe and would soon sue for peace, and besides no one had ever heard of the Japanese retreating.

As we set off on camel, at the furthest edges of the war, my heart sang with the freedom of the new journey, and Tseren-tso's pragmatic grumbling that winter was a ridiculous time to start a journey did not in the least lessen my euphoria. I would no longer have to convince people that the sheep I was creating were not demons, and it was even more of a relief not to have to try to persuade people to like my countrymen. From now on I was Mongolian and no one would know otherwise. We were finally on our way, and that was all that mattered. The journey might take a year, or it might take two. It might take even longer. What did I care?

Three

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“Wake up Dawa Sangpo!”

I was dragged from a deep and dreamless sleep into the reality of the cold, dark Mongolian night.

“What time is it?” I mumbled, knowing the answer already.

“Maybe two hours past midnight, maybe three. It’s time to be off.” My tormentor was Danzan, an old hand at travelling this way. Our camp was already astir with activity, and I knew there was no way to avoid being part of it. In less than half an hour I would have to be astride my camel. There was no time for a fire, and the best hope of warmth once I wriggled out of my sleeping bag would be in activity. The tent came down and was packed up in no time. Then Danzan and I shared the heavy work of loading the baggage camels; I, tying their loads clumsily with numb fingers in the dark; he with a sure, practiced hand. Before I was even fully awake I was in the saddle between the two humps of my camel, and Tseren-tso was handing me my breakfast: a lump of cold meat that had been boiled the day before, and some biscuits that had been fried in butter. Danzan went off in the lead followed by me. He would be guided by the stars until dawn.

There was nothing unusual in this hurried and cheerless early morning start: we were simply travelling by the Outer Mongolian or *khalkha* system, the secret whereby Mongolian caravans were able to cover far greater distances than their Chinese counterparts. The cold meat, and hard biscuits I held in my hand were anything but appetizing at this time of the night, but I knew it would be another twelve hours before I had a proper meal, and that eating would at least keep me from falling asleep and off my camel. As I chewed and forced myself to swallow I went over in my awakening mind, as I did every morning, the uncertainties of the next few weeks.

So far everything had been no more than practice. We were getting used to the routine, and to living with one another on the trail.

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Only a few days after starting we had overtaken three monks who had studied with Danzan at Batager Sume and who were themselves on a pilgrimage to the Kumbum Monastery in Chinghai province. Since this huge Tibetan monastery on the cultural border between Tibet and Mongolia was our own immediate goal, it would have looked suspicious had we tried to worm out of travelling with them; but I was worried that daily contact might expose my disguise. Danzan felt, on the other hand, that nothing could be better for me, and that with three strangers around there would be little chance of letting down my guard. They had been with us for several weeks now, and my fears had all but disappeared as the days went by and they treated me as they would any other monk.

Ahead, on the border between Inner Mongolia and Ninghsia Province, lay our first challenge. To reach Kumbum we would have to cross that closely guarded border and descend into a desert patrolled by Kuomintang, Outer Mongolian, and Muslim troops—the latter nominally under Chiang Kai-shek's Central Government, but independent-minded enough that Chiang's General Fu Tso-yi spent more time keeping an eye on them than fighting the Japanese. There might well also be Kazakh and Tibetan bandits to be reckoned with. This border area had so many agents from all sides wandering around that virtually no one was trusted, and my disguise would do me less good than stealth and night travel. Though pondering on what lay ahead could not do me much good, since I had too little solid information to make any plans, at least it kept me awake until sunrise when I could observe our surroundings.

Had we been travelling by the more leisurely *harchin* system, used when there is only a short march—by Mongolian standards anyway—to be covered, we would only now be waking up, and there would be the good possibility of some hot tea before starting. Danzan, however, rightly felt that I should harden myself to the rigours of the *khalkha* system. Dawn did not even signal a break to our march—the closest thing to a break came when one of us slid off a camel for a call of nature. We would continue straight through until 10 a.m. The logic behind this is simple. Between 10 a.m. and noon a fierce wind springs up in most of Mongolia, and the greatest ground can be covered with the least wear and tear on men and beasts by doing a long forced march before then. Peter Fleming, whose account I had read, had not realised that two distinct systems existed; "We woke before dawn to the stately and deliberate (yet somehow urgent) sound of camel bells; some

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caravan was doing a night march." Fleming's guides were Chinese, and his most consistent complaints were about the wind.

The sun, at least, did bring light—and a little warmth—to break the day's journey into two psychological stages. During the first stage the vast spaces of the Mongolian grasslands could only be sensed; brooding, mysterious, yet at the same time benign and friendly. In the morning sun their grandeur was fully visible. There was no snow yet so there would be plenty of grazing, and Danzan called a halt at about 10:30 where a small hillock would provide some shelter from the wind. I was by then very hungry, but knew that it would be hours before we could eat. First there was work to be done. Danzan and I began by unloading the camels and putting them out to graze, then we helped Tseren-tso pitch the tent. After that the three of us went out with the monks to collect dried dung for fuel, and as long as we were on a main caravan trail or grazing ground there was never any shortage. Though our two parties had separate tents, it was easiest to share the tasks of dung-gathering and cooking.

Tseren-tso took the first load of fuel back to start the fire—easily done since we still had a supply of matches—so that by the time the rest of us returned it was giving out a cheering warmth, and the water for the tea was nearly boiling. It was not long before the strong black tea that we so looked forward to was ready. Like Tibetans, we brewed it with salt and natural soda, though unlike them we mixed in milk when it was available instead of butter. Even so, the drink was more like a soup than a beverage; and very different from what the Chinese, Japanese, or English think of as tea. But I was already well accustomed to it from my years on the farm, and had been anticipating the first sip, and the warmth it would give, since before dawn.

Now that we were drinking tea, we could all relax for the most enjoyable part of the day. Tseren-tso cut up our daily meat ration into pieces big enough for one person each including enough for next morning's breakfast, and set them to boil along with wild onions and rock salt. Of course she would not think of roasting the meat, for that would risk getting the juice in the fire and offending the fire god, thus bringing on eye problems for someone. We helped ourselves to more tea as we sniffed hungrily at the boiling meat. When at last it was ready we dug in greedily, carving off bite-sized bits with our knives, while Tseren-tso put noodles in the broth to boil. We made noodles from our supply of flour, and dried them in the sun whenever we stopped long enough, so that we always had some ready.

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Eventually, replete with meat, noodles and tea, and drowsy from the fire, I began to doze. It was first Danzan's turn to watch the camels. He woke me several hours later and I went out into the now dying wind. Caravans with a long distance to cover, but assured of a good rest at the end, would begin a late afternoon-evening march at this point, and the distances covered in this way are sometimes truly prodigious. But we had no idea how long our trip would be, and so had decided to spare our camels by limiting them to one march a day.

As the sun set I gathered our small herd around the tent. We had been up since 2 a.m. and would be up again at that time the next day, so we were all ready for sleep. I snuggled into my sleeping bag, while the happy couple, who still seemed to be enjoying a honeymoon, preferred to remove their bulky outer garments and use them as covers so that they would have a little more freedom of movement. I crossed my boots and put them under my head as a pillow; all day they had kept me warm, now I had to return some of the warmth or else they would freeze and be useless in the morning. My last thought before drifting into an exhausted but happy sleep was that Mongolian nomads, caravan men and armies had been travelling in just this way for more than a thousand years.

By the time we reached the last Japanese intelligence outpost at the Kangai-nuuji Gorge in a raging snow storm on December 15, we were all well used to our routine.

It was well past midnight when the blizzard, which had forced us to camp short of our goal, abated. My tent flap was frozen stiff as a board. I pushed it aside and went out alone.

The clouds had blown off and a full moon now outlined the fang-like peaks of the range called the "Mountains of the Wolves", but an icy wind still cut into my face. My feet were numb. Pulling my woollen cap down over my forehead, and protecting my face as best I could with the sleeves of my Mongolian robe, I mounted my camel in the knee-deep snow and spurred it toward the Military Intelligence outpost.

As I drew near to a lonely hut hidden in the shadow of the gorge, a sharp cry challenged me: "Hanbe? Who goes there?"

"I must see your commanding officer," I answered in Mongolian. "It's urgent."

I was ushered into a small, dimly-lit room. Three Mongolians were sleeping in one corner, and two others were playing cards. I waited for a moment, trying to bring some circulation back into my feet, when another Mongolian came in and demanded to know what I wanted.

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The roughness of his speech was proof enough that he had not seen through my disguise. To him I was just another Mongolian, a none-too-respectable pilgrim monk who had probably come to beg.

He motioned me to the inner room where I found the Intelligence Chief, Yoshizawa, sitting around the stove with two others. It was comforting to meet countrymen in this forgotten land on the western edge of Inner Mongolia, although I knew they would be the last ones I would meet for a long time.

So far at least, I had been within regions nominally controlled by Japan. A very different situation now lay before me. My three companions spread a map under the dim lamp and began to explain the deployment of the enemy Chinese and Outer Mongolian troops along the border of Ninghsia Province, where Japanese influence ended. Directly to the south was the Chinese Central Army under Fu Tso-yi; to the west a Muslim Army under Ma Hung-kuei; and to the north the Soviet Outer Mongolian Army. Border units of all these forces constantly patrolled this area. The only thing they all had in common was their hatred of the Japanese. I could expect no mercy were I to fall into any of their hands.

But I had no intentions of being caught: that was the whole point of pilgrim disguise that allowed me to move at will. The three intelligence officers advised caution, recommending the longer but safer route that would take me north along the border of Outer Mongolia. Though they were my countrymen I felt somehow remote from them and their considerations. Their outlook was limited by their way of life. I was perhaps a little too proud of myself, for I felt that anything was within my power, and I was far more concerned with speed than with caution.

A little more than three years before I would have thought much the same as they, but now, although only twenty-one, I was very different from the boy who had left Japan in 1940. Indeed, the journey ahead was dangerous, but so what? It was keeping me out of the army where there would be as much danger but to far less purpose: and after all, what young man of my generation really expected to live past twenty-five?

My mind raced eagerly ahead past the Ninghsia border to Chinghai and beyond, for there, where Japanese power held no sway, lay not only adventure, but a greater personal goal: the fulfilment of these dreams which only partially concerned the information I was to collect for my superiors. No matter what happened, it would be a long time before I

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returned; far longer than the year allotted to me, for once I was beyond the border, who would there be to order me to return?

Later we arrived at a spot called Hanan, where a number of our local agents lived, reporting on the caravans trading with Sinkiang. These caravans would usually have an agent or two of ours with them as well, but their reliability was always doubtful. Whether Mongolian, Turki, or Chinese, they were not the sort of people whose first loyalty is easily given to a foreign invader: their motives were purely monetary. Besides, if they were caught they could always bargain for their lives by volunteering to share—or sell—what they knew on Japan; that is if they were not already double or triple agents. An exhausted caravan was just dragging itself in from Sinkiang when we arrived. I found it prudent not to make myself known here. Though our agents might well have some useful information about the border, now almost upon us, they might also have spread news of me throughout the caravans and camps.

My plan was rather to rendezvous the next day with our old friend Dorji, who had been sent ahead with two disciples named Norbu and Erenchin to make discreet enquiries into the border situation. He was one of the few men in whom I felt I could place complete trust. Inquiring for him I found a camp with three tents, and heard voices chanting a sutra. A young woman holding a dog which barked furiously at my approach told me that Dorji was in the middle tent. Leaving my whip on the roof of the tent, I lifted the thick felt flap at the entrance and went in. Inside I found three monks seated along the left side of the tent beating drums, clashing symbols, and chanting. The familiar, mustachioed figure of my old friend sat in the middle, completely in his element.

As soon as the chanting was finished, I introduced myself to the three monks in the traditional way by exchanging *huurug*, or snuff bottles, with each in order of their seniority. This was another of those little details, like placing the whip on the roof of the tent—lest one lower the status of the inhabitants to that of beasts—that had to come naturally and without hesitation. I explained that I had come to see Dorji concerning my pilgrimage to the holy land of the west—a true enough explanation as far as it went—and asked him to come to our tent.

Once we were in private we went over his information, comparing it with what the Japanese intelligence officers had given me earlier. The 'border' between Inner Mongolia and Ninghsia was 250 miles long,

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and was more or less defined by the Mountains of the Wolves, which the Chinese call the Lan Shan, to the south and bending up to the west of us. Much of the area was in reality a no-man's-land, patrolled by all sides, and other parts were effectively patrolled by none, but were the haunt of bandits, outlaws and refugees. There had never been any border before the Japanese came along; Ninghsia had always been just a lowland desert region of Inner Mongolia. To cross into Ninghsia meant essentially to descend from the tableland on which we had been travelling since leaving the farm down this western part of that same escarpment that led to Kalgan and Huhehota in the east. But when we reached the foot of these mountains there would be no railway, and no welcoming pleasure quarters; only a scrub desert occupied by the enemy which we would somehow have to cross. Our problem was to choose a safe route along the mountain paths that would be constantly watched, and once we reached the desert below to keep from leaving too suspicious a trail. The odd thing was that even this bit of chicanery fitted in with my disguise, for the three monks with us, who were *bona fide* pilgrims, were in precisely the same situation here in these lands where no one was trusted, and every stranger walked warily.

One evening as I pondered my problem, an old man named Dongo, having heard that we had some skill with medicinal herbs (in reality, of course, our disguised drugs) called on me. He was tall and bent with age, but his weather-beaten and wrinkled face with its wispy white goatee looked as wise as it was old. "My son is in great pain," he said. "Boils have broken out all over his body. Please tell me what I should do, wise lama." Being, even in my travelling disguise, neither an incarnation nor very learned, I did not really deserve to be called a lama, but the ignorant are quite loose with this word, and often use it as a term of flattery. But having been asked, I could hardly put him off, and I was just wondering how to make up an impressive-looking ceremony when Danzan came to my rescue.

"If you give the young lama a few moments solitude, he will try meditation." This satisfied the old man, who went out of the tent to await the result. Danzan quickly produced three dice and whispered in my ear what to chant. We had been practicing ceremonies like this, but inhibited by the presence of our three travelling companions, had not been able to perfect them. As I continued to chant, Danzan whispered as well what the result of the throw had been. Though a devout Buddhist, as well as a believer in the more degenerate fortune-telling practices such as this, my friend saw nothing wrong with a little

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charade of this type. Besides, he may have reasoned, we were giving our visitor the actual result that the dice showed and had as good a chance of curing the boy as did any other travelling monk: better in fact, since we would also sneak him some powdered medicine disguised with soot.

"You have incurred the serious wrath of the God of Water," I told the old man when he returned. "You must worship the God of Water. Mixing this powder with your son's tea may also mitigate the god's anger." He thanked me for my advice, then hung around in the easy manner of the steppes chatting about daily happenings. He was a nomad who had wandered with his herds along the Ninghsia border all his life and knew every trail and secret path in the area. He bemoaned the coming of both the Chinese and the Japanese, but especially of the Japanese. Before he had ever heard of them, life had been peaceful and the grazing good. Now, a law-biding man minding his own, or religion's, business had to sneak about at night, or through uninhabited areas to go anywhere at all. It soon occurred to me to sound him out about acting as our guide.

"We have truly been born into evil times, as you say," I began. "Here we are simple pilgrims trying to reach Chinghai in time for the Butter Lamp Festival at Kumbum on January 15, yet even such as we must go in fear of being thought secret agents or smugglers. Could you, with your vast experience, guide us across the Ninghsia border? You will," I added offhandedly, "be well paid for your trouble."

There was little subtlety about the grizzled old man. "How much will you pay me?" was his first question.

"If you get us safely past the border guards and down into Ninghsia, I will pay you twenty large silver coins."

"That's a lot of money," said the old man reflectively, pulling his pipe out of his boot. He took a few puffs and began thinking hard. Finally he tapped the head of his pipe against the sole of his boot and announced that the price suited him fine. "Besides," he added, "you're pilgrims, and I enjoy helping pilgrims on their honest way past the enemies of religion." I could not but feel a little guilty as I handed him an advance payment of ten pieces of silver on a *khata*, the white ceremonial scarf so important to all Central Asian Buddhists, and arranged to meet him at his tent after dark so that we could make a secret departure.

Dorji and I had our evening meal together, during which he asked me to look out for the more irresponsible of his two followers, Erenchin, who had accepted an intelligence gathering assignment in

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Lanchow. Dorji was worried that he would simply fritter away the funds and get into trouble. When we had finished eating he helped us prepare for our departure.

Finally, I stood up with my camel reins in my hand. This was it. There could be no turning back now. Dorji tied a *khata* around my neck and, his wrinkled face becoming more wrinkled still, hugged me, his forehead against mine, and kissed me as if parting with his own kin. He knew well that we might never meet again.

“Take care of yourself. Study hard, become a good monk and come back safely. I will be waiting for you.” Part of this little speech was for public consumption, since our three travelling companions were present as well. But the cow dung fire, still not quite dead, caught the tears welling in his ancient eyes, and I felt that there was a real sincerity behind his words. A learned but guileless monk like Dorji assisted the Japanese not out of any political or financial motives, but simply because of the affection he felt for certain individuals. I am sure that nothing would have made him happier than for me to forget all about my mission, study wholeheartedly at Drepung, and come back many years later with my *geshé* degree.

In the twilight we led our expanded caravan—Dorji had exchanged three of his camels for one of mine with an ailing leg—through the sparse shrubs to Dongo’s tent. The old man stood waiting for us with his camel, eager for the adventure and feeling important. Exchanging but few words, we began to travel south through the thigh-deep snow toward the Mountains of the Wolves in pathless grassland until we made camp at midnight in a valley. According to Dongo, this area was uninhabited and little frequented, so that it would be quicker and just as safe to travel the next morning.

We started at dawn, the mountains and the danger they represented drawing closer with every step, pitched our camp in a hollow and rested for the afternoon, then were away again in the evening. After another stop of a few hours’ rest and refreshment we were again on the trail before dawn, and by late morning of December 24th had arrived at the stone altar of Zuriktin Chagan Obo. These cairns (or *obo* in Mongolian) are often used to mark passes, but this one was the closest thing to a border mark. Dongo told us that we were now in a no-man’s land at the limits of Japanese power, and that from here on Chinese patrols would outnumber Japanese ones. “At least the Chinese have the virtue of being lazier and less efficient than those others,” he

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spat. "I don't know why they could not have stayed in their own country, wherever that may be, and left us in peace."

We pitched our tent out of sight behind the hillock with the *obo* on it and had lunch. During the meal, Dongo readied us for what to expect. "This will be the most important night. Not far up the main trail here a track branches off to the west. It's not used much. By taking that we should arrive just before dawn at a *geru obo* (a tent-shaped cairn) where the mountains peter out at a place called Shine Osu. We won't even have to climb to a pass, we'll be standing on top of a cliff looking down a maze of canyons at the desert. There is a guard post there, and there are two others on the way, but they are notoriously lax. Fu Tso-yi's soldiers do not like our upland winters, and prefer sleeping to sitting up and watching."

"You're sure they're lax?" asked one of the monks. He had been this way before in more peaceful days and now mistrusted everything.

"Of course, it's almost a standard pilgrim route. The first guard post, which we should pass early in the evening, is off the trail and it is just a matter of being reasonably quiet. The others should present no problem as long as we pass by after midnight. Now straight up ahead at Bayan Shanda, it's a different story. That is the main headquarters. The commander there is a terror. Better get what sleep you can, we have a long night ahead of us."

As soon as the sun touched the horizon we began toward the northern foot of the Mountains of the Wolves. There was no moon but the stars shone brightly in the crisp air. I was tense with anticipation and not entirely confident of old man Dongo's guarantees, for I knew that the Chinese would like nothing better than to lay their hands on a real Japanese agent. For me there could be no buying myself off with divided loyalties. My only comfort was that we were nowhere near the Communist 8th Route Army, the only really dedicated fighting force on the Chinese side.

Our camels moved steadily through the snow, their hooves making monotonous, soft, crunching sounds. After some time I noticed that the pole star, what the Mongolians call Altan Khatas or the 'Golden Nail', was still directly behind us. We were still travelling due south. This worried me a bit, but old Dongo, leading the way, seemed to know what he was doing. Then I noticed that we seemed to be on a wide road rather than a secret path. I called to Danzan who slowed his camel to wait for me. "What do you think of this?" I asked him. "Shouldn't we be going west on a small trail by this time."

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"I was just going to mention it to you. I don't like this at all. It looks like we're going to have to risk insulting our guide. Hey, Grandad!" he called softly to the old man who stopped his camel and waited for us, shaking his head and muttering about demons loose in the night hiding the landmarks from him. There was nothing to do but turn back and head directly for the pole star, but it was really too dark to make any sense of the terrain and we had no idea how far we had overshot our trail. We finally decided to wait until daybreak. Thoroughly disgusted and extremely nervous, we did not even pitch our tent, but just unpacked the camels and lay down.

Tseren-tso went off to relieve herself, soon followed by Danzan, then the three monks, and finally our guide. When he had finished, Tseren-tso went off again. The nervous parade continued. I felt atrocious myself, ready to spill over, and wanted to join them, but I was certain that any show of weakness on my part would shatter the resolve of my two companions. So I lay, utterly miserable, trying to control my stomach cramps and pretending to sleep. "Look at him," said Tseren-tso stumbling back to the camp, loudly enough to wake me if I had been asleep. "How can he sleep at a time like this?" Finally just before dawn I could control myself no longer.

As the first dim light filtered in from the horizon we saw that we had bedded down in a dry river bed flowing north from the Mountains of the Wolves. The next thing we saw was Dongo, who had climbed the bank, running back with panic written all over his face.

"Bayan Shanda Monastery is just over there!" he cried, gesticulating wildly. He had delivered us right to the doorstep of the enemy's border guard headquarters. We quickly packed our camels, hurried them with our whips, and rushed toward the foot of the mountains. Fleeing first and fastest was old Dongo, the Danzans and I close behind, and the three monks bringing up the rear, all of us well aware that if we did not reach cover before sunrise we would be visible from the monastery.

We made it just before the sun came up, and Dongo found us a secluded hiding place in a mountain fold. Luckily there was some grass here, so we could let the camels loose without fear that they would stray into the open.

After a good look around from cover, our guide and I decided to chance going out to discover where we had missed our turn the night before. We soon found the place. It was at a point where we should have descended a six foot cliff to reach the path, and the fault was not

entirely Dongo's, since a recent landslide had obliterated the usual landmarks. We marked the spot with our spades, and hurried back to our hideout, keeping a lookout for early patrols.

The mountains ran west north-west, and peeking out Dongo pointed to a tiny dot on a rise a long way away just north of their foot. That was the *geru obo* that was to have been our destination. As everyone seemed to have lost faith in the old man, Danzan calculated the distance and decided we could make it on our own. It was too dangerous to build a fire since the smell of smoke would carry a long way, even if it could not be seen, so we had a cold breakfast of boiled meat and biscuits which had long ago been fried in butter. To drink, there was only very cold water.

About 10 a.m. two cavalrymen, wearing navy blue overcoats and with rifles slung across their backs, passed eastward below the foot of our hiding place; luckily not passing close enough to see the tracks we had left. This was more than enough to convince us to sleep for the day and to save our energy for a night trek.

Dongo apologized for not having been of much use and tried to return the ten pieces of silver by holding them out to me spread on the *khata*. But I knew the poor old man had made an honest mistake—he was as frightened as any of us—and besides, I did not want to leave any bad feelings behind us, so I picked up only one of the coins. This wordless gesture meant that he was to keep the other nine and the *khata*, and would thus restore his honour to a certain extent as well.

At sunset, after a good long sleep we bade farewell to the old man, and, descending the cliff as we should have done the night before, struck out on our western course with Danzan as our guide. The sky was overcast and it was very dark. We soon came to the first of the lookout posts that Dongo had told us about, a small hut about a hundred feet off the road, and no one seemed to care to be on watch on such a cold night. We saw only a light in its window and were thankful that the night was so dark. I noticed also, as I followed close behind Danzan, that we came upon a number of forks in the trail, and it was eerie the way he always seemed to choose the right one.

Much later we smelled smoke and knew that we must be approaching the larger outpost at the mouth of the Chagan Gol Canyon. There was a tent ahead by the roadside with a lamp hanging from it. We were clearly at the mercy of destiny, and Danzan never slackened the pace of his camel. As we passed the tent I sneaked a glance inside and saw a soldier, asleep on duty by the fire. The soft padding of the camels' foot-

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steps seemed unnaturally loud. So did the beating of my heart as I waited for the sharp command to halt. Only when we were well past did I notice that I was sticky with sweat although the temperature was lower than minus 30°C.

We must have traveled twenty-five miles that night, but it was too dark to find the *geru obo*. More relaxed after passing the two outposts, the monk who had been this way before began grumbling that this was a different road from the one he had taken previously, though he had no positive suggestions to offer. Eventually, since no one knew for sure where we were we decided to stop and wait out the night, again not even bothering to put up the tent. Thirsty after all the tension I found it difficult to sleep, and made the disastrous mistake of trying to eat some snow off my spade. My tongue came in contact with the metal, froze to it, and by the time I got it off I had a mouthful of blood. Even more miserable than the night before, I lay down and pretended to sleep.

As dawn broke on the 26th we found that we had not missed the *geru obo* at all; in fact we had camped uncomfortably close to it, for not far away was the outpost of Shine Osu, a large mud hut with four or five saddled horses tied in front looking ready for action. It was useless to try to hide: there was nothing to do but to try to brazen it out and hope that the guards were still asleep.

It was an eerie spot. During that long night we had left the mountains behind us, and though we could not see it, we knew that just beyond the outpost the land dropped off, and that if we could get there we would be safe. Almost abreast of the hut, a saddle bag slipped off of one of the camels. We calmly made him squat on all fours and hurriedly tightened the straps. The monks and Danzan counted their prayer beads and moved their lips in silent chants. I counted my own prayer beads and thought about the Emperor. The outpost remained silent.

Then all of a sudden we were looking down at the Ninghsia Desert in the distance as we reached the edge of the land. Behind us were our Inner Mongolian grasslands; to our left and right—southeast and northwest—the mountains rose up and faded off into the distance; and about a thousand feet below, through a series of canyons, was the desert.

Wasting no time on the scenery we managed to get our camels down a steep slope into a valley where clear water trickled from a spring. We pitched our tent in a mountain fold, and for the first time in days were able to enjoy tea and a hot meal, though these pleasures were

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mitigated for me by my painful tongue. Several hundred feet above us we saw a flock of sheep and goats bleating along the rocky mountain-side. We had succeeded in breaking through the border to the Alashan Banner. Here in these gorges and valleys no temporal power held sway, and this was a favourite hideout for refugees from both Outer Mongolian Socialism and Inner Mongolian feudalism. In this land of outlaws and refugees we felt we could again relax for a few days.

* * *

The next morning, after a long night's sleep, we had our first unhurried start for some time, and proceeded down the frozen riverbed of the gorge. It was a good thing we were no longer hurrying along in the dark as we had been, for the camels were having such a difficult time with their footing on the ice of the riverbed that eventually we had to give up riding and go ahead of them sprinkling the ice with sand. The sheer-sided gorge seemed to wind on forever, and not only could we no longer see the desert, but it was often unclear in just which direction we were heading.

As pilgrims we had to visit the region's most celebrated religious centre, the Löpön Chimba Monastery, which was in an altogether different gorge. One of the monks said he knew a shortcut that would save us a whole day over the normal route of following the canyon down to the desert and doubling back. This shortcut involved a hard, steep climb for the camels, but we all eventually made it safe and sound to this unusual cliffside monastery: unusual because while the great majority of Mongolians follow the reformed Gelupa Sect, this temple was dedicated to Löpön Rimpoché, or Padmasambhava, founder of the old, unreformed Nyingmapa Sect.

We camped nearby, and on the 28th of December observed the proper rights such as offering tea and money, and asking that a sutra be chanted for our safe journey in return. I was happy enough to do this, and in fact to give sincere thanks for our safe arrival, though like most Japanese I was a very lax Buddhist compared with the Mongolians. In fact, the paucity of my belief showed through all too clearly, for in the main temple—in a large natural cave—was a golden Buddha image said to look different to every pilgrim who looks at it. Tseren-tso insisted that it had a moustache, our monks said it looked angry, and Danzan said it was smiling. All this seemed very strange to me: I thought it just looked like an ordinary Buddha. I should have had the sense to make

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up something. There is also supposed to be a young reclining lama lying half way up the reddish brown precipice directly across the canyon from the temple. Again I could see nothing and was foolish enough to say so, making myself needlessly conspicuous. "What are you saying?" demanded one of the monks. "You are only showing your lack of faith! Look, he is lying facing westward with his hand as a pillow. May he be praised!" The others even said they could see the hem of his robe billowing in the wind. Was it possible that these simple but reverent people, brought up since their infancy in an unquestioning belief, could see things that my own critical eyes could not? Whatever the answer, I would have to be more careful about this sort of thing.

As beneficial as this canyon may have been for human pilgrims, it was doing our camels no good at all. They were tired from the forced marches and sparse grazing of the border crossing. The short cut to the monastery had improved neither their physical condition nor their temperaments, and there was little for them to eat here. Their welfare gave us the excuse we needed to make a hasty departure when a group of Inner Mongolian pilgrims—whom I was afraid might be expected to know what a Japanese looked like—arrived. We soon emerged on the edge of the desert, but found good grazing at the foot of the mountains where we camped for three days, including New Year's Day, 1944.

On that day I made one of those absurd little nationalistic gestures that it still amazes me to think about. I was attempting, and largely succeeding, in being completely Mongolian; I knew from personal experience that my countrymen were bleeding Mongolia, Manchuria and China for all they were worth; and I had gained a healthy disrespect for most of the Japanese in Kalgan. Yet such is the power of early indoctrination that on that morning—the most important holiday in Japan—I climbed the nearest hill alone, faced east, and softly sang *Kimigayo*, the Japanese National Anthem. It was the first and last time I made such a gesture.

Although there was a main caravan trail running from here to Yamen, the capital of the Alashan Banner, we thought it would be safer to cut across the desert and avoid the customs post along the way. Desert travel was actually much easier than what we had been through previously. It was a good deal warmer, although still below freezing, and while there was no water, we supplied ourselves with blocks of ice for emergency use between wells. The Alashan Desert is really more properly described as 'semi-desert', for there were abundant shrubs called *zak*

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that would burn when still green, supplying us with fuel, and whose leaves were a great favourite with the camels.

It was not until the southern tip of the Tengri Desert with its deceptive and dangerous dunes, that we expected any real difficulties, but both the weather and the local population seemed to be conspiring against us. On the 2nd of January we had planned to stop as usual by noon, but had to struggle on as we came upon no water. Then we unexpectedly emerged from the *zak* forest into a clearing where we found five or six tents not far from a well. But as we eagerly began unpacking beside the well we were approached with some urgency by men from the tents.

"You're lucky we're here," one of them told us, "or you might be in trouble. This well is poisonous. We certainly wouldn't drink from it." The men looked and spoke like Mongolians, but as we were talking with them, two women wearing black veils that hung over their shoulders came out of one of their tents. I had never seen Mongolian women dressed like this before, and it could only mean that they were Muslims, something very unusual among pure Mongolians.

"Is there any water nearby?" asked Danzan.

"Oh yes, only about an hour away in the direction you are going. Do you have any coral beads or silver with you? I have some good camels to trade."

"We have some nice silver bowls . . ." I began when Danzan interrupted me.

"There's no time for that now, Dawa Sangpo. Can't you see that everyone is thirsty? We've already done a long stage." A little irritably I abandoned my trading scheme, and as soon as we were out of earshot Danzan told me of his misgivings. "I don't really trust them," he told me. "I'll be very surprised if there is a well, but we were in no position to force ourselves on them. I don't think you'd have made a very good deal on their camels either," he added.

He was right. There was no well, and it was near sundown when we camped. We had an emergency water supply, but even so tea was scarce that night. We learned later that it was not the custom of Muslims to share their drinking water with infidels.

Several days later as we trekked south, it began snowing, and this developed into a heavy storm that halted us for four days. When we continued on the tenth of January it was still heavy going for the camels in the knee-deep snow. As we emerged from the *zak* into a clearing we saw an armed figure who looked like a ragged soldier strug-

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gling toward us. One of our monks spoke Chinese so he stopped to chat with him while the rest of us continued. When he caught up he told us that the soldier had tried to steal his camel, and he had only escaped by galloping away, terrified of a shot in the back. Since none of us were armed, we spurred our own camels on until evening, thinking that there would be trouble if he overtook us. When he had not shown up after dark we decided against posting a guard.

About two hours after we had gone to sleep we were awakened by footsteps. It was the soldier, but he was now completely exhausted and hardly able to speak. Feeling sorry for him, I brought him into the tent, blew up the fire and heated some tea and noodles. He ate as one famished, and then began to talk. I had to go to the tent of the monks and awaken the one he had attempted to rob.

When our friend managed to slow him down and make some sense of his words he turned out to be thanking us, apologizing, and telling us the story of his life all at once. "I'm sorry about this afternoon, but I was desperate," came the translation. "Since you're Mongolians it is safe to tell you that I have deserted from Fu Tso-yi's army. I was never meant to be a soldier—I'm a farmer from Shensi. They kidnapped me ten years ago, forced me to march all over the country and be shot at. And when they pay me at all it is no more than forty yuan a month, hardly enough for a pair of canvas shoes. I just couldn't stand any more. I want to go home and see my poor old mother."

He was near tears, and seemed more pathetic than dangerous. When we dried his shoes before the fire he was as grateful as if we had given him a new pair. I picked up his Czechoslovakian made rifle and noticed that it was empty. When I asked him if he had any shells, he sheepishly replied that he had none.

He slept with us and the next morning we found him rounding up the camels, helping with the loading, and generally making himself useful. Since we had no spare camel for him to ride we gave him cheese, butter, and biscuits, and told him to catch up if he could. He dragged himself into camp about six in the evening. We were headed south to Yamen, a place he wanted to avoid, so we split up the next day. The poor man had known so little kindness that it seemed to hurt him to part from us, and he waved until we were out of sight.

I was hoping for a good look at Yamen because of the rumours I had heard in Kalgan. Today it is often forgotten that after Hitler had his chance to show off at the 1936 Olympics, the 1940 Games were scheduled for Tokyo. This would have been the first time they had

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been held in Asia, and a tremendous boost for our prestige. There was, however, the problem of how to get the Olympic flame so far. The planners seemed to realize that an invasion of China was in the offing and that India would be unavailable to us. That would leave the flame in non-allied Afghanistan. It was a long flight from there to Manchuria, so relay stations would have to be established.

One possible site was Ochina Lake on the Outer Mongolian border, and another here at Yamen. Camel caravans were sent out with Japanese staff, equipment, and aircraft fuel, and runways were constructed. Though the experiment was ostensibly in the name of the Olympic spirit, it was ultimately intended to open up a Eurasian airline linking Tokyo and Berlin.

Somehow these isolated airfields were left out of the planning when we invaded China in 1937, for the Chinese army marched straight in and arrested the defenceless Japanese staff. Nothing was known of their fate. I had hoped to snoop around and learn something, but when we heard that many Chinese Muslim and Mongolian soldiers in the town were checking up on all travellers, I remembered Tsugiki's injunction to take no foolish chances, and gave up on the idea.

When on January 18th, as we were approaching the Tengri Dunes, we found a well with abundant good water we stopped to let the camels feed to their hearts content, and also to treat the sores on the backs of their hooves. Camels are gentle and patient creatures who will repay a little care of this sort. Though I could hardly tell them apart at the outset of our journey, they had gradually begun to emerge as individuals. The oldest, Shara Ada, always took the lead, and young Jojik always strayed from the road to eat grass whenever he felt like it. Jimbuger was recognizable by his dainty gait, Seturhi by his split nostril, and Dokshin by his strength and short temper. Treating their sores was another new experience for me, though Danzan was an expert.

"Soon it will be mating time," he commented as he showed me how to scrub the hooves with a mixture of strong tea, salt, and soda. "Then we will have to be careful of the males. They can get vicious. A mating bull will attack anything that approaches. It's a sight, I can tell you: they froth at the mouth, and their eyes burn. They charge with their heads almost lowered to the ground . . ."

"That sounds like Dawa Sangpo before one of his trips down to Kalgan," interjected Tseren-tso who was going by with water. "But he was always so placid when he came back. I wonder what he did there!"

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Laughing, Danzan was about to add a remark of his own at my expense when he caught himself. He looked at me uncomfortably, then attempted to reprimand his wife. "Woman, how many times do we have to remind you that Dawa Sangpo is your *brother*? You know that there are some things brothers and sisters just do not mention in front of one another."

"But he's not really my brother," she answered breezily. "And besides, no one is listening." The monks were chanting in their tent.

It could be very frustrating trying to reason with Tseren-tso, but I tried anyway. "We've told you again and again that we have to keep up the act all the time. That way we'll all be used to it and their won't be any chance of us forgetting at the wrong time and giving ourselves away." I could see my words were not getting through.

Danzan had hobbled one camel with a rope passed under its foreleg and behind its neck, and was now beginning to sew a leather patch directly onto the back of a hoof that had worn down and was showing soft, fleshy pink spots, so my attention was drawn back to the camels. "Are they really that dangerous?" I asked, recalling that I had indeed been in Kalgan during the mating seasons on the farm and knew little about rutting camels. "What do you do if they charge?"

"Oh that's easy," said Tseren-tso still hanging around. "Just run straight down a steep hill. Camels can only go down slantwise and it slows them up."

I looked around at the flat terrain. "What if I can't find a hill?" I asked.

"A frozen lake will do just as well," answered Danzan nonchalantly. "Remember the problems our animals had on the frozen river? Here, give me a hand with this sewing. You'd better learn how to do it."

I found the needle awkward and was worried about going too far in and finding a hoof in my face, in spite of the camels being hobbled. "But there are no lakes found here in the desert either," I countered.

"And that is why, as you undoubtedly noticed, I bought only geldings from Prince Koh Wang," laughed Danzan. I knew I had been set up, and felt my ears go red at making such a foolish gaff.

"Little Dawa Sangpo seems to no longer know a gelding from a bull," laughed Tseren-tso. "He's almost become a gelding himself, pretending to be a monk for the last four months. But don't worry—soon we'll be in Chinghai, and you know what they say about the girls there!" I poked my finger with the long needle as she ran off shrieking with laughter.

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"I hope you never have to regret the day you arranged our marriage," said Danzan, laughing fondly at his simple-minded wife. "That woman will give us all away yet."

* * *

It was only another three miles to the Chokt Huree Monastery, the last outpost on the edge of the Tengri Desert, so we started late the next day. We pitched our tent in a dense grove of pampas grass and turned the camels loose to feed. The ground was white with soda, which they licked hungrily, and it was also good for their foot sores.

Just as we finished pitching our tent we were visited by a bullying and overbearing trio of young monks who had, it seems, been gambling in the recesses of the pampas grass. Not looking for any trouble we offered them the seats of honour, on the north side opposite the entrance to the tent, exchanged snuff, and invited them to tea. One of the three—his speech weighed down by a thick eastern Mongolian accent similar to Danzan's—kept insisting that we must be smuggling something, and the more I looked at him the more familiar he looked, though I could not seem to place him.

Finally his face registered: it was Erenchin, the wayward disciple that Dorji was concerned about. We had never actually met or conversed and I thought it unlikely that he would recognize me, but I could not imagine what he could be doing here at this remote monastery in sight of the Tengri Dunes. It was, of course, not at all unusual for agents to disappear with the expenses they had been allotted for independent investigations: particularly those under-funded and under-trained ones who had already had the better part of their stipends appropriated by embassy officials. You could never tell when this type would sell you down the river, but since I trusted Dorji so fully, I could not believe ill of even the slackest of his disciples.

Seeing that Erenchin was returning my interest in him, I decided to take a chance and make myself known. "Try some of my snuff," I offered, holding out a fine snuff bottle that had been a present from Dorji, and which anyone who knew him would certainly recognize. It was porcelain with eighteen Buddhist saints carved on it, and this reminder of his lama had a visible effect on Erenchin. After inhaling the snuff and sitting for a moment in concentration, he suddenly got up and left on a flimsy pretext. I hoped I had not misjudged him, for we were at his mercy.

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After dark he returned, alone but for a bottle of Ninghsia spirits which he brought as a peace offering and to apologize for his behaviour of the afternoon, and explained to us that he was depressed and undecided about what to do. He had been assigned to collect newspapers issued in Ninghsia and Lanchow in recent months, a simple enough mission at which he had almost totally failed for lack of a Ninghsia identity card which was necessary to enter either city.

We drank steadily as he told us of his trials and tribulations and it quickly became obvious that he simply lacked the determination and imagination necessary for his task. The local officials were so corrupt that the necessary papers were always obtainable, but I think Erenchin had other uses for his money, such as gambling, and—not surprisingly—little or no true loyalty to the Japanese cause. He was fed up with being at loose ends in the desert—away from Dorji's influence he was hardly an exemplary monk—but was afraid of what the Japanese would do to him if he returned to Inner Mongolia empty handed. Since he was the only agent I had come across since Dorji, I thought I saw a good opportunity to divest myself of whatever information I had collected, and urged him to go back and deliver a message to the Japanese Embassy in Kalgan. Sensing his reluctance, I offered to include a face-saving statement regarding his failure.

It was obviously a load off his mind, and I began to compose the letter that night. I had not had a drink in four months, and I was distressed to find that I could hardly hold the pen, so the letter was not all that I might have hoped. I am able to quote it here because it eventually found its way back to me, having been forwarded to my father as my last communication, after which I was assumed dead.

January 20, 1944

Dear Mr. Nakazawa,

I am writing from Chokt Huree Monastery, about 200 *ni* (80 miles) south of Yamen. Erenchin, one of Dorji's subordinates, has unexpectedly visited me, and we have just celebrated our chance encounter. He has on several occasions attempted to enter Ninghsia and Lanchow, but has failed because he cannot get an identification card from the Ninghsia government. Since he is at a loose end and doesn't know what to do, I have asked him to return with this note.

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On passing through the Banner of Alashan, I have been impressed with the possibility for reopening trade with north-west China. If Ma Hung-kuei (the Ninghsia Governor) could be won over, large-scale trade is entirely possible. Even smuggling, I believe, would be worthwhile. I am sending information on the deployment of the Muslim Army and the Central Army along the border (sketch maps attached). I expect to enter Chinghai Mongolia by way of Kumbum Monastery and then go on to Sinkiang. If I fail to enter Sinkiang, I intend to go to Lhasa and return by way of India or Burma.

The three of us are in high spirits and on the best of terms. Though I have not heard any news of Nishikawa, I believe he is safe and probably headed for Kumbum. I hope you will further avail yourself of Erenchin's services.

Yours most faithfully,

K

In a sense this letter ended my brief and hardly glorious career as a spy. It was the only communication I ever sent back, and there was little sent with it of much real value, so that in the end—unwittingly, it could be said—I did little if any harm during World War II.

And then there is that odd, passing reference to Kazumi Nishikawa, whom I knew only slightly, and about whose mission I knew next to nothing. In fact I had met him only once: when we greeted the new students who came to the Ko Ah Gijuku the year after us. He was a tall, quiet, and rather near-sighted man of about twenty-seven or twenty-eight. We youngsters were a little in awe of him and his experience, for he had already spent several years working for the North China Railway Company. Though I had not met him since, like everyone else I had heard the story of his expulsion from the Ko Ah Gijuku, for breaking into the school's warehouse on the night of a full moon party to get the *saké* to which his ration card (issued to students over twenty-one), entitled him. According to rumour he had been blameless, but as the oldest had taken responsibility for the others.

Somehow he seemed to have worked himself back into official favour, and had started on a mission of his own at the same time I had. All I knew of this obscure mission was that he was heading for a Tibetan-speaking area of Chinghai or Kansu in the company of some Tangut Tibetans. I certainly could not have predicted the strange circumstances under which we would next meet.

Four

Across the Sea of Burning Sand

"Where the plants are thorny, there people's hearts are also barbed." I had heard Danzan muttering this old Mongolian proverb often as we traipsed through Ninghsia, and on the morning of January 21st when we awoke to find our camels missing I heard it again. This had obviously been the work of an expert. There was such a confusion of hoofprints that not even Danzan could tell which belonged to our own beasts, so we decided to split up and search.

Our separate ways rejoined at the camp of a salt caravan whose members told us that several stray camels had wandered into their tethered herd the night before, but had disappeared a little before dawn. We were able to pick up the right hoofprints from there, along with those of a human pursuer. The latter turned off towards the monastery after about an hour, and soon after that we found our camels safe and sound. We tied them together and led them back to camp. When we arrived, Tseren-tso told us that a monk had appeared when we were gone and asked what we would pay to have our camels brought back. Ninghsia, as a crossroad of trade routes, was well known as a place for exploiting and cheating travellers. The inhabitants were past masters at the arts of trickery and thieving, and it seemed that even the monks joined in the sport.

After this we could not wait to be away. The Tengri Desert lay before us, but we preferred to take our chances with its treacherous dunes rather than with the human treachery around us, and even though the camel search had taken up most of the day, we packed our tent and took to the trail. Erenchin alone saw us off near the monastery. The dunes looming above us to the west were bathed in scarlet by the setting sun, and that night we stopped at a spring about three miles on. A short stage the next day brought us to the jumping off spot known as 'The Fountain of Wealth.' It had been getting warmer as

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we trekked southward into lower altitudes, and it now seemed more like summer than mid-winter. We even saw swans swimming on an unfrozen pond, a remarkable sight at the end of January.

There is no way around the Tengri Desert. The southern tip falls into the broad, swift Yellow River, which picks up a muddy red hue here, and so there is a trail across the dunes which is used by pilgrims and merchants. Actually the name, which means 'The Desert as Vast and Endless as the Heavens' is a bit of an exaggeration since the worst part of this crossing is only twelve miles or so and thus nothing like as long or as challenging as the great Takla Makan Desert which we hoped to cross into Sinkiang. What makes it difficult is that if one strays from the trail or falls into a gulley between the dunes, there is no way out as sand will just collapse in on anyone trying to climb out. Impoverished pilgrims crossing on foot were often lost in this way, to suffer a lonely and terrifying death from starvation and exposure, or by having lost their way in one of the frequent sandstorms that descend without warning. This is why crossing the Tengri Desert on foot is said to equal in merit the reciting of all one hundred and eight volumes of the *Kangyur*, the Tibetan collection of the Buddha's teachings.

After preparing ourselves for the day with a large breakfast of meat and noodles we began our crossing. It was a novel feeling to be so hot at this time of year as the sun beat back from the reddish sand. I pulled both arms out of my fur-lined robe, and tied the sleeves in front. Danzan led on foot to be sure of the trail, for the wind blew sand across the beaten path and he had only the lumps of camel dung which remained in place to guide him. I rode behind him trying to practice my Sutra chanting, but my mind soon wandered and I found myself singing a song I had written at the Ko Ah Gijuku, which had become a kind of unofficial school song.

*Although disguised in Mongolian garb,
The flash in his eyes betrays him,
The youth, weather beaten and uncouth,
Plodding through the desert in the sinking sun.
How many nights to camp till the Takla Makan?
The stars are my only guide.
Tomorrow I cross the Sea of Burning Sand,
With hope and light locked in my heart.
Today again the sun sets on this forgotten land.
Far above twinkles the Great Bear.*

Across the Sea of Burning Sands

*Poking at the dying campfire,
I sing a song of my native land.*

As it turned out, nothing happened until we had crossed the worst of the desert and reached 'The Ants' Well' about 3 p.m. Very sun-burned from a single day in the desert, we pitched our tent behind a hill to the south of the well, and as we were drinking tea heard a commotion in the well's direction. I climbed to the top of the hill to see what it was all about and was astonished to see more than a hundred Mongolians, some on camels and some on foot, being herded toward the desert we had just crossed by armed Chinese cavalrymen. I was glad that we had camped earlier and not come face to face with them. Whoever they were, I did not like the look of them.

We stayed out of sight and they passed without noticing us. The next day, soon after starting we saw three Mongolian tents well off the trail. A man, an Inner Mongolian monk judging from his dress, came out of one of them, stood in our path and greeted us suspiciously.

"Did you see a crowd of pilgrims under armed escort going the other way, into the desert?" he asked.

"We did. Last night," answered Danzan. "Do you know who they were?"

"Are you pilgrims yourselves?" asked the monk in return, still suspicious, but somewhat put at ease by my companion's accent.

"Aye, bound for Kumbum and Lhasa. We had a difficult time crossing into Ninghsia, but we thought that from here it should be easy."

"Nothing is easy in these days. You're lucky you weren't seen or you'd be going back the way you came with my companions. There were about two hundred of us accompanying the holy Lama Tokan Gegen back to his monastery in Chinghai . . ." My ears immediately pricked up; this was the Lama I had interpreted for in Kalgan. "Most of us had looked forward to such a pilgrimage all our lives, and in the presence of this high Lama, it would have gained even greater merit. But curse these evil times! The soldiers of Fu Tso-yi apprehended the lot of us at the time we crossed into Ninghsia, and took us to Lanchow for questioning. You may know that the Lama has spent the last few years in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria; and it is even said he went to the land of the Japanese. But of course he was only about religion's work, and trying to bring the light of the Dharma to that aggressive and violent people who regard themselves as Buddhists. But the Chinese

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themselves know even less of religion than the Japanese, and they refuse to believe we are anything but spies." He looked back toward the tents. "But I must stop talking. Try to look angry with me."

"Why? What happened to the Lama?" I asked.

"The answer to your first question is that there is a soldier in the second tent with a rifle trained on us, though I doubt that he is a very good shot. I told him I'd find out who you were." During this speech he began gesturing angrily, in what looked to me to be a rather unconvincing performance.

"The answer to your second question is that when they asked him why he'd gone to Japan he replied only that he goes wherever Buddhists invite him. Well, you know what the Chinese are like. The answer did not satisfy them. Even so, all might have gone well if they hadn't discovered a Japanese among us. At least they said he was a Japanese. He was taken away and we heard a shot. That was just the excuse they needed to confiscate all the golden images, and everything else that had been donated to the Lama. Of course they said they would give them back to those who had donated them, but we know what they will really do with them. But please, look angry as I pretend to search you saddle bags."

"I still don't quite understand," roared Danzan. It was difficult not to laugh at his angry tone and accompanying gestures.

"I'm not going to give up my pilgrimage easily," the monk replied, grabbing my camel reins. "I made a fuss about forgetting some of my belongings at the last camp and convinced the commander to let three of us go back and get them, but he sent a guard with us. The poor fellow is not much of a soldier, and he's more scared of us than we are of him. I'm just playing along with him to get on his good side." I remembered the pathetic specimen of a deserter who had travelled with us, and thought our friend had a good chance of success.

We dismounted, pretended to protest, and hid Tseren-tso—always hopeless when there was even a minimum of acting to do—behind the camels. In the midst of his search, the monk slipped us a letter for a Lama at Kumbum. "Perhaps we'll meet again at a holier place," he said to us as he walked back to the tents.

We remounted and continued on, chastened by the tale and thankful for our own good fortune. In the afternoon we passed Mongolian soldiers acting as customs guards on the border between Ninghsia and Kansu, but they paid no attention to us. As glad as we were to leave Ninghsia and its sneaking dishonesty behind us, Kansu

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was, nevertheless, far more Chinese than Mongolian and we felt very foreign.

The next day after crossing some mud ruins—all that was left of this section of the Great Wall—we began to climb back into the mountains. The children in the Chinese villages made a big fuss over our camels, and ran behind collecting the dung which they would dry and sell as fuel. Gone for the moment were the free and easy ways of the steps where this necessity was always there for the taking. In fact when we camped nearby we were asked to pay for fodder, fuel, water and space.

After fording the Jongalong River we continued to climb and spied a pathetic family group of Ordos Mongolians, three adults and a child, coming the other way. "Beware ahead," said their leader, "this unholy land is infested with bandits. Just yesterday we had camels and goods, today we are no better than beggars." All of them had tears in their eyes as he related their tale. "And the worst of it is the cowardly way in which we were robbed. The child here was riding the lead camel, when some Chinese frightened it with stones, then ran out and grabbed the boy. They said they would kill him if we did not give them everything, including our camels. What choice had we? How can a man fight such cowards?"

We gave them a few pieces of silver and a small bag of flour, and told them there was a village just ahead where they could await the main body of their pilgrim caravan. Perhaps the sight of five able-bodied Mongolian men and one stout woman gave pause to the bandits, or perhaps they were satiated by their recent raid, for we passed unmolested.

A huge caravan of more than a thousand pilgrims and camels returning from Kumbum told us that the Tatumg River was frozen—winter was returning as we climbed from the desert—and that there was a strict customs post at the Tengri Dawa Pass leading into Chinghai. When we reached the river the ice had broken in the middle, and a ferry boat was the only means of crossing. This box-shaped ferry was guided by a thick rope attached to two sturdy posts on either side of the river. There were two ferrymen: one pulled on the rope and another pushed with a pole. I could see it was a seller's market and that we might be in for trouble, as a Tangut Tibetan and his wife were arguing fiercely over the fare for their horse.

We could only get the first of our camels on board, and it was shaking with fear. The second camel simply refused to budge, no matter

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what we did. Evening was drawing in, and finally one of the ferrymen got fed up, stripped his clothes off, and led to camel to a waist-deep ford downstream. As long as the camel was led by a man he did not fear the water, but it could not have been pleasant work wading through the freezing stream with chunks of ice floating by. By the time we and all our camels were safely across it had set us back almost eight hundred yuan. Unable to afford any further losses, we crossed the Tengri Dawa Pass in the dead of night to avoid the customs post.

We had now entered Chinghai, a border province of many races. Under the autocratic rule of the Muslim General Ma Pu-fang and his clan Chinghai was virtually independent of Chiang's central government, and I could not help but notice as we passed through the fertile valleys of eastern Chinghai, how well-governed and peaceful the province seemed to be. We saw many signs calling for the preservation of forests, and even saw squads of soldiers detailed to plant saplings. At a large barracks in a place called Lo-chia-wan music blared from loudspeakers and the soldiers we saw gave the impression of being well-trained and in high morale. A sentry at the gate seemed to think I was too curious, and leveled his rifle at us as he told us to be off. He was probably on the lookout for spies from the central government.

Chiang was apparently frightened of adequately arming the more than 100,000 soldiers of this army, which was nominally under his command, and Ma had been sending merchants all the way to India, via Tibet, to purchase arms. I do not know whether Chiang had more to fear from Ma's military efficiency or from his example of reasonably good government: Chinghai could even boast to be one of the few areas outside Communist control where laws against opium cultivation and transport were strictly enforced.

When we reached the capital, Sining, in early February, it marked the first time in over four months that I had been inside a city, except for one night time foray I had made into town to buy flour. I can hardly say that I found it a gratifying experience. Local officials refused, as they had already done once or twice along the way, to allow us to camp; and we were forced to stay in a cramped, dirty, vermin-ridden Chinese inn where the cost of both accommodation and fodder were exorbitant. Of course, we were crawling with vermin ourselves, but they were our own. They were always with us and we were used to them. Somehow these Chinese lice and bedbugs seemed devious and less trustworthy. We signed in as "Danzan and a party of five from Baron Hiid Monastery, Alashan Banner." Two policemen came and

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checked over the register and our possessions, but we seemed to arouse no suspicions.

The mixed nature of Chinghai's population was reflected on the streets of Sining. There were comparatively few Chinese and most of the inhabitants were Muslims, who appeared distinctly Turkish with their hooked noses and reddish-brown beards. Amdo Tanguts, the Tibetan tribesmen of Kansu and Chinghai, swaggered along the streets with one shoulder bare and a long sword thrust into their waistband. Their women plaited their hair into a hundred and eight braids which were spread out across their backs by a broad, stiff, ornate cloth. There were also a number of Inner Mongolian pilgrims either bound for, or returning from Kumbum, now only a day's march to the southwest.

Visitors were allowed to see little of Sining besides the market place. The inner citadel was closely guarded, and open only to those with proper papers. Even so, I could not but be impressed by the comparative peace and prosperity enjoyed by the average citizen, and the lush, well-tended look of the fields and forests outside the city walls.

Shortly after we arrived I met a Mongolian pilgrim on the street who asked me if I had worshiped the Lama Tokan Gegen, who was now staying in Sining. Governor Ma Pu-fang had arranged his release from Lanchow, and the Lama had come to thank him. This in fact was a move typical of Ma, an extremely pragmatic Muslim with a large Buddhist population to govern. A very different type of man from the fanatics who had stamped out Buddhism in India more than a thousand years before, he felt that infidels were better manipulated than put to the sword. Tokan Gegen was only a minor prize in this game: five years before Ma had been in possession of the infant Dalai Lama himself, born not far south of Kumbum. In the end it had cost the Tibetans 300,000 Chinese dollars to get the boy to Lhasa. Ma now again found himself in an enviable situation; one of the three candidates for the position of Panchen Lama, Tibet's second most revered incarnation, had recently been discovered in Chinghai.

Though I knew His Holiness Tokan Gegen well from my Kalgan days, I was confident that he would not betray me, and it would have looked thoroughly suspicious had I attempted to avoid seeing him. I therefore went to call on him immediately at his stately quarters where, with two attendant priests, he was receiving pilgrims on the second floor. The deep faith of the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples is probably manifested most strongly when they are confronted with one of their living Bodhisattvas: human manifestations of divine beings who have

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voluntarily deferred the ultimate Buddhist goal of Enlightenment so as to be reborn into the world of suffering to assist lesser beings. I was never to get over the eerie feeling it gave me to see men and women prostrating themselves before these men and boys with a reverence we in Japan would reserve for none but the Emperor.

But now I joined them, stretching myself out on the floor before the Lama and presenting him with a *khata* containing a large silver coin. He took the *khata* with his left hand, and with his right honoured me with a one-handed blessing. This was because as a simple monk I deserved more than being merely touched with a tasseled stick, and less than the full two-handed blessing. I was relieved that he failed to show any recognition, but when he began to address the pilgrims, I felt that his words were meant for me alone. "This land," he began, "is very unsettled compared with Inner Mongolia. To the west the Kazakhs persecute our people, and we are powerless to stop them. Therefore I advise you to leave for your native land as soon as you have finished whatever you came to do: otherwise leave for Tibet. In that holy land there is peace."

Tibet. For years my thoughts had been only of Sinkiang, and I was under orders to proceed there on a mission that I myself had planned. Yet some force seemed to be drawing me away from those western deserts toward the semi-mythical land beyond the clouds. Dorji had told me to make good the cover story of going to study at Drepung, and I had almost unconsciously mentioned the possibility in my letter to Nakazawa. Now I felt that the Lama Tokan Gegen was also advising me to do just that.

* * *

The next day we left, with a sense of relief, for Kumbum. City life and its expenses had appealed to none of us, and the crowds in the streets now bothered me nearly as much as they did my Mongolian companions. Even so, I came away from Sining impressed, and in my next report I planned to emphasize that even though Fu Tso-yi was one of Chiang's better generals and had inflicted severe losses on Prince Teh's army in 1936, his troops now were demoralized and fit for little besides apprehending unarmed pilgrims. The Muslims under Ma on the other hand would be far better won over than fought.

There was noticeable excitement now among our three monks as we climbed towards their destination. Danzan as well, though he had

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been here twice before, could not hide his exhilaration as we neared the great monastery at a height of over 7,500 feet. The birth-place of the renowned fifteenth century reformer of the Tibetan faith, Tsong Khapa, to whose Gelupa Sect the vast majority of Mongolians belong, Kumbum is regarded by Mongolians as second in holiness only to Lhasa.

As soon as we topped the low pass of Nienchen Tangla, from which the monastery first appears, we dismounted, burned incense, and began to chant. Everyone else's impulses were purely spiritual, mine more worldly; for I really was quite overwhelmed by my first sight of the three glittering gold roofs dominating the buildings of all shapes and sizes that crowded the valley and were home to more than three thousand monks. As we descended from the pass toward the monastery, the monks—all with far away looks in their eyes—bade us farewell saying that, as custom decreed, they would enter cloisters according to the place of their birth.

Of course I had been in and around monasteries almost since my arrival in Mongolia, and I was accustomed to their architecture, colour schemes, and customs; but this was the first time I had ever seen anything of this scale. In the grasslands there was not a single town approaching the size of this community, which at festival times could swell to over five thousand. It's wealth was stunning: on the one hand a measure of the respect in which religion was held; but on the other hand an aspect of life here that could all too easily become corrupt and an end in itself.

* * *

We were assured of a greeting since an old friend of Danzan's and Dorji's, a physician monk named Jimba, lived here in a courtyard built on high ground beside the main edifice. A thin, small and moustachioed man with slanting eyebrows, he ordered an apprentice to prepare food for us as soon as greetings had been exchanged. This gave us our first look at the odd method of cooking employed at the monastery, for the only plentiful fuel was straw which had to be continually fed into the stove at just the proper rate with a tool looking like an ice pick. If the straw was fed in too fast there would be nothing but smoke, too slowly and there would not be enough heat. It seemed to take considerable skill just to keep the fire alive. We were offered a small room on the west side of the courtyard. A long, low, folding desk

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stood at the center of the room, and a colourful carpet covered the dirt floor.

The apprentice soon appeared with some *tsampa*, a flour made of parched barley, and tea. Five or six strips of long, thickly cut butter were placed on the *tsampa*, pounded into a solid shape resembling Mt. Fuji, and heaped on a tray. Though I had often heard of *tsampa*, the staple diet of Tibet, I had never eaten it before; and with butter and powdered cheese it indeed tasted very good. The festive meal was completed by piles of black and white sugar, raisins and dried dates, that all lay on a separate tray.

After the grasslands, and what I considered the purity of the nomadic life we had been living, I found the power of money in the monastery to be all too evident, and I felt that had we come as beggar pilgrims we would have been treated coldly, even by an old friend such as Jimba. But the wealth had also been put to good use to build a gorgeous monument to the Dharma, and particularly to the 'Virtuous Order' founded by Tsong Khapa.

Lying on the southern edge of Mongolian influence, and the northern edge of Tibetan influence, this monastery also symbolized an important link between the peoples of Tibet and Mongolia. It was built on the orders of the Third Dalai Lama, actually the first of the line to bear that Mongolian title, which he received from Altan Khan at Huhehota and bestowed posthumously on his two predecessors. It was the task of the Dalai Lamas, as the leaders of Tsong Khapa's sect, to consolidate and continue his work, and from the time of the Third onwards, the Mongolians have been staunch adherents of the Gelugpa.

Most Tibetans, with political notions that were at best vague by twentieth century standards, would have contended that we had now left China behind, and were not in Chinghai Province at all, but in the Amdo Province of Tibet. To support their argument they would have cited the presence of Kumbum and a large Tibetan population: and would probably have considered it irrelevant that the whole province was so tightly controlled by the Ma clan that the Tibetans could not even move their important incarnations around at will.

On February 5th, along with other monks from the monastery who came from our registered birthplaces, we offered *donchit*, a thousand sacred lights, in the main temple. We had missed the Butter Lamp Festival by more than two weeks, and this was a ceremony performed by individuals. Though the Gelugpa is the newest and least mystical of Tibet's religious orders, there was enough of the mysterious and

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unknown here in this chapel dedicated to the great reformer to impress even a cynic such as me. On the central pedestal was enshrined a large, bejewelled statue of Tsong Khapa wearing his enigmatic smile as well as his characteristic pointed yellow hat. In front of the statue stood two golden burners, taller than a man and each holding over four gallons of butter. The many pillars were completely shrouded in colourful satin damask, and similar drapes hung from the ceiling. Though the room was large, it was only dimly lit even at mid-day, and divided into almost cavern-like sections by the pillars. Running down each section were parallel rows of cushions where the monks sat hunched up in their dark red robes and crowned by their tall yellow hats, solemnly chanting. The thick, heavy smell of burning butter enhanced the atmosphere of other-worldly mystery as our thousand sacred lights glowed in front of the sacred image.

We prostrated ourselves again and again before the golden statue, following the prescribed routine; beginning with our hands high above our heads and ending with our arms stretched out before us, foreheads touching the floor. These were actions I had learned years ago along with the Mongolian language at Tsagan Tologai-in Khural—just another part of being Mongolian. In front of the temple were about another twenty pilgrims and monks going through identical movements, and the boards of the corridor were worn hollow with their efforts. Finally, to complete our worship we touched our foreheads to the statue's toes.

If all this sounds strange, it must be remembered that we were not simply worshipping a man. Though a historical figure, Tsong Khapa was also believed to be an earthly incarnation of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Supreme Wisdom, just as Tokan Gegen was thought to be the incarnation of the horse-headed Bodhisattva of Compassion; and he was being worshiped as much for what he was as for what he had done. Handprints and footprints said to have been made by Tsong Khapa during his childhood were on display in the main temple, and inside the monastery there is also a tree said to have sprung from the spot where his umbilical cord was buried. Though I was told that Tibetan letters could be seen on the bark and leaves of the tree, all I could see were small white spots, and again, as at Löpön Chimba, I wondered if eyes guided by a faith I did not possess could see things that mine could not. On the other hand, I also heard a Mongolian say maliciously that the monks scratched the letters on the bark and leaves at night with needles. (Years later, when I became friends with Takster

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Rimpoché, the abbot of one of the temples at Kumbum and the Dalai Lama's elder brother, I learned that the tree on public view was not the real one; the true one was surrounded by a wall to protect it from the faithful).

But the monastery's concerns could not be purely spiritual. It had a large population to feed, and at the times when all the monks gathered in the main temple three large cooking pots, each measuring over six feet in diameter, were used to prepare their meals. The monks churning the ingredients in the pots had to be chained to nearby pillars to prevent a fatal plunge into the feast.

Work such as this was done by a class of monks common to large monasteries, and with whom I first came into contact at Kumbum: the *dob-dob*, or soldier monks. Since the monasteries could not subsist on donations alone, but were functioning economic entities administering estates and sending out trading caravans, these brawny and less scholarly fellows had other useful functions. In addition to performing menial tasks around the monasteries, the more responsible among them were the caravan leaders, while the less so were employed as muleteers and guards. They spent more of their time practicing sword fighting and wrestling than they did in prayer, and were very fond of dueling—particularly over handsome young boys. They were a fearsome sight with their robes glistening with butter, their two curly locks also groomed with butter, and the rings they painted around their eyes with soot.

We were fortunate in being at Kumbum at the time that one of the boy candidates for Panchen Lama was being initiated into monkhood. This Lama, whose seat is in Shigatse, about ten days walk west of Lhasa, is held to be the incarnation of Amithaba, and receives veneration second only to that paid to the Dalai Lama. The previous incarnation had led a tragic life, having been dragged into a long dispute with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama; and though both Lamas had desired a reconciliation, greedy officials and the Chinese had made a point of keeping them apart for political reasons. He had died, still in exile near Jyekundo on the Tibetan border in 1937, and now there was fresh controversy over his new incarnation.

The boy being initiated at Kumbum was only one of three who possessed all the proper bodily signs and were able to identify objects from their past lives—though to judge from the enthusiastic local reaction, everyone here was ready enough to accept him. He was also the claimant favoured by Ma Pu-fang and the Chinese, simply because they

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had possession of him. Whether Lhasa would accept him seemed doubtful, but as if unconcerned about his future the solemn six-year old sat on a throne covered with silk brocade and blessed each pilgrim and monk to come before him with a scarlet ribbon to be worn around the neck. Laymen and women received a white one, and a large crowd had gathered for the ceremony.

Eventually, in 1948, this boy was recognised by all parties as the Seventh or Tenth Panchen Lama (the former count is used by the Lhasa Government, the latter by Shigatse officials and the Chinese). He was another tragic figure, constantly under the influence of the Chinese and allowed to spend little of his life in Tibet. For most of his life he was a virtual prisoner of the Chinese Communists who attempted to use him as a propaganda tool for their own purposes.*

The crowds at the enthronement ceremony were very much to our advantage, for among them were sure to be some Chinghai Mongolians, natives of the Tsaidam Basin which was the gateway to our promised land of Sinkiang. Though they had a reputation similar to the natives of Ninghsia, the most sensible thing for us would be to find a group of these people going home and to travel with them.

"Keep your eyes open for them, Dawa Sangpo," Danzan advised me on the morning of the ceremony as the crowds began to gather. "They are easy to spot by their clothes, though at first you might mistake them for Tangut Tibetans."

"Dawa Sangpo will have no trouble noticing a Tsaidam girl," chimed in Tseren-tso.

Her husband ignored her. "The men wear long sheepskins with the fur inside, but they tuck them up to knee-length under their sashes, like this." He demonstrated with his own robe, creating a large pouch above his belt. "It makes them look a little like inflated sheep's bladders, and they use this pouch to carry everything you can imagine: bowls, books of sutras, babies, dogs. Except in the very coldest of weather they always keep their right arm and shoulder out of the robe, bare."

"The girls too," said his wife. "They're real show offs—you can bet they'll be sure you get a good look at their right breasts!"

* Even before the Cultural Revolution he was imprisoned, tortured and eventually forced into marriage. In later years the Panchen Lama began making statements strongly in favour of Tibetan independence. Loved and respected by the Tibetan people, he died suddenly at Shigatse in 1989.

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"They'll cover them here in the monastery," growled Danzan, though Tseren-tso's description interested me more than his.

"They don't wear any underwear either, the hussies, just a kind of undershirt. Men at least wear lambskin trousers underneath."

"Woman, would you please try to remember we are in a sacred place! Do you think Dawa Sangpo is going to go around checking under each woman's dress?"

"Well it was *you* who told me about Chinghai girls," she replied sulkily, and then refused to contribute anymore to the conversation.

"What you can recognize them by is their hair." continued Danzan. "The unmarried girls braid it into 108 strands. They don't spread them along their backs with a long thick cloth at the ends like the Tibetan women, but let them hang over their shoulders. The married women have just two braids, and they put the ends into embroidered black pouches. Most of them wear a tall hat that comes to a point with red tassels hanging from it."

With that description they would have been hard to miss and it was not long before we found a group of three. They looked wild and exotic to me, indeed much more like Tibetans than Mongolians, and it was a pleasant surprise to be able to understand their speech, though they did have a strange accent and seemed to talk around many simple ideas. They were a friendly enough lot, two men and a young woman with her hair, I was disappointed to notice, in two braids and her right breast well covered. We invited them to Jimba's courtyard and offered them tea.

Their leader was a man of about thirty-five named Gombo Zaisun. "Zaisun" is a title of honour given to those who paid high taxes, but he did not have the appearance of a rich man. He was tall with a long face and a serious, no nonsense manner. The younger man, Tenzin, was short, and said little, but we were to learn that he had a quick temper. I thought that the girl, Za-huhun or "Little Maiden" would be quite pretty after a good wash. She had a ready smile, but was often quiet and brooding. I wondered if it had to do with the ugly red scar she bore on her neck.

"You're more than welcome to come with us," repeated Gombo Zaisun over tea, "though I can't imagine why you would want to go to such a place."

"It is on our way," answered Danzan simply.

"Well, you're lucky to be heading for Tibet and not bound for Sinkiang." We were sticking to our story of being Lhasa bound pilgrims.

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“Until three years ago not only the Lhasa caravans passed through, but the ones to Sinkiang as well. But then the Muslim Kazakhs out there rebelled and cut off the Takla Makan. Besides that they are always raiding into Tsaidam, and we have no peace. The whole west is disrupted, and the east is full of refugees. Cruel, they are. They’re not satisfied with just stealing cattle, they seem to get a real pleasure out of killing. I’m sure you’ve noticed the scar on Little Maiden’s throat.” The girl looked down and pulled one of her braids across to hide it. “That’s an example of Kazakh hospitality. And she was lucky: they thought she was dead.”

A monk who was visiting Jimba for some medicine heard him talking and joined our group. He had the accent of a Torgut Mongol. “We’ve had our problems with those accursed people for years. They’re not invincible though. Out in Bulkul they made too much of a nuisance of themselves. There is a road out there: no one knows where it comes from, but trucks come through loaded with supplies for Chiang Kai-shek. These trucks were too tempting for the Kazakhs, but they weren’t as easy pickings as they thought. Chiang sent so many soldiers after them that they scampered into Tibet.” I tried to betray no emotion at this, but it sounded like the first report I had heard of the route I was under orders to find.

* * *

After more than ten days at Kumbum we were ready to depart for the Tsaidam Basin. Now came a cultural stumbling block, for we had to pay Dr. Jimba for his hospitality and I was faced with the dual problem of trying to save his face while at the same time allowing him to accept the money. He kept insisting that he did not wish payment though I knew he wanted it very badly, and not knowing when we might be back or under what circumstances, I had every reason to leave him satisfied. I finally gave him the opening he needed when I bemoaned the insecurity of our future in the Kazakh and bandit-infested lands ahead.

“In that case,” he replied, “Perhaps I should take an offering to a high Lama so that your future might be told.” This allowed him to disappear honourably with the money I had been offering him. He soon returned with triumph written all over his face.

“Your future is bright, and you will certainly reach your destination,” he told us. All we had to do was to remember to recite a certain

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sutra, and look out for white stones, which the Lama had said would be very auspicious. "Perhaps it would also be helpful if I asked the Lama to recite the sutra for you . . .", for which of course he would need another offering.

We were saddled and ready early on the morning of February 12th, when Gombo Zaisun came for us. He and Za-huhun were astride camels with small loads. Tenzin followed on horseback, a rifle with attached tripod slung across his back. We brought up the rear with our seven camels, now rested and in good condition, though hungry for good grass after their diet of straw. Entrusting the route entirely to our friends from Chinghai, Danzan and I merely kept a lookout for landmarks in case we should have to return.

Five Unhappy Valley

Tibet, some thirteen hundred years ago, under King Songtsen Gampo, was a very powerful country, quite as powerful as China under the new T'ang Dynasty. It controlled an empire stretching from Ladakh in the southwest past Kokonor in the northeast, from Sinkiang in the north past Kathmandu in the south. Neighboring countries treated Tibet's military might with respect. When Songtsen Gampo demanded a bride of the Nepalese they readily acceded; and though the Chinese attempted to turn down a similar request, a quick and efficient invasion which put the capital of Chang An under siege was enough to bring about a favourable settlement. But when the Chinese princess bride, Wen-cheng-kung-chu reached a high pass just east of Kokonor, she balked at going any further. She knew that this marked the point of no return. Her Tibetan escorts told her that if she wished to go home her father would have to send the sun made in gold and the moon in silver as compensation. It was simply their way of telling her that she had no choice but to weep and cross into Tibet.

This was the story that Gombo Zaisun told us the evening after we crossed the same pass, which has ever since been called the Nima Dawa La, or 'The Pass of the Sun and the Moon.' This marriage of the Tibetan warrior king to two Buddhist princesses in fact was an important—if largely forgotten—event in Asian history; for the Chinese bride and her Nepalese counterpart were amongst the first to bring the pacifying influence of the Buddha's teaching to the fierce and warlike nation of Tibet.

The pass no longer defined a political boundary, but it did mark a physical one: the long climb to the 11,550 foot high crossing led to a much shorter descent, and before us stretched a high plateau in the center of which was the huge inland sea known as Kokonor, completely frozen over at this time of year. According to the legend the lake did not exist in the princess's time: it was spirited here from Lhasa to create solid ground there for the foundation of Tibet's first Buddhist temple.

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We camped at a spot near the lake called Namoktai, and from there we could see an island that we were told had a small temple on it. Only a few monks lived there, hermits who left but once a year, walking across the ice for provisions. Otherwise, the whole plain was inhabited only by Tibetan Tangut nomads who looked much like the Tsaidam Mongolians we were travelling with but who lived in elaborate large black yak hair tents.

In the evenings as we sat around the campfire in our snug tent and drank strong black Mongolian tea, we got to know our companions better. At first they were difficult to understand, not only because of their accents, but because they often seemed to ramble on and on to express the simplest ideas. Their talk became a little more comprehensible once Danzan explained to me that this was because any words related to sex were strictly taboo in daily conversation—yet judging from the number of words forbidden they seemed to have little else on their minds. It was impossible, for example, to speak directly of: entering, getting soaking wet, piercing, standing erect, having a rendezvous, sharpening, digging or climbing. One might have thought that such taboos of speech would come from an unusually restrained and puritanical people, but just how far this was from the mark is shown by our initial assumption that Za-huhun and Gombo Zaisun were married, since they quite openly slept together. We were soon—just as openly—informed otherwise: she had a husband at home in the Tsaidam, an Inner Mongolian doctor-monk. Yet she behaved in every way as a dutiful wife toward Gombo Zaisun, and it was at his request that she told us the story of her scar.

It was hardly a tale to make us feel confident about where we were heading. Slowly and softly, with lowered eyes she began, and her voice could barely be heard above the wind that shrieked across the snow covered plains, but as she warmed to her narrative her voice grew stronger.

“It was several years ago, at home in the Juun Banner, a home I wonder if I will ever see again. There was a big crowd of us at the monastery for the yearly scripture reading ceremony. We were immersed in our holy work when out of nowhere appeared a band of mounted Kazakhs who began firing at us. They are Muslims and have no respect for our religion. We fled into the monastery, barricaded ourselves inside, and our men began to return the fire. But the Kazakhs surrounded us and set fire to the buildings. The monastery store room was filled with wool and that caught fire too. We couldn't stand the

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heat, and the smoke made it impossible to breathe. Finally we ran out in panic."

She paused for a moment, and her eyes reflected the firelight as she looked up at us. "They were ready and waiting outside. I didn't get far. The last thing I remember is a bearded Kazakh right in front of me with a murderous gleam in his eye. He fired point blank before I even had chance to scream."

"They thought she was dead," Gombo Zaisun took up the tale when she paused, "and it was lucky for her that they did. Not only was she spared what they might have done to her, she was also spared the sight of what was done to others that night." I wondered if it was only the wind whistling across the frozen lake that caused me to shiver within my warm, fur-lined robe.

"When I came to it was morning and they were gone," the girl continued. "I could hardly move. Somehow I managed to crawl to the river, though I was more dead than alive, and there I was found by others. It was many months before I was well, and I might never have recovered had it not been for the attentions of a kind lama-doctor. He was so good to me I could not but consent to marry him?"

"Consent to marry him!" laughed Gombo Zaisun as if such a grim tale deserved some comic relief. "You trapped the poor man in the midst of his pilgrimage." He turned to me. "Her husband is a monk from Inner Mongolia, the same as you. You will find many such in Tsaidam. The road to Lhasa abounds with perils, some bitter and some sweet."

"Say what you will, I've been a good wife to him," said the girl proudly and, it seemed to me, sincerely.

"Aye, that's true, and no one can say you have not," agreed Gombo Zaisun, just as sincerely, as they prepared to go to bed.

I found it difficult to sleep that night. When the wind eventually died I could hear the howling of wolves, and when I finally dozed my dreams were a mixed-up vision of mangled corpses, mounted wolves with rifles, and pathetic imprisoned monks praying to be allowed to continue to Lhasa.

Only a day or two later we were making our final approach to the Tsaidam. After a forced march to get past a spot notorious for bandits we camped in a gorge at mid-morning on February 18th so that the camels could have a good rest before crossing the last pass. That evening a man suddenly appeared like a vision on foot at our camp. Without a word Tenzin quickly and quietly set up his rifle on its

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attached tripod, lay down and took aim from within the tent while Gombo Zaisun went out to talk to the visitor.

He came back after exchanging a few words. "As I feared, he is a Kazakh, and it is strange that he should be out walking alone after dark in this gorge." He thought for a moment. "They're a brazen lot, absolutely fearless. There is probably a crowd of them with their eye on us, and they just sent him to check if we look worth robbing. I think it is too dangerous for us to camp here tonight." He said it matter-of-factly, as if we were camping in a place where the ground might be too wet.

We hurriedly made preparations for departure, then waited until it was pitch dark. After several turns along the gorge we sighted a campfire across the stream and heard laughter accompanied by voices speaking a language we could not understand. Tenzin dismounted with his rifle and whispered that he would act as rear guard. He was the quiet one and we never heard his story. Hoping that the trickling of the rivulet would muffle our footsteps, we stole by not twenty yards from the campfire. Slowly we crept past, praying that our animals would make no noises or mis-steps in the dark. Every step sounded ten times louder than it really was, and it seemed incredible that we were not heard. Once we were safe Tenzin caught up, almost sorry not to have had a chance to get a shot off. We continued on for a few hours before making camp.

* * *

It was in the Tsaidam Basin, whose eastern fringes we entered the next day, that small caravans gathered into larger ones every spring to continue on to Lhasa. Less than ten years before, Peter Fleming had been able to state that the Tsaidam was less studied and visited by foreigners than any other area of comparable size in Asia. Here we planned to lay up and rest for a time while planning our next move, yet we certainly could not have foreseen that we were destined to spend the next fourteen months here.

The Basin, averaging over 9000 feet above sea level, is surrounded by mountains to the north, east, and south, and rolls out gently toward the horizon in the west. To the northwest, many days journey away over the Altan Tegh Range, is the fringe of the Takla Makan. Within the Basin itself can be found virtually every type of terrain Central Asia has to offer, from arable farmland to grassland, to desert, to pleasant high valleys. Much of the lower land is marshy as the rivers that flow

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here have no outlets. The entire Basin was administered from Sining by the Muslim Army.

Gombo Zaisun led us to a rocky gorge north of the Bayan Gol River where Mongolian tents stood side by side. We cleared some of the rocky ground with our spades and set up camp. Za-huhun went back to her husband. Everyone in the area belonged to the Banner of Juun, and so should have been living far to the west, but all had fled here from the Kazakhs, to whatever marginal land was available in the Banner of Khuhut. Though Gombo Zaisun himself had told us that he could no longer live up to his proud title, we were still surprised to see quite the poverty to which he had been reduced. Poor as they were, however, the villagers came to us with fresh milk, butter, and cheese. We returned their hospitality as best we could with raisins and dried dates.

When the banner system was inaugurated in the early days of the Ch'ing Dynasty there were twenty-nine banners in Chinghai Mongolia. The Tibetans, however, gradually built up their power, and now there were only five Chinghai banners left. Of them only Baron and Khuhut remained relatively unscathed by the most recent Kazakh incursions, while the western banners of Khurrik and Taijinar were in total disarray.

Scars like Za-huhun's were not at all unusual in these violent parts, and one of our new neighbours, a garrulous and tough-looking middle-aged man named Shara Hund, was fond of showing off the one on his solar plexus. He and his buxom daughter, who brought us fresh milk every morning, were frequent visitors to our tent, and he told us his story shortly after we arrived. Tearing open his robe to expose the nasty wound that looked impossible to survive, he launched into his tale with none of Za-huhun's shyness or hesitancy. He had been a victim of the same attack as she, and like her had been shot point blank when he had tried to make a run for it from the burning temple: but he had had the misfortune to regain consciousness while the raiders were still looting the monastery and torturing the wounded to death.

"I tried to keep still, not moving a muscle," he went on, pausing for effect. I was glad he had chosen a sunny morning for his rendition. "A crowd of them had built a fire and sat around it eating and drinking—and were taking pot shots at the corpses of my friends. I saw horrible things that night, and I prayed for a shot to kill me quickly. But the actions of my past lives decreed that I should live and witness scenes from the deepest hells, and live with the memory. Can you imagine seeing a

living man having the skin peeled off his face like he was a dead animal, and the sounds he makes as he dies in agony? Can you imagine the kind of people who cut off the arms and legs of their living victims just to watch them squirm as they die, or even worse split open living bellies and tear out the guts. We wouldn't do that even to animals we slaughter. The memory of that night will haunt me all my days." Nevertheless he seemed to relish his narration of the tragedy.

"Then one of their shots hit me in the thigh. That shot may have saved me, for the pain was more than I could bare and I again lost consciousness. When I next awoke it was day, and my daughter here had found me and was taking care of my wounds. A good girl—a consolation to a man in times of trouble."

"Is there nothing that can be done to stop these marauders?", I asked. My interest was more than academic, for they lay directly in our path, and it sounded as if a party of Mongolians would stand little chance among such a cruel people.

"What can anyone do? They may be barbaric, but that does not stop them being master strategists. And I tell you, you've never seen such horsemanship, such skill with a rifle—not to mention courage, for they die bravely when their time comes. They must be much like our ancestors, who conquered the world under Ghengis Khan. But at that time we did not yet know the holy light of the Dharma. Now we could not do such things. Nor would the Kazakhs themselves be so merciless to people of their own religion.

"And the government in Sining? Oh they came and made a great show with many soldiers, but in the end they did little. Why would they harm fellow Muslims? And yet, how can we complain? Have we not brought these things upon ourselves through our sins in past lives?" It was this belief in *karma* that led to the remarkable lack of bitterness towards the Kazakhs that I found. Fear there was, but also an acceptance of the cruel fate these people were suffering, and they seemed no more to harbour a personal hatred toward their tormentors than they would toward a flood or a landslide.

While our neighbour talked, his daughter would sit quietly gazing at me, and I found her scrutiny disturbing. She was a plump yet attractive girl, proudly exposing her full, round, right breast; along with a smooth but muscular shoulder. Her father was liberal in her praise, telling often of her gentleness and consideration as she had nursed him, though gentleness was the last thing I would have suspected of her; she looked as strong as a pack camel.

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Often, after she had brought our milk in the morning she would stay, sitting in a corner for hours with little to say, but casting her disturbing air of ripe sexuality through the tent. Though she was not really my type I was finding it increasingly difficult to keep my mind off what Tseren-tso had told me these girls did not wear under their robes; and at times like this I thoroughly regretted my monk's disguise. Danzan might be able to get away with being married and still be accepted as a monk, but indiscriminate misbehaviour on my part would have led to talk and suspicions, and these were matters to be avoided at all costs.

One day when Danzan and his wife were out she came to me with a *khata*, told me she thought she had a cold, and asked me to take her pulse. It was a pleasant duty. So that I could make a thorough examination she pulled her left arm out of her robe to reveal a left breast as appealing as the familiar right one. The nearness of all this exposed rotund flesh was enough to cause momentary lightheadedness and was a sore trial to a healthy young man trying to pretend to be a monk. She turned this way and that, suggesting areas that I might examine: a little pressure here perhaps, a little squeeze there. I could find nothing wrong with her, but was developing symptoms of a fever myself when Tseren-tso and Danzan suddenly returned.

"You've been so kind," said the girl, not in the least embarrassed, replacing her left arm chastely in her robe. "I feel better already." I fumbled among our medicines and gave her something—I was not even sure what—and she left happily.

"Sit down Dawa Sangpo, we're going to have a talk," said Tseren-tso sternly as soon as she had left. She suddenly seemed to have assumed a protective, sisterly air. "What cheek!" she continued. "Do you know what that girl came for?"

"Why no," I answered, feigning innocence.

"Humph! She came to show you what a beautiful body she has. I've watched the shameless hussy throw herself at you day after day."

"It's true," added Danzan, who presumably knew something about women throwing themselves at monks. "Remember the reputation of the Chinghai girls. Trying to land a pilgrim is just a game to them. And don't forget, you own seven camels. There are Inner Mongolian monks all over Tsaidam who will never return to their homes."

"Then they must be well content," I answered testily, a little put out at being told how I should behave—and also at the thought that the affectionate display of flesh might have been inspired by my camels rather than by my person.

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"I dare say they are," shot back Tseren-tso, a rare hint of sarcasm in her voice, "like Za-huhun's husband."

Her words hit home. Za-huhun was the very model of a meek and obedient wife to her husband when she was at home—or to any other man she happened to be with at other times. No, my sister was right, and was only looking after my well-being. I did not want a wife like that, and I did not want to be stuck here in Chinghai Mongolia forever. I wanted to finish my pilgrimage, become a good monk as Dorji had said, and return to West Sunit . . .

I stopped myself in the middle of these thoughts with the sudden realization that for the moment I had not only been acting out a role, but had actually believed that I was an Inner Mongolian monk on a pilgrimage. In a panic I tried to recall the hills and beaches of my native Kyushu, but they would not come. The abrupt breakdown of my resistance must have led the couple to believe that their persuasiveness had carried the day, and I was more than happy to let them think that.

* * *

Under the circumstances it was a relief when Gombo Zaisun reached the decision he had been pondering for some time and decided in March to move from the mountains down into the basin. This was the opposite of the normal seasonal move, and it was because the former wealthy nomad had decided to swallow his pride and take up the Sining Government's offer of land to those who would farm it. It must have been a bitter pill for the once proud nomad to swallow. Mongolians do not traditionally regard land as property: animals are property, the land feeds them and is there for all who use it wisely. But he was left with no choice. He had no more animals, and farming would be the only way he could recoup his lost wealth.

He asked us to accompany him down to the administrative center of Chagan Os. His claim would be nearby, and he wanted us to loan him our camels for plowing. This was the subject of some heated discussions between Danzan and myself. Everything in Danzan's nomadic instincts went against it. It is a very bad way to treat camels. But in the end he had to agree that the most important thing was for us to keep up good relations with the local people until we could find a good way of getting through the Kazakhs to Sinkiang, or join up with the spring caravan to Lhasa.

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Chagan Os was a new town: a dismal, barrack-like administrative center. A sign at the entrance to the village declared that the 'Chinghai Tsaidam Land Reclamation Centre' had its headquarters there, but Gombo Zaisun was one of the few takers of the land offer. This whole eastern part of the Basin was crowded with refugees. Grazing was scarce, and would have been scarcer still had not the refugees been relieved of most of their flocks by the Kazakhs.

Once we settled in, our daily routine became monotonous, and we were glad of our growing medical reputation that made us acquainted with our neighbours and gave us something to do. Of course we never let on that we were using disguised Western medicines and that these were the secret of our success with colds, headaches, simple fevers and stomach aches. Another reason for our success rate was that we refused to treat any ailment beyond our capacities, so that no one ever died on us. I always let Danzan take the lead in everything, so that he became known as *ihu emchi* (the great physician) while I was called *baga emchi* (little physician).

One of my most successful cures began as an experiment. A woman came with some nameless disease of vague symptoms: just a general sort of melancholia and malaise which was fairly common among the nomad women, and which was probably largely psychosomatic. I decided to try a steam bath. Placing a large basket of the kind used for gathering dung on the floor, I cut a hole in the side and put a basin of hot water inside. Then I kept feeding the water with heated stones so that it would boil, and made the woman squat on top, completely swathed in her leather garment. Though she raised a terrific racket, screaming that it was much too hot for her to bear, I succeeded in keeping her inside until the perspiration flowed freely. After this treatment, strange to say, she recuperated at an amazing pace. It was probably the closest she had ever come to taking a bath.

In spite of his marriage, and probably as a result of our enforced idleness as well as the ever-present example of the many Inner Mongolian monks hereabouts who had been waylaid into matrimony but had no intentions of giving up their robes, Danzan was slipping more and more back to the life of a practicing monk. He was often asked either to officiate or assist in ceremonies, and on such occasions I usually went along, my duty being to beat a drum—and to try to pick up whatever I could of the sutras being chanted.

Once we were asked to assist in praying for a rich nomad who had been ill for a long time and lay dying. Each time he lost consciousness

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the members of his family would drip water on his face to bring him round, for it is common in Mongolia and Tibet not to let a sick person sleep during the day lest an evil spirit snatch away his soul as he sleeps. Meanwhile the traditional ceremony for exorcising the evil of disease involved the rubbing of a doll made of kneaded *tsampa* against the man's body, mounting the figure on a *tsampa* horse, placing them on a tray along with other offerings, and then finally casting them out of the tent in the direction divined.

It was a hopeless case from the beginning. Eventually when the patient's face turned dark blue and he started to lose consciousness, it was obvious to me that death was near, but the lama in charge began a ritual for calling the soul back from hell that owed more to ancient animist beliefs than it did to Buddhism. Since the man was born in the Year of the Cow, a small cow was quickly molded out of *tsampa* with its back hollowed out, and butter was poured into the hollow and lighted. A tray with the *tsampa* cow on top was floated on a basin of water and rotated. If it stopped with the face of the cow toward the dying man, all would be well: if not, the lama would identify the obstacle to success by means of dice and the ritual would be repeated. The obstacle was always something valuable, usually of precious metal or a gem, to which the lama would point and have brought to him, and which then became his property. We went through this ceremony so many times that silver bowls, coral hair-ornaments, furs and swords with fine silver work were soon piled high before the senior lama. It all seemed a bit blatant, and rather embarrassing to me, but in the end the lama gave it all back and only accepted five sheep while Danzan and I received one each.

The man died of course, and then we continued to chant until *rigor mortis* set in. The lama then ascertained that, as the man's head was warm rather than his feet, the soul would achieve nirvana rather than go to hell.

* * *

In April the vanguards of the year's caravan for Tibet began to arrive. Tsaidam was the main staging point, and early arrival here was necessary for getting the livestock into good condition for the high and barren four month trek to Lhasa. Since everyone still thought that was the direction in which we were headed, we showed as much interest as

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we could; but in fact, though we still intended to reach Sinkiang, that hope now seemed more and more distant.

I had made a point of getting to know a man who once came to us for eye medicine, and who had crossed the Takla Makan Desert with his family. He was originally a refugee from Soviet Outer Mongolia, but had still found nowhere he could be left in peace. After being forced from northern Kansu to Tien Shan Mongolia by the Chinese, he had found Sinkiang already overcrowded with Kazakhs and Uighurs. Not only that, but many nomads were turning to farming and spoiling the grazing, while Soviet influence—which had driven him from his home in the first place—was increasing. He and his family decided to take his chances with the Takla Makan and emigrate once more: this time to the Tsaidam. They had no sooner arrived and sworn allegiance to the rich and powerful governor of Taijinar Banner than the Kazakhs attacked and devastated the whole area. All things considered, he looked back on crossing the Takla Makan as one of the less unpleasant episodes of his life. They had found oases and rivers that would later end in bitter lakes, but which supported good grass at each stage of one or two days, and they had encountered no serious problems crossing with several hundred sheep.

Obviously the time had come for some hard decisions. I was still for attempting to carry out our mission and going to Sinkiang, but though the desert crossing seemed easier than I had dared hope, the presence of the Kazakhs made our chances for survival appear slim. I wondered if in all conscience I could lead my friends into a death trap. Yet how could I go on alone? There were no caravans mad enough to go that way in these troubled times and I would need Danzan's experience. We still had our secondary plan of going to Lhasa, but if we missed the caravan while looking for a way to Sinkiang, it would be a whole year until the next one.

It was as we sat in front of our tent one fine spring day pondering this problem that it was taken out of our hands. A soldier of the Muslim Army, a rifle slung across his back, came to us with a Mongolian interpreter and told us that all pilgrims going to Tibet would have to report to the barracks at Chagan Os to receive identification papers. This was hardly an appealing prospect, and I had never heard of any such procedure—but the worst thing would be to resist, so Danzan and I set out immediately.

At the barracks we were handed over to a Mongolian servant, who led us to a small dirty room and told us to wait. After we had sat

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nervously for awhile another soldier came and took us to a room nearby where we were made to stand on the earth floor, looking up at a desk and a second lieutenant on a raised and carpeted level. The young officer looked disdainfully down at us then suddenly began to speak.

"Who are you and where are you from?" We were at first too shocked to answer, for he was speaking in an elegant Mongolian.

"Well, what's wrong, can't you speak?" he barked impatiently.

"Danzanhairob and Dawa Sangpo from Baron Hiid, Alashan Banner," answered Danzan. This was how we had registered at the inns where we stayed.

"Years of birth?"

Danzan told him. Mongolians don't bother with the dates and often even get the years wrong.

"What is the purpose of your journey?"

"We are pilgrims, honoured Sir. My wife wishes to worship at the holy city of Lhasa, and her young brother here has his heart set on studying at Drepung."

"By what route did you come?" The young man seemed to be trying to intimidate us with his brusque and overbearing manner, but he was no older than I was, obviously inexperienced and a little nervous.

Danzan outlined the route we had actually followed. I became more and more apprehensive and began to fear that someone had betrayed me. Yet who could it have been? The last person who knew my identity for sure had been Erenchin, and by now he should be in Kalgan.

"And what is your connection with the Lama Tokan Gegen?"

"None my lord. Dawa Sangpo attended a public audience in Sining, and his monastery, Gorin Gumpa, was pointed out to us on the road between Sining and Kumbum." Now I was really worried. If it could be shown that there was a connection between the Lama and ourselves, it might come out that we were from Inner Mongolia and not Ninghsia, and we might well be suspected of being Japanese agents.

"The Sining authorities were informed by telephone from Lanchow that a large party of Inner Mongolian pilgrims were being escorted back the way they had come, when three men and one woman wounded some of their escort and broke away. That was in February in Ninghsia, and they headed this way. I have orders to keep my eyes open for suspects and to send them back to Sining under guard. You look suspicious to me."

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It was not as bad as it could have been, but it was certainly bad enough. Being sent back under arrest would mean an investigation of some sort, and this Muslim Army seemed far too efficient to play games with.

"But we are only *two* men and a woman," I protested.

"And we were *five* men and a woman in February," added Danzan. "You can check the inns where we were forced to stay."

"We were in Kumbum for ten days as well, you can check that," I added, then wished I had kept my mouth shut, since we had stayed as the guests of an Inner Mongolian doctor.

He finished making notes of all our answers and left, telling us to remain. The servant brought us a scant snack of *tsampa* and hot water: no butter, cheese or tea. We in turn offered him snuff and tried to find out more about what our situation was.

"Why does an officer in the Muslim Army speak such perfect Mongolian?" I asked.

The servant chuckled. "That's because he is Mongolian. You really don't know who he is?"

"Why should we?"

"Do you know where you are now?" he replied quizzically, enjoying the knowledge of something hidden from us.

"In Chagan Os," I answered, a little exasperated.

"In the Banner of Khuhut," added Danzan.

"And who rules the western half of the Banner of Khuhut?"

"The governor, Babu Noyen. But what does that have to do with the Mongolian speaking officer?"

"Well, you see, Babu Noyen is a very cunning man. He is a good Mongolian, and very religious, but he knows the Chinese and the Muslims are very powerful so he takes no chances. That's why he sent his two eldest sons to study in Chungking. The older is in charge of the government store here. The second went to the military academy. Well, of course to be close to home he had to go into the Muslim Army."

"And he's the officer who has been questioning us?"

"That's right. He's not been back long and he's very zealous."

"What about his father?" asked Danzan, sensing an opening for us.

"Oh, Babu Noyen is definitely the man to know if you are in trouble," replied our man with a wink. "He can get you out of it—if he thinks it is worthwhile."

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"And is the son . . . ?" Before Danzan could finish his question that very son had returned. The servant looked sheepish and left.

"It will take some time to receive instructions from Sining," the officer began importantly. "In the mean time I think one of you should stay here—just to make sure the other does not run off." Danzan and I looked at one another. As the younger, it was my place to remain.

"I'll stay," I volunteered.

"Very good. I'll send some one to conduct you to your cell. You're not really a prisoner yet, so we won't make you too uncomfortable." He walked out of the room.

I turned quickly to Danzan. "Find this Babu Noyen and see if you can come to some agreement with him. Everything depends . . ."

". . . on how our young officer reports to his masters in Sining," Danzan interrupted quickly. "Don't worry, I've thought it through. The father controls the son, and the son controls our fate. So rest as comfortably as you can in these uncomfortable looking buildings Dawa Sangpo, and leave everything to me." He broke off suddenly as a soldier came in and motioned me to follow him.

Whether it was bargaining over camels, or arranging slightly shady deals, I knew I could be in no better hands than Danzan's. Nevertheless, I was more nervous during the next four days of arrest than I had been at any time since crossing the border into Ninghsia. At least then we had been active, and by our actions we had some control over our destiny. Now it was entirely in the hands of others and I felt utterly powerless. I could do nothing but sit and pretend to chant sutras during the day and fight off the bedbugs at night, for as Danzan had surmised, the mud buildings were indeed uncomfortable compared to our familiar tent.

On the fifth day Danzan came for me along with a messenger from Babu Noyen. Although there had been no word from Sining, we were to be released into Babu Noyen's custody.

"How did you manage it?" I asked him as we walked to our camp, out of earshot of the envoy.

"Skillful diplomacy," he answered with an ironic smile. "Do you remember our best silver bowl?"

"You mean the one we never used because it was too fine?"

"Yes. I thought it was time to make it useful, so I filled it with raisins, covered them with silver coins and presented it to Babu Noyen on a *khata*. He became more interested still when he heard of our seven camels."

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I was not entirely pleased and my voice showed it. "Just how much do you think this detention is going to cost us in the end?"

"That is something we will just have to wait and see. Our first aim is to keep from going back to Sining under arrest. Remember the Japanese with Tokan Gegen who was shot? What would seven camels matter to him now?"

We reached our camp where Tseren-tso was already at work packing, finished the job as quickly as we could, and hurried toward Babu Noyen's summer camp in the mountains, half a day's exhausting march away. Finally, on the banks of a rivulet watering the clearing of a valley hemmed in by a forest of giant pines and cedars, we saw a cluster of the round felt tents that are called *ger* in Mongolian—but which English has followed Russian in calling 'yurts'—where a carpet of multi-coloured wild flowers and green grass spread over the embankments. It was the pleasantest spot I had yet seen in the Tsaidam.

We were instructed to pitch our tent west of the *ger*. After we unpacked our camels and let them loose to graze, we were told to attend Babu Noyen in his large *ger*, which was two or three times the size of a normal one. There was a large crowd gathered in front, looking in our direction, and some were restraining furiously barking dogs: hardly an auspicious beginning.

As soon as we entered my eyes fell on a man seated in the center. I had been expecting a man physically as large as his reputation—the title *noyen* indicates noble birth—but Babu Noyen proved to be small of stature with a dark complexion, smallpox scars spreading from his nose, a well-shaved head, and sleepy eyes that masked the mind of a formidable schemer. (The smallpox scars derive from the traditional vaccination given to children in the nose; when wiping their runny noses they spread the fluid across their cheeks, which are thus marked for life). I advanced before him, offered him a *khata*, exchanged snuff pots with him, and thanked him for saving us—promising at the same time that we would be of no further trouble. His reply was that we were to leave everything to him and stay just as long as we wished. Precisely what he meant by these words I could not be sure, but they sounded as ominous as kind, and from that moment we became a part of the family village.

This was an operation nearly the size of our farm back in Zarin Sume. Noyen's immediate family consisted of his corpulent but gentle-eyed wife; his beautiful daughter-in-law, wife of his eldest son and daughter of the Governor of Baron; and his younger brother Wangyel,

who was in charge of all of the family's two thousand five hundred sheep. Besides the family members there were about twenty servants and a monk in charge of the altar tent. Babu Noyen was punctilious about religious observances, and instead of the normal altar in his family *ger* he had an entire separate *ger* that functioned as a movable temple. He was always sponsoring some ceremony or other.

Each of the servants had his or her own job. Some took care of the sheep, horses, cows and camels, while others had their specific domestic tasks. All the servants slept outside whenever the weather permitted. They never slept in groups but always singly, scattered here and there—and love bloomed in the soft spring nights as in the small hours the men would visit the women whose favour they enjoyed and then return to their own places before morning. It was a carefree existence—barring of course chance offspring and venereal disease—and there was ample opportunity for some pleasant misbehaving. Yet as with our neighbour's daughter at our first camp there was just too much risk involved, so I slept alone and regretted my monk's disguise, my only consolation being my freedom from worries about gonorrhoea and syphilis.

These did not worry my Mongolian friends anyway: they referred to gonorrhoea as "shivering sickness" and believed it was caused by urinating in a cold wind. Though they greatly feared syphilis they seemed to have no idea of its cause. I remember Babu Noyen visiting our tent one day to mix some syphilis pills. This he did by heating a mixture of vermillion, mercury, and sulphur in a small pot covered with a porcelain bowl and sealed with clay. After about ten minutes of being heated, the pot was opened and the contents mixed with soot and *tsampa* then rolled into pills.

I regretted the disguise even more a couple of weeks later when Babu Noyen asked me to chant the Dolma Sutra, the Sutra of the Goddess of Mercy, one hundred thousand times. Danzan was already busily fulfilling requests to chant and pray, providing us with a bit of a living at the same time, but I had so far avoided this by saying that my knowledge of the complex sutras was poor, and that the very reason I was going to Lhasa was that I wanted to study where such things are learned best. The Dolma Sutra, however, was known even by women and children. I cursed myself inwardly. Why hadn't I paid more attention to religious matters while learning the language at Tsagan Tologai-in Khural, or asked Dorji to teach me at least some of the basics? Or why had I not disguised myself as a simple caravan man? I thought of that other Ko Ah Gijuku student, Nishikawa, who was roaming around out

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here somewhere as well. He had a reputation for spending long hours over the Tibetan scriptures, had even lived for a time as a monk after his expulsion from the school, and would never have hesitated when asked to fulfil some simple religious duty.

It was impossible to claim I did not know this sutra, but I did manage to mumble that I would have to wait for an auspicious time to begin, in this way gaining three precious days. I had Danzan chant the sutra line by line and write it down in Mongolian phonetics, marking the rises and falls. Then I isolated myself in the mountains on the excuse that I needed a period of meditation to prepare myself spiritually, and practiced for all I was worth until I had it by heart.

When the day for the opening ceremony arrived, I was invited to the family *ger*. Babu Noyen offered me tea and a seat in the center then presented me with a *khata*, lit the sacred lights, and bowed three times before me on his knees as if I were an honoured lama. Each of his family members followed suit. Forcing myself to be calm, I began chanting in my most solemn tones. If I got through the first ten minute rendition successfully I would be fine: all I would have to do was to keep repeating it for the next six months until I had accomplished it a hundred thousand times—and that would mean we would miss the caravan for Lhasa and be stuck here for another year.

Somehow our whole situation just did not seem right. Why had he asked me to take on this task just before the departure of the caravan? We tried everything to persuade Noyen and his officer son to let us be on our way, but the invariable reply was that we would have to wait a little longer since there had been no instructions from Sining to let us leave. Besides, it would be most inauspicious to stop the hundred thousand chants in the middle. It was suggested that our camels might just as well graze with Babu Noyen's herd: this would free us from responsibility for them so that we could concentrate on our chanting, for which we were receiving a sixty pound sack of flour every month—enough to keep the three of us in noodles.

Next we heard the rumour that the Lhasa caravan had already left. Here in our cool high altitude valley we had no idea what was going on down in the Basin. When my best camel disappeared from Noyen's herd and we were told unconvincingly that it had strayed, our suspicions that we were being held as much for Babu Noyen's enrichment as on the orders of the Sining government increased. He was a subtle and likable thief, allowing us by chanting to earn a basic living in compensation for what he had stolen, but I could envisage being gradually

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impoverished until I wound up as no more than a servant monk. Danzan and I would go over plans for escape, but we knew it was hopeless. The local people knew all the trails far better than we did, and anyway there was nowhere to go but into the arms of the Kazakhs.

Babu Noyen loaned us an ancient but comfortable old *ger*, and we moved gratefully out of our familiar but cramped tent. Tseren-tso was given the task every morning and evening of helping with the milking of the three hundred cows, and their offspring crossbred with yaks called *hainak* that yielded more and richer milk; and as summer came on we found ourselves drifting toward ever more secure detention. When Tseren-tso proudly announced that she was pregnant, that put an end to any plans for escape in the near future.

Six

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“And the way he behaved when she was around . . . I could tell he just wanted to *pull out his spade and dig a hole!*”

Danzan and I were suddenly aghast as Tseren-tso, carried away by the importance of being pregnant and an audience of young men, began once again saying all the wrong things, telling the story of our former neighbour's daughter. “Not only that, he was thinking of *sharpening his knife*; it couldn't have *pierced* anything the state it was in.” Inspired by her own wit she seemed unwilling, or unable, to stop as she emphasized each phrase to make sure her unsubtle points were not missed. Although this would have been perfectly acceptable sexual banter back on the farm at Zarin Sume, here it could put us in the gravest danger.

Our visitors, two young servants of Babu Noyen's, were also looking uncomfortable, for the foolish woman was breaking two very strong taboos: first she was joking about sex in the presence of her brother, and even worse she was using those forbidden words of the Tsaidam to do so. Danzan, looking extremely embarrassed, tried to change the subject to the late summer caravan that had just arrived from Lhasa.

“If we hire out our camels to carry loads back and forth to Sining as you suggest, are you sure they will be well treated?” he asked.

“Well, Ado—our chief herdsman—is going with the caravan, and he can be trusted to look after them properly,” replied one of the young men, relieved to have a safe subject to talk about. “And when they return you will be richer by ten silver pieces for each camel.” These were not entirely comforting words: that same Ado had been in charge when our best camel had “strayed”, and that was one of the reasons why we needed to recoup our funds. At the same time we wondered silently how much was in it for Babu Noyen, who never seemed to do anything without considering the possibility for profit to himself. But now, just as our guests were beginning to relax, Tseren-tso was struck with another brilliant idea.

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“Dawa Sangpo had better not go with them. It’s a long *climb* over the passes to Sining, and if it rains he’ll get *soaking wet!*” She doubled over with laughter at her own jest, but our visitors, who by now had had enough, got up and excused themselves in embarrassed haste. Danzan looked angrily at his wife. I knew what he was going to say to her, and I had a fair idea what her defiant reply would be. A long night lay ahead, and there would be tears before morning. I wondered if I should stay and mediate, just to keep her from raising her voice—all I needed now was a scream of “But he’s not really my brother!” echoing throughout the gorge. But in the end I decided to entrust that task to Danzan, and since it was a fine summer night I went outside to sleep.

Our situation had improved as the summer wore on. Not long before the arrival of the return caravan from Lhasa Danzan had come back from a visit to Babu Noyen with news of a reply from Sining. We were not entirely free from suspicion, but it appeared that Babu Noyen would do his best to see us onto the next year’s Lhasa caravan. It was from that point that I sensed a change in people’s attitude toward us, and we were accepted as neighbours rather than detainees. Had our unpredictable Tseren-tso only managed to keep her tongue in check we could have relaxed and felt secure.

On the other hand, another bout of religious fever had come upon our host, and he had gathered every monk in the neighbourhood to participate in the chanting of the *Kangyur*—the complete Tibetan collection of the words of the Buddha in one hundred and eight volumes. As my turn approached I realized that I was again in quite a fix. It had been all I could do to learn the ten minute Dolma Sutra at short notice, and now as summer faded into autumn I had finally completed the hundred thousand repetitions: but I was completely unacquainted with the *Kangyur*, and I knew I would never be able to fake my way through any part of it.

Much of my time was occupied with trying to find a plausible excuse for getting out of this when our old friend Gombo Zaisun turned up, as usual doing a little small trade, and invited us down to his home in the basin. His younger sister was ill and he was hoping we would treat her. I thought it would be a good idea as well to get to know the area in case we got a chance to make our break west. Since we were now only under a light form of detention, Babu Noyen readily agreed to let me go as long as Danzan stayed and took my part of the chanting.

We left on camelback the next day for the town of Shan since Gombo wanted to visit his brother there. It was only a day’s ride, but it

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took us through that remarkable variety of landscape found in Tsaidam as we first descended the mountain, then cut across the Chagan Os valley into scrub. Through breaks in the shrubbery as we rode west we could see sharp cliffs of sand to the north. Leaving the path—and the scrub—we struck south through a sandy desert, which eventually ended at the top of a cliff about two and a half miles long, running from east to west, and dropping about sixty feet. Below was grassland where the Yogorain Gol flowed west before changing its name to the Bayan Gol and disappearing into one of the basin's many bitter lakes at the center of a marsh. The town of Shan sat on the south bank of the river.

Like Chagan Os this was largely a new military settlement with barracks going up everywhere, providing employment for many a destitute refugee, but spoiling the pleasant prospect which had before been dominated by the Panchen Monastery. This area provided pasture for herds donated to the Panchen Lama, and the monastery housed more of his wealth—thus the name Shan, borrowed from Chinese and meaning 'treasury'. We forded the river and entered the town in fading light, calling first on an old friend of Gombo Zaisun, a seventy-five year old Outer Mongolian monk nick-named Khalkha Lama (*khalka* simply means Outer Mongolian) who lived near the monastery.

The pleasant old man was proud of having been to Lhasa eleven times, and he kept his small mud house—with an earth floor in the center and an elevated wooden floor all around—neat and clean. We were treated to a noodle dinner, and he invited me to spend the night while Gombo Zaisun went off to visit his brother who was working here as a coolie and earning a silver piece every two days.

After he had left we settled down to sleep and as I was just drifting off, I heard a rustling by my bedside and looked around to see the Khalkha Lama with a wicked gleam in his eye reflected from the altar lights. "If you are a monk you will know what is expected of you," he whispered with an obscene giggle.

This disguise really was proving most inconvenient. No sooner had I escaped chanting the holy texts than I was called upon for a duty I would never have expected—and for which I was even less inclined. "Which way do you like it, young fellow, from the front or back?" the old man continued, his breath coming in short gasps. "I'm Mongolian, but I've spent long enough in Tibet that I can go either way."

In my panic I remembered that during one of our conversations Danzan had told me that good-looking young boys sometimes had to be careful in the monasteries. From the little I knew of homosexuality, it

seemed that most customary practices would be distasteful in a land where toilet paper and bathing are equally unknown, and he explained to me that it is the boys' thighs that provide the necessary friction. The Mongolians liked their boys front-side up, the Tibetans back-side up: this was the preference the old man was enquiring after.

My only preference was for escape, but he would not take "no" for an answer, and was trying to pin me down and pull up my robe when I was obliged to defend my honour a little more forcefully than I wished, and threw him against the wall. I hated to do it, for he was in most ways a likable old man, and I felt a little sorry for him as I grabbed my pillow and rushed outside to sleep with the camels. At least they were gelded. The next morning the aged lama was in a very bad temper, and Gombo Zaisun had no idea what it was all about when he came to get me. I decided, as we worked our way northwest into the Banner of Juun, that there was no reason to enlighten him on the conduct of his friend.

Some of the refugees were cautiously making their way back to the banner's eastern edge as the Kazakhs, having plundered all that was worth having, were gradually beginning to leave: either for their own land or for northern Tibet. Even so, there seemed to be an almost insane fear of the Kazakhs among the Mongolians.

Juun, Gombo Zaisun's original home, was near the middle of the Tsaidam Basin which rolled out in all directions so that we could barely see the mountains to the south. Gombo's family *ail* (settlement) consisted of five tents in marshland atop a hill. I seemed to know everyone there from the rocky gorge and Chagan Os—though I looked in vain for Shara Hund and his playful daughter—and I was welcomed as an old friend. Enjoying the celebrity I demonstrated the little palmistry which I had picked up, and realized that I had gone too far when mothers with fat rosey-cheeked babies in their arms began to swarm around me demanding to know what the future held for their little ones. I could not imagine where so many had come from.

The next day, after I had given Gombo Zaisun's sister one of my special steam baths, we went to call on Za-huhun and her husband. Though I had met her husband once or twice in passing, this was the first time I had visited their tent and seen Za-huhun at work as a housewife. She seemed happy to be back in the home that, one cold night on the banks of the frozen Kokonor, she had wondered if she would ever see again; and was making *tsampa* outside the tent, all the while keeping an eye on a distilling operation which was producing a

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strong liquor called *arikh* from fermented mare's milk. Her husband and Gombo Zaisun seemed on the best of terms and we sat outside the tent sharing a bowl of *airak* (or better known, from the Russian, as *kumiss*), the refreshing, mildly alcoholic fermented mare's milk of summer, as Za-huhun heated sand in a large steel pan and threw in grains of barley.

"I'm used to this diet of *tsampa* now, and I quite like it," sighed her husband, watching her contentedly, and taking a gulp of his *airak*. He was a mild mannered man in his early forties and still wore his monk's robes.

"You should be," interrupted Gombo Zaisun, "your wife is an expert at making it." We could hear the barley beginning to pop open like flowers while its pleasant aroma drifted over to us. "The trick is to roast it just the right amount without burning it," he explained for my benefit. "A valuable skill in a woman." As soon as the popping stopped she quickly transferred the parched barley and sand into a sieve and sifted the sand from the grain: the latter was put aside to be milled later while she went back to the fire to re-heat the sand.

The three of us gazed appreciatively at her small but well-formed right breast, shown to good advantage as she worked. "Still, there are times when I wish I had continued on to Lhasa," said her husband in an undertone, not to hurt her feelings. "I arrived in Tsaidam in the autumn and so had to wait for spring to pick up the caravan. It was a time when there was much work for a doctor, just after the big raid on the monastery. Many people were ailing, including . . ." He gestured toward Za-huhun, who was now kneeling by her still checking the rate at which the steam from the boiling fermented mare's milk was condensing on the bottom of a pan filled with cool water—which was supported on an upturned wooden tub with the bottom knocked out—and dripping into a pot. Mare's milk is most plentiful at this time of year, and preserved as a fiery liquor would help to provide warmth throughout the winter. "Oh, I wasn't a very good doctor—that's why I was going to Lhasa to study . . ."

"She makes a nice *arikh* too," interrupted Gombo Zaisun, who had obviously heard it all before. "It's the figs and raisins she puts in the milk before it ferments that give it such a nice taste." He called out to her: "How many times have you run it through?"

"Three," she called back. "It should be good by now."

Gombo Zaisun strolled over and dipped a finger into the thrice distilled clear liquid, then held his wet finger close to the fire. It flared into a quick blue flame that went out before it could even burn him.

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"Perfect," he commented and came to rejoin us. "No doubt about it, you found yourself a good wife."

"Yet if I had not made a bad loan," the doctor continued to reminisce, "I would have been on that spring caravan."

"Leaving a broken-hearted maiden behind him, the heartless beast," whispered Gombo Zaisun into my ear.

"The man refused to pay up, and I was nearly broke. When I tried to get my money he went to the Muslim Army headquarters in Chagan Os and tried to accuse me of being a Japanese agent—as if I would work for that pack of thieves! Well, one of the people I had treated for his wounds was the governor of Juun, and he immediately came to my aid. I was released, but on the condition that I swear allegiance to the governor and remain here in Tsaidam." A cheerful little girl of about four ran by—a miniature of Za-huhun. "Ah well, you see the results. A wife, a child, a pleasant existence, broken vows and a frustrated pilgrimage." He laughed, not seeming at all unhappy with his lot. "Avoid women young man: they are stumbling blocks to study and knowledge!"

Later, Gombo Zaisun let it drop that not long after the marriage, the doctor's creditor had had a stroke of luck and been able to repay the loan in full. It was obvious that the whole thing had been a plot cooked up to keep the kind doctor in Tsaidam as Za-huhun's husband.

Knowing that the reciting of the *Kangyur* would still be in progress, I persuaded Gombo Zaisun to spend the next ten days showing me around the resettled parts of Juun. He was happy enough to forget he was now a farmer, and was more than willing to spend time away from his ripening crops. During this leisurely tour, I often noticed a black slick on the surface of the frequent marshes, and I recognized it for petroleum. These simple people, accounting it a disaster when they lost a few animals, had no idea of the fortune they were sitting on.

When I returned to our mountain valley, I was happy to learn that the chanting of the *Kangyur* had ended.

* * *

In October the winds turned sharp with the approaching winter. There was already frost at night. The caravan had returned from Sining, with our camels all in surprisingly good shape, and leaving us sixty pieces of silver the richer. Our butter and cheese had all been made along with our own supply of *arikh*. Animals had been slaughtered and the meat hung to dry. We felt prepared for the winter, as Tseren-tso grew bigger.

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It was now exactly a year since we had set out, and a year was the unrealistic amount of time I had originally been given to accomplish my mission. That we had made it safely this far was a matter for pride; that we had gone no further, a cause for concern. In terms of my mission I had accomplished almost nothing, but I tried not to think too much about that. It had long since ceased to worry me that no news reached us from the outside world.

Toward the evening of December 5th, Tseren-tso began to suffer labour pains. Neighboring women, both young and old, hurriedly gathered under the direction of an ancient midwife to help bring forth the child. Two pieces of rope were tied to the wall of our ger making two loops for the prospective mother to pass her hands through: she would then assume a half squatting posture, arms fully extended, her back to the wall. This position is supposed to bring pressure to enable the child to emerge from the womb more easily. Beneath the squatting woman a soft carpet of dried horse and sheep dung was laid out. A porcelain bowl was placed nearby. It would be smashed and its jagged edge used to cut the umbilical cord.

I was assigned to keep the fire going—perhaps just to give me something to do and keep me out of the way. Exactly at midnight, Danzan and I were ordered out into the snow: the child would be coming at any moment. Hugging our knees we sat side by side and stared nervously at the star-filled night. Then at last the silence was broken by the cry of the newborn infant, and a moment later one of the women motioned us to enter. We saw a fine, healthy baby boy wrapped in felt. As was customary he had not been washed, but only swabbed off with rags.

Tseren-tso remained hanging from the loops, still squatting and utterly exhausted. I told the old woman attending her that I thought she should lie down and sleep, and was answered sharply that the mother should not rest until the placenta came out. Not knowing the first thing about childbirth, I shut up. Half an hour passed but nothing more happened. Tseren-tso was numb with exhaustion, and finally she was allowed to lie down. After a cup of hot tea she dozed off while the old woman kept grumbling that the mother should not be allowed to lie down until she had finished the job properly.

It was a long night. I lay down, but could not sleep, and kept getting up to feed the fire. Each time the child cried, the old midwife would moisten a piece of cloth with a mixture of warm water and sheep's milk, and feed him with that. Finally, pale morning light began

to creep into the tent. Danzan got up and swept away the horse and sheep dung onto which the child had been born. His wife's condition remained unchanged.

All the neighbourhood women dropped in with suggestions. Someone brought a miracle herb but it had no effect. Around 7 a.m. Tseren-tso began to drift into a delirium. The scent of fresh burning cedar leaves would bring her around, but only for a moment, and her periods of unconsciousness became longer. I felt helpless and foolish. Some of the neighbours had pulled reluctant placentas out of horses, camels, and sheep, but none dared try it on a human being. Someone held Tseren-tso up from behind to try and keep her awake. About 10 a.m. her complexion turned a ghastly dark purple, and the women began to whisper darkly among themselves.

Then one woman suddenly remembered an old refugee from Juun named Taiji Lama, who had once saved the life of a mother in a similar predicament. I asked where he lived, and hurried out to fetch him. The heavy, knee-deep snow slowed me down and made me rage inwardly with irritation, but after running for half an hour I found the black, sooty tent—and inside a black, sooty old man surrounded by a large and lazy-looking family of children and grandchildren. He was only about sixty-five, but seemed already to be going dodderly. My first impulse was to back out and escape, but he was our last hope.

"My sister had a baby last night at midnight, but the afterbirth still has not come out," I gasped, breathless from my run. There was no time for the usual polite preliminaries. "I've heard you can help."

"Midnight?" The old man pulled a flea out of his robe and stared at it as he seemed to consider. "It's almost noon now. That's bad. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"I came as soon as someone mentioned you."

"Always the same, yes, always the same. Send for Taiji Lama when it's too late and expect a miracle!" He had not moved, and seemed to be weighing up whether it was worth going out in the cold. "How far away are they?"

"Near Babu Noyen's camp. It took me half an hour, but I was running."

"It'll take me longer. I'm not as young as I used to be, and all this snow . . . You don't have anything for me to ride, do you?"

I had only myself. "I'll take you on my back," I volunteered. "We should hurry. She was turning purple when I left."

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"Purple? Oh that's bad. Very bad." He said this calmly as he put on his fur-lined robe and then told a grandchild to follow with his box and motioned me to my knees so that he could climb onto my back.

"Nothing to worry about, nothing at all," he assured me as I staggered through the snow. "It happens all the time. I've done this a hundred, no two hundred times. Maybe even a thousand . . . watch out for that ditch there! . . . never lost a mother yet. That is if they were still alive when I went to work . . . slow down Sonny, or you'll fall on your face, and me with you. Where will your sister be then, eh? Of course if she was already turning purple when you left . . . well I hope you have a good supply of the sacred texts on hand since there may be nothing left to do but pray for a favourable rebirth. But it doesn't really matter because I know them all by heart anyway . . . and I have a lot of experience praying for mothers whose families didn't call me in time. Would you be *careful* and stop *jogging* me around *so much*! If I had any teeth left you would be shaking them out. But of course we will be in time and I'll save her."

I was as tired from his nagging and his incessant chatter as from his weight, for he did not stop talking the entire time, and if Tseren-tso's life had not depended on him I would have dropped the senile old fool into the snow. When we finally reached our *ger* and he got off my back I collapsed into a corner. Tseren-tso looked even worse and was now completely unconscious.

Taiji Lama, aware of his importance, demanded that plenty of hot water be brought, and made a great show of cutting his nails with a pair of scissors. Fingers prepared, he washed his arms with soda then smeared them with butter, and finally ordered all the menfolk out of the tent. I was so exhausted that Danzan, himself in a state of near nervous collapse, had to support me.

Only ten minutes later we were called back in. Everything was fine. Taiji Lama, his face beaming, was washing his hands. Tseren-tso, now pale, looked to be in a peaceful sleep, and as Danzan and I gazed fondly down at her I regretted all my unkind thoughts toward the old man. Not once, for all his chatter, had he mentioned payment, though he had had us entirely at his mercy. Blood rushed back into the patient's cheeks in about half an hour, and the old monk said it would be safe for him to leave. We thanked him as sincerely as we knew how, and as tokens of our gratitude gave him the hind quarter of a yak as well as one of my most prized possessions—the snuff bottle Dorji had given me

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with the eighteen saints on it. He went off smiling, mounted on a camel.

Tseren-tso was able to get up in about three days, though the child had to live on sheep's milk for another week until she was able to breast-feed him. He was a roly-poly little thing, with the bright red, round cheeks common to Mongolian babies, and we were all crazy over him. Tseren-tso was proud to have produced a son, Danzan to have one; and yes, I was the fond uncle—as proud and happy as they were. Following the custom he would remain unnamed until he was five or six years old.

* * *

On the night of December 25th, Danzan and his wife were asleep on the east side of the fireplace as usual, and I on the west side. Around midnight a cry from the baby awakened me but not his parents, so I went and picked him up and carried him to my own bed. He was wet, and once I had taken care of that he soon calmed down and went back to sleep. Tseren-tso awoke and asked sleepily if Danzan had the child, so I took him back and she began to feed him. We all went back to sleep.

I was reawakened by a scream from Tseren-tso that the baby was not breathing. Hurrying to her side, I found to my horror that it was true. We could not believe it. He was still warm, and a watery fluid was coming from his nose. Our attempts to revive him were in vain, and his poor mother seemed to have gone nearly insane with grief. It could have been a sudden fever that had taken the child, but it seemed more likely (though I could never have told her) that his mother had rolled over on the baby in her sleep as she fed him and smothered him with her breast. Until morning she sat like one in a daze with the lifeless infant that had meant so much to her in her arms.

In all my years of travel I can recall no day so desolate as the next, as Danzan and I trudged through the snow to dispose of the small lifeless bundle that had for such a short time brought so much joy to our tent. Unable to face what had to be done, I had argued in favour of burial, but the idea of the child lying in the cold ground to be slowly devoured by insects and worms was as repulsive to them as the thought of his lying exposed for scavengers was to me. During that walk Danzan and I never spoke. I hated Mongolia then, hated it with an intensity a man might feel towards a deeply-loved woman who had betrayed him.

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I hated the dirt, the ignorance, and most of all I hated what seemed to me the heartlessness of this stark and comfortless interment. Babies were not even offered prayers. Did that mean they had been less alive? Why, I asked myself, had I ever wanted to be one of these people? Why had I assigned myself this course from which there was no escape?

We found a hollow in the cliff and laid the dead child there. The wind howled across the snow and smashed into the cliff. I did not look at Danzan, afraid of seeing a weakness in my friend that I had no wish to witness, and I tried not to think of what would happen after we left. A few days later when I came out to gather fuel I looked into the hollow, but the body was gone. Danzan always avoided the spot.

Tseren-tso was inconsolable, and in an attempt to find out, in her own way, just why events had come about as they had, she visited the local *sankasopa*, a sort of magician who wore long braids wound around his head and was believed to have occult powers to control the weather. She was told that our household was under the influence of an evil spirit which would have to be captured if she wanted to have another baby. Danzan was a bit embarrassed over the whole thing but like me he was worried over Tseren-tso's excessive grief and asked me—a bit shyly—if I would take part in the ceremony. Of course I agreed. I had arranged the marriage, and felt somehow responsible for all that had happened.

The ceremony lasted all day long. Danzan and two other monks from the neighbourhood chanted a sutra. Sacred lights were placed on the altar with offerings of *tsampa* molded into many shapes. Sounds of bells, cymbals, a small hand drum, and the large drum that I always played, chimed, rolled and increased to a deafening pitch, as they merged with the ever more frantic chanting.

Finally it was time to actually capture the evil spirit, who by now must have been thoroughly frightened. Nine small pieces of wood were cut into diamond shapes and inscribed with a passage from the sutra on the front and a numeral on the back. These wooden pieces went into a leather bag which I held in my left hand, and its mouth was pulled tight with a string which I clasped firmly in my right hand together with a small knife, a broom and fire tongs. Thus equipped I searched for the source of our unhappiness; behind boxes, under tables, inside and outside the tent, making sweeping motions with the broom and all the while chanting the magic sutra that Danzan had taught me. The broom was for sweeping the evil spirit out of its hiding place, the knife was for killing it, and the fire tongs for grasping it and thrusting it into the bag.

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After about five minutes of this I handed the bag to the senior lama who opened it and dropped the wooden pieces onto a desk. If the numerals 1, 2, 3, came out in the right order, the ritual was proceeding as it should; if not, everything had to be done again until they did. The numbers which came out in order were kept aside on a tray, and the ritual was directed to the remaining ones. When all nine pieces came out in numerical order it meant that the spirit had been captured and bagged.

In the end, though the numbers told us that we had captured the trouble maker, the ceremony did little toward brightening the dark atmosphere that prevailed in our tent, and the new year of 1945 was a dismal one. All joy seemed to have left the once perennially cheerful Tseren-tso, who moped through her daily tasks, and I would have given much to have heard one of her raucous and tasteless jokes followed by that laughter of hers that always threatened to betray us. Her black mood affected us all, and it seemed almost fitting that one evening a young woman of the neighbouring camp who had gone to gather fuel came running back through the soft wet snow in a state of terror. Between gasps and sobs she babbled out that while walking back along the mountain path at dusk she had met a man with a black face, dressed all in black and riding a black horse. So intense was her distress that she seemed to be out of her mind for a time and suffered from a high fever for the next few days. The Mongolians believed that she had seen *Khara Dairma*, the Black Spirit. Danzan and I could do nothing for her with our disguised medicines, and she did not recover until another extensive ceremony had been performed for her.

Nor was my mood brightened by a man who came to be treated for a stomach ailment but who almost immediately launched into a tirade on the Japanese in Inner Mongolia.

"You're lucky they've never smashed their way into your home in Ninghsia," he began, and told us that he had gone to Inner Mongolia as an attendant to banner representatives attending the All-Mongolian Political Conference at Baatu Halga (Pai Lin Miao) in 1934, and had stayed for several years in Japanese controlled lands. "Prince De is a good man, but there are just not enough Mongolians to stand against both the Chinese and the Japanese. He had to choose one or the other. The princes and the landlords wanted to side with the Chinese, but most Mongolians didn't trust them. Prince De tried an alliance with them for a while, but as soon as they began to weaken he switched to the Japanese. It wasn't that he liked the Japanese: he just hoped to use

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the them to get rid of the Chinese, and then kick them out in turn. But they were too cunning—and too powerful—for him. Now he is no more than a helpless tool in Japanese hands. It is the Japanese who hold all the positions of real power in the so-called 'autonomous government.' They are a sneaky, accursed, and greedy people. If you had come from further east you would not have found it so easy to leave on your pilgrimage: they are so afraid of spies that you need permission just to step outside your own *ger*."

I knew from experience that Inner Mongolia was crawling with Outer Mongolian, Kuomintang and Communists agents, so I could see the point of our restricting movement. Yet the longer I was outside of Japanese controlled areas, the more I wondered what right we had to be there at all. "And of course while the foreigners get richer the Mongolians there get poorer," our patient continued. "All they care about is how much meat, wool and leather, how many horses they can squeeze out of us. As for their attitude toward the people: they would make slaves out of us just to get the things they needed for their armies."

As he spoke I had a sudden vision of something I had not thought of for a long time. When I was first on my way from Japan to Peking and crossed the border from Korea into Manchuria, a young Korean customs official asked me, as he opened my suitcase, who I was and where I was going. I replied proudly with all the arrogance of a teenager sure that he knows how to save the world, that I was on my way to help the Mongolian people in their struggle for independence. He had lived all his life under Japanese rule, and did not reply. He only stared at me with a look I could not comprehend, but which I could not forget either. Now, years later, I was beginning to understand.

But our visitor was not quite finished. "How such a stupid people can rule us I do not know. Yet I know that it will not be for long and that someday soon they are in for a terrible surprise. Many of our people wear Japanese uniforms and have been to Japan for training: but it will be these very people, wearing different uniforms, who will drive them into the sea." That night as I lay, unable to sleep, in my usual spot on the west side of the fire and listened to Tseren-tso's troubled breathing, I reviewed in my mind the past four years of my life: my studies, the stud farm, my plan to go west, and the trip itself. I could not keep from wondering if through it all I had done anything for anyone but myself.

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The next three months somehow passed, the sharpness of Tseren-tso's unhappiness being replaced by a dull acceptance, my own doubts becoming an unconscious part of me. When in March the caravan for Lhasa began to arrive from Sining in groups, I knew we had to join it. Only in movement away from this place of painful memories would Tseren-tso's heart be soothed; only in movement forward toward a new goal would I be able to regain some purpose in life. Though the Kazakhs still blocked our way to Sinkiang, Babu Noyen seemed to have grown fond of us. No more camels disappeared, and his son readily gave us permission to join the caravan.

And now our minds were taken up with the preparations for the four month trek through high, barren, uninhabited country where there would be no means of buying anything. We cut meat into thin strips, rolled them in flour, hung them on ropes to dry for days, and when they were dried cut them into smaller pieces and put them into bags. We rolled out kneaded flour, cut it into noodles, and when they dried cut them into shorter lengths and put them into other bags. Patiently we boiled a whole sheep in a pot until the meat and bones separated; then we threw away the bones and continued boiling the meat until it became a thick soup, and finally a paste which was put out into the sun to dry to a fine powder. This portable emergency food is so rich that a single spoonful a day is said to be enough to keep your energy up, although of course you may still feel hungry. Tea bricks were pounded into powder, so our tea would brew faster in high altitudes where the boiling point was low and fuel was scarce. We still had some matches, but also equipped ourselves with plenty of high quality moxa mixed with black powder, to be ignited with flint and steel.

During this time we had a guest, an Inner Mongolian doctor monk on his long way home from Lhasa. He was one of the best traditional doctors I met, with a vast knowledge of traditional herbs, demonstrating great skill in curing the sick of the neighbourhood. Since our disguised medicines were beginning to run low I thought it a good idea to learn as much from him as possible. But a doctor is in continual danger of contracting contagious diseases, and to one of these our friend succumbed while he was staying at our tent, becoming critically ill. Since Danzan was kept busy with ritual ceremonies, and Tseren-tso with milking and domestic duties, it became my chore to look after the sick doctor.

Before he was well enough to go out, but well enough to teach me all I could absorb, a woman came to the tent leading a horse, saying

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that her husband was suffering from a severe fit of hiccups. The doctor told me what to do and I went in his place. On the way, as I had been instructed, I cut several branches of a tree called *shara mot* ('yellow tree'). I knew that it could be boiled down and the infused water used as eye medicine, but now it would have a different use.

When we got to the woman's tent we found her husband—yet another monk—sitting by the fireplace, a coat flung over him and hiccupping violently with his face twisted in pain. He complained so much of aching stomach muscles that I first gave him a dose of stomach medicine. Then I thrust the *shara mot* into the hot ashes in the fireplace, and when the steam hissed out, bound the tips with cloth and pressed this against his throat. He managed to bear the pain of this draconian cure, and after I had changed the branches several times he actually stopped hiccupping, although he was left with a large burn blister on his throat. I was often amazed at how effective traditional medicine could be.

Unfortunately it did not have a cure for everything. On my way back I was caught in a downpour and got drenched—something that would have delighted Tseren-tso in better days—and by the time I had reached our tent I had chills and a high fever. I must have picked up whatever the doctor had and the next day my joints ached so badly that I could not get up. In spite of the lack of sanitation I had not been ill since arriving in Mongolia, but now I was to make up for it.

Mongolians allow the sick neither to eat meat, believing it will aggravate the fever, nor to sleep during the day, believing that evil spirits will make off with the soul. Thinking that I knew better, I completely disregarded such old wives' tales ... and got progressively worse. My condition was probably not improved by worrying: I knew that if the caravan left without us we were stuck in our unhappy valley for another year. For two weeks a burning fever tortured me day and night, and then my consciousness began to slip away.

Seven

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Bound tight, helpless and blind, I was being kicked and thrown about by some invisible demon. The movement stopped. The sun, directly above me, burned into my eyes, which I was somehow powerless to close. The searing yellow disk would not let me be: it tormented and fascinated me at the same time. I wanted to climb up to it, to become part of it, to fill my body as well as my eyes with the heat that could both give life and destroy

Again the demon attacked, binding me and throwing me about at will.

Soft grass and cool flowing water . . . I lay on the grass and let the water take my spirit with it, knowing this to be only a brief respite before the demon again had its way with me

Light and dark alternated. The bulging eyes, lolling tongues, and protruding fangs of those wrathful deities that had first frightened me so long ago floated before my eyes. They seemed to be calling me . . .

“Dawa Sangpo!”

The shouted name was familiar. Where had I heard it? Dawa Sangpo . . . Danzan . . . I opened my eyes and saw a familiar face from another world, long ago. “Dawa Sangpo, don’t you recognize me?” asked the voice again.

“Danzan?” I replied instinctively, only dimly connecting the name and the face. Wasn’t there someone else? A woman? A baby? No, we had fed the baby to the birds. The world drifted away from me, but the torture did not resume.

When next I opened my eyes my mind was clearer. I struggled into a sitting position and looked around, but though I was outside I could recognize nothing. We should have been near Babu Noyen’s camp in a narrow valley, but instead were on a grassy plain. Cattle, horses, yaks, sheep, mules, and camels were grazing as far as I could see, with hundreds of tents set up. In one direction was a wall of high mountains.

Next to where I lay I saw our old travelling tent, not the dilapidated *ger* I last remembered living in. It seemed to be late afternoon

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and Danzan and his wife were preparing dinner at an outdoor fire. Tseren-tso looked around, and when she saw I was awake quickly brought me a cup of strong, black tea. "Well," she said smiling, "you're sitting up. Soon you'll be standing erect!" She was her old self again.

"Where is this place?" I asked.

My confusion further amused her. It was good to hear her laughter. "Why this is the Banner of Baron, and all these tents and camels belong to the caravan." Tseren-tso never spoke in anything softer than a screech, but I could barely hear her.

"We're going to Lhasa?" I asked.

"We certainly are," said Danzan, who had also come to my side. "We had to tie you to a camel as part of the luggage to get you here." I thought of the demon throwing me around.

"How long have I been delirious?" was my next question.

"About two weeks. You had me worried a couple of times when Babu Noyen came with medicine and you started to rave at him."

"I don't remember any such thing," I said, confused.

He cupped his mouth to my ear although there was no one but his wife nearby. "I didn't think you would. You screamed at him that there was nothing wrong with you, and that you could start at any time. I was sure you would start talking in Japanese and give us away, but something kept you under control." Tseren-tso waddled happily back to the fire to tend the boiling meat.

"She seems to be back to normal," I observed.

"Fussing over you gave her something to think about besides the baby. I think she'll be all right now. She's excited about seeing Lhasa and worshipping at the Jokhang."

So it would definitely be Lhasa. Still weak, I lay back and closed my eyes. It was comforting to have had the decision taken away. In my heart I had known for months that it would be impossible to go west to Sinkiang, but had still clung to the idea that it was my duty. Now I was too weak to resist. And besides, I reasoned with myself, Lhasa was almost as good. From there I could go south into India, the heart of enemy territory.

"When do we leave?" I asked, feeling sleep again beginning to overtake me.

"Don't worry, you'll have at least ten days to regain your strength."

The next day I was able to get up for a short time, and every day after that found me stronger, though on the eve of the journey my feet were still unsteady and I kept tripping over small stones. My hearing

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went from bad to worse and people had to shout in my ear just to talk to me. It was months before I could hear normally.

But there was everything to recover for. The spring weather was glorious and did wonders for my health, as did the thought of setting out on the very trail that had brought Buddhism to Mongolia in the first place. Traditionally, learned holy men had come from Tibet bringing the teachings of the Buddha. Fierce Mongolian armies had gone in return to help the sects of these gentle teachers to power. It had happened in the twelfth century when a priest named Phagspa had converted Kublai Khan who in turn had set up Phagspa's Sakya sect in firm control of Tibet. It had happened again in the sixteenth century when Buddhism had declined among the Mongolians, and the leader of the newly founded reformed Gelugpa came to spearhead a revival. This was the Third Dalai Lama who received his title at this time, and one of his accomplishments was to found the monastery we had visited at Kumbum. About sixty years later in 1642 another great army was sent southwest to cement the power of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and ever since the Gelupa, or the 'Yellow Sect' has been dominant.

Our caravan could not have been much different in outward appearance from the ones of those distant days. It was by far the largest I had ever seen, containing about a thousand people and more than two hundred tents. Sheer size was a deterrent to open attacks by bandits, so the more people there were the happier everyone was. The caravan's core was made up of merchants from the Chinghai Government on official business: purchasing arms in Lhasa or even from Assam for Ma Pu-fang's under-supplied army. But far more important to the Mongolians and Tibetans in the caravan was the large contingent from Kumbum which was centered spiritually about the person of Takster Rimpoché. This young man was not only the abbot of Takster Labrang—an important monastery at Kumbum—but elder brother of the Dalai Lama, who himself had taken this road to his new home only a few years ago at the age of four. We only saw this lama from a distance, dignified and impressive, mounted on a fine horse with many attendants and a bodyguard of warrior monks. There was also a large trading contingent from Kumbum. In smaller and less organized groups were petty merchants and merchant pilgrims, although unlike Tibetans few Mongolians will mix business with pilgrimage. Finally there were the simple pilgrims like us.

One of the last things we did before leaving was to purchase a couple of sheep as a larder of fresh meat on the hoof. The Tsaidam

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Mongolians raised sheep specially for this purpose, and the caravan would drive a large sized flock. It was as we were purchasing our sheep that we ran into some monks newly arrived from Inner Mongolia who were joking over the prices.

"This is more like it," I heard one say. "Six silver pieces is a fair price. Back home you wouldn't even get the tail for that."

"What are you talking about?" asked Danzan, recognizing the man's accent. "When we left you could get a good sheep for five."

"That must have been some time ago," replied the monk jovially. "Now they are fifty at the very least and going up every day. Not only that, but those fifty silver pieces are now worth a thousand yuan in paper money."

"When did all this happen?" asked Danzan. We had had no news from home for more than a year.

"Oh, in the last six months. It's the war of course. Ever since our benevolent overlords, the Japanese, began to panic everything has been all turned around."

"But what reason have they to panic?"

"You are out of touch, aren't you? They're losing the war, falling back everywhere. Of course they do not admit anything, but everyone knows. You might remember that their last major outpost used to be out west at Kangai Nuuji near Ninghsia. Now they've pulled back all the way to Baatu Haalga."

I tried to convince myself that my impaired hearing was causing me to misunderstand. Baatu Haalga was half way back to West Sunit. When we had started our trip, except for a minor reverse on some island called Guadalcanal, it had been our enemies who were in full scale retreat. It was impossible, I told myself: the Emperor's Army would never run away.

It was May, 1945.

* * *

On the 18th, like a long snake uncoiling, the caravan finally went into action. The year's supply of liquor, soy sauce, vinegar, raisins, silver coins and silver ingots was on its way to Lhasa on mule, yak and camel back. But most important were the horses and riding mules going under their own power. The best, called *joro*, are bred and trained not in Tibet, but in the Tsaidam, and are noted for their comfortable ambling gait, the legs on each side moving together so that the rider is not

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bounced up and down. Some are born with this gait, but most are trained to it by having their lateral legs shackled. Lhasa noblemen, the rich, and high lamas usually owned several head of these prized riding animals.

Only as we were leaving did I have the presence of mind to regret that we had bought no merchandise for trade. We were in poor shape financially, with little to our names besides our six remaining camels, the broken down old horse that Danzan had bought when I was ill, and a faithful dog that had somehow joined us. But I was the only one who worried. Danzan was, as always, willing to let tomorrow take care of itself, and Tseren-tso was content to follow him.

But financial worries aside, the thought of being on the road again and finally getting somewhere was exhilarating. Now that our fate was decided I could allow myself some enthusiasm over the prospect of Lhasa, and again two viewpoints contended within me. The Mongolian part of me looked forward to worshiping at Asia's holiest temples, while the Japanese in me felt the excitement of being an explorer following in exalted footsteps. I knew I would by no means be the first Japanese to go to Lhasa: what I could not know was that I would be the last to experience the old Lhasa before the arrival of the Chinese Communists.

Back on the farm, on long winter nights when all the work had been done, the books of travelling Japanese monks like Ekai Kawaguchi, Enga Teramoto, and Bunkyo Aoki had often been my companions. The first to reach the holy city, coming from the opposite direction forty-five years before, had been a visionary named Ekai Kawaguchi: a determined, single-minded, brave and brilliant, but at the same time thoroughly confused and bigoted Zen monk. He displayed to perfection—in spite of speaking flawless Tibetan—the notorious Japanese fault of not being able to see the forest for the trees. His vow of celibacy was to cause him no end of difficulties among this free and easy people, and his outspokenness over what he disliked about the country and its religion were to detract from his later reputation.

On his heels, and following our caravan route from Tsaidam, came Teramoto Enga. He was already well-acquainted with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama: he had met him during his Mongolian exile in 1905 as he took refuge from the British invasion led by Colonel Francis Younghusband, and was later to become one of his trusted advisors. Although an ordained monk, Teramoto kept his thoughts far more on worldly and political matters than spiritual ones and bent his efforts

towards establishing relations between Japan and Tibet—to the advantage of Japan. Partially as a result of his efforts, a flamboyant soldier of fortune named Yasujiro Yajima wound up training part of the Tibetan army. Yajima matched Kawaguchi for non-conformity, but was very different in every other respect. With his shoulder-length hair and handle bar moustache he had begun his travels toting a sign on his back declaring that he was the “Head of the World Travelling Society (Without Finances)”, and eventually he became the first Japanese to marry a Tibetan.

At one point in 1914, there had been four Japanese in Lhasa: Kawaguchi on a return visit, Yajima, and two other monks named Aoki Bunkyo and Tada Tokan. Aoki, who was in Tibet from 1912 to 1916, was in a sense a successor to Teramoto. He insinuated himself into the court of the Dalai Lama, and is reputed to have had a hand in the design of the Tibetan flag. But again, the hoped-for relations between the two countries did not come about, possibly because the Tibetan leader realized that both Teramoto and Aoki were Japanese first and Buddhists second. Tada on the other hand was simply a devoted scholar and spent the years from 1913 to 1923 immersed in Buddhist studies at Sera*. I had heard that both Aoki and Tada were now cooperating with the Japanese military to formulate a Tibetan Policy: the former willingly, the latter under some duress. I felt humbled to be travelling in the footsteps of such men, and on the very first day I wondered if I would in fact prove myself worthy; for at once, and before I was fully recovered, we faced one of our most formidable obstacles. This was a pass of more than fifteen thousand feet called the Borhan Bootai, ‘The Mountain Guarded by the Enlightened One.’ We began to climb well before dawn, and not long after it was light I had to get off for a painful walk since my weight was too much for the camel in the thin atmosphere. Near the top he began frothing at the mouth and emitting dry, gurgling sounds from his throat, and finally refused to climb another step. Other camels were having the same difficulties, and the more experienced travellers were picking up dried cow dung, sandwiching it

* Years later, Professor Tada was to tell me that when he married in Japan he returned his monk’s robes and a copy of his vows to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, apologising for breaking them. In turn, the Dalai Lama sent a fine Tibetan lady’s dress with a colourful apron, telling the former monk to fulfil the task of “practicing Buddhism while living at home.”

between stones, lighting it, and holding it so that the smoke would go up the camel's nostrils. For some reason this worked, and doing the same I managed to get my beast started again, climbing and resting alternately until we reached the top.

From there, weak with exertion and the altitude, I gazed out at the forbidding road to Lhasa, through a broken high plateau with many more ranges to cross. But I had just enough energy to be thrilled by the sight of a spectacular chain of snow-capped peaks to the southeast which I knew to be the Amne Machin Range. The highest mountain of this range, Minya Konka, was still thought to be higher than Everest. (In fact it was only the remoteness of the region and the lack of surveying ability on the part of the eccentric American naturalist Dr. Joseph Rock that allowed the legend to persist; the mountain was eventually measured at 24,982 feet.)

It was still early when we completed the descent, far shorter than the climb, for we had now well and truly ascended to the Tibetan Plateau. Thankful for the successful crossing, the caravan leaders called an early halt by a river, for which I was more than grateful. Even so we were beset with difficulties that evening. Carrying our noodles from the fire I was overcome with a dizzy spell—a remnant of my lingering illness—lost my grip and spilled the entire pot. Not long afterwards the river, a mere trickle when we arrived, began to rise so rapidly that we got wet feet moving our tent. Evidently, it had rained far upriver. We went to bed cold and grumpy, and hungry enough to be tempted to eat the meat we were saving for breakfast. Later that night some of the horses belonging to the government merchants were stolen by either Tanguts or Goloks, the Tibetan tribesmen who lived in this sparsely populated plain. These people regard passing caravans as a rightful crop to harvest, and are so skilful that there is seldom any need for them to resort to violence.

Now that we were across the first pass we began to slip into the daily routine that would be ours for the next four months, and I was grateful for the early practice Danzan had given me in travelling by the *Khalkha* system. About 2 a.m. we would be awakened by the shouts of the yak drivers, followed by the clanging of the big yak bells. The yaks set the pace of the caravan. Though slow, they are strong and dependable, and are the most important of the pack animals. We always tried to be on the trail within an hour of the passing yaks, which meant that there was seldom time for a fire and hot breakfast. But we knew from our own experience and from watching others that there is nothing like

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an empty stomach on a long journey for causing irritability, so we always made sure to prepare enough the night before for a breakfast in the saddle.

Even though it was summer by then, we were so high up that the tent crackled with frost when we rolled it up. Later in the day, if it was sunny it might get very hot, and often we experienced four seasons in a single day. But it would still be very cold when just after sunrise we began to hear the cheerful chiming of mule bells, and hundreds of mules decorated with bright head-dresses would begin to trot past us. The lead mules were well trained, and skillfully led the others while horsemen encouraged them from behind. Mules could carry only relatively light loads, yet they formed by far the fastest contingent of the caravan; although they were the last to start out they were always the first to arrive around noon at the camping spot which the scouts had gone ahead to pick out. We on the camels would be overtaking the yaks all morning and would be the next to arrive.

As our trip wore on I could not help but notice that our camels were a mixed blessing. Their principle advantages were that we were familiar with them and that Tibetans disliked them, believing that contact with their cud caused leprosy. This meant that we were safe from bandits, could go at our own pace, and could rest securely at night without posting a guard. No Golok or Tangut tribesman would bother to attack us, because we had nothing they wanted. The rest of the caravan was always tense. But this could work both ways. There were few camels in the caravan, and those of us who had them were looked down on. The value of our camels decreased the further south we went. As far as Tsaidam they had represented wealth, but in Lhasa we would be able to sell them for next to nothing, and they were all we had left. Sometimes I wished we had sold them in the Tsaidam and bought some decent horses, even though someone would have had to sit up all night guarding them.

Fuel would be a constant problem on the trip with so many people competing for the dried dung, so that when we came to a place with an abundance of low shrubs we stopped for a day to make charcoal. It was not very good charcoal: we simply got the wood burning, threw water over it, and packed it in bags. Still, these charcoal cinders came in handy for cooking as long as they lasted.

Only a few days into the trek, on 22nd May, we were given a reminder of the harsh nature of the land we were traversing when we saw by the roadside the corpse of a man wearing black quilted Chinese

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clothing. His eyes were hollow, his complexion a deadly bluish black, and his hair and nails were quite long. He had probably been a miner at the gold mine operated by the Chinghai Government at a place two or three days away called Shugu. Many Chinese were lured there by promises of fast, easy money, only to find themselves in conditions approaching slave labour. The desertion rate was high, but with the nearest Mongolian settlement a week's walk away most of the deserters either died of starvation or were captured by mounted guards from the mine. On the assumption that the delinquents were in possession of stolen gold, the guards were in the habit of killing them first and asking questions later. A young man in the caravan turned the stiff corpse over trying to see if there was any gold on it.

Death next visited our caravan—almost foreseeably—at the summit of the Chomchin Pass, or the 'Pass of Mountain Sickness' on the 30th of May. Experienced travellers said that the pass always claimed a victim or two, even though it was by no means the highest on the way. As we entered the gorge leading up I smelled something like rotten eggs, and thought that there might be some poisonous gas seeping from the ground. Certainly there was no vegetation around, and the caravan men said it was best to cross on a windy day. Sure enough, as we approached the pass we saw several people gathered around a young yak driver who had been overcome. His complexion was an ugly dark blue. A doctor monk was treating him by drawing blood from his hands and forehead. He was carried on horseback down to the campsite but died later in the day.

Another two weeks of uneventful high altitude travel brought us to the notorious Dri Chu or 'River of Lost Souls.' Since the Dri Chu claims a number of victims each year from among those who try to cross it, Mongolians and Tibetans believe that the lost souls of those swallowed up annually invite new friends to join them. The caravan came to the river at a spot called 'The Panchen Lama's Crossing Point.' Though the Dri Chu is not wide at this point, it is not a good summer crossing when the river is swollen from melting snow in the mountains, so the entire caravan moved upstream to look for a better spot.

Danzan and I were beginning to worry about the rate our provisions were running out, and I motioned him to pretend that a load had slipped from one of our camels so that we could stay behind. "It might be days until the caravan can cross," I told him when no one was in earshot. "Why don't we wait until everyone is out of sight and see if we can cross here?"

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"It looks awfully dangerous," said Danzan, surveying the dark, muddy current.

"No worse than going hungry," I replied. "Besides, I can swim." Neither replied, but simply stood there with their mouths open. Swimming is virtually unknown in Mongolia.

"Suppose we do get to the other side—we'll be on our own," observed Danzan after some thought.

"We're safe enough—we're poor pilgrims with camels that the tribesmen are afraid to get near. We can do forced marches and get to Lhasa much faster." By this time the last of the yaks had disappeared, so I quickly stripped off and waded into the flow at what looked the most promising point. The water was so cold it took my breath away and I quickly discovered that the current was both swifter and deeper than it appeared. Before I could turn around, I was swept off my feet. When my head came up I could hear Tseren-tso scream and saw that our worried dog had jumped in after me. I smiled and waved, but soon found I was being over-confident. I had never swum at high altitude before, and my breath was coming dangerously short as I saw the shore speed by. Then the cold made my legs cramp, so that they were useless, and although I did what I could with my arms I was sure that I was about to become this year's first lost soul when my knees struck the bottom.

Tseren-tso and Danzan had run down the river with me as I was swept along and helped to drag me to the shore. The dog shook himself off and sat down protectively beside me. I was trembling with cold, and had no breath to speak. Tseren-tso, however, had plenty of breath as she berated me for my foolishness, trying to show off and nearly drowning after narrowly recovering from my illness. It was galling not to be able to reply as Danzan, more practicaly than his ranting wife, dried me and wrapped me up in my fur-lined robe. I was still chafing under my embarrassment hours later when we reached the camping spot. Seldom has hot tea been so welcomed.

Here the river was much wider, about a thousand yards across, with a number of shoals and islands in the middle, but the channels were still too deep. The water was so turbid that it was not usable until the mud had been allowed to settle out, and this added a sinister and frightening aspect to the current. We had already made one dangerous crossing of a river this width where, though the water hardly touched the bellies of the horses there had been many near accidents as our mounts lost their footing.

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Here we waited on the bank for six days watching helplessly both as our provisions went down and as the caravan contributed its first lost soul. The soul belonged to an Inner Mongolian yak driver whose fifty animals had strayed out to an island boasting tasty grass. He had stripped down and gone after them, but the swift current had swallowed him up almost immediately. A young Tangut tribesman—they hired themselves as guides when not plundering the caravans—while trying to find a crossing almost met the same fate when his horse was swept from under him. Though unable to swim, he clung to the horse's tail and soon climbed laughing to the shore.

But while most of the caravan was happy to sit and rest, I was ever more alarmed at the state of our food supply and was determined to shorten our stay if possible. A little observation taught me that the river was at its lowest in the morning, but would rise in the afternoon and evening as the sun melted the snow on the mountains, so I decided to see how far I could get on Danzan's old horse at low water.

Two Tanguts and two Mongolians followed me, not—as I thought at the time—to save me in case of a mishap, but to mark my path were I successful. As far as the third and last island the water never reached the horse's belly, but the final strip of water was the widest, and also the deepest. I was not far when it became obvious that the horse would soon lose its footing and have to swim. Remembering my experience downstream I turned back while there was still time, but I was convinced a camel could make it.

I hurried back, packed my camel, and succeeded in returning to the third island. But the water had risen surprisingly in the interval, and since there was good grass on the island I decided to camp there rather than admit defeat, and try again at low water in the morning. The rest of the caravan thought I was crazy and gestured for me to come back: a sudden rain could cause the current to sweep over the island, taking me with it. But since it did not rain I was able to finish the crossing in no time the next morning. I then rather smugly made breakfast on the other side while taunting the others with some gestures of my own.

There was now a headlong rush to get all the men and animals across before the water rose. It was quite a sight: more than a thousand people and several thousand fully loaded beasts hurrying noisily across the river, the men—tough, swarthy soldier monks, muleteers and yak-men—their eyes wide with fear and apprehension since they were unable to swim, clutching their prayer beads and chanting. But they need not have feared. The only mishaps were the occasional yak or

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mule swept off their feet, but they just calmly rolled over and swam to shore.

By the time all were across I had finished my breakfast and repacked my camel, and now joined by my companions was ready to continue on. Later in the day we passed a black yak hair tent. A rather grubby Tibetan minor official wearing a black chuba and with an earring of turquoise and coral in his left ear, tumbled out of the tent followed by a number of local hor tribesmen. These were dressed much like the Tanguts and Goloks, but even the men among them braided their hair into one hundred and eight strands. The official addressed us in the name of the Tibetan government and collected some small tolls from the merchants, while we pilgrims were allowed to pass freely. We had been passing through ethnically Tibetan regions since Tsaidam, but the Dri Chu seemed to mark the present political boundary between Tibet and Chinghai.

* * *

On crossing the Tang La—despite an easy and gradual ascent, the highest pass of the journey at about 18,000 feet—the experienced travellers said the worst was now over. That was some comfort since the wear and tear of the journey was now terribly evident on the beasts, and more and more had to be abandoned along the way. The Buddhist stricture against killing took what struck me as a rather cruel turn here, as weak or disabled animals were not dispatched swiftly, but left to birds of prey, which often began their work while the animals were still alive. Dying yaks even had to suffer the indignity of losing their tails, which would fetch a good price in India or Lhasa. They might have met a more merciful end had their meat been worth killing them for, but there was a constant supply of fresh meat from the game hunted by the laymen of the caravan. It was all very illogical. On the other hand, the abandoned animals did have a slight chance of survival since the Goloks, who scavenged as well as stole, would pick up the ones with enough strength left in them and nurse them back to health. Horses with injured legs were also abandoned, but mules were so tough that they were hardly ever left behind. The skulls and bones of these animals were often our only road markers.

Our camels suffered accordingly and one had to be left along the way, though it hurt me to do it. A steady diet of a tough grass called *boho sharaga*, the only grass growing along two thirds of the trail, had

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worn down their teeth to where they appeared much older than they really were, lowering their value still further.

By the time we reached Nakchuka, the administrative center for this part of Tibet, it seemed as if we were back into civilization. Nakchu Gompa had a community of about five hundred monks, and there was a small town here with two district chiefs or *dzongpön*: one layman and one monk. This was my first look at this typically Tibetan system of government where lay and ecclesiastic officials shared the duties—and kept an eye on one another. The lay official wore his hair in an elaborate topknot, was dressed in Chinese silk, and sported the long earring of the nobility in his left ear. With their assistants these two were going around busily taxing everyone in the caravan. The bonfire tax, our price for camping here, was only the beginning, and the caravan leaders seemed quite prepared to sit down and haggle with the officials for months if necessary. After a week of this venerable tradition we realized that if we stayed much longer we would be faced with imminent starvation, so Danzan went to the officials and asked for permission to continue on our pilgrimage. He was matter-of-factly informed that as long as we were not merchants we could get a travel permit as soon as we applied for one: all we had to do was to pay a small tax for our camels and horse.

Feeling a bit foolish for not having applied before, we left almost immediately. It felt good, after more than three months, to be on our own, free of the caravan and able to pick our own camping spots. Though still high up by the standards of most of the world (and well above the height of Mt. Fuji) we were now descending from the grim heights where we had been. It turned warmer, low green shrubs began to dot the mountain sides, and for the first time since we left the Tsaidam that we began to see signs of the land being tilled.

* * *

Finally, on August 30th, four and a half months after climbing out of the Tsaidam Basin, there was a real change in the country as we descended into a wide valley gold with ripening barley and surrounded by blue mountains. The long tender grass growing along the river—the upper reaches of the Kyi chu that flows by Lhasa sixty miles to the south—reminded us of the lush grasslands of Mongolia, and our weary camels enjoyed a feast. Farmers were busily harvesting barley and little donkeys were almost invisible under loads of chillis.

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"Well, we've made it," said Danzan looking around at the lush scene. "Do you know where we are?"

I tried to bring a map into my head. "We should be somewhere around Reting Gompa," I ventured.

"That's right. It's just out of sight to the east, about an hour's walk." It was the abbot of this monastery who had been chosen as regent—the most powerful position in the government—while the Dalai Lama was a child, and he had served in that capacity until four years before. "We really should worship at the temple as long as we're this close," he continued. "But let's camp here tonight and let the camels enjoy their feast. They've served us well."

"Wasn't Reting Rimpoché still regent when you were in Lhasa?" I asked him as we unloaded.

"He was at first, but resigned while I was there. His administration was a scandal, but everyone was frightened of him because of his magical powers. Friends told me that rumour around the *chang* shops was that he had been chosen largely for his age: he was supposed to have been too young and inexperienced to have posed any threat to the established strongmen. It's always that way during the childhood of a Dalai Lama, just one long scramble for power." Like most Mongolians and Tibetans, Danzan had no difficulty in combining such worldly cynicism with an unshakeable faith.

"Why did he resign?" I asked as we aligned our tent as always with the entrance facing south.

"There were two rumours. One was that he was pro-Chinese, and that goes badly against the instincts of most Tibetans. The other was that his government ran on nothing but bribery, and that those who couldn't pay enough couldn't get anything done. It probably came down to the Chinese worming their way into influence by paying him more than anyone else. In the end it seems that the State Oracle at Nechung predicted that his life would be short if he did not devote himself to prayer and meditation. This was enough to frighten even him. No one defies the State Oracle. He resigned, but there was supposed to have been an agreement that he would return to power when his retreat was over."

"It's been a long retreat," I remarked. Danzan only smiled in reply.

In the afternoon, as our tea was brewing, servant monks began pitching festive tents about twenty yards east of where we were camped. These are very different from the black yak hair tents of the nomads and are more like marquees: white with appliqué designs in dark blue,

and a fringe of red, yellow and blue cloth hanging from the roof. Judging from the carpets and furniture going inside it would be more like a travelling palace than a camp. Soon, some of the cleanest and neatest monks I had seen in a long time, with freshly shaven pates and spotless robes, began arriving on fine horses. When several of them strolled over to our old tent, so pathetic in comparison with theirs, Danzan exercised his rusty Tibetan to find out who they were.

"We're in luck," he said to me when they had gone. "No need to go to the Gompa—Reting Rimpoché has come to us. He is here on a picnic, and it is a wonderful opportunity." I agreed, but for different reasons. Danzan and Tseren-tso simply wanted his blessing, for no matter how worldly he might be he was still an incarnate Bodhisattva. For my part I was curious to meet a man said to be at once so holy and so corrupt.

A decent interval after the Rimpoché's arrival we went to the tent and begged for an audience. When we were allowed in we prostrated ourselves before him as was proper, receiving the one-handed blessing in return, except for Tseren-tso whose head was touched with a tassled stick. This was by far the most important lama I had ever met and I was impatient for the blessing to be over so I could observe him properly. He was obviously a man of culture and refinement lavishly clothed in purplish red Chinese silk. Unlike the Tibetan caravan men and nomads I had met so far he had spent little time in the sun and wind, and his complexion was so fair that he could have passed for Japanese, while I was now sunburned and weather-beaten. Still well below middle age, he had a high forehead, a pointed chin, and a moustache much like that sported by the previous Dalai Lama. His manner was the most striking thing about him, and he greeted us in our own language, inviting us to seats nearby. When I attempted to sit there, however, I was immediately stopped by a Mongolian-speaking attendant who told me I was much too close.

In fact the Rimpoché spoke only a few words of Mongolian but by using them in the way he had he made us all feel at ease. He had an appealing way about him as again and again he jokingly suggested that I should join his monastery and become his disciple. I noticed that many of his attendants were handsome young boys and declined as politely as I could. I could certainly not have foretold that his violent death two years later would very nearly be the occasion for my own.

Yet I did see one way in which we could be of service to one another. Our camels had long since become a burden, and after

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checking with Danzan I asked the Rimpoché to buy them. They were obviously happy here in this grassy valley, an ideal place for them to recover from the high trek, and they could be resold next year in better condition to Mongolians going home from Lhasa.

Through the interpreter we offered our terms. Our oldest camel we would present as a gift, while for the remaining four we wanted only a low price plus transport for ourselves to Lhasa, now just four days away. An agreement was quickly reached. We would be taken to Lhasa by *ula*, the traditional corvée system which had originated in Mongolia whereby horses or yaks could be requisitioned from the public by travelling officials. Originally a sensible system for ensuring smooth government communications in a land of sparse population, *ula* had been so abused that it often caused severe hardship to the people, and was thus an easy target for the Chinese Communists. The system we used was a variant: we could only take animals from the Reting estates, where some were always kept just for that purpose. This meant that instead of going directly to Lhasa we had to follow a zig zag route to hit the correct villages.

From now on the trip would be easy, and we started the next morning. With a Tibetan servant supplied to do all the packing, look after the animals, and even to pitch and strike our tent, our only worry was staying on the yaks; though for someone accustomed to camels this could be enough of a task. Not only were there no reins to control them with, but they are uncomfortable to ride because of their slippery backs. Yaks love water, and at the slightest opportunity will jump into a stream, rider and all. Then as likely as not I would hear a loud “thwang” as a stone projected from a sling whacked the horns. My yak would then lurch wildly for the shore and I would be holding on for all I was worth. On the caravan I had learned that these slings are deadly accurate in the hands of a Golok or Tangut tribesman, who would often boast that they could kill an animal—or a man—at sixty paces. I could only hope that our servant-monk from Reting was as skillful.

But it was not without dread that I approached the holy city. This dread came from the odd rumours we had been hearing from travellers going the other way. Most of them had little interest in what occurred outside Tibet so they only half understood what they were saying about great events in the world beyond, and about an end to the war.

Finally, we reached the Go La, the pass that would give us our first view of the holy city. I had not seen a city, or even a really large monastery since Sining and Kumbum more than a year and a half

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before and I think the sight of any urban center would have been impressive. But this was not just any city, this was the holy enclave that the pilgrims had spoken of with awe for the last four months. We burned incense at the cairn on the pass, and when we turned around there was the holy city before us in the distance. My worries momentarily melted away at the sight of the regularly laid out streets and the golden roofs of its temples glittering in the sunlight. It was one of those moments when I could not tell if I was more Mongolian or Japanese. I unconsciously fingered my beads and chanted a mantra in a Mongolian reaction while inside I could not help but feel proud to have arrived at the city that had been the objective of so many explorers in the past.

But as we descended, a blatant reminder of the twentieth century filled me again with misgivings. This was a small hydro-electric powerhouse built at the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that now stood abandoned and in ruins, with broken windows and all machinery carried off. To me it was a worrying reminder of what might well now be the fate of my own country's proud industrial base. We camped at the foot of the mountains near the exit of the gorge, sleeping fitfully in our excitement.

Eight

Spy without a Country

Our arrival in Lhasa could hardly have been termed auspicious. Although the servant monk who had been sent with us was friendly enough for most of the trip, as we approached the capital he seemed to get more and more withdrawn and nervous. Since the three of us were a bit euphoric and high-spirited at the sight of the Dalai Lama's great Potala Palace soaring above the far side of the city, we did not really notice the state he had worked himself into until it was too late.

Not knowing where to stay, we off-handedly asked the man to find us an inn. Instead he led us to the southeast corner of the city, a place called Wobaling, inhabited mostly by Muslims of Chinese origin. Many of these made their livings by selling meat or milling flour, and some of the walls here were made of mud and the horns of the slaughtered animals, giving the whole area a gloomy and depressing air. We were taken to one of the better houses near a large mosque where the man from Reting quickly unloaded our belongings then left with the yaks, but without a word of introduction to the master of the house. The glass windows of the house and the potted plants on the window sills were welcome sights, though I felt a bit foolish standing in the yard without an invitation.

What does one do surrounded by all one's worldly possessions in the yard of a strange house in a strange city? Being Mongolian pilgrim nomads we did what came most naturally: we made tea, then started to cook our daily meat and noodles. Just as we had begun sipping our tea a figure in a black Chinese gown tied with a green sash appeared from the house. He wore a white Muslim cap and those thick crystal spectacles that both the Tibetans and Mongolians believe protect the eyes from fatigue. He was obviously a man of some wealth, a merchant rather than a butcher, and he was irate at finding three dirty Mongolians and a dog having dinner in his yard. After he had shouted angrily at us in Tibetan for awhile, Danzan finally figured out that he wanted us and our belongings off his property by sundown. We finished our

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meal and set off with our dog, carrying what we could and promising that we would be back as soon as possible for the rest.

"Why would he just leave us in a place like that?" I asked Danzan as we trudged along the narrow, twisting back lanes of Lhasa.

"Well," Danzan replied thoughtfully, carefully stepping around a hole that appeared to be the local public toilet, "Reting Rimpoché was supposed to have been pro-Chinese as well as corrupt, and he left the capital in disgrace. I suppose he and his followers are not really welcome in Lhasa, and may only feel comfortable in the Chinese quarter."

"The servant did seem to get more nervous and less friendly the closer we came to Lhasa, didn't he?"

"Ah well, what's done is done," continued Danzan, dropping the subject. He turned to his wife. "We're almost to the Barkhor and the Jokhang," he announced. She was turning her head in every direction, gazing in rapt wonder and the solid two and three-storey houses which she felt simply had to be imbued with sanctity since they were part of the holy city. Suddenly we emerged on a wide and busy street by a building painted in deep yellow.

"The Barkhor," announced Danzan, proud of having been here before, "the street that runs right around the most sacred temple in Tibet." The first thing I noticed was that this broad promenade was crowded with people and that they were all walking in the same direction. Mongolia and Tibet are full of holy circuits that are always followed in a clockwise direction. This one, encircling the Jokhang, which houses the image of the Buddha brought by the same Chinese Princess who wept way back on the Nima Dawa Pass between Kumbum and Kokonor, was one of the holiest of all. But though the Barkhor encircles a sacred spot, it is commerce that lines both sides of the street. There are two large squares, on the northeast and southwest corners, but for the most part there is the feeling of walking through a pleasant valley, for the whitewashed buildings with their black-trimmed windows that line the way are three or four stories high. The ground floor of every building is a shop, and encroaching on the path are street vendors with their wares laid out on rugs.

After the past year and a half in the wilds I was overwhelmed to find myself surrounded by such a wealth of merchandise. There were hardware stores, milliners, the shops of gold and silversmiths, others selling household needs, and not a few specializing in religious items. The street merchants offered mostly a dazzling array of goods imported

from India: cotton and woollen textiles, blankets, shoes, hats, soap (this a real novelty), matches, dyes, cups, mirrors, sunglasses, cigarettes, white and brown sugar and ivory bracelets. It was difficult for one accustomed to the simplicity of nomadic and caravan life to believe that such a variety of commodities could all have their uses. But most surprising was the quantity of American, British, and even Japanese military equipment openly for sale. I saw pistols, machine guns, grenades, and ammunition; all sorts of light weapons. No wonder the Chinghai Government was sending its merchants all the way here.

But far more interesting than the goods for sale were the people in the crowd. There were, of course, countless monks swathed in their dark red robes, and ladies purposely made up to look ugly—their cheeks stained with brown dye or painted with pock marks—so as not to tempt these monks from their virtuous path to enlightenment. But I also noticed some strikingly beautiful women, fair of face with their hair in one or two braids, or elaborately dressed in a wooden frame high above their heads and walking softly because of its weight, their silk dresses almost invisible under their silver necklaces embossed with pink coral and turquoise. A nobleman, decked out in gold-embroidered finery, his long hair in a double topknot fixed by a jewel in the center, sitting proud and straight on his horse and followed by mounted servants, heedlessly brushed past a ragged monk begging for alms. Muslims from Kashmir were conspicuous with their black beards, hooked noses, and red Turkish hats; while Nepalese merchants wore tight white trousers and brimless caps tipped jauntily to one side. Pilgrims with calloused foreheads wearing clog-like hand covers measured their lengths again and again around the temple, wearing the dust of the Barkhor like a badge of honour. I found the country people and nomads, with their mouths hanging open gazing stupidly at everything particularly amusing—until I realized that we looked exactly like them, our own expressions no more intelligent than that of our poor confused dog.

Caught up in the continuous drama of Lhasa's main street it was easy to forget that we were supposed to be looking for a place to stay, and I have no idea how long we would have continued to wander aimlessly gaping had not a tall monk with a goiter approached Danzan and greeted him like an old friend. He turned out to be someone he had known years before in eastern Mongolia. Such chance meetings are common in Lhasa, as Buddhists from all over Tibet and Mongolia continually converge on this town of only 40,000, and it would be difficult to avoid meeting old friends.

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Danzan told him we were looking for a place to stay, and he immediately offered to put us up, calling two young monks to relieve us of what luggage we had with us, and leering unpleasantly at me. We were guided to a large dwelling near the Chinese Mission on the southwest corner of the Barkhor, built in a U-shape around a courtyard with a well in the center. The two boys went to fetch the rest of our luggage from the unwelcoming Chinese merchant.

The three-storeyed house, we were told, belonged to a section of the Drepung monastery: the great university to which I was supposed to be going to study. Entry to the monasteries of Sera and Drepung, their colleges and their dormitories, was very strictly regulated according to birth place. Should one enter the wrong monastery, or even the wrong dormitory, by mistake, the case would be seriously argued between the two great monasteries. There would be no chance of anonymity, I suddenly realized. Since I claimed to be from the Banner of East Sunit, I would have no choice but to enter a particular dormitory of Drepung: and there would be people there who either knew me, or who could ask embarrassing questions about my background. When I undertook my mission, I had never thought it would come to this.

Danzan's friend had two rooms on the second floor and offered us one of them. The way he kept looking at me made me wonder what he expected in return. As we were settling in a caretaker monk from Drepung brought us some fried buns in a bamboo basket, and we left a donation for the monastery in the basket. It had been a long and unusual day and we retired early, but that night Lhasa lost much of its charm for me as I was kept awake by an army of bedbugs. Later I was to discover that these little creatures are to be found in virtually every bed in Lhasa, including those of the nobility, so that most Lhasans are immune to their bites. I went out on the roof and slept under the familiar stars.

The next day as I again strolled along the Barkhor, I noticed a man with the weather-beaten face and sturdy build of a caravan man staring at me. He had a blanket spread out and was selling harnesses, saddles, and sheepskins. He looked familiar, but since I did not want to meet him unprepared I quickly continued on my way and did another circuit: as long as you keep moving on the Barkhor you will come back to the same spot in about twenty minutes. It wasn't long before I'd connected his face with a name: Baarin Jimba, an Inner Mongolian monk who had often visited the Zarin Sume farm, and therefore knew exactly who I was. His hair was growing now and he was wearing a plain Tibetan



Hisao Kimura (right) on his arrival at Huhehota in Inner Mongolia, aged seventeen in 1940, with his language teacher (center) and servant.



Kimura (2nd from right) with fellow Japanese 'Good Neighbour Association' classmates on completion of their training. (Nagasaka 2nd from left).



Kimura (left) with Prince Khorjirjap (2nd from left) and Japanese visitors, not long after his conscription test in 1942.



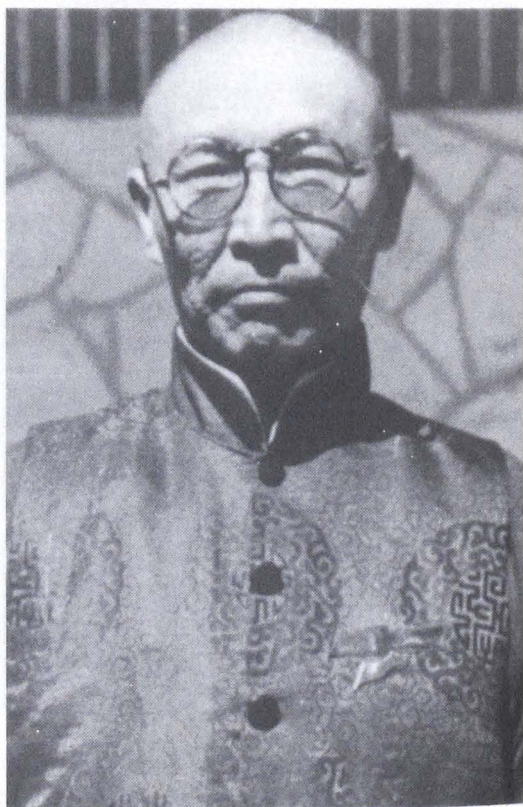
Kimura (right) with a fellow student and friends.



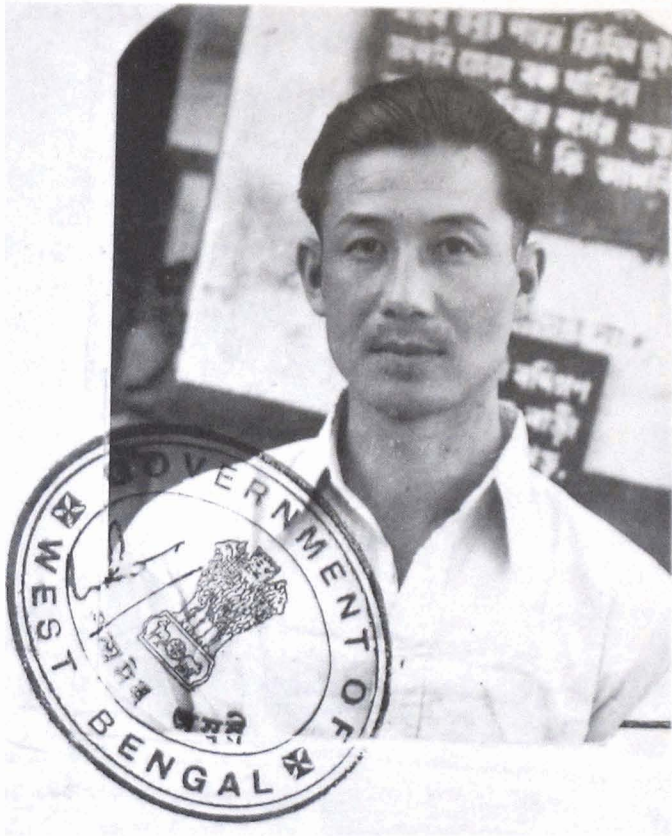
Kimura (center) with Danzan and Tserentso in Kalgan,
September 1943 before setting off.



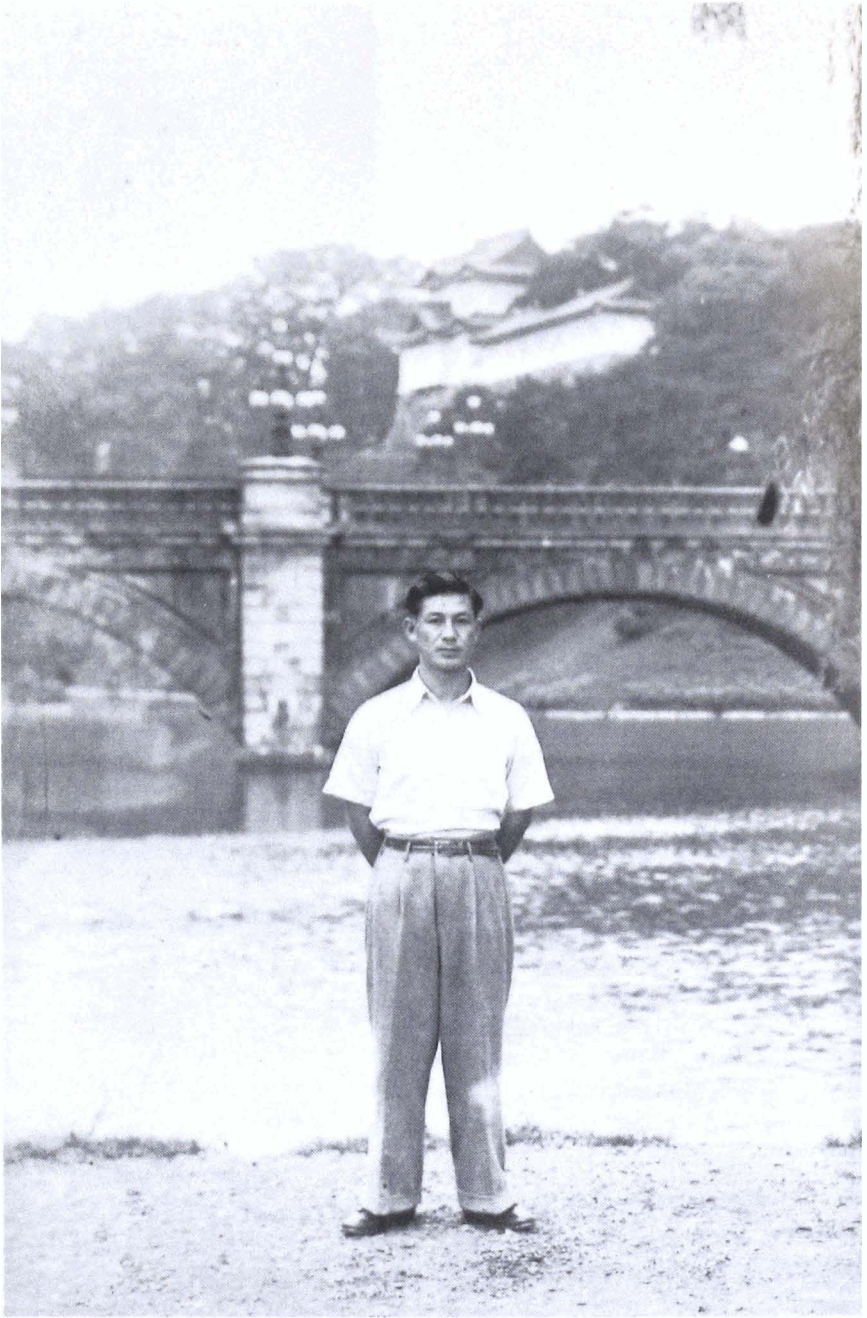
Phuntsok Wangyel and Tharchin Babu



Dilowa Gegen



Kimura after surrendering to the Calcutta police
in April 1950, taken at the Presidency Jail.



Kimura after his repatriation to Tokyo in May 1950,
outside the Imperial Palace.

layman's *chuba* which had kept me from recognizing him at first. I remembered that he had gone with the young incarnate lama of a monastery south of the farm to the Labrang Monastery in Kansu, after Kumbum the most important religious center near Inner Mongolia. What he was now doing in Lhasa as a layman I could not tell, but there was no sense in trying to avoid a meeting, so on my next circuit I walked right up and squatted down beside him.

He nodded knowingly and broke into a wide grin. "So you've arrived safely?" he asked as if it were the most natural thing in the world for me to be here. Indeed it would be natural enough for a Mongolian, and I was reminded of Dorji's injunction to study hard and become a good monk. I realized that by going through the forms of a pilgrimage like this I made my Mongolian friends think of me more and more as one of them, for in this part of the world religion is far more important than nationality, and men are regarded as brothers because of the way they behave rather than where they were born.

"Yes, thank you," I replied. "My name, which perhaps you do not remember, is Dawa Sangpo." There was no way he could remember it since I had not even had that name when he knew me. "And what has brought you all this way? The last I heard you were headed for Labrang."

"Labrang was a disappointment. It had little to offer the young Lama. We decided it would be best to come here, for in Lhasa one finds the center of all learning, and the most renowned teachers. The Lama was eager to acquire the knowledge to assist his fellow beings trapped in this world of suffering. But," he sighed, "the ways of *karma* are strange. He fell ill and passed on last year while a sinner like me has survived and prospered. I hope to return to Inner Mongolia sometime this winter as soon as I finish my business here."

Baarin Jimba knew my real identity, so I could speak freely with him, but of course it would not be wise right here in the street. "Why don't you come and visit?" I asked. "I came here with Danzanhairob and his wife. Surely you remember them."

"Danzan! Yes, of course I remember." He looked at me sideways. "We shared a weakness for the ladies—that's why I left the monastery. Lhasa may be a holy city, but it is also the most wonderful place for women I have ever been. Don't be fooled by their attempts at camouflage," he gestured at a woman with pock marks painted on her face who was walking by. "There are more *joroos* here than in Tsaidam!" This term referred to the comfortable riding gait of the best Tsaidam

horses and riding mules, and was also used as a complimentary term for the way a lady conducted herself in bed.

He was beginning to make gestures to be certain I understood when he remembered my travel-stained monk's outfit and laughed apologetically. "But you say Danzan is with his wife? Did he marry that girl who used to herd sheep for you? He'd certainly done everything but marry her before I left. Of course I'll come." He seemed to sense that I did not want my identity publicly revealed.

Just then Danzan himself walked by, counting his beads and mumbling a mantra to himself. If you wait on the Barkhor long enough you will see everyone in Lhasa. We called out to him and he joined us. He and Tseren-tso had been to worship in the Jokhang, and he had left her prostrating in front of its doors in a religious ecstasy. The two old friends exchanged a long greeting, then Baarin Jimba closed his shop (by wrapping up his wares in the rug), and we all went to our lodgings. After snuff and tea and all the other courtesies had been satisfied, Danzan broached for me the subject closest to my heart. "Of course you know who Dawa Sangpo really is. Along the way we heard many rumours about the war. Do you know the truth of the matter?"

Baarin Jimba scratched his head, hemmed and hawed a bit, but finally saw there was no point avoiding the issue. "Well," he began, "I can't say that I really know anything for sure. The local Chinese all claim that it is over and the Japan has suffered total defeat. Not that they had much to do with it. All Chiang Kai-shek's armies did for the entire war was retreat. They tried to hold a victory parade in Lhasa with paper lanterns, but the Tibetans stoned them off the streets."

"Does that mean the Tibetans were pro-Japanese?" asked Danzan a little doubtfully. In spite of our friendship he had few illusions about most of my countrymen.

"More likely just anti-Chinese. The Tibetans know nothing about Japan, but they have long and bitter experience of China. Most people here would regard any enemy of China as their friend." Baarin Jimba suddenly remembered my origins and looked a little embarrassed. "But don't despair Dawa Sangpo. There are other rumours as well. These also say that the war is over, but that neither side won conclusively."

"How can I find out?" I asked, my voice shaking with emotion. I could see that he felt sorry for me and wanted to help out, even if he could probably not understand quite how I felt about my country. Though he was a rough-looking character, I remembered him as honest and intelligent, and I felt that I could trust him.

Spy without a Country

"Why don't we just ask? I want to go home to Inner Mongolia, so it is only natural that I'll want to know what I'm going to find there and who is in power. I can speak Chinese, so I'll take you to the Tibetan-Mongolian Affairs Commission. That is a Chinese agency, but it is an official one, so it should have some reliable news."

We went right away, and I will never forget the pompous, effeminate, bespectacled Chinese official with whom we spoke. Jimba translated his words as he proudly conveyed his information, and there was no way he could soften what was said. "Oh yes, Japan has been completely defeated. Unconditional surrender, you understand. Now we have occupied the whole country, and they are learning what it is like to live under us! Of course there are a few American troops there as well . . ." Jimba hustled me out before I could betray any of the kind of emotion that could give me away.

"He's just an inflated braggart," he said when we were outside, trying to comfort me. "Let's try asking at the British Mission. I'm sure they are more reliable." So for the second time that day, I went to people I still considered the enemy.

The British Mission was in a park called the Deki Lingka, west of the city beyond the Potala and the Medical College. The way there passes one of the most awe-inspiring blendings of the works of man with the works nature in the world, taking one right past the foot of the great palace and through the Bagogaling Stupa, the West Gate of Lhasa connecting the Potala with the Chagpori Hill and Medical College. But on this day I had no eyes for these wonders. My heart and mind were far away, filled with shocked disbelief and apprehension.

At the British Mission a Tibetan-speaking Sikkimese could give us little comfort. Japan, he said, had indeed surrendered unconditionally. The order that brought about the end of the fighting had come about two weeks before from the Emperor himself. It was now September 3rd, and the Mission had just been informed by wireless that the formal surrender had taken place just the day before. The situation was not entirely clear, but we were told of new weapons capable of destroying entire cities in a single blow.

I walked back to Lhasa in a daze, hardly hearing Baarin Jimba's words of sympathy, and wondering if I even had a country to return to. I kept repeating to myself that it could not be true. Ever since childhood it had been drilled into me that the Emperor's Army never retreats. Whatever its faults in ruling colonial possessions, whatever greed individual officers might display, our fighting men would never

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allow an enemy onto the Emperor's soil. In desperation I made a plan on the spot. India was only three weeks away, and Burma not far beyond. In India I would certainly be able to get more accurate information, and if the worst were true then I would simply head straight for Burma. Surely Burma was still occupied by Japanese forces.

* * *

Much to my surprise, the Danzans thought this was a wonderful idea. Religious fervour had overtaken Tseren-tso in Lhasa. She planned to walk the Lingkor—the outer pilgrim's circuit marking the limits of the city—visit Sera, Drepung and all the smaller shrines; and to spend the rest of her time worshipping at the Jokhang. In contrast to Kalgan and Sining (the only other two cities she had ever been to) the crowds here did not bother her, whether because all were moving in the same direction or because all were engaged in religious activities I am not sure. Though he had been here before, Danzan found his wife's simple devotion touching and accompanied her on most of her pious rounds. When Tseren-tso heard me mention India, her eyes immediately lit up. The only thing she could imagine surpassing this Lhasa pilgrimage would be one to the sacred places of the Enlightened One in the land of his birth.

Our problem, however, was money. The sale of our camels had brought little, and it was now two years since we had set off from Inner Mongolia funded for only one. Baarin Jimba had good connections in Lhasa, and he offered to sell whatever of our belongings we could part with, including the trusty old tent that had sheltered us from wind, rain, snow and cold. It all went for little enough.

"There is someone in Lhasa who could help you," he suggested, counting out the paltry coins that our belongings had fetched.

"Who would that be?" I asked, doing some quick calculations and seeing that we would not get far before we would have to start begging.

"Have you ever heard of Namgyel Dalama?" asked Jimba.

"The one from Chagan Obo Monastery in East Sunit?" I ventured.

"He's the one. You know he was very involved with the Japanese and their plan to search out a new Jebtsundamba Khutughtu. It is cunning the way your people always use religion for political purposes: and that plan was the most cunning of all. If it had been successful you would have gained a lot of support in Inner Mongolia, and would have caused no end of problems for the Outer Mongolian Government."

I knew of the plan, though not of the results. The Jebtsundamba Khutughtu had been the Mongolian equivalent of the Dalai Lama, an all-powerful incarnate Bodhisattva; both a political and spiritual leader. When the Socialist Government took over Outer Mongolia in 1921 they quickly saw that he could become a rallying point for dissidents and forbid searches for his further incarnations—a policy that led the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to immediately distrust anything to do with a doctrine called Communism. Outside of this, however, the Outer Mongolian religious policy had been remarkably restrained until in the 1930s the Japanese began secretly arming many monasteries in hope of bringing about a revolt that we could exploit. When this was discovered it led to an anti-religious drive on the part of the Ulan Bator Government that closed down almost all of the Outer Mongolian monasteries and brought a flood of refugees south. One of the most important refugee leaders was a high incarnate Lama named Dilowa Gegen. I had been lucky enough to meet him once at the refugee center between East and West Sunit. It was he whom the Japanese had planned to send to Tibet to search out a supposed incarnation of Mongolia's highest Lama. Namgyel Dalama—whom Baarin Jimba was now suggesting could help me—accompanied him. I asked Jimba to explain what had happened.

“Your army put up a great deal of money for the mission, and Dilowa took the attitude that if he could accomplish religion's work it did not matter where the money came from. The Japanese would come and go, but the light of the Dharma was forever. They were to go by sea to Calcutta then up through Darjeeling to Lhasa, but Dilowa never got past Hong Kong. A Kuomintang agent in Inner Mongolia tipped off Chungking, and the news was relayed to the British. When the ship docked in Hong Kong the British detained Dilowa and handed him over to their Chinese allies. They've kept him confined in Chungking, but since he is free to receive followers he has built up a network all over Mongolia and Tibet. They say that even though he is under confinement he knows as much as anyone about what is going on everywhere from Kalgan to Lhasa.”

“So if Dilowa is in Chungking, what is Namgyel doing here?”

Jimba laughed. “Who do you think Dilowa's man in Lhasa is? Somehow Namgyel was forgotten in Hong Kong—as was most of the money. There was no reason not to continue his pilgrimage so he simply went on, and when he got here used the Japanese money as capital to set himself up in the money-lending business. You'll find him as

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shrewd as they come, but likable and very ethical. Everything he does is for the Dilowa, and he lives simply in spite of the wealth he was entrusted with. He's not too worried about increasing it, but it is a point of honour with him that it does not slip through his fingers."

"Should I tell him I am Japanese?" I'd never met Dalama though we were from the same banner.

"No, don't put him in that position. He'll probably figure it out anyway, but the less said the better."

Jimba showed me to the fashionable area where Namgyel Dalama lived in another building belonging to Drepung right next to the mansion of the present regent. I was taken to a neat and clean room on the second floor with ornate pillars, an elaborate altar, and an empty throne. Jimba told me that these quarters, and the throne, were kept in readiness should Dilowa suddenly arrive.

When Namgyel appeared and sat on a cushion in front of me I was at first too shy to speak. He was short, but stocky and strongly built, obviously a man at home with physical activity and quite the opposite of an aristocratic monk like Reting Rimpoché. But when he spoke and asked me what I had come for I was surprised at the gentleness of his voice. This gave me the confidence to come right to the point. "I need to borrow some money," I blurted out. "I am but a poor pilgrim and have no collateral. I only came to you because we are from the same banner. If I ever return to East Sunit alive I shall surely repay you. That is all I can promise." It was hardly a line well-calculated to please a professional money-lender, but he listened in silence and gave me a penetrating look.

"How much do you need?" he asked simply.

"Enough for me and my two companions to get to India and have a little left over," I replied.

"Fifty dotse (about 1000 Indian Rupees) will serve your purpose, I believe," he said simply and began to count out the money. It was so easy that I had to make an effort to hide my surprise.

I immediately began making preparations for our journey while Danzan and his wife continued their devotions. Though I was anxious to be going, I knew it would be wrong to hurry them. They had given me two years of their lives, and had lost their baby on the journey. For Tseren-tso the opportunity to worship in Lhasa was like a dream come true, and there was an intensity to her devotion that I found more impressive than all the wealth of the great monasteries. I had to let her have this. We had all shared another dream: of the three of us returning

Spy without a Country

to Inner Mongolia and managing our own ranch, but I now wondered if I would ever be able to go back at all.

Dutifully I visited one or two places with my friends, but took nothing in. While a part of me realized that I was being unfair to this city that so many people from both East and West would have given so much to see, its magic was gone. Entering Lhasa had been no triumph for me; everywhere I looked reminded me of the defeat of my country, though this was a truth I was still trying to resist. I am grateful that this was not my final visit to the holy city, and that in later years I was to learn to love Lhasa as it deserved to be loved.

Baarin Jimba bought us two horses with part of the money I had borrowed, so that we now had one horse each, and we announced to our Mongolian friends at the house that we were going on an additional pilgrimage to the Tashi Lhumpo Monastery of Shigatse, seat of the Panchen Lama. Some of these friends insisted that I should not leave without undergoing religious instruction at Drepung, and I replied that while I was anxious to do this, I wanted to complete my pilgrimage first.

On September 20th, after less than three weeks in Lhasa, and only a few days after the arrival of the main body of the caravan we had travelled with, we again passed through the stupa gate between the Potala and the Chagpori, minus our three horses which our loyal friend Baarin Jimba would deliver to us the next day near Drepung. We spent the night at the monastery, and the next morning Baarin Jimba appeared with our horses.

* * *

Three weeks later I stood, a tiny human figure dwarfed by the natural splendour around me, atop the 15,744 foot Jelap La, the pass that marks the border between Tibet and a small corner of Sikkim leading to India. On this journey from Inner Mongolia I had crossed more passes than I could remember or count, but somehow I felt that this one marked a real turning point in my life as I gazed west to the peaks of Kanchenjunga, now scarlet in the setting sun; then turned north to the majesty of the Tibetan mountains rolling out like a stormy sea.

The trip from Lhasa had been all too quick, yet even so I had been impatient. Natural wonders like the Yamdrok Tso were mere blurs in my mind. Towns like Gyantse and Phari had simply been inconvenient

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stops, and the snow-blindness I had suffered at the latter an irritant that kept me from my goal of discovering the fate of my country.

Behind me now lay Central Asia: Mongolia which had been my home for five years, and Tibet of which I as yet knew so little. Before me lay the Indian subcontinent; a world of steaming jungles, baking plains, teeming hordes and holy rivers that I did not yet know. If I had wondered before what my part was in the scheme of things, my mind was now in utter turmoil.

Four days later we reached the outskirts of Kalimpong.

Nine

Kalimpong

Weary from our three weeks on the trail, we asked an Amdo lady knitting a sweater at a Tibetan settlement called Eleventh Mile on the eastern edge of Kalimpong, where we could find a room. She told us we could stay in one of her own, so we continued no further. There was also a stable for our two remaining horses. We had left our dog with some friendly villagers a few days back, knowing he would never survive the low altitudes. It had been a tearful occasion for Tseren-tso, for a dog is said to be the last thing a Mongolian will part with.

In Lhasa we had been given the name of an Outer Mongolian artist named Dharma, so with our luggage and horses taken care of we went straight off to find him. Dharma, we had been told, was a multi-talented artist. He painted well, worked wonders with gold and silver, was especially admired as an ivory sculptor, but was best known among the rougher elements of the Tibetan community as a tattoo artist. Unfortunately he had been living in Lhasa when the Tibetan government issued new one hundred *san* notes, and rumour had it that he had been unable to resist the temptation of putting his talents to use in making some of his own. Notably less successful at counterfeiting than at sculpting, he had been forced to leave the capital with unseemly haste along with his wife and children.

He greeted us at the door of his house by the market place: a squat, strongly built, typically gruff and good-natured Outer Mongolian. Always happy to take a little time off from work, he ushered us in to meet his wife and large family. Like many others, Dharma had once been a monk, but on a pilgrimage to Lhasa had found the temptations of the flesh stronger than the religious vocation, and had married a Lhasa woman. Staying with them as well was a Buriat Mongolian monk named Guru Dharma who was taking care of the family altar in return for his keep. In spite of the similarities of their names and the warm-heartedness they shared, the two Dharmas were very different in appearance. Dharma the artist looked tough and workmanlike in an apron covered with ivory dust, while the scholarly Guru Dharma was

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somewhat effete and pale. He had recently taken his degree from Drepung, and not feeling up to the rigours of the overland journey home, was presently waiting for a ship from Calcutta to Peking. We immediately settled down to snuff and tea.

I introduced myself as being from Inner Mongolia, and at once Guru Dharma congratulated me on the liberation of my land. "You must be relieved," he commented, "that those thieves are leaving your country now that the war is over."

"Is it really over?" I asked, trying to hide my anxiety. "In Lhasa we heard nothing but rumours."

"Oh yes, all the Japanese are being sent home, to live themselves under foreign domination." Though delivered matter-of-factly and without the self-satisfaction displayed by the Chinese official in Lhasa, these were much the words we had heard there. Again I could not help but wonder if we would now be treated as we had treated others.

"But how can you be sure?" I asked.

"India is a very modern country. There are many ways to learn what is happening in the world: newspapers, radio, even cinemas. Have you ever been to a cinema?"

"No," I lied.

"Come on then, we'll all go tonight. They show news before the film and you'll be able to see what the country of the Japanese looks like." My two friends were tired, and had already had enough for one day, so they went back to the inn, and that evening Guru Dharma took me to the ramshackle movie house by the football field. It was the first time I had been in a cinema since Kalgan, and I was thankful for the darkness that hid my apprehension as the newsreel came on.

What I saw next was devastating. Though I could understand little of the English commentary, the pictures told the story all too clearly. There was first an aerial view of Tokyo, almost completely leveled, the Imperial Palace being the only recognizable feature. Then came the figure of the once proud and haughty General Tojo, architect of the disastrous Japanese policies in Asia and the Pacific, looking very small and rather shabby beside an American MP guard, after a failed suicide attempt. This was followed by a scene of Japanese troops doing the unthinkable: surrendering their weapons to the enemy. The cinema broke into cheers. "Gurkha soldiers just back from Burma," Guru Dharma explained in my ear. "They did most of the fighting there."

Worst by far were the scenes of poverty in the burnt-out cities as a ragged population struggled for survival among the ruins. Where now

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was the glory of our new industrial civilization? Where was that extra bowl of rice for every Japanese, the promised result of our colonial expansion, in which I too had believed when I first went to Mongolia?

My eyes swam with bitter tears and I felt confined and ill in the crowded theater, yet I did not have the energy to make an excuse and leave. This was the end. There could be no more believing it all to be rumour or propaganda. I sat through the entire feature without even realizing what it was. Instead of the well-dressed Americans cavorting through their mating game on the screen, I saw other scenes: a Japanese officer beating a rickshaw coolie in Kalgan, and Japanese trading company employees insulting Chinese on the streets. I remembered the stories, all too well known, of the behaviour of our troops in Chinese villages and I knew that if Japan were indeed occupied by Chinese troops that the revenge exacted would be terrible.

In spite of the rumours that had prepared me, the certainty of defeat was just too much to take in. I excused myself from going back to Dharma's saying that the unaccustomed heat and stuffiness of the theater had made me ill, and wandered around the quiet streets of Kalimpong, not really noticing where I was, able only to feel the pain, the shame of defeat, the helpless anger at I knew not what, and a great hollow emptiness inside. Somehow I found my way back to our inn and was grateful that Danzan and his wife were asleep, so that I would not have to face them.

I slept poorly and was up again early the next morning, when I climbed the hill behind the town and found a large rock where I sat for most of the day, unable to think, only to allow the pain and the disgrace to wash over me in waves. I was to come here everyday for the next week. In front of me lay a deep gorge. On the far bank rose the foothills of Sikkim, and beyond them the massive snow covered bulk of Kanchenjunga, while behind and below me was the pleasant-looking little town filled with Buddhist and Hindu temples, as well as Christian churches and stone cottages that could have been out of picture books I had seen of Europe. It all made no sense. Why should such a town be here in India, peaceful and serene, and why should I be in it, when my country lay destroyed and suffering?

Even before going to Mongolia I had prided myself on being different from the majority of my countrymen, who were so well known for doing what they were told blindly and without thinking. That did not help now. In fact it made things worse, for I was perhaps able to see more clearly than others that we had brought this defeat and disgrace

on ourselves. Now that our "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" lay in ruins at our feet, it was exposed for what it was. Unbidden, the words of the Tsaidam Mongolian who had gone to Inner Mongolia for the political conferences in the 1930s came into my head: "Many of our people wear Japanese uniforms, and have been to Japan for training; but it will be these very people, wearing different uniforms, who drive them into the sea." He was probably right. Though some of us had formed friendships, in general the Japanese could expect no loyalty from the peoples they had ruled so brutally and so cynically.

It is often said of us that we need to belong to a group to feel that we exist at all. Now I realized that in spite of everything a basic assumption of my life had always been that I belonged to a nation under the all-knowing and benevolent protection of the Emperor. Call it self-deception if you will, but now it was gone, and there was nothing to take its place. I was not really Mongolian, and even if I could convince myself that I was, it was to their religion rather than to their nation that the Mongolians gave their first loyalty. I knew I could never feel the kind of religious faith that came so naturally to my friends. Who and what then, was I?

In all my years away from home I had never been homesick. Perhaps this was because of my parents' unhappy marriage which had driven my mother from home, so that I grew up without the strong bond that usually exists between a Japanese boy and his mother. But now during this week homesickness engulfed me as my self-reliance seemed to crumble into that empty space where the nation should have been. That emptiness could only be filled, I thought, by going home: but I knew this was impossible. I had no money, and even if I had I could hardly just go to Calcutta and get on a ship to Yokohama or Kobe. I would be arrested on the spot. Turning myself in would be as bad. How were defeated spies, even inefficient ones, treated by the British? And what would happen to my friends if I were arrested? They were accomplices. I could not let them suffer. That would be but poor payment for all they had done for me.

I had also promised them a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, and as the days wore on and I could do nothing more productive than stare at the distant mountains, I began to look to that pilgrimage with hope, like a man lost in a forest to a distant light. Again physical movement would come to my rescue allowing the healing balm of time to come between me and the decisions I would not be able to put off forever.

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During this week when I said little, Danzan and his wife were considerate enough to leave me alone except to see that I was fed. I think they knew what was wrong, and when I finally told them they were not surprised, only disappointed that we would never be able to go back home together and manage our ranch. They arranged to rent a small six-by-six foot room for five rupees a month, and Danzan sold the horses through Dharma. Winter would soon be coming on, and while winter in Mongolia and Tibet was that dread season to be prepared for through the rest of the year, it was supposed to be the only time that the Indian plains were bearable for pilgrims such as ourselves from higher and colder lands. We decided to leave right away while we still had some money.

* * *

It was a forty mile walk to the nearest railhead on the plains at Siliguri. The road drops almost straight down from Kalimpong at 4000 feet to the gorge of the Teesta River only a few hundred feet above sea level. It was the first time we had been this low since the Ninghsia Desert and even though it was by no means the warmest time of year, we found the heat oppressive. When I tentatively introduced my companions to bathing I was surprised by how they took to it and we often jumped into rivers along the way.

At Siliguri, without bothering to buy tickets, we boarded a train, and it was not long before we experienced the courtesy shown by the Indian people toward pilgrims; for although they are not themselves Buddhists, they hold all believers in the deepest respect. When the conductor came around to check our tickets, for example, the other passengers in our crowded third class compartment insisted that he not bother us. Although we could not speak or understand a word, our amulets with the images of the Buddha in them were enough to give us holy status. Eventually the conductor was driven away in defeat, and our fellow passengers smiled kindly at us. Though I felt guilty about caging a ride, I thought that the devotion of my two friends would make up for my own lack, and that whatever spiritual forgiveness we might need would be forthcoming.

Later a more determined conductor was able to overcome the protests of our Indian supporters and order us off at the next station. But even this was no hardship. It was one of those lazy Indian country stations where all activity ceases as soon as the train pulls out, and the

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earthen platform was a perfect camping spot in the mild weather of late October. Once camp was set up, we went to the village nearby to buy rice and sugar, but the proprietor of the small shop we went to simply heaped rice in a brass tray, put red flower petals on the top, and refused to accept any money.

It had not really occurred to me until then just how we must have looked to the Indians. Though we might have appeared quite normal in Mongolia or Tibet, here we must have looked unkempt, dirty (in spite of our frequent bathing), poor, and perhaps even a little frightening. Some people seemed prepared to run away screaming at the very sight of us, but our amulets always inclined their hearts toward us in the end. Back at the station we gathered twigs, built a fire, boiled our rice and tea, and eventually got on another train where the conductor was more amenable.

Though I had dragged my two friends countless miles and more than two years away from their home, their reaction to the sight of the pagoda and the sacred Bodhi tree at the spot where the Buddha is said to have experienced Enlightenment left me in no doubt that they felt well compensated. For once even Tseren-tso waxed eloquent. "I, a poor and unworthy Mongolian woman, have only you to thank for being able to worship at this sacred place," she said with tears of gratitude in her eyes. "Should I die now, I would die satisfied."

For whatever reason, my own spirits began to recover at this point, and I faced our return to Kalimpong with a new resolve. Perhaps it was seeing part of a new country where life went on in its age-long way with no considerations for the kind of nationalistic feelings that had recently swamped me. Japan, I decided, was for the moment in the past. It would be best if I forgot who I really was, gave up any idea of returning home, and looked to my future like any destitute Mongolian pilgrim.

* * *

Back in Kalimpong I set right out to look for a job. First, following a lead from Guru Dharma, I went to the Himalayan Hotel and asked the owner, David MacDonald, if there were any openings. MacDonald was an interesting character. Part Sikkimese and fluent in Tibetan, he had accompanied the Younghusband Expedition on its 1904 invasion of Tibet as an interpreter. Later he was British Trade Agent in Gyantse. For his services he was offered a knighthood, which he turned down in favour of a grant of land here in Kalimpong on which he built his fine

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hotel. The stone two-story building with its wide verandas and manicured garden, was like a small piece of England here in the Himalayan foothills, and I felt more than a little intimidated on first approaching it. But though Mr. Macdonald had no openings, his manner soon put me at ease, and I was to get to know him well in later years.

That still left me with the problem of finding work, and I went back to Dharma's house to ask him if he had any ideas. He was in his work room in front of a stretched canvas, bringing to life a painting called the *rig-sum-gampo*, a group of three figures: Chenresig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Manjushri the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and the wrathful protector Channa Dorji. His daily work was carving the ornate central sections of the small hand drums called *damaru*, but he would occasionally get a lucrative commission for a painting such as this.

"Well, I deal with a lot of people for my art work," said Dharma, as he delicately built up layers of shading on Channa Dorji's blue body. A novice had done the rough work of putting down the base colour, and now Dharma was giving it life and depth with a darker blue which he took with his brush from the back of his hand near the base of his thumb. "There are two people in Kalimpong known to be friendly to the weak and kind to strangers. They both live up on the hill, so if one can't help you, you can just go to the other. One of them is named Ang Pemba. In fact he ordered this painting for his chapel." I knew that religious art was not to be bartered and sold, but only done on commission. Looking over his shoulder as he brought out the expression on the deity's face, I was amazed that such figures could ever have frightened me. They were now old friends.

"Should I see him?" I asked.

"Well, the trouble is that you could probably only get charity from him. He made a lot of money when he was younger, and didn't much care how he did it. Now to atone he has built a shelter for poor pilgrims. He is also," Dharma laughed, changing brushes and going on to the yellow-orange body of Manjusri, "a patron of the arts. No perhaps we should take you to see Tarchin Babu first."

"Who is he?"

"A very strange man. But a very good one," he quickly added. "He owns the newspaper here. It's the only Tibetan newspaper there is, and it goes from here to Lhasa and Sikkim . . . everywhere where there are Tibetans to read it."

"What is strange about him?"

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“His religion. He is Tibetan . . . well no, Kinauri, but that's almost the same. They call him Kunu Tarchin because he's from somewhere called Kunu on the other side of Nepal. But he has the same religion as the English. Can you imagine that? A Tibetan but not a Buddhist.” It was hard to imagine. “But he's open-minded, not like the missionaries. He often uses his printing press to print maps and guides of the holy places of India for pilgrims. Everyone who comes through meets him, and some learned scholars and high lamas stay with him every year.”

“But what could I do for him?” I asked.

“A bright young lad like you? Didn't you tell me you had been to one of those fancy schools the Japanese started along the railway? As soon as I open the eyes on this painting I'll take you there. The office is only just up the hill.”

The painting was almost done. He had timed it so that he would finish on an auspicious day for ‘opening the eyes’: painting in the pupils and putting a light red wash in the corners of the eyes of the main figures, after which it would be consecrated by a lama. The next afternoon that he was free he took me to see this famous citizen of Kalimpong.

At first I thought Tarchin, who was small and dark with a thick moustache, looked more Indian than Tibetan, but his friendly and open directness reassured me. Though he was fluent in Tibetan, Urdu, Hindi, Nepali, and English, we had no common language, and I had to rely on Dharma to interpret. In spite of his religious beliefs I was to learn that he was committed to the welfare and the independence of Tibet, and though I did not know it at the time, he had extensive contacts with the secret world of British intelligence—with which he willingly cooperated as long as it was for the benefit of Tibet.

“What can you do? Do you have any skills?” he asked, looking a little dubiously at the ragged pilgrim who had presented himself. I had made an attempt to tidy up, but nothing could disguise the patches and holes in my old robe.

“Nothing special,” I answered nervously, wondering what he would say if I told him I could speak, read and write Japanese like a native.

Dharma came to my rescue. “He told me that he read books on the new age at a Japanese school in Inner Mongolia. I'm sure that can't be held against him now that the war is over.”

Mr. Tarchin laughed at that, then thought for a moment and gestured toward a map on the wall. “Do you know what that is?” he asked.

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I told him it was a map of Asia, and he asked me if I could point out the route I had taken to come to India from Mongolia. Starting at Zarin Sume I carefully traced the route we had followed through Ninghsia to Tsaidam then south with the caravan to Lhasa, and finally the three week journey across the Himalayas. He then asked me if I could read the place names. I obliged him, telling him that the Japanese school had taught the English alphabet. He looked at me intently for a moment, and I wondered if perhaps I had gone too far.

"All right," he said finally, "you can help with the printing for a while. Fifteen rupees a month." It would not keep the three of us, so I asked about the Danzans. They were just simple nomads, I said, but they could do all the things a nomad could do. "There's always wool to be spun," he said after a moment's thought. "Bring them up to the house and I'll introduce them to my wife. She's in charge of that sort of thing."

* * *

And so Kalimpong became our home, and now that I was over the initial shock of defeat I realized that it would be hard to find a much more pleasant spot in India than this meeting place of many cultures which in some ways combined the best of East and West. As a trade center between India and Tibet, Kalimpong was the terminus of the caravans in the same way that a harbour is to ships, and had long been known as the 'Harbour of Tibet' with one of the liveliest markets in the Himalayas. It had been a base or jumping off point to many of the better known Western explorers and scholars of Tibet—people such as Marco Pallis, John Blofeld, and Alexandra David-Neel—and it was here that Kawaguchi Ekai had first escaped from Tibet in 1902. To Kalimpong the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had fled in 1910 from Chinese invasion, and from here he began his triumphal return to Lhasa where he would formally declare independence. All the early Japanese to live in Tibet—Teramoto, Aoki, Tada and Yajima—were familiar with Kalimpong, so that living here I felt myself to be the heir to a great tradition.

Tibetans formed a large part of the population, and most of them lived to the east of the bazaar. There were a few financial moghuls among them, and most others were engaged in legitimate trade, but there was a large minority that did not emerge until after dark and whose only interests seemed to be drinking, gambling and women.

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They were a constant source of headaches for the police since their favourite sport seemed to be fighting with swords and knives. Many of them visited Dharma for tattoos, so that he received more attention from the local police than he would have liked. The Sikkimese were entirely different, although of Tibetan descent. They formed an elite, occupying important roles in government and education. Prominent among them was a Mr. Lhatseren who was in charge of security. Tarchin Babu was unique: an elder in his church for about thirty years, he was widely known and respected by all.

Chinese, mostly from Yunnan, formed another important segment of the population. Though the bulk of them were law-abiding merchants—including a number who had settled here a few years before when their Chinese circus went bankrupt—they were a constant worry to Mr. Lhatseren's security people since the Chinese government (this still meant Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang) often sent agents to Kalimpong disguised as Tibetans.

Since most of the people farming the hills around—as well as a large number of the townspeople—were Nepali, their language formed the local *lingua franca*, while English was the common tongue among the educated and elite. Neither Bengali nor Hindi were often heard in this northern corner of Bengal, and in fact the most numerous Indians were the Marwaris from Rajasthan. A strictly vegetarian (which oddly acts as no antidote to obesity, particularly among the women) and insular merchant caste, their self-centered and materialistic ways have always made them unpopular, but without them business in the Himalayas would come to a virtual standstill.

We slipped into a pleasant existence in this lovely little town. Every morning Danzan and Tseren-tso would climb to the east ridge and spin in the Tarchin garden. This was not far from the rock to which my depression had led me every day after I had seen our defeat reported in the cinema, and they enjoyed a commanding view of Sikkim and Kanchenjunga. Meanwhile, down below I helped with the old printing press. All the other workers spoke in Tibetan, so I made a concerted effort to pick up what I could, and soon I was able to hold my own in basic conversation.

One day I drew a cartoon and a map about the Chinese civil war that had flared up again between the Kuomintang and the Communists now that their common enemy was gone. Tarchin was so pleased with the results that he ordered me to work in the office from then on, dis-

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patching the papers and keeping the subscribers' list in order, which I was able to compile in Romanized Tibetan.

In mid-November Tarchin asked me to draw a map of my journey with brief explanations of which side was holding what territory and their troop strengths at the time. I should have suspected something, but was simply eager to please. A few weeks later he came into the office and told me to make myself as presentable as possible. I had given up my old monk's robe and was letting my hair grow, so I ran home to comb it and change into the less ragged of my two Tibetan *chubas*, then followed him to the bungalows below the Himalayan Hotel. There, seated at a table in a garden we found Lhatseren and an Englishman. I was immediately tense, wondering if I was going to be arrested.

The Englishman was introduced as Eric Lambert, a policeman who was head of Intelligence for the northeast frontier region, which included Kalimpong and Darjeeling, and whose headquarters was at 'Oaklands' in Shillong. He held up the map I had made and asked me, through Tarchin, if I had drawn it. I answered that I had, looking from Tarchin to Lhatseren, then to Lambert, and realizing suddenly that everything I had done unwittingly had been reported through intelligence channels.

"I've heard that you are hoping to go back to your home in Inner Mongolia," Lambert continued.

"Yes," I answered, relieved. It seemed I was still believed to be Mongolian.

"We might be able to help you," he went on. I could see what he was driving at. With the present turmoil in China, a well-placed agent could help sort out fact from fiction. The first thing that occurred to me was not that I would be employed by the intelligence service of our recent enemy, but that this could be my ticket, if not all the way back to Japan, at least to far closer than I was at the moment.

"Do you understand any English," he asked, suddenly addressing me directly. I did not recognize the word "any" but got the gist.

"A little," I answered, grateful for the Mongolian pronunciation training that had taught me how to make an "L" sound. If I had answered "a rituru" it would have been a dead giveaway.

"What would you think of learning more?" This was too much for me and it had to be repeated in Tibetan. I responded enthusiastically. "Perhaps we could help you with that also," he answered, dismissing me and then speaking rapidly in English to Mr. Tarchin.

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"You made a good impression," said the latter to me on the way back. "He wants you to start at Dr. Graham's Homes in the spring." This was Kalimpong's famous school which had been founded by a missionary named Dr. Graham for children of mixed Indian and British parentage. "In the meantime," he added, "try to keep progressing in Tibetan."

* * *

In late November, not long after I had drawn the map, I was sitting at my desk in Mackenzie Cottage when I heard someone shouting in Mongolian: "Is there a Mongolian here?"

Thuptden, the office boy, went to the door but could not understand, so called me. At the door I saw a man clad in ragged Mongolian clothing, wearing a lambskin cap and carrying a large bundle over his shoulder. In his hand he held a long, thick stick. For a moment we stood there in silence looking one another over, both trying to remember what was so familiar. It came to me first, for his eyes had grown even worse in the past two years.

"Nishikawa-san?" I asked softly after Thuptden had left. It was that same Kazumi Nishikawa who had been at the Ko Ah Gijuku the year after me, and whom I had mentioned in the one letter I sent back. He blinked his myopic eyes at me in bewilderment.

"Oh brother, what a grand Mongolian mansion you are living in," was all he could find to say.

He had arrived with a Chinghai Mongolian who, intimidated by the 'grandeur' of MacKenzie Cottage, had remained at the bottom of the steps. Even so we could not speak freely right there. I shouted to Thuptden that a close friend from Mongolia had turned up so I would have to step out for awhile, then I took them to the room I shared with the Danzans.

Fond as we both were of Mongolians, right now the presence of his friend was awkward. I could tell Nishikawa was itching to find out what I knew as we sat on the floor exchanging snuff. No opportunity came until the friend went out to relieve himself. As soon as we were alone Nishikawa tried to speak and found himself tongue-tied. I knew what was happening—he was trying to speak in Japanese but could not find the words. Finally he gave up and spat it out in Mongolian: "Did Japan lose the war?"

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"Yes," I answered in Mongolian as well. "I saw it in the cinema and have collected some magazine and newspaper photos."

"I'll try to sneak away from my friend sometime tonight so we can have a longer talk." That was all we had time for just then, and I took him to Dharma who was willing to rent a corner of his house cheaply. That night after dinner he came knocking at our door, and to be more private I took him to the church on the edge of the market. It had a wide open veranda which was at certain seasons used as a residence by beggars, but at this time of year was empty. There we sat overlooking the dark and deserted market place with the eastern hill and the star-filled sky looming above us. Again we tried to talk in Japanese but nothing came out: it was the first time either of us had spoken with a compatriot for over two years.

Finally Nishikawa took a deep breath and said, "Are you absolutely sure it's over?" In reply I took out a small collection of newspaper photos and articles, and he looked at them in the light of a smoky oil lamp. I told him of the film I had seen the first night in Kalimpong, and of the times I had been back to the cinema whenever the newsreel changed; of the total destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by a frightening new weapon, and of the constant flow of Gurkha soldiers back from Burma and Malaya (one of whom, in answer to my query as to what the Japanese looked like had answered that they looked just like me!). I did not tell him of my growing belief that we had brought this on ourselves, that we never should have invaded Manchuria and China, and that our actions in the lands we occupied had only embittered Asia against us. It was a strange scene: two Japanese by a deserted market place at night under the Himalayan sky, talking about their country in a foreign language because neither could seem to speak his own any more. The news affected him as badly as it had me.

"And what of you?" I asked finally, genuinely curious, but also hoping to distract him a little.

"I've never really been far from you," he replied. "I spent several months at the Baron Hiid Monastery in Ninghsia . . ."

"That's where we always claimed we were from," I interrupted.

"I know. So I was told later when I inquired for you."

"But what did you do in a monastery?"

"I studied, of course," he answered. "I can't understand how you were able to get away with posing as a monk when you knew so little. After several months at Baron Hiid I moved on to Kumbum and

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studied there for a year. I'm quite good at reading the Tibetan scriptures, and I know much of the *Kangyur* by heart."

"I envy you that," I said. "The *Kangyur* almost gave me away. I even had to memorize the Dolma Sutra in a panic." I laughed at the memory and he looked at me strangely.

"I like being a monk," he said. "For all the corruption in some of the monasteries there is something good and worthwhile at the core of it all. Sometimes I've felt that I was approaching it. I wouldn't mind going back and studying at Drepung for a while." I had spent so much effort trying to keep out of monasteries that I found this hard to believe, yet I could see that he was completely sincere, and also why his eyes were so much worse.

"But back to my story," he went on. "I heard that you were in Tsaidam, and I stayed for a while at Shan. Dismal place. Somehow you managed to slip away on the caravan to Lhasa without me knowing."

"I hardly knew myself. I'd been very ill."

"Maybe that's why. Also I was expecting you to go west. When I learned that you'd gone south I thought I'd better follow and see what was up, though I wanted to see Lhasa myself anyway. But once the caravan had gone I had to go all the way back to Labrang in Kansu to get another. When I finally reached Lhasa I heard that you had gone to Tashi Lhumpo."

"That was a blind," I interrupted.

"I discovered that in Shigatse. But with all the rumours about the end of the war I gave up on you and decided to come to India and find out for sure. And so here I am, and almost out of money. We were hoping to find some Mongolians who could advise us on what to do, and the first place I asked was right across the street from where I found you."

"What do you think *we* should do?" I asked. I had been purposely letting life overtake me, but now meeting another Japanese reminded me that we might perhaps have responsibilities to our families: such as remembering our own language.

"I don't think there is anything we can do right now," he replied thoughtfully. "Getting ourselves arrested won't do anyone any good. For the moment just waiting seems to be the best thing. You seem to have a good job and my needs are simple. My feet and back are strong. You may have had camels and horses, but I walked the entire way." He said this with just a hint of pride. After thinking for a moment he added: "Of course you came through Phari."

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"I did, but I was snowblind and upset over the war rumours," I replied thinking back to that cold bleak town where the houses were made of black peat and the rubbish in the streets was so deep that most people preferred to walk on the roofs.

"There is definitely money to be made walking between here and there with a load on your back." He said this as if he were talking of a stroll to a neighbouring village rather than a mid-winter crossing of the Jelap La and a week's walk to a plain nearly 15,000 feet high. "Did you notice the price of tobacco there?"

I was startled by the question. "Not really. It was the last thing on my mind. I don't smoke," I added lamely.

"That's not the point," he continued impatiently. "It's illegal to import Indian tobacco, so it fetches a good price. All I have to do is figure out how to get it past the border guards. But enough time to think of that later. First I want to go down to Calcutta, and if we can afford it to make a pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya."

Only a day or two later he and his companion set off for Calcutta. Seeing Nishikawa again gave me something to think about. Though we had so many similar interests, we were very different people. I felt I had a right to be proud of what I had accomplished in language and travel, yet in some ways he was ahead of me. True, his Mongolian accent was not nearly as good as mine, and he had to use the excuse that he was from a Sinicised region where the language had declined; but his periods in the monasteries had resulted in a far better knowledge of Tibetan, particularly the classical language, than I had so far achieved. He had no problem posing as a monk since for all practical purposes he was one, and as he proudly said, he had walked the entire length of Central Asia. He seemed to have no ambition beyond seeing ever new places and increasing his knowledge, and he was able to ignore physical discomfort to a remarkable degree.

They were back in only a few days having gone only as far as Calcutta where they had decided that a trip on to Bodh Gaya was more than their limited resources could support. Both of them felt more at home in the mountains, so they had decided to come back and shore up their worldly wealth with some trans-Himalayan trading. Nishikawa had eighty rupees left to his name. Seventy of these he invested in as much rolled tobacco as he could carry—he kept the other ten for necessities along the way—and for the next few months this lone Japanese on foot was to exemplify in miniature the traditional trade between Kalimpong and Tibet.

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His major worry was the customs post at Chumbi, just the other side of the border, but apparently he just looked too dirty and ragged to be worth worrying about (the guards even offered tea and *tsampa* to his friend from Chinghai). Once he arrived in that cold and wind-swept market town of Phari he quickly sold off his wares and headed straight back to Kalimpong with a load of *tsampa* and butter. In no time at all he was off again, this time with tins of what were called State Express 555 cigarettes, the most expensive brand available in Kalimpong. In fact he had purchased empty tins and stuffed them with an inferior brand. His basic honesty was his undoing on this trip, for he did not like cheating people and sold his cigarettes in Phari for much less than he could have.

But his departure on his second trip was a very sad occasion for me. In January of 1946 Danzan and Tseren-tso had come down with severe cases of diarrhoea which depleted both their strength and their spirit. It was common for Mongolians and Tibetans to get this disease once, and not uncommon for them to die of it: but we were told that those who recovered developed an immunity to the water and climate of the region. In fact it was so common among pilgrims that it was even considered a holy disease.

One evening when the worst was over we were having dinner in our room, one of the first real meals they were able to eat. I had gone out of my way to get them some dried meat and noodles, and prepare a real Mongolian nomad's meal of the kind we had so often shared in late afternoon on the trail.

"This makes me think of the grasslands," remarked Tseren-tso as she held her meat in one hand and cut off chunks with her knife. She looked meaningfully at Danzan.

"You've been good to us through this illness," he said to me.

"It's no more than you did for me in the Tsaidam," I replied, happy to see them up and eating. I knew they could not have faced rice and dal, and that even *tsampa* might not have tempted them very much. Both looked pale and shaky. "Now that you're getting better you should be all right," I added.

They looked at each other and then looked down. "Dawa Sangpo . . ." Danzan began but trailed off.

After a brief silence his wife took over. "We've had enough of this place," she began with her usual directness. "We want to go home. Now that we have worshipped at Bodh Gaya India has nothing more for us."

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"But," I began, though I realized right away that there was really nothing here to keep them. "But you have no money," I concluded limply.

"We still have a little if we divide up everything. It would be enough for us to buy something to trade in Phari like your friend Lobsang." This was the name Nishikawa went by. "Then in Lhasa I'm sure we can somehow earn enough to go back with a caravan." I was silent when Danzan finished this speech.

Tseren-tso took up where he left off. "You told us you can't go back now, though I don't really see why, just because your side lost a war. And if you can't go . . ."

". . . yes, I know," I helped her out. "We can never manage the ranch we've talked about." I felt wretched. They had stayed with me for so long out of personal loyalty and in hopes that a ranch with many animals lay at the end of it, not exile in a foreign town where they were ill much of the time. I knew they were right, and I could not blame them for not wanting to stay. I had interesting work and the prospect of learning English and Tibetan before me. Life here for them was pointless and futile.

They were only waiting to get stronger and for Nishikawa to come back with the tale of how he had fared, and as the time of our parting approached I felt utterly inadequate. I wanted desperately to do something for them, but although I had a secure job I had little money. For two and a half years we had been a family, had shared hardship and trials, laughter and tears; and though it would have been much to Danzan's material benefit, I do not think he once considered betraying me. Finally I sold the only two things I retained that were of any value: my golden image of Chenresig—the Bodhisattva of Compassion—and my agate snuff pot, to David MacDonald for one hundred and thirty rupees. This was all that I was able to give to them as my token of gratitude. It seemed so little after all they had done.

When Nishikawa returned, full of the success of his first expedition and anxious to start again, they decided to leave with him. They needed little preparation, and I remember walking to the end of town with them on a cold and foggy morning in late January. I recalled only too well what they must now be feeling: the carefree joy at the outset of a journey, when you are leaving all your old problems behind and have not yet had time to develop new ones. They kept turning back to wave until they suddenly disappeared around a corner of the town leaving me standing in the middle of the street; the only one with a job and a

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secure future, the only one utterly bereft. I could never remember having been so completely alone before.

* * *

With his usual quick perception, Tarchin sensed my loneliness and invited me to move into the office and to have my meals with his family. Every morning I would climb the east ridge to the Tarchin house, have breakfast, and return to the office about ten. At noon a servant would bring us lunch, then at five a horse would be brought for my employer while I followed him home on foot for supper. I enjoyed these family evenings, and they were good for my Tibetan.

Of all the people I met in my travels, the Tarchins were some of the best. During my years of deception, with the need for constant vigilance, an irritability and harshness toward my neighbours had unconsciously taken hold of me, but this gradually began to thaw in the family warmth of the Tarchins. Often when talking with Tarchin I would feel that our spirits were in deep communion, and I would be seized with an impulse to tell him who I was. I tried to atone for my life of deception by performing to the best of my ability everything he asked me to do.

I had company at the office, for also staying there was a regular guest of the Tarchins, a Kalmuck Mongolian lama named Geshé Wangyel. He was not only a scholar of note, but he had a keen business sense and had amassed a fortune in trade between Lhasa and Peking. One of the most widely travelled Mongolian lamas, he had been as far as England, as sutra instructor to Marco Pallis, one of the few Westerners up to that time who had made a serious attempt to understand the Tibetan religion from the inside.

Geshé put his money to what is considered in Tibet the best possible use. The highest aspiration of every student monk is to obtain the degree of *geshé* ('Doctor of Divinity'), but there is a lot more involved in this than twenty years of study and then passing rigorous examinations: the prospective graduate must also throw a feast for the entire monastery. Since there are more than seven thousand monks at Drepung, this involves a lot of money. Geshé Wangyel used his fortune to finance his poor but studious countrymen, so that no deserving Kalmuck Mongol ever went without a degree for want of funds. I was a little shy of him since he was so well-travelled (when we first met he

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remarked that I did not look like a Mongolian), but he was to become one of my staunchest friends and supporters.

Nishikawa was in Kalimpong for so short a time between his second and third trips that I hardly saw him. Anxious to make up his losses on the cigarettes, he quickly sold the butter and *tsampa* he had brought back, loaded up with rolled tobacco, and was off again across the Jelap La and up the Chumbi Valley to Phari. One of the few things he did tell me was that Tseren-tso had proved her worth on the trip: when a Tibetan customs officer in Chumbi had shown too much curiosity, she had withered the unfortunate man with a stream of abuse in Mongolian.

This third trip was more successful financially, but Nishikawa was caught in a terrible blizzard on the way back, and he limped into Kalimpong more dead than alive. Never one to squander his meager resources, he lived for free on the church veranda by the market place among beggars while he was recovering. Whenever I visited him with medicine he had new stories about the lowest life in Kalimpong. The town was full of Tibetan beggars just now because it was winter, and too cold up on the plains. When summer came they would migrate to the cooler highlands: a nomadic subculture. Nishikawa learned that it only took a week's begging among the generous Nepali villagers to support the average professional beggar for a month in town. Alms were always given in the form of rice, and the experienced mendicant would carry three bags for the various grades: the cheapest he would eat himself, while he would sell that of better quality in the market.

As soon as he was up and around, Nishikawa was full of plans for yet another trip across the Himalayas. On a Sunday when I had no work, we climbed the east ridge together to my old rock—a place where we could be in private—and he told me what he was going to do. "I've seen a lot in the last month," he confided, scratching under the patches of his lice-ridden old robe. He certainly looked little better than the beggars he now lived with. "First I almost died crossing the Jelap La. But that was nothing to life among the poorest of the poor. Oh, some are simply cynical professionals, as I told you, but there are real ones as well: people for whom life holds nothing, not even the slightest glimmer of hope. One morning I awoke and found that the man beside me was dead. After he had died someone had stripped him of the only thing he had of any value at all: his rags. There he lay in the cold, any dignity he might have possessed gone with his life. You cannot imagine

the horror of it." He stopped talking and drifted into reflection, while I could think of nothing to say.

"It was probably that incident more than anything else," he continued, "that has made me decide to go back to Lhasa and enroll in Drepung." I stared at him blankly. "Why do you look so surprised? I've liked the times I've spent in monasteries. I'm sure that beyond all the chanting and memorization, and ceremony there must lie some deeper truth."

"What about returning to Japan?" was all I could say.

"What about it? We can't go now, and I have to do something until we can. You're well set up and you seem happy." Again I could see how different we were. Although I would miss him, the last of my old companions, I could see that there was no use in trying to keep him in Kalimpong.

* * *

In March Tarchin took me to enroll in Dr. Graham's school atop the mountain to the east of the town. Through Eric Lambert I was able to satisfy the formality of a recommendation from a member of the local British community: in fact from a former Resident in Lhasa, a Scotsman named Major Sheriff. His wife was a daughter of Dr. Graham himself, the missionary founder of the school. I was to receive private lessons for two hours everyday from an elegant middle-aged Englishwoman named Miss Bumfield, and was also given free use of the library.

Languages have always fascinated me, and I plunged right into learning English. Under such an intense program I made steady progress, especially since I had just acquired a Tibetan roommate who had been raised by a Dutch scholar and was fluent in English. His name was Twanyan, and like me he had come to Tarchin asking for help. Having been born in Kalimpong of mixed Chinese and Tibetan parentage, and orphaned at the age of seven, he had led an exciting life. Like a latter day Kim he had wandered all over India until the Dutch scholar had taken a liking to him and had him educated. Unfortunately, Twanyan had contracted tuberculosis soon after the professor's death. He had now just come out of a sanatorium in Patna, and so was badly in need of the kind of friendship and assistance the Tarchins offered him. His presence gave me an excuse for my rapid progress through the early stages of my studies, for of course, it would never do to let Miss

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Bumfield know that I had once studied English at a mission school in Kyushu.

So while my outward life was calm, my intellectual life was frenzied, as I grappled with two difficult languages. But Tarchin seemed to feel that my studies were at least as important as my work, and often encouraged me to study while putting some of my duties on Twanyan. As a result, although I never acquired quite the fluency in Tibetan or English that I had in Mongolian, by the end of 1946 after a little more than a year in Kalimpong, I was quite competent in the former, and could communicate with reasonable ease in the latter.

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The Great Tradition

Like the tree-clad slopes of a dormant volcano, the calm everyday surface of Kalimpong life disguised feverish underground activity. This was mostly Chinese-inspired, with agents sent via Tibet to ferret out what they could about events in India; but there were also anti-government Tibetan exiles and reformers, anti-Chinese Tibetans, White and Red Russians, and a whole medley of other agents working for a variety of causes in this cozy little town.

To complicate the situation there was a vicious rivalry between three separate Chinese intelligence services under the Defense Department, the Transport Department, and the Tibetan-Mongolian Affairs Commission. These three went at each other with a determination and a savagery that made the well-known jealousies between the British MI5 and MI6 look like a decorous tea party by comparison, and occasional mysterious murders in Lhasa or Kalimpong were sometimes found to be the result of this inter-service feuding. Dharma could tell me something about this since his eldest daughter had made the mistake of marrying a Tibetan merchant named Lobsang, who in reality turned out to be a Sikang Tibetan, a graduate of the Central Military Academy in Nanking working as an undercover agent for the Defense Department. After the couple moved to Lhasa he was assassinated by a Yunnanese operative from the rival Transport Department.

There were also a number of Russians, Kazakhs and Uzbeks in Kalimpong, whose activities echoed the days of the Great Game. I remember in particular a tall and handsome young Russian who was married to a White Russian beauty. He disappeared quite suddenly in 1948, and I probably would have forgotten all about him had I not made his acquaintance again in 1950: in the Presidency Penitentiary in Calcutta. He had been arrested for espionage, but the Soviet Government would not even acknowledge him as one of their citizens. His

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situation aroused my sympathy, for like me he was a spy without a country, cast adrift on the shoals of international espionage.

In 1946 Lhatseren seemed to get a laugh out of arresting a seemingly innocuous lame Chinese youth who taught at the Chinese Primary School. It turned out that he was receiving large remittances every month through the Kalimpong branch of the Bank of China. What lent humour to the situation was that he was operating right under the noses of Tarchin and Lhatseren, for he lived directly across from the Tibet Mirror Press, and next to Lhatseren's house.

The two most important political exiles in Kalimpong were former favourites of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama who had been out-manoeuvred by their enemies after his death. Their's was part of the story of the unseemly scramble for power among less able and less respected men that always seemed to occur after the death of a Dalai Lama. One of them, Kunphel-la, had once been the second most powerful man in Tibet after the Dalai Lama, by whom he was treated as a son (he was also the only other Tibetan to have had a car). Kunphel-la had taken precautions toward keeping himself in power by raising his own personal regiment, but his judgment of men had not proved particularly sound. He had recruited only sons of the nobility who, being accustomed to a soft life, were only too happy to be persuaded to disband by his rivals at the very moment they were needed. Because of his good looks and his youth it was rumoured that there was something unseemly in Kunphel-la's relations with the Dalai Lama, and that political power had been willed to him as a result. To anyone who knew of the wisdom of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama such a tale was ludicrous, but power-mongers in Lhasa found it useful. Kunphel-la's talents in Kalimpong extended, so far as anyone knew, only to managing the wool warehouse.

His fellow exile, Changlochen Gung Sonam Gyalpo, was one of the foremost writers in his day of Tibetan prose, as well as a gifted speaker. People flocked to hear his tales of corruption and intrigue among the Lhasa nobles. It is some measure of his speaking skills that he was able to hold his audiences despite all his teeth having been yanked out under torture.

Joining these two later, unfortunately at a time when I was away, was one of the most remarkable men of twentieth century Tibetan scholarship: Gedun Choephel. I would meet him some years after in Lhasa, but by then his tragic life would have run its course, leaving him a shell of a man sustained only by opium and alcohol.

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Corruption in Kalimpong was of a more modest scale. It was an open secret, for example, that the export of cotton was conducted in a shady manner. When I first arrived I had wondered about all the idle Tibetans who seemed to spend their time gambling in the *chang* shops and chasing women. Most of them, it turned out, earned their livings by applying for export licenses under a variety of names and then reselling them. The British were so anxious to export Indian cotton, both for financial and political reasons, that they winked at all these people applying for licenses who had no intention whatsoever of exporting cotton themselves. Meanwhile the inefficient system that had led to this abuse in the first place became so encumbered that it was far easier for the real merchants to buy these black market licenses, rather than to apply for them legally.

* * *

In the spring of 1946, not long after I had begun my English lessons, a large number of Mongolian monks and lamas came from Lhasa on pilgrimage. Among them was Namgyel Dalama who had loaned me the money to come to Kalimpong from Lhasa. Since Tarchin made it a habit to be helpful by printing leaflets and guide maps to the sacred places, as well as clearing out a warehouse across from the printing press for the pilgrims to use, he was often the first person they called on. This was extremely valuable to his position in the intelligence network, and it was also a chance for me to make important contacts, for as a Mongolian in his employ it fell upon me to take care of the Mongolian pilgrims. Because of this, when I next went to Lhasa I had a whole network of friends and acquaintances there including a merchant named Gyamtso who came to Kalimpong to buy ivory and sandalwood and with whom I would later usually stay in Lhasa.

One day by chance I found myself alone in the warehouse with Namgyel Dalama. He smiled knowingly at me, and I wondered if it had something to do with my unpaid debt. "You really do very well," he said. "It is obvious that you have most people fooled."

"What do you mean?" I asked, though his meaning was only too clear.

"When you came to me to borrow money in Lhasa, I knew right away that you were Japanese." My heart skipped a beat at this casual observation, and he noticed my discomfiture. "Don't worry. Why do you think I waited until we were alone to say anything? It would

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certainly do me no good to reveal your identity, and you seem to be doing no one any harm.”

“But how did you know when I’ve fooled so many others?” I asked.

“There were several things that gave you away, but only because I’ve often dealt with the Japanese. Something in the way you moved alerted me, though I must say your accent is convincing. Then there was your obvious agitation and hurry to be away—and I’d been told that you were going all over town asking about the war. There are no secrets in Lhasa. Knowing the Japanese as I do, I could tell that you were worried about your defeat.”

“Of course I don’t have the money to pay you back,” I told him.

“Oh, don’t worry about that. You told me when you borrowed it that you would never return it.”

“I did?”

“Of course. You said you would try to repay me if you ever returned to Inner Mongolia. I knew you would never return there. But I thought to myself: ‘Where did all this money come from?’ Of course the answer was that it came from the Japanese who wanted us to find the Jebtsundamba Khutughtu. Now there was a Japanese in trouble standing before me. How could I refuse?”

Another distinguished guest at Tarchin’s home was Takster Rimpoché, the brother of the Dalai Lama. I met him also, and told him that we had been on the same caravan to Lhasa. He was friendly and easy to talk to in these surroundings, and we laughed that I had found him so imposing on the trail.

Later that same year the Lama Dilowa Gegen himself turned up. I was not surprised since Lambert had mentioned to me in passing at Lhatseren’s house that the British were attempting to secure his release from Chunking. As soon as he was released he flew straight to Calcutta then came up to Kalimpong to prepare to continue on to Lhasa. He stayed at the Himalayan Hotel for a few days while the warehouse was made suitable. Shortly after his arrival he called on Tarchin and I was asked to serve him tea. He sat in the Tarchins’ guest room, tall, dignified and commanding even after the years of house arrest, and I knew as soon as I looked into the searching, intelligent eyes behind the large round glasses that he had recognized me; even though we had met only once years ago. I was relieved that he said nothing.

Later when we spoke privately he told me that he agreed with Dalama and saw no reason why anyone should know who I was. He even gave me some information from that vast spy network of his about

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some of my less fortunate countrymen. It went back to the story of how we tried to open a Eurasian air route, and wanted to test it out by transporting the Olympic flame to Tokyo. While Japanese intelligence had never found out what happened to the agents at Ochina in northern Ninghsia by the Outer Mongolian border, the Dilowa knew that they had been arrested soon after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War and held in Lanchow. As soon as the Japanese bombed that city for the first time they were taken out and shot. This was the sad, but nevertheless inevitable end to our attempt to use a world symbol of peace and brotherhood to further our colonial and military aims.

There were now far too many people in Kalimpong for comfort who knew my real identity. Though I was certain I could trust both Dalama and the Dilowa, I wondered if some of their followers would prove as discreet. I did not learn until much later that Tarchin was in fact tipped off by some of the Dilowa's own followers about me in the autumn of 1946, but that he felt it made no difference and continued to treat me as always.

About this time Kalimpong was visited by an eccentric 'White Lama' from Arizona named Theos Bernard. Ten years before, back in 1937, he had made a brief visit to Lhasa in the company of Tarchin, and now he was hoping for permission to go again for the Monlam, or New Year's ceremonies. He often called at the office and talked with me. When he decided to go off and explore around Ladakh while he waited for a reply from Lhasa he asked me to go with him as guide and interpreter. My English was now up to it, and I felt I would probably benefit more from a trip like this than from further lessons. Tarchin, however, had other things in mind for me, and dispatched one of his servants as a guide. He may have been protecting me, for what I didn't know was that Bernard had written a book called *Land of a Thousand Buddhas*, in which he claimed to have passed through his complex monastic initiations quickly and effortlessly because he was none other than the incarnation of Padmasambhava, the Indian mystic who converted Tibet to Buddhism in the seventh century. It was probably just as well that I missed out, not only because of Mr. Bernard's questionable reputation, but because the entire party was killed the next year while trying to sneak across the border. For most outsiders, Tibet was still a forbidden land.

Just what my employer had in mind was revealed to me in late November of 1946. One day he called me to his office where we could

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be alone. "I'm sure you realize that Tibet considers itself an independent country," he began by way of introduction.

This was something Tibetans were likely to have strong feelings about. Some might oppose the particular nobles who were in power during a regency, and a tiny few might even wish to reform Tibet's feudal system; but none besides the most blatant opportunists would accept that Tibet was part of China. This was more true than ever after the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had formally declared independence in 1913 and rid Tibet of Chinese troops as well as the two *ambans*: Chinese representatives the Tibetans thought of as ambassadors but whom China regarded as governors. For years afterward there had been no Chinese representation in Lhasa, but they had wormed their way back in with an official 'Mission of Condolence' ostensibly sent to mourn the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1933, but which had stayed on, to later become the Tibetan-Mongolian Affairs Commission. It was highly typical of the Chinese to try to take advantage of the confused political situation that always arose after the death of a Dalai Lama. But now it seemed that there were additional reasons for concern.

"The British have always understood the wisdom of keeping Tibet as an independent buffer state," he continued, "and India, under self-government, will continue that policy. The problem is that right now the British have their hands full with trying to figure out how to hand over power. We're worried that the Chinese might take advantage of this, swoop into Tibet, and take over before anyone knows what is happening." I had no idea either of the reason for this history lesson, or who he meant by 'we'.

Then suddenly he looked up at me and announced: "I want you to go and discover whether or not it is true that China is making preparations for an armed invasion of Tibet. It will make a good story for my paper," he added weakly.

In spite of all that I had been learning, I was getting restless, and was ready to jump at the chance of an adventure such as this. Sensing my enthusiasm, he changed tack to make sure I understood the realities of such a journey. "Of course you realize that this will mean wandering around the border areas of eastern Tibet," he warned. "These regions are remote and lawless, and can be dangerous at the best of times." The warning was not really necessary. I had seen many proud Khampas, the people from the eastern region of Kham, on the Barkhor, and had met quite a few of them in Kalimpong as well. They have always enjoyed a

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reputation as bandits and rebels, and they make the fiercest of the soldier-monks. There was a saying attributed to them that went: "No murder, no food; no pilgrimage, no absolution. On! onward on your pilgrimage, killing men and visiting temples."

"You may as well know that you won't be the first person I've sent," Tarchin continued a little nervously as these thoughts were going through my head. "In fact you will be the third. The first seems to have died of illness. The second just disappeared."

This information perhaps did not disturb me as much as it should have. I had plenty of hard travelling experience behind me, and was confident of my own abilities. My only real consideration was that I should do nothing harmful to my own country, which hardly seemed possible in this case.

"Who will I be working for?" I asked a little foolishly.

"Me," he answered sensibly. "Not only do I want the news for my paper, but I'd like to warn the Tibetan government if there is any danger." Of course I knew that behind 'me' were the figures of Eric Lambert and Lhatseren, but that hardly mattered. Here was a chance to put my newly-acquired skill in Tibetan to use, and perhaps to help a country to retain its independence. I think that subconsciously it might have been a way of atoning for having been part of an oppressive colonial establishment. I agreed right then and there without any more questions.*

Events now moved very quickly. Tarchin told me he wanted me to leave as soon as possible and immediately issued me with funds—rather more, I thought, than he would have been able to afford to invest in a news story—particularly if this was the third attempt. He also told me that I would be well paid if I returned successfully. I had been through this before, it seemed; long ago, far away, and in a different language. It felt strange to step back into my old shoes.

I ordered a sword from a Nepali blacksmith and asked Dharma for some ivory dust. He always had some left over from sawing and I knew

* Many years later, I learnt that in the India Office Library in London there exists a highly-classified document entitled *Aid to Tibet*, dated 27 April, 1946, which had originated from the Colonial Secretary's office. It concluded that foreign domination of Tibet would "constitute a direct threat to the security of India", identified China and the Soviet Union as potential enemies, and Nagchuka and Chamdo as the most strategically important areas to be investigated. This may well have been the origin of my mission.

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that it was valued as a medicine to staunch bleeding. But most of my preparations would be made in Lhasa, so my first task was to get there as quickly as possible. Making the rounds of the caravan inns I found a unit ready to go in two or three days. It belonged to Drepung and was led by a young Khampa warrior monk. I liked his air of strength and self-possession, and being with him and other Khampas would sharpen my understanding of their dialect and personalities. I paid them to take my bedding and personal belongings by mule while I would walk—though on reflection I would have done better to further toughen myself up by carrying a heavy load. The original agreement also called for me to prepare my own meals, but during the journey the muleteer monks asked me to join them and though I later tried to pay they would accept nothing.

One of the things I most looked forward to on this trip to Lhasa was making up for having noticed so little coming the other way fourteen months before when depression and worry over the fate of Japan, plus a bad case of snow blindness around Phari, had caused me to miss so much. We left Kalimpong on December 10th, a caravan of about a hundred mules looked after by ten drivers. All were on foot except for the leader and since we soon worked into a routine where I ate with everyone else, I began to take a hand in the mule-driving as well. Partially to familiarize myself with Khampa ways, I dressed in Khampa clothing, right down to a fox fur cap, much to the good-natured amusement of the mule drivers who took it upon themselves to teach me to behave accordingly.

Since mules travel so fast our daily marching schedule was relatively leisurely with departure not until 5 a.m. every morning. This was certainly a relief from the *khalkha* system I was used to when a 3 a.m. start would have been considered indulgent, and on this trip there was always time for tea and *tsampa* before setting out. The mules carried light loads of about 80 lbs. on each side, the leaders picking out the way while we urged the others on from the rear, their cheerful bells adding a festive air to the march. This early part of the journey through the southeast corner of Sikkim and up to the Jelap La involved a lot of climbing on narrow mountain paths and usually a scout would go ahead to try to keep us from running straight into another caravan. Occasional quarrels would erupt anyway between two caravans—especially if they were from rival monasteries—over who had the right of way and there would be a good deal of bluster and bragging. Swords might be

drawn, and even crossed, but it was all in good fun and there was never any real harm done.

Normally we would cover from fifteen to twenty miles in a march of five to eight hours. We needed to reach our destination before noon for the same reason we'd had to in Mongolia: the wind. But here we were on such a well-travelled trail that every night we were able to stop at an inn. Not that we slept indoors—that was the privilege only of the caravan leader—but the inn's kitchen always provided shelter and warmth so that we could make our tea without going to the trouble of collecting fuel and making a fire. On arrival the drovers would unpack their mules and pile the loads in heaps, while one was detailed to go inside and start brewing the buttered tea that would put strength back into everyone. Then they checked the hooves, looked for saddle sores, and doled out wheat fodder before enjoying the first tea since early morning. Dinner was a simple affair of buttered tea and *tsampa* or noodles (although in India and Sikkim we would still be eating rice) eaten in the comfort of the inn kitchen, with the customary extra portion prepared and offered to the innkeeper. Then each muleteer would go outside to sleep beside the loads he was in charge of. The animals had to be fed once more during the night and again in the morning, so a muleteer had to carry an alarm clock around in his head.

I enjoyed travelling like this. It was fun taking care of the mules without having any real responsibility for them and the physical activity was welcome after so long at my books, although the first few days, and especially the climb to the Jelap La, were a trial. Until the Tang La north of Phari we would be doing nothing but going up and down: down from Kalimpong to the Teesta gorge; up to the Jelap La; down to the Amo River that ran through the Chumbi Valley; then up the course of that river to the Tibetan plateau.

We were lucky to find the Jelap La free of snow, and now just when my climbing muscles were regaining their tone, a whole new set came into use for the long descent to the Amo and the border town of Yatung lying so deep in the valley that the sun did not appear until nearly noon. Yatung did not seem like Tibet at all in spite of its famous wall and border gate. There were probably more Indians and Sikkimese here than Tibetans, as well as a detachment of the Indian Army, and since the Younghusband Expedition of 1904 there had been a British Trade Agent stationed here (for many years the post had been filled by David MacDonald). I remembered when coming the other way that the army basketball court had awakened strange feelings in me after years of

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wandering in the grasslands and across the high plains. I also remembered the English notice boards telling of Japanese atrocities, which I had tried to understand without being too obvious.

The walls of the gorge are so steep that there is no avoiding Yatung or Chumbi, which has the more formidable customs post, a little further on. But I had no cause to worry, and I tried to imagine Nishikawa sneaking through with his tobacco—particularly the last time when Tseren-tso had been with him and had terrorized the unfortunate official. In Kawaguchi's time, more than forty years before, there had been an elaborate system of checkposts in the towns between Yatung and Phari meant to deter travellers both from entering and leaving Tibet, but these no longer operated, and we continued to climb through the wooded gorge by the rushing Amo, until after several days of steady ascent, the trees disappeared and we emerged on the Tibetan plateau just south of Phari.

Phari, that eerie and windy market town dominated by a huge grim-looking fort, where Nishikawa had come to sell his tobacco, had the twin distinctions of being possibly the highest and the dirtiest town in the world. At well over 14,000 feet it was always cold, even in summer. The inhabitants seemed for centuries not to have bothered to clean the rubbish from the streets with the result that many streets functioned primarily as rubbish dumps while people walked along the roofs of the interconnected houses and entered through upper-storey windows. Water had to be brought some distance from the river, except when there was snow to melt. It seemed an altogether discouraging place to live but was ideally situated as a market town, the true physical and cultural border between India, the plains of Tibet, and the hills of Bhutan; and even in the most appalling weather the town was bustling with activity.

Both Indian and Tibetan currency were in use here. Mountainous bales of wool on their way south were piled in yards along the street. The rice market was found in the southeastern part of town, where Bhutanese men and women in their remarkable bright hand-woven robes and short cropped hair sold rice in gloomy earth-floored rooms. Unbelievably tough, they travelled barefooted even now in the dead of winter, their well-developed calves rippling as they walked. The men carried swords and daggers, and even the formidable Khampa muleteers I was with told me they would think twice before picking a quarrel with a Bhutanese.

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It was a relief to get out of the oppressive atmosphere of Phari and make the easy climb to the broad Tang La, and then with Chomo Lhari (23,989 ft.) on our right the barren plain of Tuna stretched before us. In the library at Dr. Graham's I had been struggling through accounts of the Younghusband Expedition, and found it unbelievable that an army would have camped in this inhospitable spot at almost 15,000 feet for the winter. Near the tiny village of Guru I tried to find the spot where the first engagement of the campaign had taken place: a very nasty battle between well-armed British and Indian troops and a force of reluctant Tibetans who really had no intention of fighting.

Several days later Gyantse, although nearly 13,000 feet, seemed lush by comparison, reminding me of the way it had felt to reach Reting after that far longer trek from Tsaidam. An attractive market town dominated by a hilltop fort at one end and a large monastery at the other, Gyantse was as far as British representation in Tibet extended until 1937 when a representative was placed in Lhasa to counter the Chinese presence there. It is a shame that I had no time to linger, for on later trips I would discover a shortcut that avoided Gyantse altogether.

We were now back in the heartland of Tibet, but still had two passes to cross before we reached Lhasa. The first, the Karo La, at almost 17,000 feet, was a cold, bleak, and almost perpetually snow-covered place where on the north a massive glacier extends almost down to the well-tended mani wall marking the crossing. It is a suitably forbidding place for the world's two highest battles to have been fought, again during the Younghusband Expedition. There had been two battles because after driving the defenders off, the British forces abandoned the uncomfortable position, little dreaming that the outgunned but determined Tibetans would reoccupy it as soon as they were gone.

But I put all thought of war and battle out of my mind as we skirted the beautiful high Turquoise Lake or Yamdrok Tso, where at this time of year the mountains that bordered it were snow-covered right down to the brilliant frozen surface. This lake could not help but bring to mind the Bengali spy Sarat Chandra Das who passed this way disguised as a Sikkimese in 1881 when the blue waters were said to have turned red. Das, a scholar spy of great learning who had helped Kawaguchi with his Tibetan studies in Darjeeling is often called the last of the 'pundits'. These were native agents in the pay of the British who had walked the length and breadth of Tibet, measuring distances

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by counting their paces on 100-beaded rosaries, and recording altitudes with boiling-point thermometers.

There was a great tradition of 'native' agents in Central Asia. The Russians had traditionally used Buriat Mongolians, and the most famous—a scholar monk named Dorjiev—had become so influential with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that he was one of the main excuses for the Younghusband's mission. The Chinese found ethnic Tibetans born in Szechwan, Sikang and Yunnan to be useful spies to sneak through Tibet into India where they could lose themselves in the Chinatowns of the major cities. But it was undoubtedly the British, with their pundits recruited from among Sikkimese and hillmen from Tarchin's area, who had established the most romantic tradition of undercover work. Musing on just who was behind my recruitment for this mission, I could only wonder, particularly with independence just around the corner, if when all was said and done, the last real pundit might just be Japanese. Just like them I even had a number—ATS5—although I was not to learn of this until later.

From the lake it was an easy climb to the Khamba La, but a steep and difficult descent with the mules to the Tsang Po on the other side. With the river low in the winter we were able to take the large wooden ferry rather than the yak-hide coracles that were used all summer, and from the north bank it was just a stroll of a couple of days to Lhasa.

My arrival was rather marred by a rare bout of diarrhoea which I developed on the 19th day of the journey, just one day short of the capital. Perhaps this was because I had been unable to resist the temptation to stop at the village of Chushul, where the Tsangpo and the Kyi chu join, and sample the local delicacy: raw fish. In all my travels, this was the only place I found in Tibet where fish was eaten. They were first gutted, and cut into small pieces, bones and all, then pounded with a stone mortar and pestle, and seasoned with salt and red pepper. It was not very good, and the effect was dramatic. I was having to stop so often that I could not keep up with the caravan, and told them to go on. By the time I passed Drepung it was getting dark, and fearful that I might be suspected if I entered the city late at night, I slept in a dry riverbed north of the Potala.

When I told the caravan to go on, I had been in no mood to carry my bedding, and now I badly regretted it, for the night of 31st December, 1946 was bitterly cold at 12,000 feet. I tried burying myself in the sand, but this of course did no good at all, and it was far too cold to

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sleep. For comfort I had only the dark silhouette of the Potala etched against the night sky as I shivered the long night away.

Surprisingly, other than being tired and hungry I felt fine the next morning—New Year's Day, 1947 by the Western calendar—and found my way to Go Khangsar where Namgyel Dalama had lent me money a year and a half before, knowing that I was Japanese and not expecting me to pay it back. I was hoping to find my friend Gyamtso here, the ivory and sandalwood merchant whom I had met in Kalimpong. Sure enough, he was there with his wife and two daughters, ensconced on the second floor, and my luggage had been safely delivered by the mule-teers. The Dilowa Gegen who had come to Lhasa six months before me now occupied the whole second floor—which Dalama had for so long kept in readiness for him—along with his large retinue. Already staying as Gyamtso's guest was another Outer Mongolian lama whom I had met at the refugee settlement near Zarin Sume, and this meant that there were any number of people in Lhasa who knew that I was Japanese. It was this lama who finally confirmed for me one of my long held suspicions: Inner Mongolian military personnel had indeed exchanged their Japanese uniforms for others, and were at the forefront of the anti-Japanese drive when the Outer Mongolian Army descended on Inner Mongolia towards the end of the war.

Through the people staying at Go Khangsar I learned that my friend Lobsang (Nishikawa) had been successful in his ambition to enter Drepung. He was said to be studying hard and was well-liked by his instructor and colleagues, though he was very poor and life was by no means easy for him. I asked a monk returning to Drepung to let Lobsang know that Dawa Sangpo was in town, then went out to the Barkhor to savour the excitement of being back in the holy city.

Nishikawa came to see me at Go Khangsar the next day. "You certainly seem to be prospering," he greeted me with a hint of irony in his voice. It was typical of Nishikawa to come out with such a remark, which I had no doubt was perfectly sincere, after casting a critical glance at my serviceable but travel-stained clothes. He, indifferent to physical discomfort as ever, wore no boots and was clad only in a thin and worn monk's robe even now in the dead of winter; yet he seemed healthy and full of vitality. I noticed, however, that his eyes seemed even worse and asked him about them.

"I suppose it is the price I have to pay for learning. Poor novices like me live in dark little rooms with no windows. The light is dim even by day, and we have only one small oil lamp to study by." I knew

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that whenever he went about something he did it wholeheartedly, and he probably stayed up until the early hours of the morning studying. "But what brings you to Lhasa?"

"Work," I answered, keeping my voice low though we were alone in the room. "Tarchin has asked me to go to the eastern border and see if the Chinese are making preparations to invade. It should be interesting—just like the old days."

"Except that the last time you were serving your country," he answered huffily. "Who are you working for this time?" For all Nishikawa's non-conformity, there was an uncritical patriotic streak in him that was proof against all the sort of doubts that had assailed me.

"I'm not entirely sure, though I have my suspicions," I answered. "But I'm certainly not working *against* Japan, and I might be helping Tibet. I can't see why you would object to working for a country we both like."

He was silent for a moment and seemed lost in thought. "In a way I envy you," he said finally. "I'd like to see Kham."

"You can come along if you like," I suggested, pleased that he had mentioned it.

"Ordinarily I'd jump at the chance," he replied thoughtfully. "The trouble is that now that I have been accepted as a student at Drepung I wouldn't want to betray my Lama. He has been extremely kind, and I feel I am making real progress as his student."

"Think it over and let me know what you decide so I can make plans. If you decide not to come I'll start looking for a caravan." I saw no sense in pressuring him. It might be nice to have the company of a countryman, but it might also open us to more danger. I knew his first two loves were travel and study, and it would be interesting to see which won out on this occasion. In the end it was the temptation to see a new place that proved stronger, and the next day he told me that he had decided to join me. First, however, he had important ritual duties at the forthcoming Monlam Festival which began on January 4th and lasted for twenty-one days.

During this period the monks from the three great monasteries of Drepung, Sera and Ganden gathered to pray for the safety of the nation and the prosperity of Buddhism; and the city reverted to monastic rule, coming directly under the administration of the Grand Proctor of Drepung. The capital's population swelled during the festival, and most Lhasa families found contingents of monks staying with them. They packed out the Jokhang, chanting six times a day, while, more *dob-dob*

than ever stood guard over the Barkhor brandishing their heavy sticks which they were only too happy to use on priests and lay spectators alike. When tea and *tsampa* were served in the Jokhang during breaks, the holy precinct looked more like a battlefield than a temple. Nishikawa participated in these rites everyday.

While taking in what I could of the festival, I spent most of my time preparing for the trip. There were things to buy, such as second-hand sheepskin-lined travelling monk's robes, fur caps, and long Tibetan boots. We also needed pots and ladles, a leather bellows, books of sutras (since we would be posing as pilgrim monks) and ex-army raincoats that were readily enough available in Lhasa not to be out of character with our disguise. Butter, that important staple, would be kept in boxes. Personal possessions as well as merchandise were stuffed into small oblong bags, and we had other provision bags for salt, tea and *tsampa*. We would carry it all in a traditional compact arrangement: strapped into a shoulder-frame backpack. This consisted of two arched frames of cane (wood was used in Mongolia for this, but since we were supposed to be returning to Inner Mongolia from Lhasa the Indian cane was plausible enough), and everything was wedged between them, tied up every morning, and untied every night.

In addition, I spent many hours squatting in market stalls along the Barkhor, in restaurants or *chang* shops meeting caravan men, Khampas, and other experienced travellers of the region, learning about the route and what would be the best items to trade in. I learned that we would have to face at least twenty passes before we reached Chamdo, and that we could expect blizzards at high altitudes and rain whenever we descended. Based on their advice I laid in a stock of large needles which would be far more valuable than money in remote areas. By the time Lobsang joined me in February I felt I had prepared as thoroughly as possible in Lhasa. He had received leave from the monastery by saying that he was going on a brief pilgrimage to Samye, Tibet's oldest monastery founded by Padmasambhava in the seventh century. I had meanwhile rented a room over a noodle shop on a back street behind the Jokhang so that we could make our preparations in private.

Finally, as we began our trip by walking east through the pre-dawn streets of Lhasa, Lobsang a head taller than me, I could not decide if we looked formidable or faintly ridiculous. Over our robes we each wore a small amulet box (*gao*) hung from our necks containing a Buddha image, and our prayer beads were wound around our left wrists. We were armed with swords and knives which we hoped we would not have

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to use except to ward off dogs. But I knew that the journey would have to be a combined effort in which each made up for the other's weaknesses. I would have to do most of the talking since Lobsang's language abilities were poor compared to mine, but he would have to do most of the praying to cover up for my minimal knowledge. And while he could sleep soundly under the most appalling conditions, and it might sometimes be difficult for me to keep up with his long legs that were well accustomed to carrying heavy loads, his eyes were so bad that he often could not make out what was going on right in front of him.

The straps of my pack frame bit into my shoulders as we walked. Nishikawa swung his long legs confidently into stride, but I was still struggling to keep up with him on the second day as we passed the foot of the mountain at the top of which stands Ganden Monastery. It was only on the third day when we had our first contact with Khampa refugees: a young couple, the wife carrying a small child. Unable to bear the heavy tax burden in their homeland, they had left to become pilgrims and itinerant farm workers. It was the first real inkling I had of what lay ahead.

Later we were joined by more Khampa pilgrims, and it was important for us to recall that they might be looking for more than simple companionship. The rule was never to indicate that you might have anything of value. While I have almost always found Khampas to be likable and forthright people, it was impossible to ignore their reputation, and we were often told stories of them crushing the skulls of their sleeping companions and stealing their possessions.

Yet our journey continued uneventfully for nearly two weeks due to our caution and because we were following the famous mail runner's road connecting Lhasa and Peking. There were plenty of passes on this trail, but at least the rivers were bridged, and it was not until our climb out of the Tsachuka Gorge to the Nubkang La (West Snow Pass) at over 19,000 feet that we encountered serious difficulties with snow. My companion's long legs were better able to cope with this, as I found myself constantly stumbling and falling. But I was encouraged by the view of a broad green valley from the top of the pass, and two days later I was overjoyed to find wild parsley growing near a village called Alando. I had not eaten any green vegetables since Kalimpong.

I was lucky to survive the experience. Shortly after I had eaten the boiled leaves, I was overcome with vomiting and diarrhea. Seeing my condition the inhabitants of Alando gleefully recounted that scores of

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cattle and horses died every year from mistakenly eating the same greens—and that even a small portion was usually quite fatal.

My shakey legs, as I recovered, made surmounting the deep snow of the Sharkang La (East Snow Pass) no easier, and after descending we again narrowly escaped being poisoned when we innocently bought some yak meat. The next day we were about to eat it at an inn when the proprietor demanded to know where it had come from. An honest answer got us thrown out into the street. It seems that the village where we had bought the meat was in the midst of an epidemic of cow-pox. That night we camped by the roadside rather than risk the cold hospitality of the district, and it rained. We made makeshift tents with our pack frames and waterproofs, but I still found it impossible to sleep. I was just as impossible to awaken Nishikawa who had not even bothered to take shelter, but who slept soundly on his back with his mouth open to the rain. Again and again I was to see him sleep the same way. I would not have thought it was possible.

From here we descended to a green, forested area, then after three low passes, entered a valley that should have been one of the richest agricultural regions in Tibet. We were surprised, however, to see that many of the fields had been left untilled and were choked with weeds. When we arrived at the main settlement of Shobando we found that the inhabitants, many of whom suffered from goiter, seemed to do nothing all day but drink *chang*. The houses were in poor repair, and some had even fallen down. What the reason was for this air of decadance and apathy, we never discovered. It was a relief when we climbed out of this strange valley.

Several days later, after another pass and having crossed the bridge over the Nakchu—which I had previously crossed near its source on the way from the Tsaidam—we again began to climb into the snow. The one thing I had not remembered to bring was snow goggles, so we decided to begin our final ascent of the Yitruk La around two in the morning, hoping to be well on our way down before the sun came up. In fact, by the time we reached the summit the rays were glaring back up at us in full force. I lay back in the soft snow and closed my eyes, and must have fallen asleep, for when I next opened them Nishikawa had left a message of encouragement in the snow, but was nowhere to be seen. I struggled on half blind, cursing myself for my lack of foresight, and my companion for not waking me. He was waiting just below the snowline by the bank of a stream of melting snow, cooling his eyes in the water.

The Great Tradition

The rest of the day was a trial, with my vision double and at times even triple, but at a village called Nyenda we were told that only a two-day march and the 13,000 ft. Namtso La now seperated us from Chamdo, our first major destination. We had been on the trail for two months, and the journey was already proving more difficult than I had bargained for. Yet had we only known, these two months were but a pleasure jaunt compared with what fate now had in store for us.

Eleven

Down and out in the Borderlands

Chamdo, where five main roads met, was the center of trade and politics for eastern Tibet, yet it was a small town of only three or four hundred houses. Located on a triangular slope between the confluence of the Dza Chu and the Ngom Chu, which then joined to form the Mekong, it was not a very pretty place. Although the town was at only at 10,600 feet the surrounding mountains were bare and drab, lacking both the spectacular bleakness of the highlands and the wooded cheerfulness of the lower valleys.

Chamdo's appearance perhaps reflected its violent twentieth century history. In 1908 it had been overrun by the Chinese and so badly misruled that when an army came from Lhasa in 1918 the local Khampas gave it full support and sent the Chinese scurrying back to Szechuan. One of their greatest grievances had been that the Chinese, responding to a revolt in 1912, had destroyed the large monastery on a rise above the town.

This had been a great popular victory for Tibet yet here, nearly thirty years later, I was disturbed by something I had noticed during much of our trip: the way in which the soldiers and officials of the central government treated the local inhabitants. Time and time again we had met refugees fleeing from misrule; and bullying by Tibetan soldiers was carried on openly here in town.

The province of Kham was governed directly from Lhasa: one of the four *shapé* (cabinet ministers) was placed here and rotated every three years. Soldiers and minor officials were rotated as well, and they tended to think of Kham not as a place to be well governed, but as a source of wealth to be squeezed dry. The proud Khampas had not taken this treatment lying down. Although the region was quiet just now, over and over again they had risen in rebellion, just as they had risen against the Chinese, so that there were many experienced guerrilla fighters amongst them.

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Tarchin had supplied me with a letter of introduction to the governor. This simply identified me as a Mongolian pilgrim on my way home and—in the manner of a passport—asked that I be allowed to pass unhindered. Although I approved of little that I had heard of the governor and his policies, I knew it would be wise to stay on the right side of him, so I presented the letter along with a *khata* at his headquarters in the rebuilt monastery above the town.

Meanwhile we stayed in rather more humble surroundings. The house was termed an inn, but there was only one big room where everyone ate and slept together. Unexceptional from the outside, it was solidly built with the large and impressive wooden beams that are a feature of Chamdo houses. The landlady was a Shigatse woman married to an officer who was away on duty. A number of military men who were stationed along the border came to visit her while we were there, making the inn a perfect base for my investigations. I had to exercise a certain amount of care in this, for even though my work could ultimately benefit the Tibetan government, the corruption among soldiers and officials here was notorious. Snooping was not appreciated, whether on the part of a British agent or by someone from the central government gathering facts on the mistreatment of local inhabitants—or perhaps trying to get a true picture of the military situation that local officials were bribed to distort.

The caravan inns were another source of information. Chamdo is an important stop on the 'tea road' that begins in Tatsienlu—a town well to the southeast where the tea is packed—and which continues all the way to Lhasa. Tea has traditionally been the most important and stable item of trade between Tibet and China, and this trade has always continued whatever the political problems between the two countries. Caravan men were normally straight-forward and honest, and a few cups of *chang* were usually sufficient to get whatever they knew out of them. I was able to conclude after a week in Chamdo that there was no unusual military activity in the area—and that the road to Tatsienlu was so infested with bandits that it would amount to suicide to try to go there at this time of year without a strong caravan. But since at this season the caravans were all going the other way, it was now time to continue on north to Jyekundo, another important caravan town where the Chinese were supposed to have an airfield and barracks.

Once on our way up the valley of the Dza Chu it was not long before our troubles began again. About four days out a blizzard struck, and, just when we had despaired of finding a place to camp, we

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stumbled on a cave where we had to remain for two days waiting for the snow to stop. Ironically a wild daphne bloomed near enough to the cave for its fragrance to remind us of the homeland neither of us had seen for so long.

Eventually, the snow stopped and we were able to make our way upstream to the border village of Tsokiyumdo. Sumdo is a Tibetan word meaning a 'three valleys', and the village was built, like Chamdo, at the confluence of the two rivers that joined here. There was a bridge with a wooden gate across one river leading to the village, then another leading to Muslim-administered Chinghai. I had, of course, spent more than a year passing through this province and under detention, and although the Tsaidam had been devastated by rebellious Kazakhs, I remembered much of Chinghai as being peaceful and well-governed.

We were waved across the bridge by the Tibetan guards. Before we reached the other side I heard a cry to halt, but since we had already been allowed to pass I simply continued on thinking that the order was for someone else. I did not notice that my companion had stopped. Another more urgent cry came and I turned around to see an imperious-looking official with a beard and shaved head gesticulating angrily at me.

"Come here when you're called!" he screamed. "Where do you think you are going?"

"Isn't this the way to Mongolia?" I answered attempting to feign innocence but apparently succeeding only in appearing arrogant.

"Where have you come from?" he then demanded.

"Lhasa," I answered, and he looked knowingly at his two companions.

"And when did you leave Lhasa?" was his next question. When I told him that I thought it was around the 16th of February he looked absolutely triumphant. "Come with me," he ordered. "I have a few questions for you."

He led us across the bridge and into the village. On the way I managed to get in a few words with the Khampas escorting us and found out that the imperious one was the local chief of the border guard. In his office he searched us thoroughly and took apart our pack frames. This did not worry us since we were careful from the beginning to carry nothing suspicious, but we could not imagine what it was all about. He then subjected us to a string of questions: what monastery did we belong to . . . how long had we been there . . . what had we studied? His bald pate indicated that he might well be a monk

himself—duties were commonly shared between monk and lay officials—and well versed in the scriptures, so for once I let my companion do all the answering. I did let it drop, though, that we had been received by the governor in Chamdo, and that seemed to thaw him a little.

“Well, your story sounds good,” he said finally, “But I can’t let you go until I have more information from Chamdo.”

“But why not?” I protested. “We are just simple Mongolian pilgrims going home. What right have you to detain us like common criminals?”

“Because, little monk with the big mouth, common criminals are what you just may be, and if I discover that you are from Sera instead of Drepung as you claim, then you will be in very serious trouble.”

“Sera?” I was genuinely mystified.

He snorted. “A few days after you say you left Lhasa, the former Regent, Reting Rimpoché, was arrested for plotting with the Chinese to put himself back into power. Reting studied at Sera and still has strong connections there at the Je College. I suppose you are going to tell me you know nothing of this.”

“Of course I don’t,” I replied, wondering what was coming next.

“Well, you monks of Sera tried to invade the capital and fought with the soldiers for a whole week to try to get the Rimpoché back. It was quite a battle, I understand, but you were outnumbered, and when you ran out of ammunition you finally surrendered. But some of you, it seems, got away, and we have been told to keep a lookout for any monks trying to leave the country.”

“You don’t think we would be stupid enough to try and cross openly in front of such diligent government servants, do you?” I asked, but my new attempt at humility was again taken for arrogance.

“You will remain in custody until my messenger gets back,” he answered gruffly.

This messenger would be sent on a swift horse to Chamdo to check our story. His sash was personally sealed with wax by our friend the chief of the border guard, and would be checked at the other end to make sure that it had not been opened. This meant he could not remove his robe or sash during the ten-day round trip. Since we had presented ourselves to the governor there with the letter saying we were on our way to Mongolia from Kalimpong I had no doubts about the final outcome, but I did not like the look of some of the soldiers who

suspected that we had been murdering their comrades in Lhasa, and being in their custody was hardly an inviting prospect.

It was not until we returned to Lhasa that we learned further details of the so-called rebellion of the former regent, the same Reting Rimpoché I had met near his monastery; and I was very glad that I had not taken up his offer to become a disciple. I remembered the story that Danzan had told me, that when Reting Rimpoché had resigned as regent in 1942, he had insisted that the arrangement would only be temporary, until he had finished a religious retreat. It seems that he thought the time had come—and with some justification, for while his own administration had been marked by corruption and greed, that of his successor, Taktra Rimpoché, was characterized by even worse corruption, negligence and incompetence.

The clumsy means Reting was accused of using to attain his ends, however, hardly seemed creditable: he was said to have sent a package to Taktra Rimpoché which contained a bomb. This was supposed to have exploded prematurely, injuring a servant of the Regent. Since the box that was put on display outside the court house as evidence showed no signs of having suffered a recent explosion, most Lhasans just felt this was a rather foolish ploy in a struggle between rival nobles that would, in the normal run of things, continue behind the scenes without affecting everyday life. They took the situation more seriously when Reting was arrested and the monks of Sera's Je College went on the rampage. These monks might even have won had they not put so much faith in magic amulets that were supposed to protect them from bullets, but which instead had led to their massacre in a pitched battle on the open ground between the capital and the monastery.

Meanwhile, Reting Gompa was sacked and this was supposed to have been a good time to pick up bargains in Lhasa, since returning soldiers were selling off the monastery's treasures for whatever they could get. Then, in the midst of the investigation the Rimpoché suddenly died in the Potala prison. Rumours abounded as to how the relatively young and healthy ex-Regent had taken his leave of this world. Some even said he had used his powers to spirit himself into the next.

It was the repercussions of this affair in distant Lhasa, from which no one seemed to emerge in a very good light, that had led to our arrest here on the border. It was strangely like the last time I had been arrested years before in the Tsaidam and again I was grateful to be held for the wrong reason.

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We were placed in the custody of a Khampa farmer named Gyal Tsering and his attractive wife, so it appeared that detention might well be less harsh than I had feared. But just as I was about to go to sleep a soldier came in. "You!" he screamed as he pointed at me, "Little monk with the big mouth! Come with me!" As usual I had done most of the talking and this had not seemed to endear me to the soldiers. He took me to another house where he and his fellows were billeted. As soon as we entered someone grabbed me from behind and tried to tie me up. I broke loose and lashed out with my fists, but I was outnumbered and soon pinned to the floor. There were only a few soldiers, but they were drunk and getting drunker, and it appeared that baiting me was to be part of their night's entertainment.

"You may have thought it was a sport to kill soldiers in Lhasa, but you're at our mercy now!" bellowed their leader once my arms were bound tightly at the wrists and stretched above my head by means of a rope to the ceiling. Thus suspended, I was completely helpless and could do nothing to defend myself as he slapped and punched me in the face, encouraged by his drunken friends. Fortunately, he quickly bored of this, though my wrists were so painful that any damage to my face was hardly noticeable by comparison. Soon the men went out, talking of women, and I was left in the custody of a Khampa civilian under orders to watch me and not go to sleep.

As soon as my captors were out of earshot this man too left, telling me he would be right back. He returned with a woman who brought *tsampa* and tea which she kneaded together and fed me with her hands as I still hung uncomfortably from the ceiling.

"Are you all right?" asked the man, looking with concern at my bruised face.

"I think so, except for my hands," I answered. "I can't stand up stretched out like this all night."

"We'll untie you if you swear by the Enlightened One that you will not try to escape," he said sympathetically.

"Of course," I agreed readily. "Where would I go?"

The rough yak hair ropes had been tied so tightly that they had torn right through the skin of my wrists, and the blood that should have been flowing to my hands was trickling down my arms. I could feel nothing in my hands at all, even long after they were untied.

"These are the kind of louts we have to put up with all the time," lamented the man. "If only His Holiness were older . . ." he added wistfully. No matter how badly they were governed by officials from

Lhasa, I found that everyone here had complete faith in the Dalai Lama and his ability to set things right. I could only hope that his faith was not misplaced, for I knew that in this remote and exploited border region during a corrupt Regency I was seeing the Tibetan government at its worst. Under the circumstances I could hardly begrudge my kind jailer and the woman the solace they took in one another later that night—though I wished they had been a little quieter and not so close to my pillow. It was a fitting end to a most disquieting evening.

In the morning before the soldiers returned my friends tied my wrists loosely behind my back. I was ordered to return to Gyal Tsering's house, and on the way I stopped at the chief's office to complain of my treatment. I found however, that he had been invited to a *lingka*, or picnic feast, and would not return for several days. Whether he had given his men leave to rough me up or if my experience was simply evidence of slack discipline in his absence, I did not know. Nishikawa, had been tied up too but had suffered no further harm.

That afternoon the woman who had fed me, and helped to keep me awake the night before, took me to a small hut where I found a Chinese soldier in a navy blue cotton uniform. As there were no open hostilities between the Tibetans and the Muslim Government of Chinghai, which he served, Tibetan and Chinese soldiers here lived side by side on both sides of the border. "It looks like you've had a bad time," he commented sympathetically in reasonably good Tibetan, looking over my bruised face and then offering me *tsampa* with plenty of butter. But he was not simply being friendly; he wanted to see if he could get any information from me about the Tibetan military situation in the areas I had passed through. For my part I would have liked to have known if his army had any loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek, and how likely they would be to join him in an invasion of Tibet. So we sparred, and in the end neither of us learned anything from the other. I was certainly not about to betray what little I did know just because some of the worst examples of Tibetan manhood had roughed me up, and I kept answering that since I spent all my time in monasteries I knew nothing of military matters.

I was relieved to be able to spend the night back in Gyal Tsering's house, although much to my surprise our host left soon after the sun went down, carrying his fur bedding. Not long after, the leader of the soldiers—the one who had slapped me around the night before—came in and bedded down with Gyal Tsering's pretty wife by the fire. The noisy love making of the night before had had my full sympathy, but

this I found unbearable, particularly as I had been admiring Gyal Tsering's wife and thinking what a lucky man he was. When I saw him the next day I asked him what was going on, and if it did not bother him.

"What does it matter what I, or my wife, think of it?" he asked resignedly. "There's nothing to be done against a soldier. Complaining would just get me chased off my land, and the land is all I've got."

"Do they really treat you that badly?" I asked, though I had seen enough to know the answer.

"They can take whatever they want and do whatever they please. When we hear a soldier coming the children stop crying and the women hide. Do you know what the soldiers and the officials say about coming to Kham?" I shook my head. "They say it is better than a New Year's feast. The officials try to squeeze us dry, the soldiers take our women. If it wasn't for this," he bared his left shoulder to show the scar of a deep sword cut, "I would just move and try my luck somewhere else." I remembered Khampa refugee families that we had seen all along our route. "As it is I'm too weak to earn my living, and have to rent my land out to get by."

"Did the soldiers give you that wound?" I asked.

"No," he laughed for the first time. "It happened in a fight when I was young. You know how we Khampas are: but it's silly to fight each other instead of the real enemy."

"What would happen if the Chinese invaded?" I asked.

"We'd join them," he answered without hesitation. "Just as my father joined the Tibetans to drive the Chinese out more than twenty years ago. They could just walk right in now. The people on the other side of the border are much better off. It's always been that way. One side exploits us and then the other. They tax us into poverty, and we don't even know if the government gets the tax money or if it just goes to enrich some official." He shook his head ruefully. "If His Holiness were only older it would be different, as it was in the days of His Late Holiness."

His answer was typical of the Khampa attitude, and this was bad news for Tibet. The Tibetan nobility often treated the peasants and servants well on their private estates, but here where they came for only a specific period they felt no such scruples, particularly during a regency. In addition to general robbery and rapine, the *ula* system of free transport was terribly abused as well. Such brutal behaviour was not only inhuman, but particularly short-sighted in such a sensitive

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border area that so often changed hands. Kham seemed to me similar to a place like Poland or Korea, always being overrun by someone, and most of the men had been involved in uprisings against either the Chinese or Lhasa: or even against both. No one in the Tibetan government seemed to realize just how fast time was running out.

Every night I was subjected to the sounds of the rape of Gyal Tsering's wife, making sleep difficult, and with nothing else to do I often pondered the future of Tibet. Just suppose it was not Chiang Kai-shek or Ma Pu-fang that Tibet would have to deal with, but Mao Tse-tung's Communists—whose single-minded dedication was beginning to look capable of carrying them to victory in the civil war. Their sort of program could only appeal to a people so downtrodden. But how could Marxism, with its materialism and unrelenting opposition to religion, ever be reconciled with this most religious of all peoples? For no matter how much they were exploited, their faith in the Dalai Lama and in Buddhism remained unshakable, while their belief in karma helped to ease the pain of daily life. There had to be a way for Tibet to reform itself before it was too late. Could no one see the writing on the wall? I resolved to find out when I went back to Lhasa; or even better to Kalimpong, that gathering place of exiles and the discontented. As a sympathetic foreigner who spoke Tibetan and was widely travelled, I felt I was in a unique position to sound a warning.*

On the tenth day of our detention the messenger returned from Chamdo with a letter in his sealed sash that cleared us. The Chief sent him to us with a large chunk of butter and some local mushrooms which he evidently thought would make up for the blows I had suffered. Although the bruises were now gone from my face and my hands were again useful, my unhealed wrists were reminder enough of my treatment here, and when Nishikawa and I were reunited, I was anxious only to be away.

We were off the same day, making our belated crossing of the second river into Chinghai and continuing upstream through the wooded valley toward Jyekundo. Spring was now advancing, and

* When the victorious Chinese Communists invaded eastern Tibet in 1950, many Khampas did initially side with them. The poverty and cynicism of Communist policies towards minorities, however, was evident by the mid-1950's when the Khampas were actively fighting them in a guerrilla war on a far larger scale than any ever waged against the Tibetan government.

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paradoxically, as always in these highlands, the increasing sun only made the rivers higher, swifter, and colder, so that time and time again our crossings were hampered by thin sheets of fast flowing ice. It was these fords that also gave us our clearest evidence of Chinese intentions, for often the banks had been cut away to make slipways for trucks, and we found tire tracks well inside Tibetan territory.

As we climbed the air grew colder, and the trees ended, but when finally, after ten days, we emerged to find ourselves on high pasture-land, there was no clear path to our immediate goal—the Panchen Gomba—or to Jyekundo beyond. We thought we were fortunate when we spotted a woman tending a herd of horses at the foot of a hill, but her reaction when we approached and asked directions surprised us: she just mumbled a few words and ran off. When we tried to follow we heard shouts and were set upon by several pigtailed men brandishing rifles who came bounding from behind the hill. Before we even knew what was happening one of them landed a blow on Nishikawa's back with the butt of his rifle.

“Horse thieves!” they cried at us. It was an absurd accusation since we were on foot, but we hardly seemed to be in a position where logic would prevail. By and large, it seemed better that our captors themselves were not robbers, but thought we were. This at least gave us the psychological advantage of appearing tough.

Even so, we both stood with our hands up feeling frightened and a bit foolish. “Open your packs!” we were ordered. Though these men were wild and unkempt with greasy pigtailed and worn chubas, they could not help but remind me of the border guards as they methodically rifled through our packs.

“Do they think they'll find horses hidden in our packs?” I asked Nishikawa sarcastically in Mongolian.

“I think it's nooses they're looking for,” he answered.

Their leader pricked up his ears at hearing us talk in Mongolian. “Well maybe you are pilgrims after all,” he conceded. “I've done a little trading as far as Kumbum and have met Mongolians there. Everyone knows that Mongolians are honest to the point of stupidity,” he added with a laugh. Now their whole attitude changed as they helped us to repack. “Sorry to jump on you like this,” he added, “But it is so lawless around here. A couple of days back some of our horses were stolen and we've been looking for the culprits ever since. Where are you heading for? Maybe we can help you on your way.”

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We told him we were looking for the Panchen Gomba, and they happily gave us directions. Even so, I think there can be few more suspicious or unfriendly areas in the world. That evening as we rested by the roadside, minding our own business and with no one in sight, a man rode up to us out of nowhere and insisted that unless we left immediately he would set his dogs on us. There was nothing to do but travel on blindly in the dark and finally make camp when we thought it was safe.

In the morning we awoke in the middle of the very airfield I was searching for. In fact little construction, save a few drainage ditches, marked this field. A good natural clearing on a gentle slope had simply been located, surveyed, and marked out in 1942 by Colonel Ilya Tolstoy of the United States Army. I felt an ironic bond with Colonel Tolstoy (a grandson of the Russian novelist) and his companion, Tibetan-speaking Captain Brooke Dolan, because though on different sides we had in a sense been engaged in the same work; and with about the same degree of success. I had been looking for allied supply routes, while he had come through Tibet in 1942 to set one up to replace the Burma Road. Failing in this—for although the Tibetans were friendly enough they steadfastly refused to ally themselves with China and break their neutrality, saying that as a Buddhist country they did not want to contribute to the war effort—he had to content himself with surveying these airlift stations which were never used. There was only one building, a mud hut that looked abandoned, but the airfield seemed serviceable enough and probably could have been called into use at any time. Across a river stood a large, once magnificent, but now dilapidated temple: the Panchen Gomba. Here one of the most tragic episodes of twentieth century Tibetan history had come to an end in 1937 with the death of the previous Panchen Lama.

It was a sad and lonely place. Ten years previously it would have been far more grand, but still an unlikely spot to find Tibet's second highest incarnate Lama. He had been driven from his home by a quarrel with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama—but few Tibetans could be found who really believed that the disagreement was between the two high Lamas. It was thought rather, with some justification, to have been the fault of greedy officials around the Panchen Lama who had convinced him to leave the country in 1923 in protest to his estates in Shigatse being heavily taxed to support the Tibetan army. Once he was in China, the Chinese got their hooks into him, and it was they who insisted that if he returned to Tibet it could only be with a large

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Chinese military escort. Since the Dalai Lama had not only declared independence, but mistrusted the Chinese so much that he would not allow any sort of official Chinese presence in Tibet, the conditions were obviously unacceptable. After the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's death in 1933, there was even less chance of the Panchen's return, for Regency officials wanted no figure with strong traditional support to challenge their own authority.

A few monks still remained at the temple, and we were able to trade some of our dwindling supply of needles for hot water to make tea. Neither of us had much ambition to continue after the excitement of the previous day, so we spent that day and night resting at the temple. The next day passed uneventfully and we arrived that evening at another temple just across the river from the town. The Lama there had made a pilgrimage to the holy places of India and visited Tarchin on the way, so that our introduction from the latter assured us kind treatment.

The size of Jyekundo, at just under 12,000 feet, came as a surprise. Like Chamdo and Tsokiyisumdo it was located on the confluence of two rivers, but instead of being in a wooded valley, was surrounded by high lush pasture reminiscent of the Mongolian grasslands. It was another important caravan center, like Tatsienlu in the southeast, but here it was wool rather than tea which was the lifeblood of the town, and the terminus was Sining rather than southern China. Jyekundo had previously been part of Tibet, but China had incorporated it into Chinghai province in 1928. As in Chamdo, the caravan inns provided a ready source of intelligence, and I gathered that the Muslim Army had little interest in Tibet. In fact while we were there the Muslim cavalry was mobilized and went in the other direction to fight the Outer Mongolians. The motorable road that had been constructed between here and Sining was no longer even passable, and local residents told me they had only ever seen two motor vehicles.

Three days in Jeyekundo were enough to find out everything we needed. When we left town it meant we were on our way back to Lhasa, starting on what was supposed to be a motorable road to Nakchuka: but since there was no way for vehicles to get even as far as Jyekundo this road was useless and just petered out after three days anyway. Two days further on, we came across a pilgrim monk tottering along the trail from the opposite direction, his face pale and his lips purple from hunger and exhaustion. We offered him some *tsampa* which he wolfed down greedily, gasping out between bites that we

should leave the route we were following, which had nearly been the death of him. There were no villages between here and Nakchuka, still two months away, and the few nomads were so far off the path as to be of little assistance.

Following his advice we turned southward, although this put us against the grain of the mountains that ran east-west. Range after range of mountains and valleys stretched out before us from the first pass we climbed. This meant that at least two months of alternate climbing and descending lay between us and Lhasa.

In spite of the sparse, virtually invisible population, news of two travellers trading needles spread quickly. Perhaps we were too open about it. We should have realized that the land was so poor hereabouts that it would be nearly impossible for anyone to live without a little brigandage, and that even we would seem worth robbing to the local inhabitants. One day we were resting and sipping our tea in a high valley wooded with stunted trees on the banks of the upper Dza Chu when two Khampas burst upon us. The younger one stood a little way off pointing a rifle at us, while his older companion badgered us at close range demanding our needles and other valuables. We were, by now, getting accustomed to unpleasant situations like this and our Mongolian came in handy as we pretended to be unconcerned.

"What do you think we should do this time?" I asked.

"We'd better concentrate on one rather than both," Lobsang answered. "I'd like to have that rifle, but he's too far off. Let's try to catch the old guy here and use him as a shield. I'll grab him and you try to cover him with your knife. Let's try to do everything together for a change."

It would be a delicate moment. If the man with the rifle reacted quickly, one of us could wind up with a bullet in him. My companion signaled by nodding slightly then suddenly jumped up and grabbed the nearest man around the neck. In the same instant I drew my knife and pressed it to his ribs. Much to our astonishment, the man with the rifle turned tail and ran.

Nishikawa got a better grip while I fished a rope out of my pack. Once we had him secure we had to decide what to do with him. Our destination for the day was a village said to be not far off where there should be some local officials, and the safest course seemed to try to get him there and hand him over. Still worried about the other man who had disappeared with the rifle, we took off up the valley towards a low pass at as fast a pace as we could.

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But for some reason, no matter how fast we went our captive seemed to want to go faster, and was nearly dragging Nishikawa who held him by the rope. I could see his friend slinking along behind us, but mysteriously he had not fired a shot. Suddenly our prisoner sat down in the middle of the trail and refused to move.

"Kill me if you want, but I won't walk another step!" he screamed defiantly. The strains of the past few months were beginning to tell on me. Being arrested, beaten, and mistaken for a horse thief in recent days had put me in no mood to be indulgent with a man who had just attempted to rob us at gunpoint. With no intention of putting his words into effect and killing him, I strode up and brought the handle of my spear down on his shoulders with all my might. It certainly made him move. In fact he suddenly jumped up and started running toward the pass at such a pace that even Nishikawa with his long legs was hard put to keep up, while I began to fall behind. At the top of the pass I saw the man fling up his arms and start to run down the other side. Nishikawa's poor eyesight had prevented him from noticing that the rope had come loose, so that he was caught by surprise.

"Bring the rifle! Bring the rifle!" shouted our former captive from the other side of the hill, distancing himself from us. I ran up to Nishikawa who still stood there with the rope in his hand.

"The gun must be empty," he shouted to me in Mongolian as I approached. "One has the gun and the other has the bullets. I wish we'd had the sense to take them away." Now we found ourselves in a bizarre situation, caught between one man with an unloaded weapon and another with the ammunition. As long as we could keep them apart or capture one we were safe. Otherwise we were finished.

There seemed but one practical course of action, though it involved a certain loss of dignity. "Let's run for it," I screamed. "We can't be too far from the village, and it will take them some time to get together and load up." We both knew that their primitive rifle was little good at any but the closest range, so wasting no more words we took off as fast as our legs would carry us for as long as we had breath. Fortunately we were now descending, and we finally staggered into a mounted traveller who listened sympathetically to our story and escorted us to the local governor. Though we knew there was no chance of apprehending the culprits, we dutifully reported what had happened, and once I had cooled down and remembered how local Khampas were usually treated, I was just as glad they would not be caught.

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The terrain now became ever higher and more barren, inhabited by nomads who led the simplest of lives. *Tsampa* here was a luxury, and although everyone was happy enough to trade for needles, all we could get in return was butter and cheese. When our own small supply of *tsampa* ran out, the steady diet of butter and dry powdered cheese gave us heartburn which improved neither our stamina nor our tempers.

Twenty days after leaving Jyekundo we crossed the Saratse La, settlements and cultivated fields finally began to reappear at a small town called Seratse Karangtan on the northern caravan route from Lhasa to Chamdo, but this led to no improvement in our situation, for by then we were out of needles and reduced to selling off or trading our belongings. We tried begging—actually chanting *sutras* in return for donations—but found that hours of chanting seldom yielded more than a handful of *tsampa*, and that if we were ever going to get back to Lhasa it would be more efficient to trade off our extra possessions: our raincoats, summer clothing, extra shirts, swords, knives, prayer beads, and even our amulets. This left us at the mercy of the elements and the dogs; since the trading was always on the villagers' terms, we seldom got a decent return, and had to make do with the barest sustenance.

At least we had the comfort of our cooking pot. It was the one thing we had refused to sell, so that we would always be able to make hot tea whenever fuel was available. Then one night it was stolen as we slept. It was our last luxury and our grief was out of all proportion with our loss. Or perhaps not: we were still more than a month from Lhasa, and with only river water to wash down our butter and cheese we wondered if we would be able to keep our health and strength up. Some sympathetic villagers gave us a clay pot and again we tried to make tea, only to find this vessel so inefficient that it took hours, and ten times as much fuel as before, to bring water to a boil.

All these other problems led to the occasional rankling between us. One would expect that two countrymen in such a remote and inhospitable part of the world would automatically pull together, but like a Japanese Burton and Speke we found any number of things about which to disagree. Our most serious quarrel could only have occurred between two Japanese, and seems thoroughly silly in retrospect. It was about the Emperor. I happened to remark offhandedly one day that with or without the Emperor the Japanese people and the Japanese nation would survive, while to Nishikawa—for all his nonconformity—

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the idea of Japan without the Emperor lay somewhere between heresy and treason. We argued all day—in Mongolian of course—becoming quite heated, though neither of us had the slightest idea whether or not the Emperor still existed. In the end he became so angry that he did not speak to me for several days.

Finally, we had no choice but to beg, no matter how much it slowed us down, for we had traded everything we could spare. At least we now found ourselves in a more settled area where there was more *tsampa* available, and although a day of chanting yielded little enough, this at least improved our digestions. But as we approached Lhasa we came upon more cultivated fields, and as it was now summer, at night we would steal small amounts of unripe wheat or barley and beans which we could eat raw. Of the last two or three weeks of the journey I remember little besides the constant struggle to survive: always tired, always so hungry that my ears were ringing, and always with no choice but to go blindly on.

The most fervent pilgrim could not have been happier than we were on finally seeing the Potala rise up before us in the distance, with its golden roofs glittering in the late afternoon sunlight. Late as it was, we continued on, and it was after sunset when two ragged, starving, and dirty pilgrims presented themselves at Go Khangsar to be nearly turned away by my friend Gyamtso who did not recognize us at first. But when he did his hospitality knew no bounds—though he did force us to change into something less lice-ridden while he brewed tea, for we had transgressed even the loose Tibetan standards of cleanliness. That evening we felt like nobles, dressed in clean clothes and able—we could not recall the last time—to have our fill of hot tea and *tsampa*.

I was proud of having survived. We were, however, completely broke. It seemed reasonable to assume that I could simply go to the British Mission and ask for some money to get back to Kalimpong; so off I went, full of confidence, to see the British representative in Lhasa, Hugh Richardson, whom I had already met in May 1948. I was anxious to renew my acquaintance with this well-known figure who had spent more time in Lhasa than any other European, and who was so well acquainted with Tibetan nobles and their intrigues. My reception was, however, somewhat less enthusiastic than I had anticipated.

“There are two reasons why I cannot help you” came his rather cold reply. “One is that I am no longer the British representative. The other is that even if I was, you have no right to divulge your mission, if true, to anyone, even to me.”

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I felt rather let down after the efforts of the past months, but reflected that civil servants have their jobs to do and that they may not always be pleasant ones. As I left, I noticed the green, orange and white flag flying over what was now the mission of newly-independent India at Deki Lingka.*

Fortunately, Lhasa was full of friends. Geshé Wangyel, the generous Kalmuck Mongol I had met in Kalimpong, was willing to loan us the money we needed to go back to India. Nishikawa seemed reluctant to face his lama after running out on him, and was eager to visit more of India and Nepal, so after a few days rest the two of us again went south. With full bellies, and no fear of robbers, our personal relations improved and the three week walk through southern Tibet in the summer was a real pleasure.

* * *

Why was it, I could not help but wonder, that each time I was in the field spying, on my return the world had been turned upside down? While on my first mission, the Japanese military had ceased to exist even before I reached Lhasa. Now after this, my second major venture, there was no longer any British India on my return. India was now independent, and the posts formerly held by the British were now occupied by Indians. Of course, everyone knew that independence was coming some time, but the speed with which the last Viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, had moved surprised everyone. This at least meant that Lhatseren, whom I knew well, had taken over from Eric Lambert; but it did put a damper on my longer range hope of having the British plant me in Inner Mongolia.

I was asked to go to Shillong to make my report. After setting Nishikawa up with a job as typesetter at the Tibet Mirror Press I continued on to Assam, where the turmoil I found in the intelligence headquarters at 'Oaklands' made me wonder if anyone would ever read the report that it took me three weeks to write in English.

* Years later, in 1960, we met in Tokyo and had a good laugh over the identity of the gaunt figure who had walked in, confidently expecting a loan. Hugh Richardson has since devoted his life to the study of Tibetan history and to helping the Tibetans in exile.

Twelve

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Our inequality in the distribution of wealth was certainly not in accordance with Buddhist teaching Even more fundamental reforms were needed in our system of land tenure.

His Holiness, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

I had no sooner returned from finishing my report when Mr. Tarchin told me of an exciting job teaching the Tibetan language at the London School of Oriental Studies. He was willing to recommend me for it if I would go to Gangtok, the capital of nearby Sikkim, for an interview with the Political Officer there who was handling the selection. It was only a five or six hour bus ride to Gangtok, so I left right away.

The post of Political Officer to the state of Sikkim was traditionally an important one, for he also handled British India's relations with Tibet and Bhutan. In the past it had been held by such well known figures as Charles Bell and John Claude White. The incumbent of the time, Arthur J. Hopkinson, like Richardson in Lhasa, had been asked by the new Government of India to stay on for a time to help through the transitional period. When I met him at the Residency, easily the largest building in the this tiny hilltop capital after the Royal Palace, I was quite honest about not being a native Tibetan speaker (since I was still posing as a Mongolian) but he was still encouraging and told me he would forward his recommendation.

Returning to Kalimpong in the autumn of 1947 was like coming home. As always there were new people about, for the Tibet Mirror Press was a place where Tibetans on pilgrimage or other business could always be sure of a temporary job. One of these, of course, was Nishikawa working on the press. Another was a young man with a bad hair lip who had come to look into the possibilities of corrective surgery, and in the end was to exert a great indirect influence on my life. He was a nineteen year-old named Kesang Tsereng, and he came from Batang in the far east of Tibet. This was much further east than Nishikawa and I had travelled, in a region which Kuomintang China had taken in 1928 and called Sikang Province. Like so many others

who came to Tarchin, young Kesang Tsereng brought a letter of introduction—in this case from his elder brother Phuntsok Wangyel who was, according to Tarchin, one of Lhasa's more remarkable young men.

Meanwhile I had taken up my former duties in the office and was slipping back into the old routine as though nothing had happened. One day two Englishmen came in and greeted Tarchin like old friends.

"I have what you've come for, courtesy of Geshé Wangyel," he told them, placing a large parcel on his desk which one of the visitors opened with a gleam of expectation in his eyes. It proved to contain a number of fine Tibetan *thankas* or scroll paintings.

"They're wonderful," he exclaimed as he looked them over, identifying the main subject of each one, along with the smaller figures of obscure Bodhisattvas and wrathful protectors, while his companion commented on the technique of the artists.

He was particularly pleased with one depicting Buddha in the center surrounded by what seemed like hundreds of Bodhisattvas, protectors and saints. "This is a really fine *Lamrim*. I've been after this one for years." Something in his manner irritated me, particularly since I could identify but few of the figures myself. "This was the subject that taught me that to a Tibetan there is no fundamental difference between a *thanka* and a book, or between a painter and a writer. A *thanka* is as much science as art, and symbolically contains the same knowledge and wisdom as a book on the same subject would. I tried to buy one of these once, but the owner couldn't be found. Instead, I was offered a book on the subject, and told it would come to the same thing."

"I remember that," said his companion. "But we were very innocent in those days even to offer to bargain over a *thanka*."

"That's true. I hadn't learned yet that you should never even attempt to purchase one that is being properly used for religious purposes. It is only proper to buy one that is being neglected or that a competent authority is willing to sell. I think we can trust Geshé Wangyel to have exercised proper judgment and I'm certainly happy with these as interest on my loan."

"And the Geshé says he has used your loan to make a good profit on trade everywhere from India to Peking, so everyone is happy," said Tarchin, laughing.

"Excuse me Sir," I interrupted, and the three heads turned to me. "Do you really believe that someone from the West like you can understand how we Orientals think? It seems to me very arrogant of you." I do not know quite why I said it. For all my experiences I had still not

grasped the fundamental truth that as a Japanese I was as different from most Asians as any European was.

“Whether we come from East or West, young man, we are all human beings, and I believe that men of good will can always understand one another—if they care to put forth the effort. I first came to this part of the world as a mountain climber, but soon discovered there are greater peaks to climb than physical ones, and have spent many years studying under learned lamas in Sikkim and Ladakh—particularly under Geshé Wangyel who spent some time as a guest at my home in England. May I ask the name of your lama?”

Of course I had none. My relations with Geshé Wangyel were complex: he had loaned me money, and I suspected that he knew I was Japanese and was protecting me, but I had never received any religious instruction from him. “Everything is my teacher,” I replied a little huffily. “The wind, the sky, and the nomads of the grasslands.”

He laughed gently, not a man to take offence easily. “A good answer—particularly for avoiding the issue. Mr. Tarchin is coming to dinner tomorrow night at my house. You must come along.”

“You will have trouble arguing religion with these men, Dawa Sangpo, in English or Tibetan. Let me introduce you to Mr. Marco Pallis and Mr. Richard Nicholson. Our friend Geshé Wangyel tells me Mr. Pallis is one of the best students he has ever had: from any country.”

This inauspicious beginning was to lead to a long and lasting friendship, and I was soon to learn how wrong my prejudice had been. Marco Pallis, a naturalized Englishman born in Greece, had both a deep love and understanding of Tibet and its people. He had worked long and hard at the language, was able to use it in difficult religious discussions; and in books such as *Peaks and Lamas* began writing with sympathy and understanding about Tibetan Buddhism well before it became fashionable.

* * *

New Year 1948 found me still in Kalimpong, and in January Tarchin paid me for the mission to eastern Tibet. Someone must have been happy with my information, for the payment came to so much more than I had expected that even after giving a third of it to Nishikawa I was still better off than I could have imagined. It occurred to me, in fact, that I now had more money than at any time since one of those

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annual paydays in Kalgan when I would happily squander it all in the pleasure quarters; and that I had spent the five years since leaving Zarin Sume more or less in poverty—and celibacy. Not that going without material comforts had ever particularly bothered me: I had found the nomadic lifestyle fulfilling, and after the near starvation of the recent trek back to Lhasa from Kham even having enough to eat everyday seemed the height of luxury.

But now it appeared that the new Indian government was not about to carry out the plan Eric Lambert had mentioned of planting me in Mongolia, so there was my future to think of. If I was ever going to go home, I would need to save some money. There would be a passage to pay, quite probably some hefty bribes to Indian officials, and I would need to land with enough to live for awhile in an uncertain economic climate. Of course that day was still somewhere in the indefinite future. I was not homesick nor, with all my new challenges, had I been for some time. Yet somewhere in the back of my mind was the feeling that I could not be an exile playing a role forever.

Business was not something I was particularly good at or interested in, but I was well acquainted with local trading practices from my many times up and down the Chumbi trade route, as well as from talking with caravan men, traders, and innkeepers. With a little common sense I thought I could make my money grow.

One of the riskier items to export to Lhasa, but which for that very reason held out the prospects of a good return, was kerosene. The risk came from the possibility of leaky cans, and many a shipment arrived in Lhasa empty. Still, I decided to take my chances. If successful, in a year or two I could have enough money to do whatever I wanted; and if not I would be no worse off than before. I was beginning to feel that the Press was keeping me more out of kindness than because I was really needed, and as long as I would have to work at something, the life of a Lhasa trader had real attractions.

As I had expected, Tarchin voiced no objections. “As long as you’re going, you can do me a favor,” he said when I told him. “Have you ever heard of a man named Gedun Choephel?”

“I certainly know his reputation,” I answered. “But he had left Kalimpong before I got back from Kham.” I was indeed sorry to have missed this brilliant but unorthodox figure. Born in 1905, Gedun Choephel, was known as one of the most learned and extraordinary of contemporary Tibetans. He was an outstanding historian, poet, and artist, and his debating skills were legendary; but he was also known as

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a revolutionary, nationalist and a socialist. He had spent nearly fifteen years wandering around India and Ceylon during the heady days of the independence movement, was fluent in quite a number of languages, and had written on everything from religion to politics, including a treatise on love and sex. In Kalimpong he had naturally gravitated to that group of dissidents which was ever-present, had issued revolutionary pamphlets (printed at the Tibet Mirror Press) calling for radical change in the Tibetan government and had been deported by the British in the last days of their rule as a result.

"If you know his reputation, then you may know that not long after his return to Lhasa he was clapped into prison for his political views. Of course his religious ideas are just as unorthodox—he once actually won a debate against a panel of learned *geshés* in which he argued against the possibility of Buddhahood—and that is quite as bad as far as the conservatives are concerned. In fact a crowd of monks went so far as to beat him up after that to make him admit that Buddhahood might exist.

"But now a family of noble patrons has secured his release by claiming that he went mad in prison. I can only hope that it was nothing but a ploy. Men of genius often have fragile minds. I'd like you to take a letter to him for me: and to let me know how you find him. Crucial times are ahead for Tibet. The entire face of Asia is changing all around us, and we can't afford to lose men like him."

I readily agreed to take the letter. Gedun Choephel was the sort of man I had resolved to meet while I was under detention listening to Gyal Tsering's wife being raped in Kham: a patriotic Tibetan reformer hoping to change the country from inside before it was violently overtaken by the twentieth century.

"Someone else you might look up," he continued, as if reading my thoughts, "is Kesang Tsereng's brother Phuntsok Wangyel, a remarkable character. How he manages to survive at all is beyond me. The Chinese have a price on his head and the Tibetan government hates him. He actually had the courage to submit a proposal to the cabinet outlining reforms in the government. But the only thing the conservatives fear and hate more than a reformer is the Chinese—just look what happened to Reting Rimpoché—and so they they protect him while at the same time they keep an eye on him."

"What did he do to the Chinese?" I asked, my interest now thoroughly aroused.

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“Have you ever heard of the Deching Incident? No? It was an armed rebellion he led against Chinese rule in an area called Zayul in southern Kham, along the Yunnan border. I know all about it because he came here in 1944 to ask me if there was any chance of getting British support for his group—the Autonomous League of Eastern Tibet. I presented his case to Eric Lambert, but had no luck. The war was still on and Britain and China were allies. He went ahead anyway, and might have done better if the wartime capital hadn't been so nearby in Chungking.”

A young man, a relative of Mrs. Tarchin's, entrusted me with a more delicate task. “I left my fiancé in Lhasa,” he told me, unhappily. “She was going to follow, but it has been months and I've hardly heard from her. Could you find her for me, give her this gold ring, and tell her I'm waiting?” It sounded simple enough so I agreed. I had little confidence in the outcome, though, when he told me that she was a waitress in a *changkhang* near the Barkhor. The Lhasa *changkhangs* were not only beer houses and gambling dens but were said to be places of assignation where all sorts of irregular arrangements could be made. It hardly seemed the sort of place where one would find a faithful fiancé pining for her man far away.

It appeared that no matter what happened I had an interesting trip ahead of me, and I went off in high spirits to Gangtok, for the same Mr. Hopkinson who had forwarded my teaching application to London was also in charge of issuing permits to export kerosene. I had no problem with the latter, but found that London was holding out for a native Lhasan. With Lhasa ahead of me I found the disappointment easy to bear, and recommended Mrs. Tarchin's younger brother who in fact did go to London later that year and stayed until 1950. Still, I've often wondered how different my life might have been had my application been successful.

While in Gangtok I also bought several watches from the Omega Agency which I knew I could either sell in Lhasa or use as the kind of well-placed gifts that can always help a trader out of awkward situations—or into them. To care for the kerosene I used a trick I had heard experienced traders speak of: carrying plenty of bar soap and inspecting the cans frequently for leaks. Particularly during the early stages of the journey the cans are likely to bump against the rocks of the steep valley walls on the climb out of Sikkim or up the Chumbi Valley, but leaks could be plugged with soap that had first been warmed in the hands,

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and I promised the small caravan I hired a bonus if they delivered the shipment safely.

Before we left Sikkim, we stopped at an inn where Nishikawa and I had stayed on our last trip out of Tibet. The landlord was a friendly character, full of information, but I remembered him as a bachelor. Now he had a wife who looked vaguely familiar, and whom I finally remembered as a prostitute who had plied her trade in both Lhasa and Kalimpong. I could not help but wonder how this well-travelled, plump, and highly made-up young lady would do as a respectable country wife.

By the time we reached Phari I thought the cans were safe enough and the caravan well enough trained that when someone offered me a good riding mule in exchange for my watches I took him up on it and rode ahead.

* * *

I arrived in Lhasa for the fourth time in March, 1948 and a couple of days later my caravan delivered all but two and a half cans of the kerosene safe and sound. After paying off the men I had more than doubled my capital, and a little nosing about told me that the most profitable export item would be gold, though its export did have the minor inconvenience of being illegal.

Meanwhile I went to call on Phuntsok Wangyel with a letter from his brother. Even at first glance it was easy to imagine this tall, good-looking and strongly built young man in command of Khampa nationalists. He had an easy and friendly manner, and immediately invited me to dinner.

This was the first family from Batang I had met, and I found them a little different from most Tibetans. Batang lies between Chamdo and Tatsienlu, has a very distinctive dialect, and a history of rebellion. In spite of their rebellious nature, each member of the family had a Chinese as well as a Tibetan name, and all were bilingual. Phuntsok Wangyel's uncle was named Chiang Shin-shi (I never learned his Tibetan name), and was on the liaison staff of the National Defence Ministry of the Kuomintang Government. Although he was an able man who had graduated from the top of his class at the Paoting Military Academy, his career was held back as he was Tibetan. Considering the fate of the Kuomintang—and it was becoming more and more obvious every day that they were losing and losing badly—this was probably a

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good thing, but he was still bitter about it. It was this bitterness that explained the apparent contradiction of a Kuomintang officer harbouring his rebel nephew under his roof.

A few days later Phuntsok Wangyel called on me very early in the morning to ask for help. His uncle was suffering severe pain from a tumor on his neck, and because I could speak English, Phuntsok wanted me to accompany him to the clinic of the Indian Mission in the Deki Lingka where the old British Mission had been, to fetch an Indian Doctor. He had brought horses so we went straight to the mission and brought the doctor who immediately opened the tumor. The same doctor came everyday over the next ten days to dress the incision, and whenever he came I was called to interpret.

Phuntsok Wangyel and I quickly formed a close friendship, and through him I got to know the rest of the family, as well as the Batang community whose dialect was so different from even the usual Khampa speech. We were to remain firm friends over the next year until we were both deported from Tibet.

We arranged to meet every morning in a nearby park at 7 a.m. so that he could help me with my Tibetan pronunciation. I had never forgotten that pronunciation is basic to successful communication in a new language, and I was by no means satisfied with my skills in Tibetan. Yet, as our friendship grew our conversation began to range over many topics here where we could easily tell if we were being watched. Once he had heard of my experiences in Kham, he was eager to tell me of his analysis of what he called the contradictions of Tibet's feudal society. Sometimes when our discussions became too complex we would exchange ideas using Chinese characters, which I claimed to have learned at a Japanese run school in Inner Mongolia.

To me, Tibet seemed much like feudal Japan before that great reform movement we called the 'Meiji Restoration' in 1867. A special feature of this movement was that it combined revolutionary change with restoration to power of the most traditional figure in Japan: the Emperor. Both Japan and Tibet had developed their own unique cultures during long 'closed door' periods. Japan however, had managed absorb what it found useful of Western knowledge and technology while cleverly retaining much of its own culture during its own modernization. I felt that the Japanese experience could be useful in showing Tibet how to transform its government from a feudal to a modern parliamentary system, with the Dalai Lama in the place of the Meiji Emperor. My friend found these ideas attractive as well, and eventually

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our discussions led to a draft constitution for Tibet based on the Japanese constitution of 1889. As I later discovered, however, this was to him only a step along the way. He was a sincere and dedicated Marxist-Leninist who realized that a revolution could not be pushed too fast, but had to be approached step by step.

While a few influential noblemen in Lhasa, particularly the younger generation, were liberally inclined and supported Phuntsok Wangyel's plans for changing Tibet's medieval politics, they unfortunately did little more than whisper among themselves. Some may have looked at him as realistic and progressive, but others criticized him as romantically idealistic and radical. Being an outspoken reformer had its dangers in the Lhasa of the late 1940's, even if one were fairly moderate. The sad fate of Gedun Choephel, for whom I had a letter from Tarchin, made this all too obvious.

As I was aware, he was one of Tibet's leading intellectual figures; yet disdaining formal degrees, he had left for India before taking his own examinations, although he often—and easily—defeated the most learned and skillful debaters of the day. While in India, where he learned Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Nepali and English, he was also exposed to any number of new influences—from the Vedic tradition and the Kama Sutra to Socialism and Indian Nationalism. This was a tumultuous time for India and he was infected by the political excitement. His broadening knowledge caused him to be critical of the way Buddhism was applied, or rather not applied, to government in his own country. Though he had definite leanings toward Communism and Socialism, he was too much of an individual to have been a good party member, and too much of a Tibetan to be pro-Chinese. Like all the best Tibetan reformers of the time he believed simply that Tibet must put its own house in order before it was too late.

When he returned to Tibet in 1947 after having been expelled from Kalimpong, he had nothing with him besides a bedroll, a cooking pot, a black box full of books and manuscripts, and a stated desire to work for the benefit his country. He was often invited to the houses of noble families, but seemed unaware that these invitations were largely a means to gather evidence against him concerning his "subversive" views. The tragedy of Gedun Choephel was part of the greater Tibetan tragedy of the time; that true Tibetan patriots were not recognized for what they were. He was arrested, put on trial, flogged, and locked away in the damp darkness of Shol Prison below the Potala along with murderers and thieves. Perhaps worst of all, the notes and drafts of his

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history of Tibet, which he had specifically asked not be disturbed, were searched and sifted for incriminating evidence. He had an eccentric working style, writing notes on scraps of paper and empty cigarette packets and scattering them seemingly at random around his room. Yet they were organized in a way that only he could understand. Once they were disturbed or rearranged, no one was ever able to make sense of them and years of research were rendered useless.

He was only in prison for a year, but sometime during that year his brilliant but always erratic mind snapped. He took up with a woman prisoner from Kham, and succumbed to both alcohol and opium addiction. The government seems to have seen that he was supplied with every vice to further discredit him.

When I told Phuntsok Wangyel that I had a letter for this celebrated figure, he arranged a meeting. A progressive noble family, the Tendons, had secured his release and was supporting him in a nearby house where he was being encouraged, so far without success, to continue the history of Tibet that his arrest and the destruction of his notes had interrupted. We found him dressed in a dirty and ragged layman's *chuba*, sitting on the floor with his lady friend. When I handed him Tarchin's letter, he hardly looked at it, but just mumbled to the woman, asking her to go out and buy liquor. This was the man who spoke thirteen languages, and who had once debated with nine different scholars at once, listening to their questions one after another before going back to answer them all in turn.

Later by chance I ran into Sonam Thopgay Kazi, a young Sikkimese aristocrat employed at the Indian Mission in Lhasa whom I had met in Kalimpong, and whose family had once been patrons of Gedun Choephel. Hearing that I had met his old friend, he asked me to take him also. This time the scholar was more lucid, and I was given a sample of his linguistic ability, as he conversed with Sonam in beautiful English.

After I had departed from Tibet he resumed his scholarly work for a time, but never regained his old vigour or stature. He died in 1951 or 1952. Today his birthplace is a centre of pilgrimage, and he is remembered as a saint by many Tibetans; both among those remaining in Tibet and those in exile.

That Phuntsok Wangyel was able to avoid a similar fate was quite remarkable, for he made no effort to hide his own views and had on

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several occasions submitted his reform plans to the Kashag, the Tibetan Cabinet. Yet, he was also a folk hero because of his unsuccessful rebellion against the Chinese in eastern Tibet, and it would hardly do for the Tibetan government to take an anti-Chinese stance at the same time it was arresting its own anti-Chinese heroes. Even so, he was regarded as a subversive and dangerous person, and Geshé Wangyel, Marco Pallis's teacher, even passed on to me a message from the noble family with whom he was staying warning me to stop my association with him. I thanked the Geshé for the advice, but had no intentions of abandoning a friendship that was becoming so important to me.

But while the government thought of Phuntsok Wangyel as subversive, it is doubtful if they realized that he was a dedicated Marxist and a member of the Chinese Communist Party, or nothing could have saved him. Of the few early Tibetan Communists, he was the only one actually living in Lhasa during the 'forties. The others were with Chinese Communist forces. The Chinese Communist Party attracted many young people from minority groups at the time, because Article 14 of their 1931 Constitution gave minority nationalities the rights of both independence and secession: rights that were never actually allowed after 1949.

Most of the Tibetan Communists joined the Party by taking up with the Long March when it passed through ethnically-Tibetan regions of Western China. Phuntsok Wangyel was unusual in that he joined while studying at the Kuomintang's Central Political College. This would normally be located in Nanking, but along with everything else had been moved to Chiang's wartime capital of Chungking. Although this institution was created to train cadres for the Kuomintang, it was thoroughly infiltrated by the Party, and here he was secretly recruited. But although he was an active Party member, Phuntsok Wangyel managed to be not only anti-feudal—but in the Tibetan context—anti-Chinese: his object was the freedom and happiness of the Tibetan people under an independent socialist government in which the Dalai Lama would remain as spiritual leader, and perhaps for a time as constitutional monarch. (It is worth noting here that none of the early Tibetan Communist—who were nationalists first and communists second—survived politically past the 1950's.)

Not all nobles were evil or foolish, and I was fortunate enough to be introduced at this time to Tsarong Sanwang Chenmo, the richest man

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in Tibet and a rare case of a layman who had risen from the people. If Phuntsok Wangyel represented the best of the new generation of Tibetan nationalists, Tsarong represented the best of the old. His house in south Lhasa was famous for its modern amenities such as glass windows and electricity and he was always attempting to introduce some new scientific innovation in conservative Lhasa. He was also known for his open-mindedness, and at this time Lhasa's two most famous foreign residents, Heinrich Harrer and Peter Aufschnaiter, occupied rooms just to the right of the front gate. Harrer's own story, *Seven Years in Tibet*, was to become a much-loved classic of travel literature, and the introduction to Tibet for a whole generation of Westerners. His companion was, if anything, even more widely-known and liked among the Tibetans, but lacking Harrer's literary bent his name is less widely known in the West.

Even though we shared the Tibetan and English languages, I never got to know either of these men well, but I do remember selling a pistol to Mr. Harrer. I had bought it on the street—for even after the war Lhasa retained an active arms market. Remembering my helplessness in the face of armed men in Kham I was intending to teach myself to shoot properly, but I soon tired of the sport and resold the gun to Harrer during one of my visits to the Tsarong mansion. I was doing a lot of buying and selling in those days, trying to live by my small profits and so keep my savings from dwindling.

I was more interested in the master of the Tsarong mansion, where I was welcome simply by virtue of being Mongolian. His original name was Chensal Namgang, and his father was an arrow maker. He had gone into exile to Mongolia with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama on the strategic retreat from the Younghusband Expedition in 1904, and as a result he spoke Mongolian as well as he spoke his own language. His rise to prominence began after the Dalai Lama had returned to Lhasa and was almost immediately chased in the other direction by the Chinese. On the retreat to India the young Chensal Namgang, with only a handful of men, blocked the Chaksam chain ferry across the Tsang Po against a large Chinese force long enough for his master to make his escape.

This tale of loyalty and courage became a legend among the Tibetans. In Kalimpong he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan army, and was sent back to Lhasa to help expel the Chinese in 1912. When the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa the young Commander-in-Chief was further rewarded for his services with the name, title and

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possessions (including the daughters whom he took as wives) of the Tsarong family whose head had been executed for his collaboration with the Chinese. Since this new Tsarong had not actively plotted his predecessor's downfall, he was welcomed into the family as a savior, for by Tibetan law a noble family without a layman to serve the government could have its estate confiscated.

Tsarong's rise to position and power coincided with the ten-year visit of the Japanese scholar priest Tada Tokan, and it was part of the young noble's outward-looking nature that he befriended this foreigner—who often became so engrossed in his studies that he forgot to eat—and helped him out whenever he could. Years later in the thirties, when the allies enacted a wool embargo against Japan (the reason for the work I had been doing on the farm at Zarin Sum), Tada wrote to Tsarong explaining the situation to him. The latter, who had wide business connections, was at the time shipping Tibetan wool from Calcutta to America, but canceled the contract and ordered the captain to unload in Yokohama.

The new Tsarong lacked the sheer ruthlessness necessary to prosper politically under the old system, and though he held ministerial posts for many years his enemies had him removed as Commander-in-Chief while he was away in India during the 'twenties. Like other favorites he lost all real power on the death of the Dalai Lama in 1933. This may have been fortunate, for in retirement he remained alive, rich, and one of the most influential men behind the scenes in a capital where the powerful had a habit of meeting nasty ends. Even so he often told me that he needed to be constantly on guard, for he was always looked upon as an upstart by the other nobles.

I held this man in the deepest respect. Short and powerfully built, reminding me of a Japanese gargoyle, he was one of the few men in Tibet with a real interest in science, and he supervised the building of a motorable road, as well as the country's only iron bridge. Foreign visitors inevitably met him, and he even had an American pen-friend.

At the Tsarong home I met a Mongolian monk named Geshé Choitok. I had long known of him through hearsay, for in the early forties he was reputed to have walked off with the money allotted to one Altan Ochir, a Mongolian agent working for the Japanese army who died mysteriously at the Yung-Ho-Kung Monastery in Peking. I could no longer really blame him. We had, after all, stood for nothing in Asia that could inspire loyalty in the peoples we had conquered.

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Choitok knew that I often went back and forth between Tibet and India, and also that I had been making some discreet gold purchases. He offered to provide further capital if I would supply the labour and the risk, to smuggle some of his own gold into India and return with legal, but profitable, goods from Calcutta. Ready for anything, I was happy to agree, and so within two months of my return to Lhasa I was again on the road.

Choitok supplied me with several horseshoe-shaped Mongolian silver ingots, a quantity of reddish Tibetan gold, and musk. It all had a total value of around twenty thousand Indian rupees. Then as word got around that I was going south to India, my Tibetan and Mongolian friends rushed to me with requests to do odd jobs for them. Most wanted to have their watches or clocks repaired since there was not a single repair shop in Lhasa.

I left Lhasa in the middle of May with one companion, a servant of Choitok's. Since our goods were compact, there was no need this time for a caravan, but we had not gone far when disaster nearly struck as my horse shied and jumped off the Tsang Po ferry. This was one of the worst moments I had had in a long time: all our valuables were in the saddle bags. Fortunately I had a good grip on the reins, and was able to guide the beast to safety while remaining on the ferry.

Following up a rumour that Marco Pallis was in Gyantse, staying at the barracks by the Indian Trade Mission, I had lunch with him in the company of a group of young Indian officers. He had obtained permission to travel this far, but was determined to get to Lhasa to continue his studies. Again the Tibetan government was exhibiting its lamentable tendency of being unable to recognize its true friends. More than a year later, Lhasa would panic and invite Lowell Thomas and his son to try to publicize their plight against the Chinese. The hurried visit of these well-meaning, virulently anti-Communist American journalists who knew little or nothing about Tibet, really only served to underscore the fact that there was no one already on the spot.

In Phari a wool merchant agreed to take my silver ingots across the border concealed in his wool; the gold pieces I sewed into the cover under my saddle. Even though I was nervous about the border at Chumbi I really need not have worried. The border guards did not seem particularly interested in catching anyone, and it took a bribe of only a rupee to convince them not to be too thorough. They merely made a show of slapping my saddle bags a few times, then let me pass. But just when I thought we were safe, a few days further on in the small town of

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Algara near Kalimpong, the Indian police pulled a surprise check on us. To my relief they were interested only in fire arms, so we had nothing to worry about.

The Tarchins again invited me to stay at their house in Kalimpong, and I found Nishikawa still working at the press. It was like a reversal of our roles a few years before when I had been working here and he had been smuggling tobacco back and forth. He was saving his rupees to make a pilgrimage to the holy places of India and Nepal, and I asked him to try to find news of Danzan and Tseren-tso, for in Lhasa I had heard a story that they had gone to Shigatse and Nepal rather than back to Mongolia.

Two or three days later the wool merchant arrived with the silver, and since I had the gold with me, this meant that I had successfully brought all our illegal goods out of the country. I quickly unloaded the silver on a Nepali merchant who cut each piece open to make sure it was genuine, and I was both surprised and disappointed when I saw that a few in fact had iron cores.

I waited until I reached Calcutta to sell the gold. There I stayed at the famous Pandara Number Hotel; at least it was famous among Tibetans and Mongolians. It did not really have a proper name, but was nicknamed after its address: 15 Lower Chitpur—*pandara* means 'fifteen' in Nepali and just about every north Indian language. The establishment was run by a Sherpa lady and her Tibetan-Chinese husband, and while standards of cleanliness may have been non-existent the husband—who spoke Tibetan, Nepali, Hindi, Bengali, Chinese, and English—was an excellent guide through official procedures, who knew just who to bribe how much to get things done. It was his services that made this seedy establishment facing the tram road across the street from the City Cinema (with the entrance at the side accessible only through narrow alleys) home to nearly all merchants and traders from Tibet. On the ground floor in the back, you could have your merchandise packed, crated, and bound with tight steel bands. A room for the night with two meals cost only four rupees, but there were certain disadvantages as well. The night after I changed the gold into cash, mice gnawed at my leather suitcase, which I kept by my pillow, and even managed to get a few bites out of the thick wad of banknotes. Obviously it would not do to keep the money around for too long, so I quickly loaded up on dyes, gold paint, and Italian coral for the return trip, and while it was all being crated I ran around having watches and clocks repaired.

Thirteen

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When I stopped in Kalimpong on the return trip, a Mongolian pilgrim just back from Nepal brought me sad news. Danzan and Tseren-tso, he had discovered, had settled down at the stupa of Namu Buddha, just east of the Kathmandu Valley. This stupa, which commemorated one of the Buddhas of the past who had cut off his own arm to feed a hungry tigress and her cubs, had been without a caretaker, and they had taken the job. But poor Tseren-tso was no more able to adapt to Nepal than to India. Her old sickness returned and she had died not long before. Not wishing to stay too long in a place he had shared with his departed wife, Danzan had gone off with a rich Ladakhi trader who was looking for a monk to take charge of his family chapel.

I was terribly saddened by this news, as memories of our days together flooded back to me: of Tseren-tso always loudly saying the wrong things at the wrong time, of the brief life of her baby, of how they had nursed me back to health in the Tsaidam, and of her gratitude for the pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. Had they not followed me, I wondered, would they now be happily sharing a tent or small *ger* in Inner Mongolia? Or might they have died anyway in the turmoil and civil war that followed the end of World War II? Some questions cannot be answered, and I knew Danzan would tell me that it was all karma, and that my worries were useless. That in the end seemed the best explanation.

As I began my trip back, I could only wonder what evil karma had overtaken my unfortunate friend, the innkeeper in Sikkim who had married the prostitute, and was now so ill that he had to make his frequent trips to the latrine on all fours. His wife, while still taking pains with her make-up, paid him no attention at all, and it was plain to see that his days were numbered. It was also plain that the youth who took care of the manual labour took care of the wife at night as well. There seemed to be nothing but sadness on this trip, and I was anxious to be back to my friends and the *changkhangs* of Lhasa.

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By July I was back in Lhasa, and when Nepali merchants eagerly snapped up my paints, dyes and coral, we had a handsome profit to show. I was surprised at how easy it could be to make money, and was all ready for another trip. But Choitok had fallen ill and, in no state to think about business, he asked me to put it off until later. His condition improved very slowly and I would remain in Lhasa until May of the following year. I quickly drifted back into the old routine of meeting Phuntsok Wangyel in the park every morning, and learned that in my absence he and his friends had begun drafting that new constitution we had talked about, borrowing some ideas from the Japanese one, and relegating the aristocracy to a House of Lords.

I remember standing with him in the park behind the Potala at the outdoor session of the *Tsongor Tseju*, the civil service examination held every twelve years in Lhasa for the sons of the nobility. They had already taken their examinations in composition and elementary mathematics, and now—bedecked in their finest silks—they were undergoing tests in riding and archery. This display of horsemanship, which reminded me so much of Japan's *yabusama*, was not only an impressive medieval spectacle, but a living symbol of so much that was outdated about Tibet. The country was now desperately in need of precisely what Japan had needed in the 1860's: able administrators with open minds, capable of taking the best from the industrialized West while retaining that which was unique and valuable in its own traditions. At the same time, those whose only qualification for power was noble birth had to be toppled. As if this were not enough, Tibet also needed modern-thinking military officers able to wield an army of nomads and peasants into one capable of fending off a tough and dedicated Communist army that fought with a religious zeal. How hitting three targets with arrows from horseback would help to accomplish any of these Herculean tasks was a mystery no one seemed even willing to confront, let alone explain. Tibet seemed to be hiding its head in the sand, retreating into the past rather than facing the future.

As my friend and I watched this contest, we agreed that it was probably the last time it would be held in its present form. What we could not predict was whether this would be so because in another twelve years a modernizing Tibet would see it as anachronistic, or—our deepest fear—because there would no longer be any independent Tibet to hold it.

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Meanwhile I had time to search out the *changkhang* where my friend's fiancé worked, and had there been introduced to another whole Lhasa subculture. A Lhasa *changkhang* might be frequented by members of all social strata, except the nobility or the monks (although warrior monks were known to break this rule). It was a place to drink socially, make friends, do business, and where the most remarkable arrangements could be made for romantic liaisons. All this I learned from the fiancé.

At first I didn't tell her of my mission, but simply talked to her. She didn't seem to miss her prospective groom very much, and I learned from the other customers that she had several lovers.* She quite openly told me that if I was interested in a woman I should talk to one of the two old ladies there, and then embarrassed me by calling one of them over. Since the drinking in a *changkhang* was usually done around a central table, I got up and went to a corner with the old woman. "Interested in a girl, young man?" she asked without the least embarrassment.

I had been forced into the situation but was still curious, so I answered quite honestly that I might be. "Do you have anyone in mind?" she then asked. I did not know what she was talking about and must have appeared rather stupid. "My, you are inexperienced, aren't you? Well, we'll soon fix that. You see, many of our Lhasa girls have no objections to spending time with a man, or to making a little extra money. Some of them are widows who might be lonely, and some are girls saving up for their marriages. You just name the lady and I'll try to arrange something. If you have no one in mind, just leave it to me to arrange something to your satisfaction. We have rooms upstairs and a back door."

She explained all this with a twinkle in her eye but without a trace of lewdness. It seemed like an innocent game that everyone enjoyed. Even so, I found myself a little embarrassed as she told me how much money it would take. Not feeling quite ready for the experience, I told her that I was short of cash but that I would return with more, and with someone definite in mind; and was thus able to retreat with some vestiges of dignity.

* One of these, with whom I was to share a few cups, was a jailor who told me a horrifying story of the death of Reting Rimpoché: that his testicles were bound and beaten until he died of pain. Rumours were also rife that the entire case against him had been fabricated by the cabinet minister Kapshopa.

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Not all girls, of course, would consent to such arrangements, but there seemed nothing particularly low or immoral about those who did. It all seemed remarkably friendly and healthy. It could not really be called prostitution: just good clean fun and a little money made on the side.

In fact the one woman in Lhasa I really would have liked to have been alone with would never have considered any such thing, for here in this city filled with willing women, I had fallen in love with a nun. In order to supplement my income I started giving English lessons to members of noble families. At one house I met a visiting nun from Tsang. A shaved head could normally be expected to effectively neutralize a woman's beauty, but this was not true in her case. She had a natural elegance that nothing could conceal.

Her vows did not prevent her from being sociable with visiting men, and I made it a point to come early for my lessons and talk with her. One day when we were alone I even blurted out my feelings for her and told her if she would leave the convent and marry me that I would cease my wandering life and settle down in Tibet. I think I really meant it.

Luckily she had more sense. She said that if she consented she would always be considered a 'fallen nun', and she could not go through life with that sort of taint on her character. It was not that she did not like me well enough, but she was not one to take her vows, or her reputation, lightly. Perhaps in another country we could marry and live happily ever after. I think this was meant to let me down gently by making an impossible condition.

July is the season of the *lingka*, the famous Tibetan garden party when tents are pitched on the willow-lined banks of the Kyi chu while open air feasting, drinking, singing, and dancing goes on for days. Tibetan ladies, particularly widows, are friendly and easy to talk to, very different from most of Asian womankind, and these open-air parties were excellent places to form friendships with them. Once you knew a lady's name, address, and that she liked you, there was the strong possibility of a liaison later on. A friend had invited me to spend some days at his uncle's tent, where a small and unexpected event turned this occasion into one of deep nostalgia. Fortunately no one seemed to notice.

There is nothing like music to bring back old memories. One of the more popular songs in Japan during the thirties was called 'China Night' and just as I was striking up a promising friendship I heard the

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familiar melody floating through the willows. Following the sound through a maze of tents I found it came from the entourage of a nobleman whom I vaguely knew, who told me he had bought the record from a Muslim merchant. I asked to hear the flip side, 'Shanghai Line', and was immediately struck with an irrational, but utterly irresistible bout of homesickness. Here among hospitable friends, with everything to be happy about, I suddenly found myself unable to control my longing to be back in the country that I had not seen—nor in truth missed very much—for nine years.

* * *

With little to occupy me besides my morning meetings in the park, a bit of petty trading, and my nocturnal meetings in the *changkhangs*, I was pleased when the second son of a noble family offered me the job of live-in English teacher. His house was in Wobaling, that eastern suburb inhabited largely by Muslims through which I had first entered Lhasa four years before with Danzan and Tseren-tso. He was establishing a new branch of the family, and the house was in fact rented from a Muslim widow with one daughter and an adopted son. In the back she had a flour mill where a horse worked a large millstone, but this was only one of her enterprises. She also owned a farm, as well as a flour shop and a butcher shop at Wandi Shinka, a market center in Lhasa. Her mature and attractive sixteen year-old daughter was a pupil at the Chinese school. This naturally brought her into contact with Phuntsok Wangyel, who taught there. I was amazed, however, to learn that the normally down-to-earth dialectical materialist has fallen in love with the girl.

As the New Year came and went the Chinese community in Lhasa began to reflect the strain of what was happening in their country, and the Tibetan government finally began to wake up to the fact that there would soon be a strong and united China on her doorstep. The army was beefed up and could often be seen drilling around Lhasa. As the Communists won victory after victory to the popular acclaim of the vast majority of the Chinese people, gradually forcing Chiang Kai-shek's government to south China then to Taiwan, Chinese officials began selling off their belongings to support themselves for they found that their salaries were no longer being sent. The 'Tibetan-Mongolian Affairs Commission', the closest thing to an official Chinese presence in the city, dared not bring notice to itself. Off in Chinghai, the Ma

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clan were still holding out, and offered Phuntsok Wangyel's uncle the rank of Lieutenant General if he would join them. Knowing that their days were as numbered as the Kuomintang's, he had the good sense to refuse.

Assuming that their ties with China, both official and otherwise, would soon be cut, a group of Chinese officials, the uncle included, pooled their resources and bought an old house called the Doshirimba, on the eastern inner side of the Barkhor, refurbished it, and went into the restaurant business. In a typical display of my business acumen, I became a minor shareholder in the doomed venture. Tibetan mistrust of China was so strong that the new restaurant and upstairs majhong parlor, was regarded as nothing more than a rendez-vous for Chinese Communist intelligence agents. It was a natural enough (though I feel in this case ungrounded) fear. We were always hearing tales that all over China people were rising against their local rulers as the Communists approached, and the greatest fear of the government was that local Chinese and discontented Tibetans would do the same.

In May of 1949 a special secret session of the Tibetan National Assembly was called. The full Assembly was only convened in times of national emergency and there were so many rumors about the purpose of this meeting that most shops remained closed in apprehension. Then suddenly in the middle of the month the government ordered all Chinese residents out of the country within a week, and their houses were watched day and night. Tibet had finally awakened to the crises it faced. There were reports of mystical occurrences in Lhasa, ill omens in the heavens, and of unnatural births.

This expulsion order seemed to me to be an action of pure, unreasoning panic—though it could have also been meant to underscore Tibetan independence. In the end though, the government proved for once to be way ahead of everyone, for none of us could have predicted how rapidly, or how totally, the Chinese wave was to engulf everything. Still, the order was ineffective as anything but a symbolic gesture, and like the military drill going on around Lhasa, simply represented a cornered government doing too little too late. It did, however, have a profound effect on my life.

It was not only Chinese who were ordered out. The government used this as an occasion to get rid of anyone they considered politically undesirable, as well as ethnic Tibetans from western China, and this almost inevitably involved true patriots and innocent bystanders. Phuntsok Wangyel was one of the former, and I was one of the latter.

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Phuntsok was a man who had perhaps been a little too fearless and open in making his views known to the government, I had been a little too open in my association with him. My shares in the ill-fated restaurant were another point against me.

In the midst of the hurried preparations to leave, my friend came to me with yet another surprise. When he told me he had something serious to discuss, I naturally assumed that it concerned politics. It was an even more delicate matter, however, for it seemed that he and his Muslim girl were serious about one another and could not bear to be parted. As soon as he heard he had to leave, Phuntsok Wangyel had proposed, and been as quickly accepted. Now he wanted me to act as go-between with the girl's mother.

She knew about it already, of course: Lhasa is not a place for keeping secrets. Her only objection to my friend was that he was not of their faith. More of a Marxist than a Buddhist anyway, Phuntsok Wangyel found a change of religion no great problem, and he quickly arranged to meet four Muslim elders of Wobaling to undergo the necessary initiation ceremony.

* * *

Of the fifty or sixty people on that trek, including some Tibetan wives who had chosen to accompany their Chinese husbands, only the young couple looked happy. Escorted by Tibetan troops our unwieldy caravan, which included city-bred women and children, took more than twice the normal time to get to the Chumbi Valley. Once we arrived in Chumbi we were held up for another three weeks, for this exodus had taken the Indians by surprise, and they needed some time to prepare for the arrival of such a large number of people being expelled as potential Communist agents.

Though I had often passed through Chumbi, this was the first time I had ever stopped here for long. It is a pleasant place with a near-perfect climate, in spite of the steep valley walls which the sun only manages to surmount for a couple of hours every day. The inhabitants, largely fair-skinned Sikkimese, reminded me of the people of my own country, reviving my homesickness. My latest dreams of helping to write a constitution that would save Tibet from invasion had been rudely shattered, I had been forced to leave a country I felt daily more part of, and the one serious attachment I had formed with a woman was hopeless. My mind seemed to gravitate naturally to my homeland

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though my entire adult life had been spent away from it. When I learned from travellers coming the other way that my friend the Sikkimese innkeeper had died, it affected me more than it should have.

There was little to pass the time in Chumbi besides taking long walks, and on one of these I was surprised to run into two Westerners. Assuming that they must be British and that I could get some news from them I began to talk—only to discover that I had happened upon Lowell Thomas and his son on their way to Lhasa. Suddenly the tables were turned and I found myself closely questioned by the father, who obviously would be content with nothing but the story of my life. Evasion seemed the best policy, and years later when I read their account of the meeting in *Out of this World* I was amused at just how garbled a story can become.

On the outskirts of Yatung I was startled when a young Chinese . . . addressed me in perfect English: "Hello there, where are you going?"

I learned from him that he was one of the Chinese who . . . were being tossed out of Tibet . . . He was on his way to China. There were, I discovered, between fifty and sixty Chinese in Yatung, all fugitives from Lhasa.

"How many Chinese are being ordered to leave Tibet?" I asked him.

"All who are not traders," he replied.

"What are you?"

"I'm a trader."

"What do you trade in?"

"Oh, wool and other things."

"If you are a trader, why must you leave?"

"I don't know." He seemed ill at ease and forced a laugh. (Later on we learned that he had been working in the Tibetan government.)

"Where did you learn to speak such good English?"

Again he seemed disconcerted. "Oh let's say I learned in India."

Subsequently we were told that he came originally from Inner Mongolia, which is attached to Soviet Siberia, and that he had spent five or six years studying in Japan.

A few days later we were finally escorted out of Chumbi and over the Jelap La. This was the seventh time I had crossed this border pass, and my spirits were at their lowest since the first time, four years before

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when Japan had lost the war and my world had fallen apart. I had pieced together a new one for myself, but Asian and global politics had again brought it to the brink of disaster, and the old question came back to haunt me: did I really have a place outside my own country? When the question had first occurred to me I had tackled it head on by confronting and conquering the Mongolian language. Now it had all come to this. Nearly overcome with foreboding as I stood on top of the pass, I could not bear to look back at the land which I doubted I would ever see again.

* * *

While the rest of the 'Chinese' deportees went directly on to Calcutta, I stopped off in Kalimpong to see Nishikawa. After his pilgrimage to Nepal, he had decided not to come back to the Press. Instead he had found an infinitely harder but marginally better paying job as a railroad laborer somewhere near Siliguri. I sent word through a Tibetan working on the same site for him to come and see me.

He arrived not long after and we talked in the former warehouse across from the press where pilgrims stayed and where I had met so many memorable people in the past. He looked taller and more gaunt than ever, and had traded his monk's robe for a white Indian *dhoti* because of the heat. Even considering his indifference to physical hardship it was not easy to imagine him leading the life of a laborer on an Indian railroad, but he seemed to be taking it in his stride, as he did everything. He had in a sense gone back to what first brought him to Asia, for in North China before joining the Ko Ah Gijuku he had worked on the railways as well, though of course in a supervisory position.

It was a strange conversation, with both of us restless and unsure of the future. I told him that I had been expelled from Tibet, and that I was not sure what next to do. One possibility was to continue with Phuntsok Wangyel and his bride to their home in Western China near the Tibetan border. The other was to give in to the inevitable and try to find some way of returning to Japan. He seemed equally confused, talking one minute of Burma, the next of Afghanistan, and then of how much he missed Japan. He left me with the impression that he would jump at the chance to return home if it presented itself.

Before I left Kalimpong a message came from my friends asking me to go to a Tibetan nobleman named Yutho who was in Kalimpong and

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borrow a thousand rupees for them. This I did, but when I arrived in Calcutta they had already left for Yunnan and there was no way to send the money to them. Not knowing what the future held for me, I decided it was best to keep the money for the time being.

In Calcutta I booked a room at the Pandara Number Hotel and went to the Chinese embassy to try to get a visa, though by this time there was little enough of Nationalist China left. Then one evening while reading the newspaper in my room I came across the news that a Japanese ship, the *Jakarta Maru*, was at anchor at Calcutta's King George Dock. For some reason all my feelings of recent months came together, and I was overwhelmed with homesickness. Even though it was night I rushed out and got a taxi to the pier. The gates were already closed, and it took five rupees to convince the Gurkha guard to let me through—one rupee was all that had been needed to smuggle gold through the Chumbi Valley.

The sight of the Japanese sailors wearing loincloths and *geta* (Japanese wooden sandals) in the Calcutta heat made me so nostalgic that I could hardly hold back my tears. This was the first time I had seen a countryman besides Nishikawa since Kangai-nuuji in 1943. I found my way to the captain's cabin and tried to explain myself, but though I could understand what he said to me, I could say next to nothing in my own language. Frustration made me even more tongue-tied, and finally in desperation I picked up a pen and wrote down what I wanted to say: "I am Japanese. My name is Hisa Kimura. I have not spoken Japanese for seven years." Oddly enough, I had no trouble writing.

My mind felt clearer when I had done that, and the mate sitting next to the captain offered me some seasoned sea urchin paste from a jar. I think it was this taste of the sea from ten years before that decided me. I took the paper back and wrote: "I want to go back to Japan."

The captain explained to me that Japan was still under American military occupation, and that entry into the country by any but proper channels might prove very difficult. I could try stowing away, he offered, but I would in all likelihood be found, and he would have no recourse but to put me ashore at the nearest port. He was, in any case, sailing for Saudi Arabia with his cargo of cement. I left the captain with a letter for my father in Japan and made my way thoughtfully back to my hotel through the darkened streets of Calcutta, and on the way made my decision.

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The next day I turned myself in to the Police Security Control located in an old red brick building on Pretoria Avenue. The air of colonialism still hung so heavily over these old buildings that it was always surprising to see them completely staffed by Asians. The officials were very polite and allowed me to stay at the hotel, although I had to report everyday for questioning. I was a little uneasy, for though the questioning was fair, I did not know for sure if in the end I would be repatriated to Japan, or arrested as some sort of foreign agent.

When I was finally told that it had been decided to send me back to Japan, I thought of Nishikawa. The last time I had seen him in Kalimpong he had indicated that he would be happy to return, but more than that, I did not see how I could go back without him. His relatives and friends would surely reach the conclusion that I had abandoned him in a hostile foreign land. No explanation of mine that he was happy and doing what he wanted was likely to carry much weight. I could well imagine the scene as I presented myself at his house: "Yes he is fine. He has a good job shoveling gravel with Indian Railways. He owns an old monk's robe, a *dhoti* and a pair of sandals and he is saving up his rupees to wander around Burma for a few years . . ." It is an explanation that might have worked twenty years later in the West, but we were Japanese and this was 1949. There was to my mind, no alternative but to tell the police about him. Detectives were sent out and he was soon brought in.

As my questioning continued I was told that Nishikawa was staying at an ashram and also being questioned, but I never saw him. Then quite suddenly on September 26th I was put in a cell for 'Class-A' detainees in the Presidency Penitentiary. The charge was Illegal Entry. On the way the jeep stopped at the ashram and picked up Nishikawa, and only now did I learn that he had decided to abandon the idea of returning to Japan for the time being and had been on the brink of departing for Burma when he was arrested. His words to me were brief and bitter, and the thought that he felt I had betrayed him when I believed I was fulfilling my duty to his family made the months we were to spend in prison even harder to bare.

While in prison I heard from a Tibetan inmate that the People's Liberation Army had moved through Kham (with, I could well imagine, the cooperation of the majority of Khampas) into Central Tibet. The fifteen year-old Dalai Lama had fled to Yatung in Chumbi, where I had been not long before, to await the outcome of the events. The reforms we had hoped for had not come about, and the Chinese

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Communists could justify their actions not only by the dubious claim that Tibet was part of China, but with the more substantial one that they had a duty to liberate Tibet from its medieval backwardness, and to bring happiness and prosperity to its people, particularly its serfs.

Why the repatriation procedures took so long was never properly explained to me, but it was not until May 10th, 1950 that we were put aboard a ship for Japan.

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With my return to Japan these ceaseless wanderings ended, and the rest of my life can be told briefly.

We landed in Kobe on 31st May after a three week voyage, and I went straight to my home in Kumamoto. A few days later I fell seriously ill with malaria and had to stay in bed for some time. This was the first serious illness I had suffered since the Tsaidam.

While I was still in bed, on 25th July, the Korean War started, and I received a telegram from the Japanese Repatriation Bureau, which was of course under American direction, asking me to report to their headquarters at Ichigaya in Tokyo, located in the former Rikugun Shikan Gakko, the Japanese Military Academy. I made the long trip as soon as I felt able to do so. In the dormitory I found about fifty or sixty Japanese ex-army officers and soldiers, mostly repatriated from Siberia, who were being interrogated by American Intelligence officers. Nishikawa was there as well, still wearing an old Indian *dhoti*, and I gathered he was being uncooperative. With me he was stiffly formal.

I was taken to the Counter-Intelligence Department, G-2, US Army Headquarters, located in the Nihon Yusen Building in front of Tokyo Station where I was questioned for about ten months. Now that the Americas felt they had 'lost' China, and considered themselves virtually at war with the new government, they were anxious to learn as much as possible about its remote regions. World War II had been over for more than five years and I saw no reason not to cooperate. In the middle of the winter I saw Nishikawa, however, still in *dhoti* and sandals and was told that he had been offered boots and winter clothing, but had refused to accept anything from his former enemies. There was something moving in his pride, but I cannot help but wonder where Japan would be today had we all behaved in the same way.

I was not a prisoner. My movements were fairly free as long as I reported for daily questioning. The Americans provided us with our basic needs and a small allowance. I knew, however, that as soon as my information ran out I would need a job, and I turned naturally to the China Department of the Foreign Ministry. There I found that even

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former high officials, consul generals and ambassadors, were grateful for jobs as petty clerks in other departments such as the immigration or tax office, so that there was no possibility of work there. They were not even interested in what I knew of the remote regions of China and Tibet, advising me instead simply to cooperate with the Americans.

As my interrogation advanced, so did the Korean War. As so often in the past, Korea's agony worked to the advantage of Japan, and our economy, which had only recovered slowly since the war, now began to boom. Ominously, it appeared for a time that the Americans were ready to widen the war, and the US Air Force asked me to help them prepare a Mongolian phrase book. It appeared to me from the first phrase—"Don't kill me, I have money"—that preparations were being made to bomb Northeast China.

Although the Foreign Ministry had no interest in what I could offer, I was approached by a Mongolian language teacher at the Tokyo University of Foreign Languages (Tokyo Gaigo Daigaku), Professor Sakamoto, who asked me to move to his house, since his own knowledge of the language and the nomadic life of the grasslands was only from books. There was no objection to this from the American side as long as I continued to put in a daily appearance. This was my first contact with the Japanese academic world.

When my debriefing ended, I was introduced to the FBIS: the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, under the Central Intelligence Agency, by the operation chief, a Captain Buck who spoke Japanese like a native. There was something familiar about the name, and while we were talking we discovered that by a remarkable coincidence we had known one another in childhood. His father had been a missionary at the school I attended in Kyushu, and he and I used to get into fights because I had a habit of picking on another missionary's daughter.

The FBIS offered work where my talents could be used effectively. Once more I would be involved in intelligence, for yet a third country, but this would be by far the least risky and highest paying job I had ever done. All I had to do was monitor daily programs in Mongolian from Radio Moscow, Radio Ulan Bator, and Radio Peking, write out summaries in English of the contents of any items ordered by Washington, and write an annual report on the characteristics of the broadcasts. It was a very comfortable position, and I worked there happily for twenty-seven years. Shortly after I began at FBIS, in spite of my earlier lack of success, I was approached by the Foreign Ministry to translate materials concerning relations with the Mongolian People's republic. This part-

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time work would continue for many years. By 1952 I felt secure enough to marry.

It was about this time that I was approached by a shadowy Englishman with an eyepatch. I never learned his real name, or if the eye-patch was genuine, but he made it clear that if I was ever in any financial need, or just had a hankering for adventure, that there would be employment for me snooping around Mongolia. Contact with him could be established at 10 Pall Mall Hall in London. As much as I missed Mongolia and its ways, I was now a married man with a secure job, and there was no longer any justification for me to go wandering off in the employ of a foreign power.

In 1953 or 1954 an old friend, Takster Rimpoché, the Dalai Lama's brother, turned up in Japan to attend the Second World Buddhist Conference. He had been at his monastery in Kumbum when the Communists took over, and they—apparently thinking that they had converted him to their cause—sent him to Lhasa to persuade his brother to acquiesce to Chinese rule. Instead he sounded a warning and, after obtaining permission to seek medical treatment in India for his chronic tuberculosis, continued on with no intention of returning. He was now without a passport, and travelling on an Indian transit document. As probably the only person in Japan he knew personally, I was asked to look after him, and I arranged accommodation for him at the Tsukiji Hongwanji Temple, a large and unusual temple in the heart of Tokyo, incorporating architectural styles from India and China.

When the Indian Embassy refused to extend his travel papers he became an illegal alien and was even held in custody for a time in Yokohama. I took him to the World Council of Churches to apply for a Stateless Person Passport from the Red Cross. This was ultimately successful, but took some time, and Takster Rimpoché remained in Japan for about three years, during which time he seemed to be going through some sort of personal crisis which ultimately led to his giving up his monkhood and living as a layman. He had the easy-going manner common to Tibetans but in fact was a sharp and far-sighted person. Later he moved to the United States where he is still on the faculty of the Institute of Ural and Altaistic Languages of Indiana University.

My first book, *Chibetto Senko Junen*, or *Ten Years Incognito in Tibet* was the result of a series of lectures I gave for the Mainichi Newspaper Company who were proposing an expedition to climb Minya Konka, the mountain in the Amne Machin in Chinghai, which some people

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still thought might be higher than Mt. Everest. Few Japanese knew as much as I did about the climate, terrain, and inhabitants of this area (Nishikawa had long since disappeared to the far north of Japan), and after the lectures, shorthand notes were used as a basis for the book. I was too busy at the time to sit down and write it properly, and had several disagreements with the publisher over the first edition of 1958. I felt, for example, that the title was misleading; and they insisted on an irrelevant photograph of Nepal taken by an earlier Mainichi expedition for the jacket.

Throughout the 1950's, conflict between the Tibetans and the occupying Chinese increased. Instead of enjoying a partnership between Chinese and Tibetans working for the good of the people—which is what the Chinese had promised and probably what the best of them intended—the Tibetans found themselves powerless in their own country. The Dalai Lama stood between the two sides, trying to cooperate with the Chinese to avoid violent confrontations, but the Khampas were by this time in full scale revolt, as promises of reforms had degenerated into policies that were openly colonial. In 1959 a large but unsuccessful rebellion against Chinese rule in Lhasa resulted in the Dalai Lama fleeing to India followed eventually by between fifty-five thousand and one hundred thousand of his countrymen. Since Tibet has a population estimated by the Chinese at only two million, this is a remarkable number of people to have left. (Tibetan refugees claim a total of six million ethnic Tibetans, but this includes those Tibetans from areas such as Kham and Amdo that are outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region). Whether this could have been avoided by earlier reforms within the Tibetan government, or whether the Chinese would have cynically moved into Tibet anyway, is something that will probably never be known.

The Dalai Lama set up his headquarters at Dharamsala in the hills of northwest India, but Nehru's pro-Peking policy obviously made him uncomfortable. In 1960 he sent Jigme Yutho, the son of the noble from whom I had borrowed a thousand rupees in Kalimpong, to Tokyo to inquire into the possibility of refugee status in Japan for His Holiness. Through officials at the Hongwanji Temple I arranged meetings with top officials of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The ruling party's attitude was that if the Dalai Lama came to Japan he would not be able to conduct any political activities, but would be strictly limited to religious work.

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During Jigme Yutho's visit I took the opportunity to ask if he would like me to repay my long-overdue debt to his father, but he answered with a laugh that such a small sum as a thousand rupees could conveniently be forgotten. It had seemed a fortune in 1949.

Also in 1960 I received a letter from Hugh Richardson saying that he would be stopping in Japan and would like to see 'Dawa Sangpo' again. He was working as a representative for the Tibetan Government-in-Exile at the United Nations appealing against Chinese aggression and human rights violations in Tibet, but he was making little headway because of a number of important African issues—and also because neither Tibet nor the People's Republic of China were member nations.

I thought personal relations between Nishikawa and myself were on the mend back in the early 1950's when we both still lived in the dormitory of the Repatriation Bureau. There he began to write his travel reminiscences, and in refreshing our memories we discussed past events and place names. I found the parts of the manuscript he showed me to be well-written and very detailed, but was saddened and disappointed when the impressive three volume set was published in the early 1960's to find a number of personal attacks on me that had not been in the manuscript I had seen. I have always felt that his editor stepped in and decided to exploit our often stormy relationship to spectacularise the story. In the end though the book was a best seller in Japan, these immature outbursts have hindered neither my academic career nor my continuing friendships with Mongolians and Tibetans.

Over the years I have been able to assist the Tibetan refugee community in several ways. This originally grew out of discussions with Tsering Dolma, a daughter of my old friend Tsarong. She was invited to Japan on a Ford Foundation grant to promote Tibetology in Japan and stayed for seven years during which time she frequently visited my home. I often heard her complain bitterly that the Japanese did nothing to help Tibetan refugees in India who were badly in need of, among other things, doctors and nurses. Today the Tibetan refugee community there is well-organized and relatively affluent, but in the early days it faced tremendous difficulties as the climate and diet of India had much the same effect on the refugee community that it had had on my Mongolian friends Danzan and Tseren-tso.

Through a professor at Tokyo's Asia University—where I had begun teaching part time—I was introduced to Dr. Maruki and his wife, also a doctor, and who ran a large hospital and nurse's training school

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in Saitama Prefecture not far from Tokyo. They proved willing to accept Tibetan girls as trainee nurses, but the Tibetan government reacted with understandable caution by first sending boys. The result was that in 1965, five Tibetan boys arrived. All were eventually to succeed in their studies: two graduated from Asia University, one from Tokyo University of Physical Education, and two from Saitama Medical University. One of them, Pema Gyalpo, remained for graduate studies and has since served as representative of His Holiness's government in exile for Japan and East Asia; a very busy and able man who is equally at home in Tibetan, Japanese, and English.

Encouraged by how well the young scholars were doing in their first year, the Tibetans began sending five young ladies every year from 1966, their studies financed by Dr. Maruki himself. These girls lived at the hospital, spent part of everyday working to earn their keep, and were looked after like daughters by Mrs. Maruki. They all graduated and were able to pass the Japanese state nurse's examination: quite an accomplishment considering that all their studies had to be conducted in Japanese.

In 1967 I was delighted to meet His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama for the first time when he visited Japan. His brother, who accompanied him, introduced us.

While I was still working for FBIS I began to teach Mongolian part time at Asia University, and continued in this capacity until 1977, a year after leaving FBIS, when I became a full tenured professor. My academic work has led to a number of trips abroad: several times to China; to the Mongolian People's Republic; to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and much of Southeast Asia; and on a one year exchange program at Western Washington University in the United States. Since the 1950's I had also been assisting the Foreign Ministry in preparations for establishing diplomatic relations with the Mongolian People's Republic; relations which were eventually formally established after many delays in 1972.

One of my most interesting projects was a study of how the Mongolian People's Republic had created a new academic and scientific language by borrowing from foreign languages, or by mixing foreign terms with Mongolian. Another was a trip to Java in search of remnants of a Mongolian army sent by Kublai Khan in 1292. Missionary records mentioned the discovery of an isolated tribe speaking a Mongolian dialect in 1638, and I found a clan called the Tengri tribe living on the slopes of Mt. Tengri (*tengri* is Mongolian for 'blue sky').

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It was an exciting idea, but unfortunately we turned up no evidence at all to support our theory that these people might be long lost Mongolians.

In 1985, more than forty years behind schedule, I finally reached Sinkiang, my original goal when I set out from Zarin Sume in 1943 with Danzan and Tseren-tso. This trip was more constructive if less exciting, and was for the purpose of concluding an academic exchange agreement with Sinkiang College of Finance and Economics. Based on this agreement we have had a steady exchange of young teachers and students between Asia University and the Sinkiang College of Finance and Economics. Later, we also agreed on a three-year joint research project between Asia University's Asia Research Institute and the Research Institute for Nationalities of the Central University for Nationalities in Peking. The object of the project is to study Tsarist, Japanese, Soviet, and British intervention and interference in Sinkiang from 1911 to 1949 (the so-called 'Period of Confusion'), and as a result I make annual visits to Sinkiang.

And what of the many friends and acquaintances I had made along the way?

It might be best if I begin with the two men I never met, but who were my main adversaries on the way to Tibet: Fu Tso-yi and Ma Pu-fang. Fu, in spite of the poor impression his soldiers made on me, was always one of Chiang Kai-shek's ablest and most honourable generals. In 1949, his defense of the Chinese capital earned him the title "the Valiant Defender of Peiping", and he had the good sense to surrender the city when the time came to prevent further civilian suffering. He made no attempt to escape to Taiwan, and remained behind in Communist China with his former enemies.

Ma Pu-fang's little empire in Chinghai collapsed along with the rest of non-communist China, and he fled with his entire clan to Taiwan. But the Mas had made enough enemies over the years among the other refugees to feel most uncomfortable there, and after a stint as an ambassador to Saudi Arabia, decided that he and his family felt more at home in the Muslim Holy Land, to which they emigrated.

Nishikawa still lives in Northern Japan. He married into the family of a well-off cosmetics manufacturer and took over the business on the death of his father-in-law.

I have been able to follow the fortunes of other acquaintances through annual alumni meetings of Zen Rin Kyokai veterans.

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Mr. Hajime Tsugiki whose talk in a Japanese restaurant in Kalgan had led to my trip, is still alive as of this writing, and is associated with the Foreign Affairs Study Center at Takushoku University. His main concern is the campaign for the return of the northern Japanese islands which were seized by the Soviets after World War II.

My classmate Nagasaka who worked with me on the Zarin Sum Farm had the most adventurous time after the war. He first went to Taiyuan City with another classmate named Kajishima where the Kuomintang General Yen Shi-shang was recruiting Japanese soldiers and others to fight the Communists. When it became obvious that the city would fall, they decided to escape and search for their old comrade Kimura, for just as I regarded it as impossible to return to Japan without Nishikawa, they felt it would be dishonorable to return without me. Nagasaka sneaked out of Taiyuan castle with a load of rifles and hand grenades as a peace offering, and surrendered to the Communists. He was questioned but not really trusted, and was sent with a single escort for further questioning. Thinking, as he told me later, that this further questioning would "not be good for his future," he excused himself for a call of nature in a mulberry field, knocked out his escort with a rock, and escaped. He was next captured by the Kuomintang, and assumed a false identity until he eventually came back to Japan. Today he owns a small business manufacturing automobile parts.

Strangely, many of my Mongolian friends of later years ended up emigrating to the United States. This is probably because most of them were were living in Tibet when the Chinese took over, and the only sizeable Mongolian exile community was in New Jersey headed by the Dilowa. The creation of this community came about because a group of Kalmuck Mongolians got caught up in events they did not understand during World War II. Oppressed by Stalin in the 'thirties and 'forties, and knowing nothing of the racist policies of the Nazis, they looked upon the latter as an escape route from an intolerable situation. Following the Germans on their retreat from Russia, they wound up stranded in Eastern Europe at the end of the war. The American victors, confused by the presence of Mongolians so far from home first regarded them as collaborators rather than refugees, and were going to send them back where they had come from. When the truth became evident, the Kalmucks were given permission to settle in Farmingdale, New Jersey.

Dilowa Khutughtu was taken to the United States by the American writer and scholar of things Mongolian, Owen Lattimore, and

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became the spiritual leader of the Mongolians in Farmingdale. He died of cancer in 1965 in New York. Dalama also came to America when he heard of Dilowa's worsening condition, and remained there until his own death. Gyamtso, the merchant who had looked after me in Lhasa followed them later, and when I was at Western Washington I had the opportunity to speak with him by phone. Later still when his health began to fail he returned to Outer Mongolia for his final years, and there met a former student of mine. Gyamtso told him he had a Japanese friend named Dawa Sangpo. My student, realizing he must mean me, got into contact, and we were able to talk by phone a last time before he died.

Geshé Wangyel escaped Tibet by way of Gyantse to Kalimpong when the Communists came, and later he found his way to the United States. I also spoke to him by phone when I was living there. In the sixties, when young Westerners began seeking Eastern spiritual solace in large numbers many came to him, but he had little interest in commercialising Buddhism and his following remained small.

Back in Kalimpong, after Mr. Tarchin's death, the printing press was taken over by his adopted son, Sherab Gyatso. The newspaper is no longer published, though the younger Tarchin uses the press for tracts and pamphlets, and also runs an orphanage in the old house up on the hill.

Tsarong remained in Tibet through the 'fifties, but was imprisoned after the 1959 rebellion and died shortly afterwards.

* * *

Although in the last few years I have travelled to Outer Mongolia and through much of China, I have never returned to Inner Mongolia, and I have absolutely no desire to see what has been done to Tibet. In this account I have tried to be as honest as I could about both the merits and the shortcomings of the old Tibet, and the rule of the Tibetan nobility in particular. Tibet was so badly governed by the regencies of the 1930s and 1940s that the Chinese had a golden opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of their revolutionary system. Unfortunately for all concerned, this is not what happened. In order to bring Tibet to heel, after the 1959 rebellion and the Khampa rising had forcefully demonstrated Tibetan discontent with Chinese rule, a tremendous amount of destruction was perpetrated: far more than ever could be justified even if people's material lives had been vastly

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improved. Since not even the promised material improvement came about, Tibet can only be looked at today as one of Socialism's sorriest failures: an unwanted revolution imposed from the outside on a people with no desire for or understanding of twentieth century revolutionary change.

Yet the basic spirit of the Tibetan people lives on, both inside the country where religious centers are being rebuilt and the Chinese face constant resentment, rebellion and enmity; and among the refugee community where the Dalai Lama's government at Dharamsala in India has built one of the most successful refugee societies in the world. Too many travellers have come back from Tibet with stories of the reverence shown towards photographs of His Holiness for there to be any doubt that it is to Dharamsala rather than to Peking that most Tibetans look for guidance.

Tibet, while it has special characteristics which make it unique, is really part of a larger problem that spans central Asia, a huge and largely forgotten region of the world that has been in ferment for much of the twentieth century and is controlled by only two nations: China and the Soviet Union. Though both these nations are multi-racial and multi-cultural they face very different problems. In China the Han population comprises 94% of the total and the fifty-five national minorities altogether total only around 6%; but these minorities dwell on 60% of China's land mass. This is because many of these minority peoples are nomads like the Mongolians and Tibetans who live on land that is largely unsuited to agriculture. Still, it is understandable from the purely pragmatic point of view why the Chinese feel compelled to promote Han immigration to these areas for economic and defense purposes. The Soviet Union faces a different problem. There, about 60% of the population is Slavic—Russian and Ukrainian. The other 40% is divided between a hundred and twenty different national minorities. With present birth rates, the Slavic Russians seem certain to become a national minority themselves, and the Central Asian peoples will form more than half the population.

Both nations have had to face the problem of how to justify the relations between the governing race and the governed. This is a problem that is just as alive today as it was in the 1930's. The Chinese Communists had a potentially good idea: "regional autonomy under a unified nation system". Unfortunately this has not meant that the actual minority peoples are autonomous, but that local Han Party members are able to act largely independently of Peking. The Soviet

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Union used to simply boast that the minority issue had been solved through Marxist-Leninist principles.

Recent unrest among minority nationalities in both nations means that earlier claims of success can be discounted. Tibet has never really been at peace since the mid-1950's. The results of the 'autonomy' policy there were so disastrous that in 1980 when Party Secretary Hu Yao-bang visited Tibet, he was so appalled at what he found that his reaction was as severe as anything issued by the Dalai Lama's government in exile. While he called for reforms, and while the situation in Tibet did improve remarkably in the mid 'eighties, resistance and rebellion in Lhasa later became ever more open, indicating that most Tibetans will never live docilely under Chinese rule. Hu's fall in 1987 meant that Tibet lost one of its few friendly voices in far-off Beijing. But Tibet is in a sense only an extreme example of what is happening among the minorities in both the Soviet Union and China where there is a common pattern of economic, and often spiritual, dissatisfaction among the common people, and frustration among intellectuals, that contribute to an explosive combination.

This all indicates to me that there is little future in Socialism in its present form as a solution to the problems of these peoples. I do not mean this as an all-embracing, rabid anti-communist statement. China was able to demonstrate in the 1950's how Socialism could, by toppling an outdated and crumbling social system, retrieve a country and a people from the brink of starvation. However, when the same revolutionary Socialism is imposed from outside on peoples who are not so desperate and have not called for it themselves, it is doomed to failure. There is no doubt at all that Tibet was in need of change, but it needed its own kind of change, in its own time and under its own leaders. Even in China itself, the problem of what path Socialism should take when the country has achieved a reasonable level of prosperity has haunted politics since the Great Leap Forward. I often visit China, have been close to a number of both minority and Han students at Asia University, and I would hope that in the future a more flexible leadership will be able to forget its dogma and work towards a realistic solution.

Whether the Tibetans in exile under the leadership of His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama will continue their struggle for complete independence, or compromise with some form of 'high autonomy' is a problem that only the Tibetans themselves can resolve.

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I can only hope however that my own country can find a way to overcome diplomatic difficulties and extend the kind of economic and technological aid that could help to stabilise the lives of the Tibetans in exile.

This brings me to the present state of my own country. It is difficult to imagine any two situations more different than those of a young Japanese in the 1930's and today. Just prior to my departure from Inner Mongolia I wrote a last letter to my parents in which I enclosed cuttings of my hair and nails. In that letter I said that I was satisfied to be sacrificing myself for the great cause of the nation; expressed my gratitude for my upbringing; apologized for not being able sufficiently to repay their kindness; and concluded by saying that I was leaving no financial or romantic entanglements. Such a letter could never be written in today's affluent and hedonistic society.

In some ways, of course, this is just as well. We regarded ourselves as pure and noble, while in fact we were only pawns in a great game of deception. Now, with bitter regret, I recall that contrary to the rosy dream of 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity' touted by the Japanese army and government, we simply embarked on a program of vicious racial conquest. Few of us knew at the outset of the cruelties of war, but there was no excuse for not knowing the truth by the end. The great tragedy of the war for Japan was not that we lost, but that we learned so little from our defeat, and emerged with no real identity.

The one clear lesson we learned was that we did not like losing, and it was for this reason, rather than any sincere regret over what we had done, that the Japanese people tried to erase everything to do with war and militarism from our society. Of course, we were amazingly successful: so successful that even the best of our traditional national identity was obliterated. Ideally we should have retained the old spirit of self-sacrifice and dedication to a larger cause, coupled with an awareness of what is going on in the world around us so that we could recognize a larger cause when we saw it.

We took the easy way out, readily accepted what Americans called democracy, deceived them into thinking that we meant the same thing, and thought that by doing this there would be no need for any serious national reflection on our war crimes. Japan, it is true, has achieved a prosperity that is the envy of the world, but if we are not liked or appreciated by the world at large, we have only ourselves to blame. Japanese companies today can, without the least sensitivity to the

feelings of other people, go into the countries where we caused so much suffering with no thought but for their own advantage and be bewildered at the resentment caused. This stems, I believe, from our lack of reflection about the war, and from our related lack of national identity. There is a huge gap between the way the peoples of Asia regard us, and the way we think of ourselves: because we ourselves no longer know who we are. This will eventually lead us right back to the kind of isolation we suffered from before.

Teaching as I do in a university, I am in an excellent position to observe the new generation, and I think that no better example of the confusion of our young people can be seen than at the beginning of term when the student clubs all set up booths to attract new members. Hundreds of posters are displayed all over the campus, but there are very few without at least a few words of misused English on them. Many of them are written entirely in an odd and incomprehensible corruption of that language. The mistakes hardly matter since no one, except of course some of the foreign students, could read the posters in English even if they were correct. This is a visual manifestation of the common Japanese feeling that foreign languages need not be taken seriously enough to be used properly: it is enough for them to look pretty. This problem permeates our society and is not peculiar to our campus. The message seems to be that our own language is not good enough, but that other languages are mere curiosities that do not really count.

But to me probably the most disturbing tendency in Japan today is the way Japanese abroad behave in developing countries. We are very meek and mild in America or Europe, but we behave quite differently in Africa or Southeast Asia. We seem to have no more appreciation for the higher spiritual cultures of Asia than we did in the 'thirties, and while we do come up with the occasional talented and sympathetic teacher, agricultural worker, or scholar (just as we had the Zenrin Kyokai when I was young) their contribution is as little appreciated today as it was then. Just as then only military conquest was thought to matter, so it is today with economic conquest.

I wish I could end on a more positive note for both Japan and Central Asia, but there is no sense in not being honest about what I see around me with my own eyes. I can only do what I consider to be right in a small way: by continuing to travel, to study, to use those languages I know, and to communicate what I have learned through my writing and teaching, for as long as I am physically and mentally able.

Epilogue

Note

Professor Hisao Kimura was taken seriously ill on his 1989 trip to Sinkiang. He underwent surgery in Beijing, and was brought back to his home in Japan where he died on 8th October.

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