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The Tibetans

THE DRIVE FROM DELHI TO DHARAMSALA took twelve hours and only one dented fender, where I tangled with a bullock cart near Ludhiana. It was early March, 1965, two months short of my thirty-sixth birthday. I was at the wheel, which was why I'd been invited to come along on this adventure. It had been organized by Terry, the vivacious Peace Corps secretary, as a farewell gift to herself, and she had arranged everything: the loan of one of the big blue Chevrolet Carry-Alls, the company of some of her favorite volunteers, and — "I still can't believe it came through," she crowed — an audience with the Dalai Lama of Tibet. "I just need someone to help me drive, since the volunteers aren't allowed to, and to be honest I'm a little nervous with the big vehicles. Are you up for it?" I certainly was.

It was a major occasion, Tibetan New Year, Terry explained, "and there'll be thousands of refugees coming to Dharamsala to be near the Dalai Lama and get his blessing." So an hour before dawn on the second of March, stuffed into the Carry-All with packs and bedrolls, mountain boots, cases of coke and beer for our volunteer hosts — and out of the darkness behind me Jon "The Nose" Nyberg playing his harmonica — nine of us headed north to cross the Punjab and welcome the Year of the Wood Snake.

Two of us had read *My Land and My People*, His Holiness' account of his life up until his escape to India in 1959 at the age of 24. We briefed the others about how the emanation of Chenrezi, *bodhisattva* of compassion, was found in a peasant family and raised with pomp and mystery in the Potala palace, and how at fifteen he was confronted with the Chinese invasion and, nine years later, to save his people bloodshed, fled over the Himalayas. Dottie and Jon Nyberg, who worked in a TB sanitarium, had their own stories about Tibetans. Coming down from their high world without natural immunities, the refugees succumbed easily to the diseases of the Indian plains. As patients

in the sanitarium, they were remarkable at handling pain, and also irrepressible. Even right out of surgery, with tubes draining his lungs, one monk hid a litter of kittens under his bed; another climbed out the window and up a tree for a view of the land.

We inched through the traffic of Pathankote, the railhead for Kangra valley, then, turning to the northeast, came on the mountains fast. Suddenly we were in a different, glistening world; the late sun washed over liquid green terraces of new barley and wheat, glinting on lavender slate roofs and, beyond them, high snows against the deep northern sky. Up ahead, on a spur of the Himalayan foothills with its back to the Daula Dhar range, was Dharamsala.

As the road climbed and twisted, I saw them for the first time: figures in Tibetan dress turned and waved, laughing as we drove by. Some greeted us from piles of rocks, where they labored with picks and mallets. Their broad grins of greeting startled us, for we had grown accustomed to the stolidity of Indian faces. Six more miles of hairpin turns and we pulled up onto the narrow ridge of McLeod Ganj, where I unbent my fingers from the wheel and we climbed out. Here, between ramshackle houses and a drop-off onto treetops and roofs, stretched a world of Tibetans. They had no shops then, just tarps spread on the ground for their wares — plastic combs, bronze Buddhas. Around them, throngs moved in a steady murmur of greetings and gossip. By the pump a woman in embroidered boots filled her pail, a bare-armed *lama* washed. Except for a Parsee from Bombay who kept the general store, no one else lived there.

I wandered about the bazaar, fingering turquoise beads and fur-trimmed hats, but all I seemed to see was that smile. From ruddy, weathered Central Asian faces, crinkling eyes laughed straight into mine. They are smiling at me, I thought to myself in disbelief. It is not I who have been forced from my homeland, seen my loved ones and teachers tortured, killed. It is not I who have trekked out of the far heights to sicken in the heat and see more of my brothers and sisters die. Not I who now labor in road gangs breaking rocks — my culture, my tradition, lying in pieces around me like the boulders being broken into stones, the stones into gravel. Yet *I* am the one they are smiling at, as if to reassure *me*, as if to tell me that at the heart of it all and in this moment there is joy.

Two hours to the northeast up Kangra valley, we descended upon a household of four volunteers; I already felt linked to one of them, named Logan, who had stayed with us in Delhi. Our hosts were disgusted that we had drunk up the entire case of coke we had intended for them, but the beer was

still intact and we all settled in. The foursome was engaged in creating a teachers' training camp, but Logan seemed more excited about something else entirely.

"I've found this encampment near here — a group of refugees from Kham in Eastern Tibet." They were squatting in a tea estate outside Banoori, he explained, and he had been spending more and more time with them. "They've invited us to come tomorrow to their New Year's *puja* — their rituals of prayer. Want to come?"

By six the next morning I was following Logan down a footpath winding through tea bushes. Tall poles came into view, slanting against the dawn sky, their full length fluttering with prayer flags. A conch shell sounded, then the deeper voice of horns, and cymbals clashing. The summons issued from a large, mudwalled tent; the puja had begun. Maroon-robed figures greeted us and ushered us inside; we bent to enter. As I sat on a leopard skin that was stiff with age, the deep-throated chanting of monks thrummed through my whole body. It seemed to erase time and all the incidental features of my life. Centuries of certainty were present in that chanting, as if no displacement had occurred, as if each instrument and ritual object had not been carried so far and at such cost to foreign soil.

After an hour, as the puja continued, we were beckoned out to rooms in a nearby shed, where, with mounds of fresh New Year's pastry, Tibetan tea awaited us. It was my first taste of that salty, buttery beverage. I sipped it cautiously and watched the lay people through the door. They were circumambulating the puja tent, spinning prayer wheels, murmuring mantras, and when they peered in at us, the older ones displayed their tongues in an ancient form of greeting.

Logan was briefing me: the community belonged to the *Drukpa* or Dragon tradition of the Kargyu lineage. Its leader, a certain Khamtrul Rinpoche, was away at the moment giving teachings to the royal family of Bhutan. *Rinpoche*, which means Precious One, is the honorific title for a reincarnated lama. It was thanks to Khamtrul Rinpoche, a great *Dharma* master, that these lay people and monks had managed to stay together. This was rare, for life in exile tended to fragment the refugees — scattering them into road gangs, monasteries, orphanages, disrupting the age-old symbiosis between the laity and the monastics. This absent Khamtrul Rinpoche had also managed to bring out Tibetan *togdens*, or *yogis*, perhaps the only ones in exile. They had already arrested my attention with their distinctive white and red robes and big

topknots of uncut, matted hair. I gathered that they were repositories of the most esoteric practices of this ancient stream of Tibetan Buddhism.

"My best friends here," Logan said, "are younger rinpoches called *tulkus*. Each has his own monastery back in Tibet, but now in exile they're completing their higher studies under Khamtrul Rinpoche, who's like their spiritual father." He looked past me now, his face lighting up. "Good morning, Choegyal Rinpoche. Tashi deleg! I brought my friend Joanna." I turned to see a skinny, maroon-robed figure in the doorway. His eyes were large and luminous, his smile shy; in his hands he held a sheet of paper. It was a watercolor he had just painted. "Choegyal is the only one who speaks any English. He learned it from a British hippie who hung out here before I came along — so he interprets for me with Khamtrul Rinpoche and the others."

Rising, I bowed. We met. It was in the painting he showed me that I seemed to see him first. No icon or deity, no stylized lotus, just a landscape: green treeless hills, herds of sheep and yaks, the low, dark tent of a nomad family. This was the land and the people he had left behind at thirteen. "I paint it for remembering," he said. As we talked, I calculated: at nineteen, he could be a younger brother to me. I did not suspect that our lives would be linked from then on. I had no reason to imagine that twenty-two years later he would take me with him into that same green landscape in Kham. When we said goodbye that New Year's morning, he placed the watercolor in my hands — and it has hung in our home in all the places my family and I have lived.

"I'll be back," I said. "And when I come see you again, I want to bring Fran, my husband." Ah, that would be impossible, they would not be there. Choegyal seemed embarrassed to tell me why, as if speaking of their misfortune would cloud the pleasure of our meeting. It seemed that the plantation owners had accused the refugees of destroying tea bushes and, after fining them heavily, were about to evict them. They had to move off by the end of the month. Not to worry, Choegyal said, touching my hand. His gesture wanted to reassure me that this band would manage somehow to stay together, just as they had throughout their long exodus, through the snow-blinding passes and the border towns where they got separated and found each other again.

Now, as we wound our way back to the road, I understood: Logan wanted to change his Peace Corps assignment and work with these refugees full-time. "They're artists, as you saw, and I want to help them find a place to live and start up a handicraft business. With an economic base, they can stay together as a community."

Logan realized that he would need not only Fran's agreement but his active intervention with the Indian government, which explicitly forbade U.S. Peace Corps involvement with the Tibetans. The situation looked pretty cut and dried: there was no way this could happen. Yet Logan was grinning in anticipation. "It's going to be great working with these Khampas! It's going to work out, just you wait."

On the day of our audience with the Dalai Lama the sun laughed from the snow peaks and the glinting streams. Heading back to Dharamsala, with four more bodies crowded in, the Carry-All rang with harmonica music and song — "Chenrezi-baby, here we come" and even "Hello Dalai!" On a high, wooded hillside above McLeod Ganj, by the entrance to His Holiness' residence, Indian police officers stood guard, rifles erect against the flowering rhododendrons. Two lamas, a secretary and an interpreter, led us into the compound and around to the front of a bungalow facing out over the distant plains. I expected *some* degree of pomp from the days of the Potala, some arcane ceremoniousness befitting the emanation of Chenrezi, Gyatso, ocean of wisdom. But as we rounded the house, I simply saw across the grass a single figure. In plain monk's robes, his back turned to us, he leaned over a wire fence, peering at something down the mountainside. He looked so alone that my first response was a desire to weep.

One by one, with great solemnity and the gestures we had practiced, we presented and received back again the white ceremonial scarves we had brought. The thirty-year-old who accepted this homage had a twinkle in his eye and, after the scarf routine, gave each of us a very firm Western handshake. We talked about the Peace Corps and about his people, Logan and I betraying our eagerness to connect the two subjects. His Holiness spoke mostly of the book he was preparing on Buddhist philosophy, but throughout the half-hour my attention was more on the person than on his words. The photographs I had seen of him, bland and bespectacled, hadn't prepared me for the charged beauty he conveyed. The voice was vigorous, its timbre deep and resonant. This person needed no pomp. His authority was unmistakable, graced by alert, expectant stillness. No wonder they called him *kundun*, presence. The presence of Tibet. That is what the thousands of refugees came here to find, for to be *in* that presence was, in some real way, to be home.

As we passed through the gateway after taking our leave, an adornment overhead caught my eye. I turned to look up at it, stopping still. A large,

eight-spoked wheel, flanked by kneeling deer, stood upright against the sky. "That's the *Dharma Chakra*," said Logan, "the Wheel of the Dharma. Very sacred symbol."

"Yeah, I know," I murmured. I had read somewhere that when the Buddha taught, he was said to be turning the wheel, with the spokes representing the Eightfold Path. But something else, a fiercer, more intimate knowing, rose from within my body. The memory of the great wheel on which I had hung and turned had never dimmed in the seven years since the ether experience at Jack's birth. It had let me glimpse a vast, underlying order that connected and made sense of all things, and left me with the hope that I might some day be able to understand. Now in India, among the Tibetans, I encountered it again. Had the Dharma been in store for me all along? This time, instead of fear, I felt only awe and promise.

That season back in Delhi I met Freda Bedi.

I remember the moment I opened the door, how she stood there in her maroon robes graciously greeting me, as if somehow I, and not she, were the guest. There was a Peace Corps-related matter to discuss, and Fran had invited her for lunch. She was an English woman in her early fifties, a Cambridge graduate who had married a Sikh and made India her home. And she seemed to the manner born. I loved the way that touch of the Raj blended, so paradoxically and superbly, with the monk's garb she wore. Although she was no taller than I, and almost as slender then, her presence always seemed huge to me, as calm and unstoppable as a ship in full sail. I sensed that her warm but majestically unruffled demeanor could see her through anything and was not surprised when I learned later that she had been the first British *satyagrahi* to be jailed with Gandhi and, after independence, had coordinated social services for Prime Minister Nehru. When the exodus from Tibet began, she visited the refugee camps and soon resigned her post to devote herself full-time to Tibet in exile.

The Tibetans who knew her called her "Mummy," as soon I would, too. A few years after we met, she was ordained as a nun and shaved her head, acquiring the name Karma Khechog Palmo. She went to live in the great monastery of Rumtek in Sikkim alongside His Holiness the sixteenth Karmapa, head of the Kargyu lineage.

"Did you become a Buddhist after meeting the Tibetans?" I asked her. No, she had turned to the Dharma many years earlier, taking instruction in the Theravada or Southern school of Buddhism and going to Burma to practice

under the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. There in Rangoon the ancient practice of *satipatthana*, now widely known as *vipassana*, had been resurrected in the early twentieth century. Many came to train under the great teacher, in an arduously strict months-long course. Freda Bedi later described to me a kind of enlightenment experience she had there. Once when she walked out of the monastic training center onto the streets of Rangoon, there was suddenly no distinction between self and other. Everything — each being and object — was bathed in the same internal and liberating light.

One day in 1959, Nehru sent Freda to Tezpur near the border, where an Indian government train awaited the Dalai Lama, who had just escaped the Chinese. She saw him standing on the platform. And that was it. She had found her spiritual home. Now her life was in constant service to the Vajrayana, or Tibetan Buddhism, and those born into it. Unlike many Western Dharma enthusiasts, Freda displayed as deep a regard for each man, woman, and child of Tibet — no matter how impoverished, filthy, or sick — as for the most exalted teachers.

To help preserve the tradition she had come to respect so profoundly, she worked to establish sites of instruction and practice, like the two nunneries she set up not far from Dharamsala in the Kangra district. The apple of her eye was her Young Lamas' Home School, recently moved from New Delhi to a big, old mountaintop villa called Kailash above the hill-station of Dalhousie. There, young tulkus she had found in the refugee camps could continue their training under traditional teachers. To help them survive in exile and serve their people, tutors also taught them Hindi and English, geography, math.

The school at Kailash was the topic she wished to pursue with Fran. A Peace Corps volunteer to teach English to the young tulkus (but not Indian-English, with its idiosyncrasies of vocabulary and intonation) to prepare them to take the Dharma into the modern world — that was precisely what was needed now. She was aware that the government of India was being a bit difficult about all this, but surely in such a good cause.... Fran and I looked at each other and laughed. "You're getting it from all sides," I told him, for I had already been after him to try to transfer Logan to work with Khamtrul Rinpoche's group.

"I shall speak to my friend Mr. B. in the cabinet," Freda smiled. "I already know the volunteer I want; his name is Ray. When, do you think, we can expect him?"

In that moment I viewed her with a satisfaction almost equal to her own. Yes, I could learn a lot from this woman. Confidence, for one thing — the marriage of serenity with sheer nerve.

By the end of our lunch, Fran had assured her he would do what he could, and *she* had invited the whole family up to Dalhousie when school let out. "You must all come to Kailash then, to get out of the heat. May and June are unbearable in Delhi. I know just the place for you — a lovely old cottage a short walk from our school, four or five rooms, I think, with lovely views. Just bring your cook along to buy food; it's a mile uphill from the topmost bazaar." As she left, she turned to me and said, "By the way, I have an idea for Khamtrul Rinpoche's group. There are some abandoned houses in lower Dalhousie that should do fine with a little repair. I will see what I can do about a loan; I think His Holiness will be glad to help."

Driving up through the Punjab in the furnace heat of June, we stopped at irrigation pumps and bucket wells to soak dish towels and put them over our noses and mouths. Until they dried within minutes, they provided some refreshing lungfulls to the three children and me and Tomis, our cook. Three hours beyond Pathankote, on steep Himalayan foothills, rose Dalhousie, our destination. It harbored not only the Young Lamas' Home School at Kailash in its higher reaches, but also now, lower down, the community from Kham, recently resettled from the tea estate. There I would encounter Khamtrul Rinpoche at last, but I have no recollection of our first meeting and I wouldn't know, till the time came to leave him, how rare a space he would occupy in my mind, my life.

The layout of Dalhousie seemed perpendicular: three rings, each higher than the last and linked by steep roads and crisscrossing paths, looked out over the plains of Punjab to the South and allowed, as we climbed, glimpses of hidden valleys to the west and north. Its geography imprinted itself on my soul, resurfacing in my dreams for years after I'd left India. The dreams were always of seeking Khamtrul Rinpoche, of climbing the mountain paths up steep inclines, around half-familiar bends through trees and along drop-offs, then up some more across the brow of a hill to where he would always be waiting, with his people, his broad face turned toward me in a smile. Sometimes I got lost, or diverted by some maddening errand. When we finally met, the dream would end, with that fulfillment.

In actuality the hikes to Khamtrul Rinpoche and his community that summer were downhill, not up. Kailash, Mummy's Young Lamas' Home School, perched above the highest ring, and our cottage even higher than that, while the assortment of old houses where the Khampas were quartered lay a good hour's walk below, on paths pitching down from the bus station bazaar. My days were divided between those two settings. Mornings and middays I enjoyed hillside picnics and rambles with the children. After lunch I left them napping, reading or playing games under Tomis the cook's watchful eye, and trekked down to visit the Khampa lamas and the newly forming Tibetan Craft Community for the Propagation of the Dharma.

Logan had fancied a snappier name. "At least a name that's not such a mouthful, Rinpoche! How about Khampa Krafts?" But Khamtrul Rinpoche was imperturbable. "You see, it's all for Dharma, isn't it?" said Choegyal, still serving as interpreter.

When his reassignment had finally been negotiated, Logan moved in with the community, taking quarters up-slope from the makeshift monastery. He had unpacked his books, bedroll, and portable typewriter in a bare room next to some of the yogis. "They're going at prayers all night. I doubt if they sleep, and now I don't either," he said cheerfully. He seemed to know everyone by name and have some special connection with each, including the many children. At this point there were about three hundred monks and laypeople in residence — it was hard to get an exact count. They included a remarkable number of painters, sculptors, woodcarvers, weavers, mask makers, dancers, for the ancient ritual arts were strong in the Drukpa Kargyu lineage. Logan was determined that these arts be turned to economic as well as religious use.

New production plans sprouted: traditional scroll paintings or *tangkas* mounted on brocade, watercolors of folk scenes on handmade paper, thick-napped carpets vivid with vegetable dyes. The intricately carved woodblocks used for prayer flags would be sold as art objects in their own right, with handles for hanging on walls. Logan made it easier for me to participate in these plans, for I knew he was tireless in helping to carry them out — from hammering out letters to badgering government offices in Delhi for refugee rations, export licenses, loans for looms and wool.

My afternoons with the lamas were devoted to those plans, with no time left for learning Dharma, the teachings of the Buddha. With all the rinpoches had on their minds and hands, as they cared for the ritual life and physical survival of their community, I couldn't imagine interrupting them with requests for teachings. But the lessons came anyway, in unexpected ways.

Mummy, now in residence at Kailash, taught a Dharma class for her handful of Western volunteers. Chris, nearly ten by then, came along with me. “So countless are all sentient beings,” Mummy said one day, “and so many their births through time, that each at some point was your mother.” She explained a practice for developing compassion: view each person you meet as your mother in a former life.

I played with the idea as I walked to Khamtrul Rinpoche’s community down the narrow, winding road. The astronomical number of lifetimes Mummy’s words evoked boggled my mind — yet the intent of this quaint practice, for all its farfetched fantasy, moved me. What a pity, I thought, that this was not a practice I could use, since reincarnation hardly figured in my belief system. Then I paused on the path as the figure of a coolie approached.

Coolies, or load-bearing laborers, were a familiar sight on the roads of Dalhousie, and the most heavily laden of all were those who struggled up the mountain with mammoth logs on their backs. They were low-caste mountain folk whose bent, gaunt forms were dwarfed by their burdens, many yards long. I had become accustomed to the sight of them, as well as to the consternation that it triggered in me. I would usually look away in discomfort, and pass by, my mind muttering judgments about the kind of social and economic system that so exploited its own population.

But this particular afternoon I stood stock-still. I watched the slight, bandy-legged figure move slowly uphill toward me, negotiating his burden — the trunk of a cedar — around the bend. Backing up to prop the rear of the log against the bank, to ease the weight of it, the coolie paused to catch his breath. “Namaste,” I said softly, and stepped hesitantly toward him.

I wanted to see his face. But he was still strapped under his log, and I would have had to crouch down under it to look up at his features — which I ached now to see. What face did she now wear, this dear one who had long ago mothered me? My heart trembled with gladness and distress. I wanted to touch that dark, half-glimpsed cheek and meet those lidded eyes bent to the ground. I wanted to undo and rearrange the straps so that I might share her burden up the mountain. Whether out of respect or embarrassment, I did not do that. I simply stood five feet away and drank in every feature of that form — the grizzled chin, the rag turban, the gnarled hands grasping the forward overhang of log.

The routine comments of my internal social scientist were stilled. What appeared now before me was not an oppressed class or an indictment of an economic system so much as a unique and incomparably precious being. My mother. My child. A dozen questions rose urgently in my mind. Where was she headed? When would he reach home? Would there be loved ones to greet him, and a good meal to eat? Was rest in store, and quiet talk?

When the coolie heaved the log off the bank to balance its weight on his back again and to proceed uphill, I headed on down the mountain path. I had done nothing to change his life, or to betray my discovery of our relationship. But the Dalhousie afternoon seemed to shine in a different light; the furnishings of my mind were rearranged. How odd, I thought, that I did not need to believe in reincarnation in order for that to happen.

In those afternoons, when I arrived at Khamtrul Rinpoche's cottage, I usually found the tulkus and Logan occupied around the large tea table. The room with its altar, tangkas, and photos looked as if the lamas had been settled in for years, not weeks. Khamtrul Rinpoche would have a stretched canvas propped at his side on which, with his customary equanimity, he painted, as we drank our tea and discussed the next craft project. His big, round face exuded a serene confidence that our deliberations would bear fruit, as certainly as the Buddha forms on his canvas would take form under the fine sable brush in his hand. Behind him tall, handsome Bonpa Tulku hovered, as silently watchful as a butler. Bonpa Tulku had accompanied and served his teacher since Khamtrul Rinpoche and he were brought as children to the great and glorious monastic center of Khampagar — and it was Khampagar in exile, along with its surrounding lay community, that they were seeking now to re-establish. Choegyal Tulku, who was already becoming my friend for life, might be sorting through sheets of watercolors or carpet designs with Logan, while his Dharma brother, Dorzong Tulku — the same age as he and, like him, the abbot of his own monastery back in Tibet — might be contemplating the large antique typewriter. It frequently broke down, and Dorzong would then survey it in silence, as if he could learn how to repair it by meditating on it — which he repeatedly seemed able to do.

One afternoon a fly fell into my tea. This was, of course, a minor occurrence. After ten months in India I considered myself to be unperturbed by insects — ants in the sugar bin, spiders in the windows, even scorpions in my shoes in the morning. Still, as I lifted my cup, I must have betrayed disturbance by my facial expression or a small grunt.

Choegyal leaned forward in sympathy and consternation. "What is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," I said. "It's nothing — just a fly in my tea." I laughed lightly to convey my acceptance and composure. I did not want him to suppose that mere insects were a problem for me; after all, I was a seasoned India wallah, relatively free of Western phobias and attachments to modern sanitation.

Choegyal crooned softly, in apparent commiseration with my plight. "Oh, oh, a fly in the tea." "It's no problem," I reiterated, smiling at him reassuringly. But he continued to focus great concern on my cup. Rising from his chair, he leaned over and inserted his finger into my tea. With great care he lifted out the offending fly — and then exited from the room. The conversation at the table resumed. Logan and I were discussing procurement of the high altitude yak wool Khamtrul Rinpoche desired for carpet production.

When Choegyal reentered the cottage he was beaming. "He is going to be all right," he told me quietly. He explained how he had placed the fly on the leaf of a bush by the door, where the wings could dry. And the fly was still alive, because he began fanning his wings, and we could expect him to take flight soon.

The next lesson in compassion that I received from Choegyal was less lighthearted. I had been after him, as the only English speaker and the most confiding of the tulkus, to tell me some of his memories of the Chinese occupation of his homeland. It was clear to me by then that the lamas preferred not to talk about this subject, but I believed that the telling would help win support for their community. I envisaged an illustrated article for a popular periodical like the *National Geographic*, with some of the stunning photos Logan and I had taken of their faces and ancient rituals, their art, their poverty. In order to hook Western sympathies, such an article should, I figured, include the horrors from which these refugees had escaped.

I knew that Choegyal had been a mature thirteen-year-old when the Chinese invaded his monastery and that he had his own memories to tap of what they had done to his monks and lamas. I suspected a voyeuristic element in my eagerness to hear the ghastly tales — a voyeurism bred by the yellow journalism of Sunday supplements in my childhood and by the horror movies of arcane Chinese torture that Harty used to recount. Still, I knew that such tales would arrest the attention of Western readers and rally support for the Tibetan cause.

Only when I convinced Choegyal that sharing these memories with the Western public would aid the Tibetan refugees, did he begin to disclose some of the details of what he had seen and suffered. The stories came in snatches as we paused outside the carpet-making room or walked over to the monastery in its rough, temporary quarters. But the lesson I learned, one particular afternoon, was not about the human capacity for cruelty.

We were standing by the side of the road. The sunlight through the branches overhead flickered on his face and robes . He had just divulged what perhaps was the most painful of his memories — what the Chinese soldiers did to his monks in the great prayer hall while he, hidden by his teachers, watched from the mountainside above. As I gasped with shock and breathed hard to contain the grief and rage that exploded in me, Choegyal turned to look at me with eyes that shone with unshed tears.

"Poor Chinese," he said. "They make such bad *karma* for themselves."