

FATE

Gelsang Lhamu

Fate was written by Gelsang Lhamu (b. 1986), a Tibetan native of Chalitong Village, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 迪庆藏族自治州, Yunnan Province 云南省. She was motivated to write this story by the death of a girl in a neighboring village who died of leukemia in her final year of university.

A path densely floored with autumn leaves meandered behind a lofty red building. It had been her only companion since the dreadful truth had unveiled itself. She stood under a tree with heavy leaves. Shards of blue sky and sunrays peeked through in every possible way to the ground and touched her body. Unconsciously, she stood still, ignoring the beckoning leaves and the blue sky.

Her gray soul wondered, "Have I reached my end?" A tremor of grieved pain rippled through her body. Finally she let loose a heartbroken howl, "I love life! I can't lose it! I have burdens! Is this my predetermined fate? I'm not..."

Glistening tears flowed down her pale cheeks and soundlessly fell on the path. The wind gently scattered leaves in all directions. Her bloodshot eyes noticed every movement of the restive leaves—some sailed away in the wind while still others resisted the wind, steady as rocks.

Suddenly, a yellow leaf fell from the tree. She was annoyed that she didn't know the name of that tree. "Is this leaf tired, hanging on its branch like that?!" she wondered, placing the little leaf on her palm. A bit later she brought it near her colorless lips and kissed it comfortingly.

The little leaf became a tiny mirror, reflecting a dying, pallid face, tiny nose, dry lips, and red eyes. She thought it

was her. Parched lips moved weakly and the sounds they made were fathomless. Suddenly she managed, "I don't want to die. We could change it... together... we..." She tightly clutched the tiny mirror, but when she opened her hand, the only thing in her palm was the utterly desperate leaf.

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Encouragement came unceasingly from friends and classmates: "Lhamu, autumn is fading away. Snow is coming. Winter is your favorite season and we're sure you'll be making another snowman, the prettiest one in this world."

"Lhamu, you're strong. We've never heard you say a single discouraging word."

"Lhamu, we'll stand by you forever!"

"She'll never give up, and never leave all the work to her family and only sister!"

"No, I won't give up. I trust my friends and myself. I will make the prettiest snowman again, fulfilling my friend's expectations. Lhamu, you can make it," she thought.

Tightly gripping the withering little leaf in her hand, she sped to her dorm room and stood motionlessly, alone in the empty room. She relaxed with a deep breath that brought warm comfort. She had never thought emptiness could be so comforting. She cautiously placed the leaf on her bed. The concrete floor had just been mopped and was still wet, which she ignored as she suddenly sat on the floor and madly searched in her old violet schoolbag for a green-ink pen. Finally locating it, she grasped it tightly, and gave the withering yellow leaf another, all-green life. But quickly she murmured, "I'm no longer an ignorant child. How ridiculous to deceive myself so foolishly. I'll die very soon—maybe tonight, maybe a few months later. I won't make another snowman. I won't set up a shop in the village for my sister as I promised. It's time to stop dreaming. But blood cancer? They don't know yet. What should I do?"

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Full days of farming work ended with the setting sun and strange odd-colored beams flashing brightly along the mountain edges, forcing Zhoma to squint. Every single part of her mind burnt with curiosity. When she opened her eyes, the sun had vanished. She decided to believe it was a hallucination. She tugged her old blue hat tight on her head and squatted on the filthy muddy ground against a huge pile of grass. She struggled, and finally managed to stand up with the heavy stack of grass on her back. She slowly began weaving her way home through rectangular fields, headed to her distant village, murmuring, "My daughter's final year of university," and then she smiled childishly.

Faintly in the distance she heard shouts: "Aunt Zhoma! Lhamu telephoned!" She walked as fast as she could, the pile of grass trembling on her back.

Flocks of black crows drew near, cawing wildly. She felt them coming toward her, a dreadful portent.

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At eight in the evening on that same day, a white ambulance pulled in front of the dormitory yard, its dissonant screams disturbing the usual campus quiet. It soon sped through the streets, but Lhamu had already surrendered to her fate.

NON-ENGLISH WORD LIST

Chalitong 查里通, Tsha ri thang ཚ་རི་ཐང

Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Bde chen bod rigs
rang skyong khul བདེ་ཆེན་བོད་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ, Diqing
zangzu zizhizhou 迪庆藏族自治州

Gelsang Lhamu, Skal bzang lha mo གླེང་བཟང་ལྷ་མོ, Gerong
Lamu 格茸拉木

Yunnan 云南 Province, Yun nan ཡུན་ནན