

A STOLEN JOURNEY

Blo bzang tshe ring

Blo bzang tshe ring (b 1984) is from A mgon Village, A mchog Town, Bsang chu County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kan su'u Province. He says, "I wrote this story based on what I was told by the three men who brought the main character of the story to Zi ling City in their car."

Sky elephants wore orange trousers as the sun gradually clambered over East Mountain, beaming brightly into a pure, azure sky, the first rays of light dying the edges of fluffy clouds crimson. Moments later, the sun rose a bit more, revealing a window between the sun and mountain peak creating yet another majestic morning view. The green mountains were as hauntingly beautiful as usual. The extended grassland spread in every direction, like a perfect painting by an acknowledged master. At the foot of the mountain, winding burbling brooks flowed gently, creating never-ending peaceful melodies.

Ango Village began waking up. Smoke emerged from chimneys of each home. Breakfast and a new day were in the making!

Thirty-six year old Tsomo got up briskly and kindled a fire in an adobe stove with straw and yak dung. She did so prudently, in deference to her still-sleeping husband. This was her second time to get up, having already milked at three in the morning. Now she started to fetch water. Livestock, driven by children who had left before dawn, dotted the

magnificent grassland.

She quickly returned home with two buckets of water and at once swept here and there, cleaned the furniture, and put prepared food on the short-legged table. The family members soon assembled, sat in order of age around the table, and started breakfast. Tsomo poured milk tea into their bowls and then presented one respectfully with two hands to each of her parents-in-law.

The peaceful breakfast was interrupted by loud telephone rings. Tsomo answered and heard, "This is Putso. Your son Dawa disappeared last night."

Tsomo fainted, astonishing her family.

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A hard wind blew on Dawa's dark, thin face, bringing him back to consciousness. He first noticed the vast blue sky. His disheveled hair flapped in the wind, like a small black flag. He blinked and felt very cold. He realized he was leaning against a boulder. He staggered to his feet. A big valley appeared, encircling high mountains. He was frightened into utter stillness, not understanding why he was wearing a new pair of shoes and where the several keys in his left trouser pocket had come from.

He walked for several hours following a meandering stream. His intestines were full of water that gave him no energy. Evening came. He needed a place to spend the cold night but found nothing more inviting than a tree, which he collapsed under.

He got up early the next morning and continued on, eventually reaching an extensive grassland. He rested and drank from a stream. He had no food.

The sudden, unexpected sound of a distant

motorcycle ignited his energy. He ran toward the motorcycle believing it would solve his predicament. He stood straight as an arrow on the path as the motorcycle approached. He waved his arms in the air and shouted, "Please stop!"

The motorcycle slowed as it drew near.

"Where am I? Where am I?" he asked frantically.

The driver unwound a scarf protecting his face from the wind. He was surprised and speechless for a few seconds before blurting, "You are here."

"Oh! Where is here and where can I catch a bus?" he asked humbly.

"This is Bagan in Yushu. There are no buses here," the man answered, revving the motorcycle's engine.

"Can you take me somewhere?" he asked hopefully.

The driver said nothing in response and sped away.

He felt hopeless. Many hours earlier he had been in Nangchen. He guessed he was now far from there.

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After the motorcycle left, Dawa chewed some sour-tasting plants, dipped his head in a stream, and staggered along the dirt road until he fell unconscious in a crumpled heap.

"Hello! Hello! Get out of the road!" said a man gruffly.

The strange voice revived him. A sleek black car was purring nearby. Another man stood by him.

He raised his head, smiled, and pleaded, "Can you give me a ride?"

"Who are you? Where are you from?" a heavy man asked in astonishment.

"I am Dawa from Gannan," he replied.

"Get into the car!" said the man compassionately.

It was warm in the car and the seats were as comfortable as springy cotton. The car raced as fast as the billowing wind, lulling Dawa to sleep, but not before he had learned the kind man's name—Tsering—from the conversation he had with the driver.

"Why are you taking this man?" the driver asked in Chinese.

"Maybe he is from my hometown," Tsering said.

Silence for a long time suggested they were suspicious about Dawa. "Beep! Beep!" the car tooted at a turn in the road, waking Dawa.

"Are you awake?" Tsering asked.

"Yes. Where are we now?" asked Dawa.

"We're near the Yushu-Golok border," murmured the driver.

Two sparkling eyes turned and Tsering asked, "Where in Gannan are you from?"

"Machu. My brother is in the Tibetan Middle School of Hezuo. I'm going there. Where are you from?" Dawa said.

"We are from Labrang. My son is also in that school," Tsering said.

Dawa was overjoyed, believing this newly established connection would encourage Tsering to help him.

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The sun rose high in the sky and sunrays shone brightly through the car windows. The men in the car felt warm. Beads of sweat budded on their scalps. Dawa wanted some air in the car and opened a car window. Fresh air rushed in, making them more comfortable. Somewhat revived, Tsering asked, "Why did you come to Yushu?"

"I really wanted to go to Lhasa, but I was delayed,"

Dawa said.

"What happened?" Tsering said.

"I sold my motorcycle and ran away from home twice last year, but my relatives caught me in Lanzhou both times. I couldn't register in a hotel because I know very little Chinese," Dawa said.

"Oh? Did you come to Yushu last year from Lanzhou?" said Tsering.

"No. My relatives took me home. All my family members scolded me. Father scolded less than others, but he said that I couldn't go alone anywhere, because I am uneducated. These criticisms meant I didn't enjoy the New Year Festival. It was very difficult to stay there. Then I decided to walk to Lhasa with some friends."

Tsering handed Dawa a cigarette and asked him to continue his story.

"We left for Lhasa one harsh morning on the second day of the second lunar month. I didn't ask my family for money. My friends had some. Each of us wore only Tibetan robes. We had only three small bags of *tsamba* and some butter. The first day we walked through a vast grassland and only ate twice. We stayed by a spring at night. We remained energetic about our pilgrimage.

"The second day, we reached somewhere in Golok. We met some nomad families, slept in their tent, and ate some good food they gave us. The next day we walked on barren land until late at night..."

The car gradually slowed and then stopped. They got out and stretched their legs for a bit. The driver checked the tires. They were 400 kilometers from Zi ling. Then they got back inside and headed toward Zi ling City.

"Tell us the rest of your story," Tsering said when

they were back in the car.

"We continued walking and eventually reached Yushu. We were exhausted from walking and searched for a place to sleep that night. Then several hunters with rifles talked to each other in their local dialect and approached us. Our hearts throbbed because we knew we were no match for them. They walked around us, tossing our few belongings here and there.

"A man with a thick moustache gestured for us to stand up. We didn't. He gestured again, and then his men beat us and snatched our money. We fought back and in the struggle I was knocked unconscious. When I woke up the next day nobody was there but me.

"Did you meet us on the road after you were robbed?" asked Tsering.

"No. I was hired by a local family to herd their livestock. I did this for two months. I was often hungry. They only gave me a small bowl of *tsamba* each day and no cash. One day I noticed some money in my tattered amulet. I tore it open and found 500 RMB secretly put there by my parents."

"What happened then?" asked Tsering.

"I left that family immediately and went to Nangcheng County Town by bus. I took a hotel room for four people and found two men already in it. They seemed to be very kind. They told me they were pilgrims.

"We went out for supper and shopped at the hotel owner's store. It was full of clothing, shoes, and food. I saw the clerk holding a bunch of keys to the hotel's rooms. When we left the store, my roommates pointed to a small truck. They said they were driving it to Lhasa and invited me to go with them. That night we talked a lot about our pilgrimage as

we drank hot water. A few cups of water later, I was dizzy and couldn't see clearly. The next day I woke up and found myself in a big valley."

"Maybe the two men took you to Bagan," Tsering said.

"I'm not sure," said Dawa.

"Dawa, have you been to school?" Tsering asked.

"No. My family couldn't afford the tuition. If I were educated, I wouldn't suffer like this," Dawa said sadly.

"Tuition is very expensive and it's very hard for parents to earn cash," said Tsering sympathetically.

"We're almost in Zi ling. Tomorrow we'll be home," the driver interjected in Chinese.

"Tomorrow is the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month, the day of the horserace at home," Dawa thought to himself.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

- A mchog ཨ་མཚོག, A mu qu hu 阿木去乎
Ango, A mgon ཨ་མགོན།
Bagan, Ba gan བ་གན།, Ba gan 巴干
blo bzang tshe ring ལྷོ་བཟང་ཚེ་རིང་།
Bsang chu བསང་ཆུ།, Xiahe 夏河
Dawa, ལྷ་བ།, Zla ba
Golok, Mgo log མགོ་ལོག, Guoluo 果洛
Hezuo, Gtsos གཙོས།, Hezuo 合作
Kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།, Gannan 甘南
Kan su'u ཀན་སུའུ།, Gansu 甘肃
Labrang, Bla brang ལྷ་བྲང་།, Xiahe 夏河
Lanzhou, Lan kru'u ལན་ཀུའུ།, Lanzhou 兰州
Lhasa, Lha sa ལྷ་ས།, Lasa 拉萨
Machu, Rma chu ྷ་ཆུ།, Maqu 玛曲
Nangchen, Nang chen ནང་ཚེན།, Nangqian 囊谦
Putso, Phun tshogs ཕུན་ཚོགས།
tsamba, rtsam pa རྩམ་པ།, *zanba* 糌粑
Tsering, Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།
Tsomo, Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།
Yushu, Yu shul ཡུལ་ཤུ།, Yushu 玉树
Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།, Xining 西宁