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A JOURNEY IN TIBET

Jewel in the Lotus

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*To dream is to journey
beyond the borders of reality.*

Dreams of our imagination live inside us; a refuge and resting place enveloped by our more routine perspectives and pursuits; a private parallel world to which we can journey; a contourless landscape of shadows, amassing all that is our life. A place where we interpret what is happening to us and understand it.

When we behold the world through a filter of imagination, its dimensions and opportunities multiply.

The dream.

An elusive glimpse of the sun that dazzles you into a smile in which all hope resides.

A resting place wrapped in obscurity; a bottomless lake to dive into.

Away from the vacillations of verity.

Dreams; they convey our longings.

My dream conveyed the name of a real country far away, that of a Tibet.

And the dream eventually reformulated into a desire to experience Tibet in real space and time: a journey.

My longing to travel to the real Tibet – the temple, relief and replica of the dream ...

But what will become of the dream when its shadows gain the contours of reality's evanescence? What will become of the world I created as my refuge and resting place?



*To dream is to journey
beyond the borders of reality.
And to realise a dream
is to dare change.*

Everything changes; a condition for life ...

Perhaps it won't matter if I don't recognise myself in the real Tibet; what matters is believing in the dream, believing it is within grasp. Daring to long for it on terra firma. Besides, travelling is like daydreaming, leaving familiar horizons for the unfamiliar. A refuge in the light of reality.

Daring to dream, daring to realise the dream, daring to change.

So. Driven by the curiosity of my imagination and senses, I travelled to Tibet.

To touch, breathe, taste Tibet.

In reverence I came closer to my dream, only to suddenly find myself standing on solid ground, smelling real smells and seeing my landscape of shadows filled with people.

Feel the sand slip through your fingers ... The fragrances in the temple ... Dust collects in the folds of your skin ... Feel at one with the ancient grey mountains ... Laugh when the sunlight tickles your eyes ... Dance with nomads on a hillside ...

With the sun on my back and my shadow before me.







I. IN THE SEVENTH MOON OF THE YEAR — THE SHODUN FESTIVAL

Having all but arrived in Lhasa, I find myself swallowed up in a sea of humans. Like many Tibetans, I arrive on the first day of the Shodun festival, and the profusion of people is overwhelming. So long I have craved this country, so many obstacles I have overcome to get here, and now I am speechless in the face of so much Tibet at once.

The jeep stops at the foot of the hill leading up to the Drepung monastery and I get out, right in the middle of a crowd filling the road. Way up there on the hillside by the monastery buildings, the monks have rolled out an enormous thangka, a fifty-metre long fabric painting, to mark the first day of the Shodun festival.

For just one day a year. And I'm here ...

Right now though, the people around me are my whole experience. My first encounter with you is bewildering. You are so many, and so different — all of you descendants of Chenrezig and Tara's six children. And you are everywhere.

How have so many people found their way up to the roof of the world, to this plateau hiding away above the clouds?

Pilgrims from all over Tibet. And many have journeyed through time far longer than I to be here this day; born to migrate, this nomadic people – the old, the young, the children, clothed in their best of best. The diversity of colour and cloth is as bright as a rainbow against the muted shades of the Tibetan landscape.

Blouses and stripy aprons in pink and pale blue accentuate traditional black and brown dresses, adorned at the waist with large silver buckles. The nomad men wear their long black hair in a plait rolled up onto the top of their heads, bound with bright red ribbon. Turquoise and red amber bejewel their ears and hair.

And laughter bejewels their faces. It is time for celebration and festivities.

I jostle my way through the crowds. Firm hands push me to the side of the path. No-one pays much attention to me; we are all headed for the same place.

From Drepung to Sera, from Sera to Norbulinka ...

You take the bus from Drepung monastery on one outskirt of Lhasa to Sera monastery on the other. You walk with your family along the paths up to Sera.

A prayer wheel spins in your right hand; a rosary lies in your left.

The atmosphere along the way is full of incense and talk and children's legs running.

You have a picnic in the inner courtyard of the monastery.

Above Sera monastery, yet another gigantic thangka lies stretched out on the hillside, and a stream of people continue in a line along the narrow path up to it to walk the kora.

