

Sunshine on the Road

Lhashamgyal (Lha byams rgyal)

Translated by Rongwo Lugyal (Rong bo klu rgyal)

As Lhadzé stood on Lhalu Bridge, a gust of the wandering wind of Lhasa Valley came out of nowhere and blew her red hat into the river and under the bridge.

This river, neither large nor small, was a tributary of the Lhasa River—the Kyichu—which flowed from the eastern edge of Lhasa, extending to the north of the city and flowing down through the wetlands of Lhalu. After merging into the Kyichu, it eventually became a confluence of the Yarlung Tsangpo. If one were to think according to the current of the river, Lhadzé’s red hat would float along the Yarlung Tsangpo and eventually cross the Himalayan mountain ranges into South India. If everything went well, it might be picked up and worn by an Indian girl wearing bright bangles on her arms and washing clothes on the lower riverbank.

“Older Brother, please grab my hat!” Lhadzé pleaded of Phunam, who was standing next to her.

“What?” Phunam didn’t want to go at all, so he pretended not to understand her plea. “Quick, please go and grab my hat!” said Lhadzé, pulling his sleeve and holding onto the bridge railing. Her voice was urgent and panicked, as she watched the red hat slowly drifting away under the bridge and down the river.

Lhadzé was loath to part with the red hat.

Phunam leaned stock-still against the bridge railing showing his annoyance. It was customary for the people on Lhalu bridge to stand stock-still in this way, observing the chaotic traffic of Lhasa shuttling back and forth on the bridge, waiting for a madam with gold earrings or bracelets, or a mister in black shades with a pot belly to talk to them. Once that happened, it meant that they’d found work—and finding work meant earning some money. So, they stood on Lhalu Bridge, waiting in the rays of Lhasa’s sunshine.

Lhasa’s sun shone brightly on the road without obscuring their vision. With the light reflecting off the river and the hat drifting away, those harsh rays of the sun pierced through and left Lhadzé’s white skin to dry out, making her red-cheeked with “plateau redness.” Lhadzé took out a black mask from her coat pocket and masked her face, then raised and put her hand on her forehead to protect herself from the harsh sun. The rays of the high plateau were not only harsh and dry, but

it could damage the eyes. Under the shade of her hand on her forehead, Lhadzé watched her red hat drifting away along the river for a while. With the passage of the current, the hat eventually vanished from view.

Lhadzé was heartsick that the river had taken away the hat. In the rays of Lhasa's sunshine, how practical and lovely the red hat was to have! In fact, she had bought it with her income from a job putting Arga stone on the floor for a room in the Potala Palace. The talkative vendor on Barkhor Street had praised her for how perfectly the hat fit her and how beautiful she looked, as if the tailor had made it on purpose just for her. Now that Lhadzé had turned eighteen years old, she was particularly fond of beautifying herself. Her heart filled with joy when she heard the vendor's words of praise. Without any hesitation, she pulled out that day's income and bought the hat. As she walked like a peacock with her red hat, she felt as if many people throughout the area were watching her. Standing at Lhalu Bridge, Lhadzé had discovered that the sunshine of the high plateau was so vexing. The harsh rays pierced Lhadzé face and, as a result, her soft cheeks bloomed red as time went by.

"You should buy a hat and wear it," Phunam, standing next to her, used to suggest.

"I don't have the money to buy a hat yet," replied Lhadzé at the time. However, she had wished that she could afford one. Phunam lit a cheap cigarette and wrinkled his forehead like an old man as he smoked. After a while, thick smoke came out of his mouth and he blew it towards Lhadzé's face. In Lhadzé's eyes, the way Phunam smoked was both handsome and elegant; to her he seemed a matured man with a life full of experiences. In reality, Phunam was the same age as her and both of them came from a village near Lhasa—from a poor household. That day, Phunam smoked and said, "When I get rich in the future, I will buy you a red hat."

Lhadzé blamed that sentence for her falling in love with Phunam. As soon as she heard what Phunam said, a warm feeling inadvertently swirled deep in her heart. The warmth eventually swirled up into her eyes, making their edges piping hot. Lhadzé was a softhearted girl.

"Mister, I will remember what you said, so don't change your mind," she said sternly to Phunam.

"What do I do if I only get rich in the next life?" Phunam replied cheerfully.

In the bright sun of Lhasa, Phunam's smile on his dark face was pure and his perfectly aligned teeth glittered.

Lhadzé looked straight into Phunam's eyes and said seriously, "Even if it's in the next life, I will wait."

Phunam did not reply and avoided eye contact with Lhadzé, choosing to watch the people of Lhasa and the cars going back and forth.

Now, the young man named Phunam stood stock-still on the bridge. Meanwhile, Lhadzé's red hat had drifted away in the water. She had watched as it slowly and inexorably disappeared into the distance. An unstoppable fury rushed through Lhadzé. A few days ago, after she bought that red

hat, she had hurried back along Barkhor Street to Lhalu Bridge. When she reached the bridge, she was soaked all over. She wanted to show Phunam her beauty in that red hat without any delay. She had hoped that Phunam would say, "How beautiful you are!" and blow smoke in her face. Lhadzé, in her red hat, had sped away like a dancing red butterfly in the rays of the sunshine. Amid the vendors and restaurants, and the hustle and bustle of activities on the roadsides, the crowd cruising back and forth along the street paid no attention to her. She hurried back to Lhalu Bridge, and she felt that this was where she belonged—and Phunam, who was waiting for work there, was like her own relative. Now, as Lhadzé recalled her thoughts and feelings from that day, she realized how stupid she was!

"The Yarlung River will carry the hat into India," joked Phunam, blowing smoke in Lhadzé's face as she stood next to him, pitifully watching the spot where her red hat had drifted away. "It's likely that an Indian girl with bangles, washing clothes at the river bank, will pick it up and put it on her head," he continued.

"Phunam, it is an insult to blow smoke in people's faces. Don't do that!" said Lhadzé, trying to suppress her anger, yet the signs of a scowl appeared obviously on her face. Phunam, bringing his cigarette to his mouth, froze and the smile on his face stiffened. He looked at Lhadzé innocently, not knowing what to do.

"What's there to look at!? Will you be happy when my face gets completely sunburnt!?" shouted Lhadzé. Men and women who were standing nearby, waiting for work, laughed. Some made a fuss and shouted, "Phunam... Phunam." People on Lhalu Bridge had nothing else to do but wait for work. Therefore, no matter how trivial a matter was that took place on Lhalu Bridge, they loved to gather together and make a fuss over it. The well-dressed office women who were walking across the bridge fearfully dodged the scene they had created. Men who were driving by had to blow their horns repeatedly to remind them to pay attention to the cars on the road. Phunam was embarrassed. Scratching his head, he walked away from Lhadzé to the other side of the bridge.

Lhadzé and Phunam were separated by the width of the bridge. As Lhadzé turned and looked to the other side of the bridge, she saw Phunam leaning against the guardrail looking at her. As their eyes met, cars of every size were honking and speeding by, with many pedestrians also hustling through. The world around them was in such turmoil, yet the people on Lhalu Bridge were just waiting to be called, standing there without a fuss. Lhadzé looked at Phunam on the other side of the bridge and regretted what she had said to him. She thought to herself that she would go to him if Phunam were to call to her. As the sun went down, the rays of sunlight shone directly in Lhadzé's face and she put her hand to her forehead.

When Phunam saw how Lhadzé was standing on the other side of the bridge, the unhappy incident vanished from his mind like dark clouds and he waved at her. But just then, a big truck rumbled across Lhalu Bridge. Lhadzé didn't see Phunam waving at her. When the big truck passed

by and the dust dispersed by the truck settled, Phunam raised his hand again, ready to wave at her. However, he saw a small jeep stopped on the other side of the bridge; Lhadzé and some others who were waiting for work were talking to the driver. After a while, Lhadzé and three other girls got in the car and left. Phunam's hand still hung in the air. He watched the jeep drive away and was left stunned.

During the Lhasa aristocrat Lhalu's time, more than 60 years ago, there was no Lhalu Bridge. It was established thereafter. On the other side of the bridge was Lhalu Manor, from which the bridge took its name. The people who waited for work on the bridge were like the servants in the Lhalu period. Were they now suffering for lack of work in the open sunshine on the road?

"In the old society, there was too much work available for servants. Now it's different, people are having difficulty finding work," said the jeep driver to Lhadzé and the others. "You'll get 30 yuan each. It's a good deal," he continued as he looked in the rearview mirror at the three country girls on the back seat. It was Lhadzé's first time sitting in a jeep, so she had an indescribable feeling. As the jeep drove through the streets of Lhasa, a gust of wind blew in the half-open window and messed up Lhadzé's hair. The roadside shops and crowds seen from the window passed by instantly. After a while, Lhadzé felt like the car in which they were sitting was not moving at all, but rather the people and shops outside were passing by quickly. Lhadzé felt dizzy and nauseous, so she took off the black mask and fanned a cold breeze into her face. The wind coming in through the window was like a hand gripping her. It violently cleared away the dizziness in her head, instantly relieving both her body and mind at once.

"What a lovely girl!" she heard the jeep driver say as soon as Lhadzé took off her mask. When she looked up, the jeep driver was staring at her through the rearview mirror. Lhadzé instantly turned away and looked out of the window. The streets of Lhasa seen from the car were different from the streets of Lhasa when she was walking. Why was that? Walking on the road, Lhadzé felt that Lhasa was a big, beautiful city and she often looked at the people and up at the buildings. However, seeing Lhasa from the jeep window, Lhadzé felt as if Lhasa's crowds and houses were staring at her. When she heard the voice of the jeep driver, she remembered Phunam once again and thought to herself that, if he were by her, he would share this feeling. In the past, Phunam often said, "What a lovely girl!" while blowing smoke in her face jokingly. She now regretted her bad attitude toward Phunam on Lhalu Bridge a moment ago. She fixed her hair, which had been messed up by the wind.

"Girl, if you buy a hat and wear it, you will look even more beautiful," the jeep driver said, looking in the rearview mirror. Phunam had made such a comment in the past as well. Lhadzé was forced to look at his face in the rearview mirror after he repeated that same comment twice. The man who was driving the jeep was middle-aged. Unlike Phunam, he did not have a skinny face, but a plump and moisturized face that shone with happiness. As she was examining him, the

jeep driver also looked in the rearview mirror. Lhadzé lowered her head and instead looked at the driver's shoulders.

"Her hat drifted away in the river moments ago," said the girl sitting next to Lhadzé. "Can you help her buy a red hat?" continued the girl jokingly.

"Sure," said the jeep driver. Then he steered the jeep over to the side of the road and stopped. He turned around and said, "We've arrived!"

At this point, the sun was low in the sky and its rays were no longer intense. The jeep driver guided them into a Tibetan style building on the roadside. A sign above the door to the building read "Norsang Nangma (Karaoke Bar)," but as Lhadzé and the girls were illiterate, they did not pay much attention to the signboard. However, after entering the building, they were amazed by the interior layout and design. The karaoke bar was just like a temple—the hanging thangkas on the walls, the mandala mural on the ceiling, and the big horns on both sides of the stage made them suddenly lose heart. Lhadzé and the girls humbly stood aside and asked the jeep driver, "Mister, what should we do?"

"My name is Jigme. I've recently opened this Nangma and it still needs some cleaning. Can you wipe the tables, clean the windows, and sweep the floor?" said the jeep driver. Yawning and spinning the car key, he went into one of the rooms in the back.

Having waited several days to find a job, Lhadzé and the others were highly motivated to work. Immediately, they began to sweep the temple-like karaoke bar. Although they had previously heard how fun it was to visit the karaoke bars in Lhasa, they had actually never visited any personally. When people got bored waiting for work on Lhalu Bridge, the young men would look at the wealthy women passing by with their gold bracelets and gossip about them. When Lhadzé heard them saying how those women drank beers in karaoke bars, she couldn't imagine it. "Are women allowed to drink beer in karaoke bars?" she had asked. "When I get rich in the future, I will take you there," Phunam had joked. Now that she was actually in a karaoke bar, she mentally questioned whether one should drink beers in front of so many Buddhist paintings hanging on the walls.

At the end of their work, Jigme came out of the room, yawning and stretching. He looked to the right and left, then said to Lhadzé and the others, "It is clean now." He gave each of them thirty yuan. After a thought, he gave Lhadzé and the others ten more yuan and said, "This is a reward for you." Lhadzé didn't stretch out her hand, as she felt uncomfortable that Jigme was staring at her intensely. Phunam would never dare to stare at her this way. He always gave a fleeting glance—she liked the way he looked at her. It was an unexpressed signal that, in Lhadzé's mind, served as proof Phunam liked her too.

"Thank you, Mister!" said Peyang, who was standing next to Lhadzé, reaching for the money.

"Mister, what a fun place you have!" said Peyang admiringly. Jigme, as if he had just remem-

bered something, said, “Tomorrow night we’re celebrating the grand opening! Come and join us!”

“How will we afford to come to the Nangma!” sneered Lhadzé as she walked to the door.

Jigme hurriedly pulled Lhadzé back from behind and said, “If you want, clean it again tomorrow afternoon and you all can watch the performances in the evening, without paying.”

Once Lhadzé and the others heard that they could watch dancers perform in the Nangma, they felt great joy in their hearts. When they stood on Lhalu Bridge, they always heard music from the record shops on both sides of the bridge. As time went by, the lyrics and melodies became familiar to them and they occasionally sang along loudly,

*In Lhasa’s club
The crowd gathered
The person I love isn’t there...*

The passers-by would walk past with a laugh and smile. Now they finally had the opportunity to go to a Lhasa Nangma. They immediately promised to do the cleaning job.

Jigme accompanied them to the door and said, “Wait for me at Lhalu Bridge tomorrow afternoon and I will come to pick you up.”

The sun in Lhasa slowly set in the horizon and the remaining rays of sunshine stretched across the west. Lhadzé and her two girlfriends, holding the wages that they had just received, walked along the street toward Lhalu Bridge. Now they were walking with their heads up, looking at the crowds along the side of the road. Unlike before, Lhasa city was no longer looking at them—that only happened when sitting inside of the jeep. What a magnificent city Lhasa was! Many ethnic groups, with different customs and languages, flowed through the streets like a river. The lingering light of the setting sun shone on the gilded Jokhang Temple and Potala Palace roof, causing it to glitter. As Lhadzé and her two girlfriends circumambulated the Jokhang Temple three times, Lhadzé once again saw the red hat hanging on the store door in Barkhor. However, now she was reluctant to spend fifty yuan to buy it. She walked away from the store quickly. Later, after they circumambulated the top part of Potala Palace once, they finally reached Lhalu Bridge through the Lukhang.

The people who had been looking for work on Lhalu Bridge were almost all gone, leaving both sides of the bridge more spacious. As Lhadzé waited for the traffic light to turn green at the intersection, she saw Phunam leaning against the bridge rail and smoking alone. Seeing that sight, a warm feeling gushed from the bottom of Lhadzé’s heart. That very feeling eventually swirled in her eyes, leaving their corners warm. Lhadzé had missed Phunam, whom she had not seen the whole afternoon and who showed his manliness by smoking a cigarette. However, as she drew close, she did not show the slightest sign of missing him. Rather, she offered a sulky face.

"Are you still upset because of the hat?" said Phunam humorously, as he pulled at the bottom hem of Lhadzé's coat.

Lhadzé did not reply to him.

"What are you still doing here rather than going home?" Peyang asked.

"I'm here looking at the water, hoping that Lhadzé's hat will float back!" Phunam blew smoke out of his mouth indifferently as he spoke.

As Lhadzé heard Phunam's words, the warm feeling she had in the bottom of her heart gradually cooled. She ignored Phunam and walked away. The rays of the setting sun lengthened her shadow.

On their way back to the village, no matter how hard Phunam tried to be humorous, Lhadzé didn't laugh at all. Generally, Phunam had a playful spirit and cracked jokes with an unexpected imagination, saying things that no one thought of. In Lhadzé's eyes, Phunam was the most attractive young man among those who waited for work on Lhalu Bridge. However, on that day, a wandering breeze had blown away Lhadzé's red hat into the river. She'd begged Phunam for help, who was standing there and was usually amiable, but he did not move a bit. Furthermore, he said such hurtful words that she truly felt angry and resentful towards him.

The next day, the sun in Lhasa was shining generously and all the passers-by felt it brightly. Lhadzé and the two other girls were waiting for the afternoon to come at Lhalu Bridge. All three of them were wearing relatively new clothes, which was particularly obvious to the other people waiting for work. A family hired Phunam and several others for tamping. As Phunam walked away, he signaled with his hand to Lhadzé and joked, "Wow! You look even more beautiful in new clothes!"

Lhadzé once again ignored him. As Phunam's thin back gradually disappeared in the crowd of people going back and forth, Lhadzé, wearing a black mask and with her hands on her forehead, sat motionless on Lhalu Bridge.

After a while, Jigme parked the black jeep by the bridge. Lhadzé and the two other girls immediately got into the jeep. As soon as they sat on the seat, Lhadzé saw that Jigme was staring at her in the rearview mirror again. She turned away and looked out of the window. As they drove, Lhadzé felt as if Lhasa city were looking at them again.

Along the way, Jigme said, "You look even more beautiful in new clothes." Lhadzé was curious and wondered why both Phunam and the person in front of her had said the exact same thing. When two different people said the same thing, she was not sure who really meant it.

There were more people in Jigme's cabaret than the day before. Young men and women dancers and singers were hurriedly getting on and off the stage, the women walking with shoulders and backs as straight as possible to show off their breasts. As Lhadzé saw that, she thought to herself that putting one's chest out was also a way to show one's beauty. She touched her own small chest when people were not paying attention to her.

That afternoon, they did not have much work to do. Furthermore, the cabaret itself also had service personal who showed contempt towards them, practically jumping in front of them to do the work. Still, Lhadzé and her friends behaved innocently and humbly. Lhadzé found that it was similar to the people looking for work on Lhalu Bridge, who behaved that way in front of potential bosses as they hoped to be hired. Lhadzé and the others waited in such a way for dusk to fall.

The rays of Lhasa's sunshine shone through the window onto the thangka paintings on the wall. As Lhadzé was cleaning the wall mounted shelf, she suddenly noticed the Goddess on the thangka, reclining while holding lotus flowers, her right leg stretched out and left leg bent, her breasts obviously round and pointy. As she saw the rays of the setting sun hit the thangka painting, the Goddess on the thangka painting, and the Goddess's pointy round breasts, Lhadzé wondered why she was so focused on breasts on that day. Then she wondered whether it was sinful to look at the Goddess' pointy breasts.

As dusk fell at last, more and more people started to come—Lhasa's women with gold earrings, men with big bellies, yellow-haired westerners, white-faced people from inland, and Lhasa's Tibetan youth with mismatched clothes. Within a short period, all the seats were filled. Jigme greeted the guests who had entered, walked between the tables with a bottle of beer and a glass of white wine, raising his glass for a toast. At last, Lhadzé saw how Lhasa's women drank their beers bottoms-up. After a while, Jigme arrived at the small table where Lhadzé and the others were sitting, ready to raise his glass and offer a drink.

"Bring some beer here!" said Jigme to a waiter when he saw there was nothing on the table. Then he continued, "Don't be shy and don't worry about spending your money. I'm treating you today. Relax and enjoy the show!"

"We don't drink beer!" said Lhadzé. Due to loud music coming from the stage, her words were inaudible to the others. Jigme held his white wine glass in his hand and shouted into Lhadzé's ear, "Don't be afraid! I bought you a gift."

Lhadzé smelled the bitter taste of the beer and the steam from Jigme's mouth warmed her cheek. As she turned her face away uncomfortably, she saw clearly the girls on stage sticking their chests out and dancing.

"Wait a minute!" said Jigme before he went into the room in the back. In the meanwhile, the waiter brought several bottles of beer to the table. He then asked Lhadzé to pay, saying "It's 120."

Lhadzé and her two girlfriends were shocked. That figure was more than their wages after working several days. Jigme came back right at that moment and said, "Don't charge them."

In that moment, Jigme took out the red hat he'd concealed behind him and said to Lhadzé, "Didn't I promise you yesterday I'd buy you a red hat?" Lhadzé had a very weird feeling. The red hat shone in the bright lights.

Lhadzé was a soft-hearted girl. Amid the cheers and joy of her two girlfriends, a warm feeling

swirled deep in Lhadzé's heart. The warmth eventually swirled up into her eyes, making their edges feel piping hot.

"Have some beer!" Jigme filled the glasses, then put them in front of Lhadzé and the others. The beer foamed and spilled from the mouth of the glasses. In the brightly lit Nangma Hall, people seemed to become crazy after drinking this liquid.

"There's no effect to drinking a little. Look, aren't those older women also drinking?" Jigme said insistently as he put the beers into their hands. Then, he held his white wine glass up and touched it to their glasses. He said again, "Come on! Drink a little, it doesn't do any harm!"

As Jigme, the owner of the Nangma, urged them on, Lhadzé and the others were thrown into confusion. They hadn't had even a sip of beer before. Beer was a man's drink—some of the young men who stood on Lhalu Bridge, waiting for work, bought a bottle of beer from the shop and drank it among them. None of the girls there drank it. However, that night, thanks to Jigme's obstinate determination, Lhadzé, and the others took the glasses in their hands helplessly and tasted the bitter liquid inside.

Lhadzé felt a coldness flow through her throat and down to the bottom of her gut, then some warmth rushed back from the bottom of her gut to her head.

"How is it? Is it delicious?" asked Jigme, laughing and pouring some more beer into their glasses. He put the red hat on Lhadzé's head and said, "What a truly beautiful girl you are!" He continued, "Bottoms up!" He drank his whole glass of wine in one shot.

Jigme was a middle-aged man with a stomach sticking out. Could it be from drinking too much beer? Unsure whether it was due to their first time in this world of dazzling colored lights, Lhadzé and the others felt an indescribable influence working in their mind as they drank one glass of beer after another. After a while, a singer on the stage sang the song that they had often heard at Lhalu Bridge.

*"In Lhasa's club
The crowd gathered
The person I love isn't there..."*

As Lhadzé heard the song, she thought of the skinny Phunam again. What was he up to? Thinking of Phunam, she remembered the unpleasant event with him and the red hat, and she grew upset about it again. It was unfathomable that Phunam hadn't moved a bit when the wind blew her red hat into the river that day. At the thought of this, tears swirled in Lhadzé's eyes. It was the first time she lifted the glass of beer and drank it deliberately.

By the end of the performance, the three girls, who'd had beer for the first time, were drunk. Because they were very young, they did not notice many things. However, Lhadzé did notice that she was either cruising along on a cloud, or falling from it. In any case, they were unaware of how

much time went by or even the people around them. After some time, Jigme helped them to the room in the back. There, on both sides of a long table, were two couches. Jigme put Lhadzé's two friends on each of the couches, then carried Lhadzé to an inner room. As Lhadzé saw the bed in the room, she instantly tried to turn back. In light of the intoxication, she was powerless. Jigme was full of irresistible strength—he lifted Lhadzé up and laid her down on the bed, then said, "Girl, don't be intimated! I will be gone in a second." As he said this, he got up and left. After Jigme's departure, Lhadzé wanted to get out of the room and back with her two girlfriends. However, she felt that the bed was like a flat piece of cloud, wobbling, so she held tightly to it for fear of falling down.

Lhadzé was unaware of how long it had been; suddenly, she felt something was touching her body. As she opened her eyes, startled, she saw Jigme touching her. Jigme was panting and gave off an unpleasant sour taste of beer. Horrified, Lhadzé pushed him away with all her strength, but she was powerless against his strength. She wanted to shout, but Jigme pressed her down so heavily that no sound came from her mouth. Jigme then used one hand to grip her wrist, so that it was as if she were wearing a tight handcuff. At this very moment, she finally realized why the girls on the stage walk chest out, but she did not have time to think it through. Wasting no time, Jigme then took off her clothes and pulled down his trousers. Lhadzé realized in despair there was nothing she could do to save herself. Saddened and hopeless, tears gushed out of her eyes like a small creek. Phunam's skinny face, his smile, laughter, and his fleeting glances repeatedly flashed in her mind. At this terrifying moment, Lhadzé's freedom was taken, and so was her virginity; she screamed. Suddenly, everything became clear, like the daybreak over Lhalu each morning.

"Don't be sad. I will help you out in many ways in the future," Jigme said to Lhadzé, lying on his back next to her. He lit a cigarette and smoked it.

Lhadzé's tears had already dried up. As she quickly dressed and prepared to leave, Jigme picked her up again and put her back on the bed, and said, "Where are you going in the middle of the night? Sleep here. It'll be quiet. I'll be going home. I need to take my son to school in the morning."

"Can you blow smoke on my face?" asked Lhadzé.

Jigme looked at her curiously. Finally, he shrugged, inhaled a mouthful of smoke, and blew it on Lhadzé's face, who was now lying next to him.

Lying still, Lhadzé closed her eyes as she inhaled the smoke.

Jigme stroked Lhadzé's hair and said, "You are a beautiful girl! Would you like to work in my Nangma? I will give you 1000 yuan as a monthly salary, which is much better than standing on Lhalu Bridge!"

Lhadzé kept silent as she pretended to be in a deep sleep. Jigme, on the other hand, put on his clothes, and on his way out, he said, "I will come to pick you up at Lhalu Bridge tomorrow afternoon. If you are willing, get into my car as you wish." He then placed the red hat next to her, kissed her forehead, closed the door, and left.

The next morning, Lhadzé and the others got up early and walked out of the Nangma; the three of them did not talk much, particularly about drinking beer and being drunk. The morning sun shone brightly on the golden roof of Jokhang Temple and the roof of Potala Palace, while the sky was clear and cloudless as far as the eye could see. As Lhadzé breathed the fresh air, she felt she had become another person within one night. What had changed about her? She felt as if another soul had entered her body through her crown and spread all over. The mountains, houses, and everything in her sight seemed shrouded in another color.

As usual, they circumambulated the Jokhang Temple, the upper level of the Potala Palace once, passing Dzongyap Lukhang, and then headed toward Lhalu Bridge. They bought freshly made potato chips from an old Lhasa grandmother and ate them on their way. As they waited for the traffic light to turn green at the intersection, Lhadzé saw people leisurely standing on the Lhalu Bridge, waiting for work. The sun shone brightly, glaring off of passing car windows. Again, Lhadzé remembered the red hat. The one Jigme had given her she deliberately left in that back room. When she saw it, an unimpeded feeling of heartbreak flooded through her.

Phunam's thin figure was invisible among the crowd—he must have gone to work. Other than that, there were no changes to the crowd waiting for work on the Lhalu Bridge. Lhadzé leaned against the bridge railing and stared at the river beneath. Its murky, unstoppable flow had carried away the red hat and something considerably more important with it. Lhadzé found that some of her tears were dripping in the river.

In the afternoon, Lhadzé saw Phunam crossing the intersection, walking lazily toward the bridge. The sunlight made him seem even thinner and his white teeth became more visible. Lhadzé's heart constricted and inwardly she wailed. She did not dare to look at Phunam any longer; she turned her eyes back to the river beneath the bridge.

"Lhadzé, I bought this red hat for you!" Phunam's voice sounded in her ears. Lhadzé saw a red hat floating in front of her in the sunlight. As her eyes focused, she saw that Phunam was holding the hat, looking at her shyly.

"Take it quickly! If they see it, they will mock me!" he said, leaning against the bridge railing, bending over the hat to conceal it.

"Why didn't you help me save my hat the other day?" Lhadzé felt overwhelming sadness. "Oh! I wanted to buy you a hat as a gift, but I waited because I didn't have the money. Later, I saw that you'd already bought yourself a hat. So I was pretty happy when your hat floated away, giving me the chance to buy you one to replace it."

As she heard what Phunam said, a warm feeling swirled deep in her heart, and the warmth rapidly swirled up and filled her eyes. Eventually, it turned into some tears that fell into the river again.

Lhadzé said, "Older Brother, what an idiot you are!" In her mind, Phunam was as pure and

clear as the sky in Lhasa. She was tainted like the flowing river under the bridge, and she felt far away even though she was standing next to Phunam.

And then, she heard the honk of a jeep. Quickly, she then turned around and saw Jigme's black jeep parked by the bridge. He was looking at her through the rolled-down car window, holding the red hat in his hand. "Last night," he said, "you forgot to take the hat."

In the bright sunshine of Lhasa, Lhadzé felt dizzy and weak, as if she was unable to control her body. In the past, she did not dare to look Phunam straight in the eyes. Now, she suddenly snatched the hat from him and threw it into the river. Lhadzé lowered her head and said to Phunam, "I'm sorry, Older Brother. Think of me like the hat carried away by the river. Forget about me."

Then she strode away and got into Jigme's jeep. In the jeep's side mirror, as the people waiting for work on Lhalu Bridge watched, she saw Phunam staring blankly at the bright sunshine on the road. A few teardrops ran down Lhadzé's cheeks, and she felt the taste of salt in her mouth.

Translator's Commentary

I started translating Lhashamgyal's writings because he is one of my favorite writers. Over the years, I have translated many of his works, short stories and essays, including "Life in the Shadow," "The Person Who Can't Return," "Window," "The Most Ordinary Morning of My Life," "Sunshine On the Road," etc. Through my translation work, I have come to read him very closely and to see his writings with new eyes.

Lhashamgyal is one of those writers who writes quite differently compared to traditional Tibetan writers. He is on a new path of his own, which brings out a different aspect of story writing. Compared to traditional Tibetan writers, Lhashamgyal's stories touch on new themes and carry different meanings. In this case, he brings a different Tibetan lifestyle to the forefront of our attention and our imagination. It is rare that a person from Amdo can write the life of Ü-Tsang (Central Tibet) so closely and so authentically.

Lhashamgyal's "Sunshine on the Road" reflects the daily life of Tibetan people in central Tibet—in particular the people of low status, the people that society usually ignores or condemns. The ironic title of the story does not seem to reflect on the story, in fact, it reflects the complete opposite. On the surface, this is a story with beautiful images of Lhasa's bright sunshine, golden temple roofs, a decorated karaoke bar, the famous Lhalu bridge, and a love story that circles around a red hat. However, underneath all of these tropes and familiar images, the writer is showing a buried world: a world of darkness, immorality, lust, and anger, where people of high and low status mix and mingle, a world that is surrounded by danger, a world where bad things happen at every corner even under the bright sunshine.

All these images are representations of Tibetan tradition, Tibetan culture, Tibetan history, and Tibetan life. The bright sunshine is the recurrent metaphor of the story. The golden temple roofs represent Tibetans' attachments to their traditions and cultural heritage. The Lhalu bridge represents a time period in history but also stands as a metaphor for social structures, for the border between the aristocratic people on the one side of the bridge and the people of low status on the other side of the bridge, or the border between the old and modern lifestyles. Throughout the story, one can see the clash between old and modern social structures, as the characters face various challenges in leaving the traditional society behind and stepping into the modern one. The red hat belonging to Lhadzé, which I think is the central image of the story, represents modernization, and the great challenge of Tibetans stepping into modernity.

While translating one language into another is always a challenge, I think the most challenging part of the translation process is to express the author's style and to communicate the author's voice in the translation. Lhashamgyal pays great attention to his images in this short story, and one way I tried to render his style and voice is by paying the same careful attention to the images.

