

“Drölma’s Dream”  
Lhashamgyal

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(*sgrol ma'i rmi lam*)

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Translated by Lucia Galli

1.

That night, no unusual sign or omen was breaking the steady flow of hours. The village, wrapped in the thick obscurity of darkness, was quiet, the occasional bark of a dog drifting in the wind. My head had started to ache after dinner, and now an uncontrollable sense of body fatigue and mental tiredness had come upon me. It was an irresistible desire to sleep, one the like I had never experienced before. It was unbearable. While I was cleaning the frying pan and ladle, the chopsticks and bowls, I dozed off three times, dropping my hands into the cold water. The light of the butter lamp over the bed-stove flickered. Stepfather had placed a long scroll of religious scriptures across a small table, and his chanting was like a lullaby calling me to sleep. By the time I made it to my bedroom, I couldn't remember what I had said to him. As I was crossing our fenced courtyard in the pitch dark, I bumped into the large iron wash basin, and a loud bang rang out in the quiet of the night; in a moment, I was brought back from daze to reality. At once I clearly recalled having lifted that wash basin onto my bed several times before then. I headed to my room, and as soon as I got into bed, I fell deeply asleep. I couldn't even say whether I had undressed.

...I had no dreams for a while. While I was sleeping, I heard a familiar sound, but I didn't know if it was real or a dream. It seemed to come from another world, as though someone was calling me from very far away. It briefly stirred my consciousness as I slept, but the sensation of having heard something lasted for a long time. I then began to sense the presence of something tangible, but I

couldn't understand whether it was real or a hallucination. I sensed someone entering my womb. It felt like an insect squirming and crawling over my body, like a rope dangling over the depths of my sleep. After that, I even smelled something, and in that moment of confusion, I sensed that my jacket, blouse, trousers, and pants were being removed one by one. It was impossible to distinguish those dream-like sensations, close as they were to impressions well-known to me. I felt like a child again, as I lay in bed while my mother undressed me. I was carried in a world of pleasure beyond words. The pressure on my nipples was sharp and at that moment I chose to wake up. The stars, shining vividly like eyes out of the window, were proof of reality, but the sensation of a touch upon my nipples lingered and enveloped my body like a mist of endless bliss, and even the stars in sight gradually paled...in that haze and blurriness, I felt neither awake nor asleep. From the edge of wakefulness, I sensed something heavy pressing down my body.

By the time I came around again, the morning sunlight was falling from the window directly over my pillow. Thinking that it was late, I fretted to get up, but I got caught by a wave of sluggishness. My body and head were heavy, and when I stretched out my hand, I felt no clothes on me.

I had been fully clothed the night before, and when my mind cleared up, I remembered the events I dreamed about, and they felt like a past recollection.

Stepfather was standing in front of the shrine and looked over as I crossed the courtyard, his body a black shadow amidst the morning rays. He stared at my face while caressing a triangular eye charm dropping on his chest. He spoke with his usual sternness.

"You woke up late, uh? Are you unwell?"

"No," I answered, once more putting the upturned wash basin back on my bed.

## 2.

A cotton-robed tantrika arrived in the village.

It was dusk when that man passed through the thicket of brambles (actually, none of them had a thorn to speak of) at the edge of the village. Upon spotting him, Gyabo, the elderly dog from Aché Lhamo's household, immediately began barking without pause. After standing for a while in front of the yard, he hurled a drumstick towards Gyabo without hesitation and went to knock on the old woman's door.

A moment later, peace was restored to the village, and Gyabo, tail tucked under him, entered his kennel in the yard of Aché Lhamo's house. Judging from the smoke swirling out of the chimney, a fire had been lit in the hearth. The next morning, the villagers heard the pealing of a bell and beating of a drum resounding in the air above Aché Lhamo's house, and the news of the arrival of a tantrika spread throughout the village.

That man looked about forty years of age. He was dressed in a dark red cotton robe, loosely fastened by a belt, and owned all the articles expected from a tantrika. A triangular eye charm dangled from his chest—it gave the impression of being something preternatural, like a bottomless well, but apart from that, there was nothing extraordinary about his average-looking body. That tantrika had stayed for over a month in the village, and during that time, most of the local families had him perform all the healing rituals of Tulku Yaktsang’s prophecy. He set off through the thicket of brambles a month later, but this time he did not take his tantrika’s articles with him. In their stead, he bore the black leather purse that Aché Lhamo’s late husband used to wear daily. Aché Lhamo and the old dog Gyabo had seen the tantrika off—one waving her hand, the other his tail—as the morning rays were embracing the top of the mountain ranges.

The tantrika came back six months later, carrying the heavy black purse with him. That day the news that the tantrika had returned to enter Aché Lhamo’s house as a *makpa* spread like the wind in the village.

### 3.

She had been waiting for him that day, like a thirsty man would wait for a water-bearer. Having lost her parents one after the other, she had needed the comfort and support of someone like him. The old dog Gyabo had died the previous winter, and now there was no one to give the alarm if someone entered the yard. Had she not stood still in concentration, she would not have heard the secret signal of him rattling the iron doorknob.

Barely moving in the sizzling heat of a mid-summer afternoon, the wheat fields were like a decorative painting drawn on paper. Languidly stretching her neck, she gazed at the white clouds in the sky, and the odor of living things came up in between breaths, reaching her nose and giving her an indescribable feeling. The dark shape of a man wavered from the edges of the distant fields, gradually getting closer. She stopped her weeding and got up; squinting her eyes, she took a careful look all around her, then squatted down again.

When they had had their first sexual encounter near the ridge of the field that day, she had acted like a road-wise camel, and the fact that she had showed none of the typical anxieties or fears of a virgin had struck him as unusual. He was very experienced when it came to women.

“Didn’t you say that no man has ever touched you?” he had asked her afterwards.

“Why? If you don’t believe me...just leave!” She had suddenly blushed, and her fury had painted her face red. He had not dared say anything else then, but a doubt had risen in his mind, and it had been like a knot he could not unravel.

She was waiting for him now. Even the Big Dipper, with its crook-necked stars, had given way in

the west. The eyes of the constellations shone brightly in the dark sky, and the grass in the fields swooshed. It was in nights like this that men like him prowled around farmwomen's wooden doors and nomad girls' rugs, rising passion in those women, all warm in their fur coats and inner doors, with their pleasant lines. His handsome face effortlessly drove her heart to him like a pulling magnet, but there had been times when he had felt an unspeakable dread in approaching the door of her house, fearing that the tantrika might be staring at him from the roof. It was that memory that struck him now, scaring him. That night, as he was rattling the iron knob of her house's wooden gate, a stone the size of small child's head had suddenly hit the ground near him with a "tik" sound, making his heart jump. He had still yet to find a way to properly explain how that stone came about.

In bed, amidst the soft, water-like warmth of her, he felt as though intoxicated with *chang*.

"Sometimes I cannot help but fall asleep after dinner..." she said.

"It's normal," he replied.

"It felt like you were undressing me in my sleep."

"It was a dream."

"It wasn't. You also..."

"What did I do?"

"You...he, he. It must have been a dream."

She had been waiting for him. It was quiet, the kind of silence that belongs to dark, desolate places and empty valleys. The man in the nearby tea house coughed and spat, his loud expectorating shattering the stillness of the night. It was past midnight.

#### 4.

After the girl had returned to the tiny wooden hut, Aché Lhamo felt as though a thief had stolen her sleep. For a long time, she lay silently next to the tantrika, with her eyes wide open and her shoulder pressing his. In a moment he started snoring and her lower abdomen began to cramp. It had been a month, and her illness had worsened. A fierce sense of loneliness, the kind she had never experienced before in her life, rose in Aché Lhamo. She wanted to talk to him, but every time she had said a few words lately, it had barely elicited a grunt from him. When her late husband was alive, there had been no end to their pillow talking, but this tantrika was not at all like that.

There had been times when Aché Lhamo had looked at his triangular eye and had had the impression that the charm was looking straight back at her. The swirling of a bottomless well had come to her mind. That tantrika was just as unfathomable. There had been times when he had made Aché Lhamo feel angry or afraid, but there had also been times when he had given her a bliss

that went beyond words, and those instances had made everything else fade away from her mind like dark clouds cleared up from a mountain peak.

“Phew...” Aché Lhamo whiffled in her tossing and turning.

“What is it? Why won’t you sleep already?” It seemed that now that she had interrupted his sleep, the tantrika had finally took notice of her.

“Ouch! My appendix...”

“Take a sleeping pill and you’ll be sure to go out like a light,” he said, not wishing to hear her talking any further.

“Is there a drug to make people sleep when they cannot?” Aché Lhamo wondered.

“...” The tantrika did not answer. A moment later, he lit the candle on the table and immediately a dim light filled the kitchen. Aché Lhamo watched him digging under his pillow and taking a pill out of a small bottle.

“Here.” The tantrika handed her the pill, placing it in the palm of the hand.

“What’s this?”

“Tis a sleeping pill.”

“Is it really a sleeping pill?” Aché Lhamo asked, unconvinced.

“Take it and you’ll know.” There was no expression on the tantrika’s face.

Aché Lhamo opened her mouth and swallowed the round pill with some cold water. The tantrika blew out the candle. The kitchen was restored to its previous dark peacefulness, and Aché Lhamo remained silent, her head on her pillow and her eyes wide open, staring in the shadows. She had no idea of how many hours had gone by. She had been hearing the ceaseless rattling of a mouse moving in a corner of the room, when a moment later her memory became fuzzy, and she fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

## 5.

I was sweeping the lower yard the day Mum’s sickness had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. Dark clouds languidly covered the horizon, hiding the dazzling smile of the sun, and throwing the ground in shadows, but there was no snow, not even a smattering of flakes.

By the time Stepfather had got into the kitchen from the shrine room, Mum’s breathing had become very weak. Her eyes had sunken, and her face had turned a sickly yellow. Her cracked lips were pale, and although they were moving, I could hear no sound coming out from them. She had left an unfinished drink on the bed-stove, steam still rising from the cup. I had never thought that I might be forever separated from Mum. She had been in a similar state in the past, whenever her appendix had swollen. “I’m sure it’s the same now,” I told myself, but then Stepfather stroked my hair and said, “Go and call the neighbors.”

Just as I was exiting the kitchen, all around me snowflakes had started to slowly fall from the sky like bird's feathers. I could barely see the rocky slates in the distance, and amidst the fluttering of snow, everything close by looked white in my eyes. I could almost hear the gentle sound of snow crumbling in the midnight peace. I felt lost and sad, as though I was alone in the whole world; tears gathered at the corners of my eyes, and I cried uncontrollably.

Taking in my running tears and wailing cries, the neighbors sensed that something terrible had happened. As they filed to our house, Stepfather stood up tall at the end of the courtyard. Snow had started to fall even heavier, and I saw that triangular eye piercing through the fluttering flakes. It was from that time that I started to mostly fear him.

I shivered slightly, sensing that triangular eye watching me. There was no unusual expression registered on Stepfather's face. Even in the past, I never saw him laughing in joy or crying in anguish. He was just like that, serious. I thought it unnatural and sensed that something hidden had to be behind his sternness. Even then, when he had just lost that kind farmwoman, my mother, he stood as grave as usual, not letting whatever was concealed behind his gravity come out.

"What happened?" The head of the neighbors' family asked.

"She passed away," the tantrika answered, his head turned skywards. He then looked at me. I was just fifteen.

## 6.

There was not a sound. The night had enfolded every living being in its darkness and led them to sleep. Before Drölma went back to her room, Stepfather had sat on the bed-stove and was now chanting from a long scroll of religious scriptures under the flickering light of a butter lamp. It sounded like a lullaby, and Drölma felt the usual, irresistible torpor rising in her. She couldn't remember if she had said anything to Stepfather when she had left the kitchen. As she was crossing the yard in the darkness, the freezing, crisp wind drew her from her lethargy back to reality. She looked towards the gate and stopped walking. She stood silent, listening for any sound of movement, but she could hear none.

Now was the time when he would normally come. After the old dog Gyabo died, no one inside ever knew if there was someone at the gate. For many nights he had not come to Drölma. She had thought to ask him why when they had met on the road in the day, but she had swollen with pride at his aloofness and had said nothing. Yet, every night she had the sensation of lying next to him, and in between dream and wakefulness, she had felt the familiar weight and pleasure of him on her body.

As soon as she got to her room, she fell deeply asleep. She didn't undress or speak. In the middle of the night, she had the usual dream. She felt her clothes being removed one by one—was it a

memory from her childhood, when her mother used to tuck her into bed, or was it the routine he followed during their lovemaking? She could no longer separate the two...

## 7.

The eyes of the stars shone brightly in the dark blue sky and the grass swooshed in the fields. There had been many nights like the one when he had been left outside the wooden gate of Drölma's house, every time swearing not to come back again the following night. Had Drölma really changed? He had rattled the iron doorknob in their secret signal, but there had been no movement inside. He had thought of asking Drölma when they had met on the road, but then he would recall how she had left him standing outside her house in the night like some masterless old dog, and his male pride would rise and turn his face cold. Now his relationship with Drölma had reached a low point.

As for that night, it would certainly be the last time he would go to her gate. He had decided as much. The sound of the rattled doorknob rang for a long time in the quiet of the night, but no sound came from inside the house. He felt disheartened. It was with a heavy feeling that he crouched on the stone steps in front of the gate; rummaging in his pocket, he found a cigarette.

A sliver of the round moon was slowly rising behind the eastern mountains, and under its white light the entire village seemed for a moment to have been sprinkled with a cloudy fluid. It was such a beautiful moonlit night, yet the darkness in his heart deepened. Tears welled up in his eyes, and as he stared at the moon, they shimmered in the light. Truth be told, he would never be able to forget Drölma. He had been with many women in the past, but he had never felt like that before. The stages of getting to know Drölma's body and mind had been a secret time spent in a deep state of happiness, but all of that was obviously over now. The sadness in his heart blew like wind, past memories swelling up like waves in his mind. He eventually took out a box of cigarettes.

The moon had risen and hung now in the middle of the sky. He got up slowly. His right leg was numb and made walking difficult. He stood there a moment. It seemed he was that kind of man after all. As he stood there, he suddenly remembered how he had broken into Drölma's house by climbing over the outer wall of her house, and an idea popped up in his mind. Then the climbing of the wall had been exhaustively planned, but this time he did not have the strength to think about that. He could certainly have asked Drölma her reasons when they met face to face, but, like most people do at night what they would not do in daylight, his eyes too fell on the latticed door of the threshing yard. Leaning on it, he climbed the wall, dropping himself slowly onto the roof, and from there down into the courtyard. There was no sound in the house, as he stealthily moved in front of the latticed window of Drölma's room. It was the kind of window sealed with pasted paper. They had made love in that room in the past; he peered through the lattice and what caught

his eyes when he looked inside shocked him. The two naked bodies were moving in the moonlit bed, clearly pleasuring each other. Hearing the grunts of the man, he shivered. It was as though a bucket of icy water had suddenly been poured over him, but in an instant, the blood in his veins stirred up, setting his whole self, body and mind, abuzz. He felt an irrepressible urge to shout three long war cries—*ki, ki, ki*—but he restrained himself at the last moment. He stood up slowly and silently moved towards the gate.

The thrusting of that naked man, with his coarse matted hair, was now in his eyes.

## 8.

Drölma's period had not come at the usual time, and when unending morning nausea and headache began a few months later she knew she was with child. She immediately thought of him. He hadn't been with her for more than two months, but Drölma took no notice of the timing and never doubted him to be the father of her unborn baby, because to her knowledge she had ever had only one man, and that was him. It was then that Drölma began to resent him.

"Hey..." When Drölma called out, he was working the edge of a field bordering the thicket of brambles at the foot of the village, and when he lifted his head, he realized that Drölma had been standing next to him for a while.

"..." He grew very pale and did not speak.

"I have something to tell you." Although as prideful as any other woman in this world, for the sake of her unborn child, Drölma spoke with no regard for her own honor.

"I don't want to hear it." He thrust the iron shovel down with force, turning the ground up, as though he wouldn't stop until the whole earth had been dug up.

"What's up with you? Have I done something wrong?" Drölma asked those two questions one after the other, crying uncontrollably. Those tears, so pure when they fell, were like dirt to him.

"You have no shame!" he shouted. He had become so angry that even his face had turned fearsome. "I'll tell you something! I...you...tell...say..." he sputtered. At the end, he could say nothing at all.

As he looked at Drölma under the brilliant sun, he lacked the courage to tell her what he had seen and heard the night before. It was such an embarrassment.

"Speak up! You must! If you don't, I will. I'm carrying your baby!" After saying those words, Drölma turned her back and ran away like a swirling wind.

"Ptui!" He spat behind Drölma, and with an inextinguishable hatred, he violently thrust the iron shovel in the ground, shattering its wooden handle.



## 9.

I had no desire to eat that evening.

Usually, I would drink some tea before having dinner, but that night, as I recalled the words he had said and the way he had acted that day, I had no stomach for it. Stepfather stretched his neck to look at me from his place atop the bed-stove. “Are you not having dinner? Are you unwell?” he asked, and I felt my cheeks flushing and my face turning red. Truth be told, I had to think about how I would now show my face to the world.

Unlike before, that night I was not overcome by the usual irresistible torpor. As the candlelight over the stove flickered, Stepfather chanted from the long scroll of religious scriptures placed across a table in front of him. When I later went to my bedroom, he stretched his neck from where he sat on the bed-stove and asked me, “Have you locked the door?” As I couldn’t recall if I did, I crossed the dark courtyard and headed to the gate. I opened it a crack and a cold breeze blew over me.

After locking the doorknob, I went back to my bedroom. It was beyond anything I could imagine—he had come to me! At first, it was the red spark of a cigarette that blazed up in my eyes, swirling red as he pulled on it in the darkness. The glow, at times brighter, at times duller, illuminated his face; his expression was icy, and he uttered not a word until I spoke.

“Why did you come here?” Tears started to well up at the corners of my eyes. I felt abased.

“I came to clarify something with you.”

“What?” My mind was as blank as paper and held no thoughts. Up to now, I had been giving him everything I had as a woman, without hesitation. Were there any issues still left unsolved between us?

“How many months since your womb quickened?”

“Two.”

“I haven’t come to your place in more than two months.”

“...” At his words, a crack had slowly opened in the curtain obscuring my mind, and reality had begun to appear more clearly, but I couldn’t believe it to be anything like that. He then shattered the peace of my room, saying that my unborn child was in truth Stepfather’s. He even told me about the night he had witnessed. As he was speaking, his voice carried a mix of hatred and grief. At the end, he said, “If you don’t believe me, go and ask your stepfather.”

I wasn’t aware of having left my room. As I was crossing the courtyard, I bumped into the iron wash basin, throwing it to the ground. The sound reverberated loud and clear in the silence of the night, and it reminded me of the events of my dream, the one I used to have in the past. It was then that I recalled the flickering of the butter lamp on the stove and Stepfather’s chanting from the

long religious scroll he had placed across the table in front of him. The moment I came before him, I stood still, without knowing what to say. He stopped his chanting and lifted his head. As the triangular eye watched me, he asked, "You didn't lock the door, did you?" As usual, a stern expression had covered his face, and in that state, he seemed not to notice the tears running down my face.

"Is he telling the truth?"

"Drölma, we are father and daughter in name only. You're not my own flesh and blood." As he spoke, it was as though a curtain had been drawn open and the stern expression on his face gradually faded, and a cunning, wrinkled smile emerged in its wake. I had the feeling a demon had just manifested itself.

"Is he telling the truth?" I asked again. I struggled to believe that.

"He, he. Why are you making such a fuss? The truth is that I have always been fond of you." As he said this, he dug under a nearby pillow and taking out small bottle of medicine, he raised it up and placed it on the bed-stove. "But you are a young girl, and I had no other way to make you desire me. I do love you though, Drölma. After realizing that you like to drink a bit of tea before having dinner, I used this sleeping drug..." Picking up the bottle from the bed-stove and holding it in his hand, Stepfather kept talking and looking around. I slowly left the kitchen. My mind was blank. By the time I came back to my room, he was long gone...

## 10.

Snow was falling that morning, as the tantrika set off westwards, after cutting through the thicket of brambles at the foot of the village. A large iron lock hung at the gate of Aché Lhamo, in the village he had long left behind. A man carrying a small pouch headed towards the burial ground on the upper part of the village.

That night, when Drölma had hanged herself, there had been no sound in the world.

## Translator's Commentary

Winner of several literary prizes, Lhashamgyal (lha byams rgyal) is one of the most acclaimed contemporary Tibetan writers. Mainly known for his short stories, he is also a novelist, a translator, and a prolific essayist, with dozens of literary works to his credit in both Tibetan and Chinese. Born in 1977 in Trika (khri ka) County, a rural area of Amdo, Lhashamgyal began experimenting with creative writing in his late teens. The first of his short stories, “Aché Chaklo and the Three Children of Another Father” (*a ce lcags lo dang mo'i pha mi gcig pa'i phru gu gsum*), published in 1995 in the Tibetan edition of *Qinghai Judicial News* (*mtsho sngon bod yig khrims lugs tshang par*), was soon followed by “A Snowy Night” (*kha ba'i mtshan mo*), printed in *Snow Flower* (*gangs rgyan me tog*) in 1997. By then, the jump from local newspapers to national literary journals was but a matter of years, and by the early 2000s, his writings featured regularly in the renowned magazine *Drangchar* (*sbrang char*). Works like “Mother” (*ma yum*), “A Cold Wind” (*lhags rlungs*), “A Life in Shadows” (*grib gzugs khrod kyi mi tshé*), and “Sunlight on the Road” (*lam gyi nyo 'od*), originally published in the magazine between 1998 and 2009 and collected in the volume *Sunlight on the Road* in 2010, showcase Lhashamgyal's eclectic style and creative approach, and contributed to his being recognized as a leading voice of contemporary Tibetan fiction. Four-time recipient of the prestigious Drangchar Literary Award (*sbrang char rtsom rig bya dga'*),<sup>1</sup> Lhashamgyal has come to dominate the Tibetan literary scene, attracting considerable scholarship both inside and outside the PRC.<sup>2</sup> Following the publication of *Sunlight on the Road*, Lhashamgyal began exploring different formats and genres, giving proof of a remarkable versatility. The years between 2012 and 2018 were a particularly productive period, with his oeuvre enlarging to include the novel *Beloved Child of Tibet* (*bod kyi bces phrug*, 2012) and three collected volumes, namely *A Collection of Lhashamgyal's Novellas* (*lha byams rgyal gyi sgrung 'bring phyogs bsgrigs*, 2016), *My Loneliness and Your Literature* (*nga yi kher rkyang dang khyed kyi rtsom rig*, 2018), comprising essays and interviews, and *The Sleeping Stream* (*gnyid du yur ba'i chu*, 2018), his latest collection of short stories.

Lhashamgyal's fiction is a unique blend of intimism and magical realism, with forays into meta-physical symbolism. Most of his stories unfold with little to no regard for physical time and space, as their characters move through lyrical, nearly abstract landscapes. To him the issue is not one of

1. Between 2009 and 2015 he won four consecutive editions of the award with two short stories—“A Life in the Shadows” and “Sunlight on the Road”—and two novellas—“In That Year” (*lo de la*) and “I Am a Fish in Yamdrok Yumtso” (*nga ni yar 'brog gyu mtsho'i nang gi nya zhig yin*)—respectively.
2. For formal studies in Tibetan language, see, among others, Chos skyong (2018; 2021) and Pad ma phag mo rta mgrin (2018); see also Lama Jabb (2015, 107–109) and Robin (2016) for studies in English. For English translations of Lhashamgyal's writings, see Lhashamgyal and Robin (2016), Lhashamgyal and Peacock (2018), Lhashamgyal and Fitzgerald (2020), Lhashamgyal and Rongwo Luyal (2022), Lhashamgyal and Schiaffini-Vedani (2022), Lhashamgyal, Dickie, and Shastri (2023).

style but of feeling. It is through the senses—touching, hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting—that Lhashamgyal’s fictional world comes to life. By combining simple phenomena—an odor, a sound, a color, a taste, or a tactile sensation—the writer, like a demiurge “prone to mood swings,” bares naked what is usually perceptible in a bodily-sensuous rather than verbal way.<sup>3</sup> The conveyance of atmosphere—something “more easily felt than talked about”—is thus performed through metaphors and symbols, in an economy of language in which the paucity of words belies the richness of meaning.<sup>4</sup> Transitional objects—the red hat of “Sunlight on the Road,” the triangular eye charm of “Drölma’s Dream” (*sgrol ma’i rmi lam*), or the nine-eyed *dzi* of “I am a Fish in Yamdrok Yumtso” (*nga ni yar ’brog gyu mtsho’i nang gi nya zbig yin*), just to name a few examples—are thus invested with a deep relational meaning as they stand for the self, the other(s), and the relationship between them. These objects/symbols exist suspended between reality and fantasy, their disruptive nature a constant reminder of the fragility of human life and its certainties.

The short story translated here belongs to the first phase of Lhashamgyal’s production. Published in *Sunlight on the Road*, “Drölma’s Dream” is closer in style to later works and can therefore be seen as a testing ground for bold experimentations with different narrative techniques, in a raw yet highly creative enmeshment of nonlinear storytelling, embedded structures, and multilayered narrative voices. The story is told through different voices: a first-person narrator (Drölma) and a third person limited one, through which the author conveys the thoughts and feelings of Drölma’s mother (Aché Lhamo) and the girl’s unnamed lover (“he”). The shifts in psychic distance create a continuum between estrangement and intimacy, with the third person acting in counterpoint to Drölma’s narrative. Lhashamgyal exerts a tight control over the amount of information available at any given time to the readers, challenging them to parse the nonlinear narrative in search for clues. Analepsis and prolepsis add difficulty (and interest) to the reading process, blurring the lines of moment and identity, and inviting the reader into an introspective journey that is, to say it with the American poet Yusef Komunyakaa, a “voyage inward” as much as it is an “odyssey outward.”<sup>5</sup> The vagueness of the setting increases the sense of suspended time, playing into the nonlinear narrative. The few hints provided—some field bunds and brambles, a small building with a fenced courtyard, a kitchen with a bed-stove—are but enough to conjure up the image of an anonymous village, one of the many dotting the ranges and valleys of eastern Tibet. With no absolute time frame if not the eternal cyclicity of Nature, the story progresses through the seasons: time flows through the immutable changing of light and weather, the waxing and waning of the moon, or a woman’s menstrual courses. Born in the height of summer, Drölma’s love withers and dies as the child in her womb quickens and grows. Tragic and lyrical, “Drölma’s Dream” belies the enduring influence of traditional balladry in contemporary Tibetan fiction, and offers a taste of

3. Lha byams rgyal 2018a, 238.

4. Costa et al. 2014, 352.

5. As quoted in Gotera 1990, 222.

Lhashamgyal's creative take on popular themes and motifs, such as frustrated love, gender violence, and honor suicide.<sup>6</sup>

Since no two languages are identical, it stands to reason that no fully exact translation is ever achievable. Given the differences between the two languages in contact, my goal with this translation was to accurately render the original text while ensuring the English reader a more faithful and enjoyable experience of the author's style. To do so, I intentionally prioritized naturalness over formal correspondence. The preservation of aesthetics, taste, and meaning has occasionally required minor creative adjustments, especially in relation to the nonlinear narrative; such changes to the original grammatical structure have nevertheless been kept to a minimum.

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6. On this, see Lama Jabb 2015.

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