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The prison was only a ten-minute drive from the site of the mass struggle meeting, and the truck jolted to a stop before I had time to collect my thoughts. But when I realized that I was standing in front of the prison itself, my mind focused sharply. I remember small details even today.

The country around Changwu prison is stark and barren—no trees, no grass, no water, only the dry, brown hills. There were only a few brick houses in the area. Most of the peasants lived in what amounted to small, cavelike dwellings dug into the hillsides. At first I didn't realize I was standing in front of the prison, because all I could see was what looked like a doorway in a hillside that wasn't any different from many of the peasants' doorways. When I stepped inside, I knew different. It was like stepping into hell.

The doorway I entered was not flush with the hillside as it had first appeared. The minute the guards opened it and thrust me inside it seemed as if the earth had opened up beneath my feet. I found myself looking across and down at a large sunken courtyard, scooped out of the earth to a depth of nearly thirty feet. From the outside, you couldn't even tell it was there. The guards roughly pushed me forward and we descended to the floor by means of a steep staircase. When we reached the bottom I looked across the large open space. Directly opposite was a wall about ten feet high, which was patrolled by armed guards, who walked along the top, rifles at the ready.

My guards marched me directly toward that wall, and we passed beyond it through a small door. On the other side was a very small open space and beyond that a row of ten caves dug directly into the hillside. These were the cells. They were about 33 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 8 feet high. Ten prisoners had to try to live in each one of them. At least a third of the space inside was taken up by the earthen beds on which we had to sleep. When I was put into my cell, the other prisoners all looked up, suspicious but also curious about what was going on outside. Some were just peasants who had committed various crimes; some were hardened criminals—murderers and rapists; a few were political prisoners like me. What I remember best is their eyes. A few were fearful but had the eyes of people who still had hope. These, I later learned, were the newer prisoners. Most of the prisoners, however, had only expressionless stares, their eyes focused somewhere well beyond the prison and the horizon, without a flicker of hope. When the door closed behind me, the stench of human filth, sweat, and fear was so strong that I nearly vomited.

The first few weeks in this prison were one of the most miserable periods in my life. The filth was overpowering. We were allowed out to go to the bathroom only twice a day. The rest of the time we had to urinate and defecate in a large clay pot that was emptied every morning. We had no soap or towels and were forever surrounded by powerful nauseating odors. And we were under constant attack from an army of lice who called the cell and us home. You couldn't get away from either of them.

There was also the pain of hunger. At ten in the morning we were given two pieces of steamed bread, one boiled turnip, and one bowl of hot water. We got the same meal again at four in the afternoon, and that was it. Nobody actually died of starvation while I was there, but there wasn't nearly enough food, and I couldn't get used to the hunger and the weakness that this caused. Like the smells and the lice, the pain of hunger never went away, and I don't think I ever stopped thinking about food. Equally terrible was the inactivity and sense of total isolation. Except for the brief periods when we went to the bathroom and emptied the urine pots or when we ate, there was nothing to do. We were cramped together in our small, vermin-ridden cells day in and day out with nothing to occupy our minds. The guards discouraged movement or even talking. They patrolled the top of the wall that separated our cells from the main courtyard, and they could hear any-

thing that was going on behind our doors. I remember sometimes a guard would call out sharply, "Hey there. In cell number three. What's going on?" You didn't want to answer—just stop talking.

The guards watched us all the time, and so we just had to sit there while our minds and bodies became numbed by the inactivity. I had experienced hard labor and physical abuse, but this was worse than anything, and I think the Chinese wanted it that way. They wanted to leave you alone with your thoughts, so that your mind was as much a prisoner as your body. I know that this period was as close as I have ever come to simply giving up. In fact, on the tenth day I actually decided to kill myself. I think I was a little bit crazy at that time, because I did the only thing I could think of to try to end my life. When it was my turn to empty my urine pot, I waited just a moment until the other prisoners went to the bathroom and then before anyone could stop me I actually drank the urine. I had convinced myself that if I did so it would kill me. I was sure of that and gulped down at least a quart. It didn't, however, kill me. Amazingly, it had no effect on me at all. I had gone over the edge and survived. I never got that close again. Somehow after that, in spite of the constant hunger and physical deterioration, my mental strength returned and carried me through. In fact, the Chinese didn't know it, but as I reflect on those days, they were the ones who helped me the most. They did it by making me angry.

The only breaks in the routine I have just described were occasional interrogations like those that I had to endure during my mass probation. My old tormentor Ma Ximei would return sometimes, and we would go through the same old routines. But one day it was different. Ma Ximei was there all right, but this time instead of bringing students from the Xianyang school she was accompanied by three policemen. When they called me from my crowded cell they did everything they could to make clear that this wasn't going to be just another routine interrogation. They brought me to a small room and handcuffed me to a low chair in the center. Then the whole group took their seats behind a table with a white cloth on it. The chair was so low to the ground that I had to look up to meet their eyes.

In front of me were Ma Ximei, the three policemen in uniform, and some Tibetans who were there because the Chinese always wanted to be able to say that the questioning had been fair, as my own countrymen had witnessed what had happened. They were all very formal and solemn, and the policemen were extremely arrogant. Though they

hammered away at the questions they always asked, they did everything they could to make the proceedings seem like a trial. As always, they wanted to know more about my relationship with Gyalo Thondrup in India. What had my responsibilities been? What was my mission—then and now? They still wanted to know why I would have left the security and abundance of America to come back to Tibet—unless I was on a mission of some kind. That was what they were after. What was my assignment? Who was I working for? I had better tell them or else.

I gave them the same old answers, which of course made them angry. The policeman who was in charge of this supposed trial began to bully me. What did I think I was doing? I had better cooperate, because they were losing patience with me. In the relatively short time I had been in the prison I had earned a reputation as a stubborn prisoner, a man with a bad attitude. Did I know what happened to people like that? Of course I did.

In the time I'd been here we'd all known of a number of prisoners who had been executed—just taken out and shot. The guards kept a close watch on us, but news of such things raced through the cells like a fire. There were no secrets. As I looked at the bullying officer in front of me, I remembered a night not too long ago when we'd all had to listen to the shouting and crying of a man we knew had been condemned to death. The shouting went on the whole night, and I remember listening to the guards taunting him in his misery, telling him he deserved it, that he should have learned his lesson. I believed that's what I was being threatened with now. They were hinting pretty clearly that my life might depend on the answers I gave.

At that point something inside me just snapped. Instead of getting frightened, I got angry, as angry as I have ever been in my life. I remember looking at the table in front of me, the so-called judges' bench. I could see that underneath the white cloth they had laid to make the table seem imposing and ceremonial, the wood was dry and cracked and the paint was peeling. My eyes glanced around the small room and took in all the shabby details. The trial seemed to me like a joke, a very bad joke. My interrogators were like children masquerading as adults, and I didn't fear them anymore. I was so tired of being asked the same questions, so frustrated and furious that I lost all restraint and began to shout: "You want to kill me? Then go ahead, kill me. You can do anything you want to me, but I'm not going to lie to you. I'm not going to play these stupid games and say things that aren't

true just because you want me to. I believe in what I'm saying; I have told you the truth. If you won't accept it, then do whatever you want."

I meant what I said.

My inquisitors were angry, but they didn't do anything. I think the Tibetan witnesses were shocked. They just sat there, eyes lowered, staring straight ahead. None of them would meet my eye. And something seemed to happen in the room, though no one spoke about it. The so-called trial was over. No one said anything. My interrogators simply looked at one another, unlocked my handcuffs, and took me back to my cell. In the heat and adrenaline of the moment I felt I had won. I wasn't fooling myself. I knew that in fact they could kill me any time they wanted and that they still might. But I had won a victory in my own mind—whatever happened—and it felt good. My cellmates looked at me briefly when I returned, but nobody dared to ask any questions. I sat in silence, my mind racing, trying to understand what had just happened.

After the session in that broken-down little room, my life in the prison went on more or less as before. The routine was always the same. Each individual day became the same day that never varied and never ended. Summer dragged into fall. And then suddenly, one day in late November, with no warning or explanation, I was taken out of my cell and checked thoroughly by a doctor. And someone shaved my head. Nobody said why, and I didn't dare ask. All I could do was guess. I didn't think they were going to kill me. Why would they have given me a medical exam? I'd already seen how they treated the prisoners they were going to execute, and this didn't fit the pattern. But what was going on? Were they going to set me free? Were they getting ready to transfer me to another prison—and if so, where?

I didn't have to wait long to find out. A day or so later, on November 30, 1970 (a little more than 250 days since my arrest and imprisonment), I left the Changwu prison for good.

Gruffly and without explanation, two guards ordered me out of my cell. My hands were tied tightly behind me. I was loaded into a broken-down bus and driven over rough, snow-covered roads. I was accompanied by Ma Ximei and two policemen who never said what the final destination would be.

When we stopped, I was at the Xianyang prison, close to my school. I was foolish enough to hope that I had been brought here because I was going to be released soon and allowed to finish my course work

and get on with my life. Of course I was wrong. After three days, I was ordered out of my cell and moved again. My hands were again bound tightly, and I was put on a train bound for Chengdu, the capital city of Sichuan Province.

In some ways I was glad. At least I was getting away from Xianyang prison, which, though I wouldn't have believed it possible, was even worse than the prison at Changwu. At Xianyang there had been only one prisoner besides myself, and I had almost no human contact. The food was even scarcer and more repellent than at Changwu. There were the same filth and vermin, and at Xianyang there was a constant dampness that never went away and that chilled you to the bone. At least Changwu had been drier.

When I got to Chengdu, things seemed better at first. There were six or seven other prisoners, so at least there were more people to talk to. The cells were cleaner, and the floor was dry wood planking, not the raw earth of Changwu or the near mud of Xianyang. By comparison, the food at Chengdu was wonderful. We actually got steamed rice and vegetables, and enough of both to fill your stomach. I think it was because I was so happy about the changed conditions that I made the mistake of letting my guard down, for which I was made to pay.

I let my guard down in the sense that I responded eagerly to the other prisoners' questions and friendship without thinking about what I was saying. The boredom of prison life is the same everywhere, and my cell mates were full of questions. Where had I come from? What crimes was I guilty of? Where was I arrested? They were curious about the fact that I wasn't Chinese. Was I Tibetan? What was a Tibetan doing in Chengdu prison?—a question to which I couldn't respond and to which I wished I had the answer myself. My response to their attention, however, was to answer what I could. And then I guess I just needed to talk, because I foolishly began to tell them what I thought about my experiences in Changwu prison.

As I've said, one of the horrors of Changwu was that talking among the prisoners had been forbidden. Until the privilege had been taken away from me, I hadn't realized how important it is to speak regularly and without fear to other human beings. Now that I had a chance again, I couldn't stop myself. I told them what a living hell I thought Changwu had been. I told them about the filth, the food, the cruelty. I didn't even think about what I was saying.

It was a big mistake. The very next day I was singled out by one of

the prison officers who had heard about my description of Changwu. "You are a troublemaker," he said. "You are talkative and a liar, telling all kinds of stories about our very fine prison system. Your mind is still poisoned by your dreams about America. You'd do well to remember where you are—and who you are! You are a prisoner of the new proletarian dictatorship, and you'd better learn to behave properly, or else."

I knew immediately why I had received this reprimand. What had I been thinking about? Like the school during the early days of the Cultural Revolution, the prison was filled with spies. One or more of the prisoners I had spoken to had reported this evidence of my disloyalty—and perhaps had been rewarded for it. My punishment for being a troublemaker was that I was put into handcuffs that I had to wear day and night, even when I ate and went to the bathroom. It was terrible. Fortunately, I wasn't in Chengdu for long—only three days.

On my fourth day in Chengdu, I was roused from my cell once again. Ma Ximei and two armed policemen materialized as if on cue, and we were taken directly to the nearest airport, where we became the only passengers on a Russian-made plane that I was told would take me back to Tibet, my native land. I learned later that I got this kind of special treatment because I was being handled as if I were a dangerous international spy who was being taken to Lhasa for trial. I heard that was the argument Ma Ximei made to get the Chengdu security officials to pay for the plane. But I didn't know that at the time, and since I still did not know exactly what was going to happen to me when I arrived, I alternated between moments of excitement and moments of fear. On the surface, the news that I was returning home was wonderful. I could scarcely believe it. But I was returning as a prisoner, and perhaps I was getting my hopes up only to have them dashed even more cruelly than if I'd stayed in China.

I remember that the day we left was clear. We didn't talk much during the flight, and I spent a lot of time looking out a small window. As I watched the landscape change beneath us, my imagination began to stir, because when we got closer to Lhasa I realized that the snow-covered mountains below were the mountains of Tibet, the mountains that had been part of my consciousness since I was a boy.

When our plane landed it became clear immediately that I wasn't going home the way I wanted. It was December now and bitter cold. I was put into a car in handcuffs, though my cuffed hands were in front rather than in back (a much more comfortable arrangement). I was

obviously not coming home to be released. The guards also put a white cloth scarf over my face with just a mouth hole to speak and breathe through. And they put a heavy fur hat on my head. I don't know whether this was to protect me from the cold or to prevent anyone seeing and recognizing me on our way to the Lhasa prison. I didn't know it at the time, but the "dragging through the prisons" was now at an end. Lhasa's Sangyib prison was to be my final destination.

Compared to the Changwu and Xianyang institutions, the Sangyib prison was immense. It lay three miles outside the city itself, near the Sera Monastery. The prison grounds covered an area large enough that there were separate complexes of buildings and distinct areas, almost like the grounds of a large university.

When our car arrived and passed through the gates, we stopped in front of a huge warehouse. There Ma Ximei took my possessions, which had been sent from the Xianyang school, and handed them to the Sangyib security officers. The two suitcases (one was Samsonite and one an Indian leather box) contained all I had in the world. I put them in storage myself, and when I was allowed a brief look inside the case I saw that most of my things were intact. But I noticed that a gold fountain pen—a Parker 61 from America—had been ruined. Ma Ximei or someone else had obviously intentionally broken it open, presumably to search for things concealed inside. The pen was one of my favorite possessions. As I looked at it there, broken and now impossible to write with, it seemed to be a symbol of what was happening to me. Like the pen, I thought, I could have been a productive instrument. I had wanted to use my education to help my fellow Tibetans. But I, too, had been broken into, and at the moment I was of no use to anyone.

I was to be a resident of Sangyib prison for the next two and a half years, until May 1973. By the time I had checked my personal items and put them away in storage, it was about two o'clock in the afternoon. I was then taken to a building that contained rows of small cells that held one prisoner each and placed in one of them. In spite of the extremely small cells, the physical conditions here were better than those in any of the prisons I had known in China.

The building that held the cells was a newly built concrete structure. There were dim electric bulbs in each cell, and the walls and floors were concrete and a good deal warmer and drier than anything I had seen before. We got more food and freedom, too. There were three

meals a day here, and we got butter tea, tsamba, and sometimes even meat, although not in large quantities. We were allowed out every morning to empty and wash our urine pots, and we were given a basin of water a day to use for washing ourselves. Compared to what I'd been experiencing, these conditions amounted almost to luxury.

Not long after I'd arrived I saw groups of former Tibetan government officials working in the prison vegetable garden. They had been incarcerated because of their involvement in the Lhasa Uprising in 1959. I was told they had fixed prison terms, which meant that they knew when they were going to be released. They were assigned to work in the gardens during the day, and at night they were locked up in a large, communal cell. I actually envied them for their gifts of exercise and human contact, because though my material conditions were much better, I remained isolated from the other prisoners. I also envied their assurance of the length of their term. I had been classified as a political prisoner of a more dangerous kind, and so I was kept alone and denied what would have been the welcome relief of physical labor and society and a sense of when my trials would end.

For some reason, I wasn't as afraid here as I had been in China. Partly I think it was because even though a prisoner, I was at home in Tibet. Partly, too, it may have been because most of the prisoners, prison officials, and trustees were Tibetan and I was interacting mainly in my native language. Finally, I believe I had gained courage from my experience with Ma Ximei and the Chinese inquisitors after my sham trial at Changwu prison. Whatever the case, I became more assertive than I had ever been before as a prisoner. I was still haunted by the experience of hunger in the Changwu and Xianyang prisons. We got better food here in the Sangyib prison, but it was still not enough. So I began a sort of campaign to try to get more.

I approached the trustees and the Tibetan guards first. When they did not punish or mock my requests, my spirits rose, and I grew more insistent. At first a few of the guards took pity on me and occasionally brought me extra food. Then more decided to pitch in. At some point they all must have gotten together and talked about it among themselves, because eventually they regularly provided extra food not only for me but also for all of the prisoners in my block of cells. Eventually they made it a permanent arrangement, and everybody got the same extra rations. My fellow prisoners were grateful and treated me as if I had done something incredibly brave. Thus, isolated as I was, I got

some much needed support and an image of myself that I am sure helped me continue to survive.

After six months I was moved to a different part of the prison where the cells were larger and the conditions better. For example, in my new cell there was actually a window that let the sunlight in and that I could open and close myself. That may not sound like much, but after months in the Changwu prison scarcely able to move around or talk without a guard checking up on me, even the smallest chance to control my environment became important. And there were other small freedoms allowed.

For the first time since I had been imprisoned I was given access to newspapers—both Tibetan and Chinese. I was so eager to have something to read that I asked and was granted permission to go to my things in storage and recover my Chinese-Tibetan dictionary. When I had it, I was able to read the Chinese newspapers with greater ease, and I added a lot of new words to my vocabulary.

The main problem, though, continued to be boredom—how to kill and fill the time. Because I had more relative freedom here, I was able to work out a series of activities and routines that allowed me to cope better. My method in general was to divide up the day. Mornings were my exercise times. I would do about two hours of physical exercises before breakfast each day. Sometimes I would jump or jog in place. Sometimes I would carefully stretch my limbs. And sometimes I would rehearse my old gadrugba dance routines. Though I hadn't danced in years, I had practiced so long and hard when I was young that my muscles seemed to remember every move. I especially liked the dancing, because I could do it almost without thinking and by giving myself over to the well-known ritual movements I could temporarily block out the reality of the prison.

Breakfast and washing would be over by about ten o'clock, and then I would use the hours between ten and noon to read newspapers. I would read the Tibetan papers first, and then tackle the Chinese papers with my dictionary in hand. I never let myself imagine that I was going to be in prison forever. I think if I'd thought that, I couldn't have gone on. So I treated the Chinese newspapers as an opportunity to continue to learn the language, which I was sure would be useful to me when I was released. I stopped reading the papers when it was time for lunch. As I said, in this larger cell I had a window to the outside world. It was barred, of course, but beyond the bars was a glass pane that admitted

the sunlight, and so every afternoon that wasn't cloudy, I would strip to the waist and lie in the sun for as long as the light streamed through my window. It was one of my favorite things to do.

Another of the things I did to cope with the endless flow of time was to sing songs. They weren't traditional songs; they were songs I made up as I went along and that helped keep me in control. I would sing to myself about how, though I was locked alone in a room, I could breathe freely, and in my mind I could range all over the world. I would sing to myself about how I knew I was going to be free someday. I would say that, yes, it was a dark day now but I could see good things on the horizon. And I would sometimes construct the arguments or accusations the Chinese were always using against me and then rehearse my answers and counterarguments. The fact of just saying such things over and over again made it easier to believe that the events I wanted would actually happen or that the arguments I made would eventually work.

I also spent a lot of time reminiscing, conjuring up images of people, places, and things I couldn't see otherwise. I pictured my village and my parents as they were when I had last seen them. I tried to see if I could tell whether they were well, how they might have changed. I tried to imagine how Lhasa looked when I had danced for the Dalai Lama as a child or worked for the government as a clerk. I tried to bring back some of the happier details of the city seen when I had made my visit with the Red Guards in 1966. I even brought back some fond images of my time in America. I remembered people who had been especially kind to me, and when I was hungry I would remember what American apple pie looked and tasted like. Sometimes, when I was feeling depressed, I would remember the details of my conversation with Gyalola in San Francisco. I would make myself remember his telling me that I didn't know myself and that I wouldn't be able to stand up to the Chinese. This always helped me strengthen my resolve. In short, I did literally everything I could think of to keep my spirits afloat.

But the months dragged on and turned into years, and I found that although my routines were extremely helpful, they weren't always enough. And so I would seize anything that would give me a sense of hope and protect me from the darker, more pessimistic side of my imagination. I remember, for example, that I was very excited when I heard on a Beijing National Radio broadcast in 1972 that Richard Nixon, the president of the United States, had come to China to visit

Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. I was excited because I thought that in general it would be good for China to end its closed-door policy and perhaps become a part of the international community. Indeed, I thought that if China became a part of the international community, then Tibet would, too, and that therefore the process of modernization could be speeded up. But part of my excitement was also selfish. I hoped that if Communist China became a part of the international community, then some of its most ruthless policies against its own citizens might have to change and that eventually conditions for prisoners like me would change for the better. It didn't happen, of course. The hoping helped, but only for a while.

One of my few fond memories from this period is of the way I was able to knit myself a pair of wool socks. I don't remember how or when exactly I got the idea, but I noticed that the saddle blankets on the mules I saw in the prison yard were leather on one side and woven wool on the other. One day I asked a guard I knew pretty well what happened to them when they got old and worn. When I learned that the blankets were either thrown away or stored somewhere, I asked if he could get me some. He found me several badly torn and worn out pieces fairly quickly and then I went into action. I separated the wool from the hide and then untangled the wool fibers and respun the yarn. At that point I searched the prison yard for some sticks I could use for needles. I found some about the size of chopsticks and sharpened them on the prison stones. With my needles I began to knit, always making sure the guards weren't around. I don't know that they would have prevented me from doing this, but I liked the sense that I was getting away with something.

Perhaps it was the memory of all those evenings at home in the room with the fire with my whole family, talking of course but each of us always doing something—knitting, sewing, or mending. Maybe some of the knitting skills just rubbed off by my watching my mother and sisters. Whatever it was, it kept me going. I worked a long time on the knitting, and when I was done I had myself a fine, warm pair of wool socks for the winter. I had more than that, too. Looked at objectively, a pair of socks is next to nothing. But I took enormous pleasure in having made them in these circumstances. As I think back on it, it was a way of asserting myself, a way of proving that even though I was in prison there were things about my life and my environment that I could still control. It was the little things like those socks that I think

got me through the terrible experience of not knowing when or if I would ever be free again, because though my level of comfort was higher than it had been in any of the other prisons, the idea that my sentence was indeterminate preyed on my mind. My spirits often flagged, and it didn't help matters that I had some health problems.

I had developed chronic problems with digestion in the Changwu prison. My system wasn't working properly and I began to suffer regular bouts of severe diarrhea, stomach cramps, and gas. I talked to the guards, who allowed me to see a prison doctor. He gave me medicine, but it wasn't very effective, and over time I developed my own techniques for dealing with the pain. When the attacks hit, I would quickly lie down on the floor and begin to control my breathing by first holding my breath as long as I could and letting it out in a very controlled way. Then I would tense the muscles in my stomach and begin to move them in something close to peristaltic waves while I massaged my stomach with my hands. I can't tell you why it worked, but for some reason this combination of controlled breathing, muscle control, and massage got rid of the worst cramps and gas. And I still sometimes resort to it.

During my time at Sangyib prison there were also periodic interrogations and endless written reports I had to make. In the reports, I was supposed to give an account of my past crimes and detail my new thinking. They were a real challenge, because of course my thinking hadn't changed. But I knew that my eventual release would be at least loosely tied to the Chinese sense that I had in fact "reformed." So I used to make up anything I could think of that I thought would be what they wanted to hear, without, of course, admitting to the serious charges. I would confess that I now realized that I had made a mistake in criticizing socialism while I was in India—things like that. I felt very helpless and frustrated about having to play these kinds of games.

The formal interrogations occurred less frequently than in Changwu (and a bit less violently), but I was still occasionally questioned by Chinese officials who represented the Autonomous Region of Tibet. In some ways it was like a well-rehearsed theatrical performance. They always asked the same questions, and I always gave the same answers. My responses had become so automatic that I think by that point I could have gotten through the interrogations in my sleep. I remember only one of these sessions more distinctly than the others.

In the middle of 1972 I was interrogated by an officer from the Chinese Intelligence Bureau and a short, fat Tibetan as well.

What I remember is the behavior of the Tibetan interrogator. The Chinese officer was very demonstrative. He shouted at me all the time. But the one who hit me was the Tibetan. He seemed to love his work and would slap me for the smallest matter. The idea of my own countryman treating me that way is what stays in my mind.

My eventual release was as much of a surprise and a mystery to me as my imprisonment. One day, with no warning or preparation, I was sent to the office of the director of the prison. I had no idea what was happening or about to happen and so was extremely suspicious. The director's name was Mr. Qiao, and my suspicions increased when I stepped into his office. I remember it was wintertime and extremely cold. But Mr. Qiao's office was warm and friendly. There was a fire burning, and instead of shouting at me or firing hostile questions like my usual interrogators, Mr. Qiao was mild and even courteous. With a friendly gesture he pointed to a chair and asked me to sit down. There were a cup of green tea and a cigarette waiting for me. It was only after I had made myself comfortable that Mr. Qiao began to speak. He was a calm, elderly Chinese man, a veteran of the revolution. After a sort of preamble that was full of general praise for the Communist Party and its policies, he smiled, looked directly at me, and said, "When a man makes a mistake, it is sometimes allowed because he may not have understood what he has done; and if he recognizes his mistake, then it is our policy to let him have a brighter future. I want you to think about that—what it means to you—because I hope you will be one of the ones who can become a new man." I was used to bullying and accusations in situations like this. I wasn't prepared for kindness. What was going on? What did he mean? Was this another trap? Would I end up harming myself if I talked freely as I had in a weak moment at the Xianyang prison? My mind raced furiously as I was trying to think of what to say.

Mr. Qiao sat there smiling and expectant, and in the end I trusted my instincts and instead of responding with the numbed recitation of my usual bland answers, I decided to take a chance and be more forthcoming. I thanked him warmly for inviting me to his office and for his thoughtfulness. And then I tried to tell him what was honestly in my mind when I decided to return to Tibet. I told him that I now knew that I had repeatedly made mistakes, used bad judgment at times, and was extremely grateful for the leniency I had already received. I also tried to make clear that my main concern was for the Tibetan

people; that I supported the Communist Party because I thought it would help the ordinary people of Tibet. I told him that from the earliest days of the Chinese presence in Lhasa I thought that the communist system was going to make it possible to modernize Tibet, to make my people competitive citizens of the modern world. Therefore I accepted the leadership of the Communist Party and the idea of the Autonomous Region of Tibet. My loyalty was to the Tibetans living in Tibet and especially to the working classes, and of course socialism and the Communist Party.

When I was finished speaking I realized that I was shaking. Mr. Qiao said nothing for a moment, and I knew that whatever the result, the interview was now at an end. We both rose and Mr. Qiao seemed pleased. He patted me on the shoulder and smiled. "Do you need anything?" he asked. "No, thank you," I said. And the next thing I knew I was back in my cell, without even remembering how I got there.

What occurred then was all very mysterious. At first nothing happened. My days went on as usual, and there was no reference to my meeting with Mr. Qiao. There were certainly no apparent consequences. For the first few days I was both nervous and excited. Was I going to be punished? Had it really been a trick after all? Or was I going to be released? That possibility was so exciting that I scarcely let myself hope. It was the spring of 1973—a little over three years since that day in March 1970 when I was denounced at my school and taken to Changwu prison. Three years and who knew how many more were to come?

Months passed and because nothing happened—either good or bad—I had pretty much decided that nothing was going to come of my talk with Mr. Qiao. It was just going to be another one of those experiences with the Chinese authorities where they don't tell you anything and there's no way of guessing what their intentions are. At just about the time I had resigned myself to the idea that the meeting had meant nothing I had a visitor, a Mr. Wang, who was a senior Chinese security officer originally from Shanghai. His message was simple: "Today we are releasing you," said Mr. Wang. "Your arrest was correct and so our decision now is to set you free. We now consider that you have been properly educated and have become a new person. You are a new man now, and our only hope is that you will serve the people well."

I was stunned. When you hope—even dream—for something as

much as I had hoped and dreamed of my release, you make it so magical and remote that it's hard to believe it when it actually happens. For a moment I couldn't find my voice. When I did, all I managed to say was that I was extremely grateful and that I would indeed work hard to serve the people. I was literally in a daze.

There were a few formalities to be gone through before I could be set free, which was a good thing because they gave me time to regain my composure and begin to experience the full impact of what had happened. There was some important paperwork to be done. When you are arrested in China there are specific steps that are supposed to be taken. A letter of arrest must be issued and signed by the appropriate authorities. None of the proper forms had been filed when I arrived at the Sangyib prison in Tibet. And so, ironically, on the day of my release I had to wait while officials filled out, signed, and backdated all the forms that were supposed to have been filed over two years before. Of course, I couldn't have cared less about the breach in procedure. Nothing mattered but the thought of freedom.

When Mr. Wang had finished all of the official business he told me what was going to happen next. "According to regulations," he said, "you will be sent back to Xianyang to the Tibetan Minority Institute where you were arrested. There they will arrange a permanent job for you." I thanked him and said again that I would do the best I could to serve the people as they wished. All I could think about was that finally I was free.