
 WAITING FOR THE RETURN

Rdo rje skyabs རྡོ་རྗེ་སྐྱལ་བ་

"Tshe ring, how many days has your father been away?"

"Father's been gone for twenty-one days," Tshe ring replied.

"Oh! Twenty-one days isn't a short time. It's time for him to return. I hope he comes back safely and quickly," Tshe ring's grandmother observed, and resumed chanting and spinning her old prayer wheel.

Spring had passed and now it was summer. Under the blue, windy summer sky, an enormous grassland was decorated with countless yaks and a few horses sprawled across the feet of mountains that varied dramatically in height.

This was Stobas ldan's homeland. A yak-hair tent pitched between two hills sheltered Stobas ldan's family. It was the land where Stobas ldan's ancestors had dwelt and where Stobas ldan's descendants desired to live. From generation to generation, this was the land of O tho's clan. Moreover, O tho was Stobas ldan's family name. His full name was O tho Stobas ldan, but everyone called him Stobas ldan.

Stobas ldan, Tshe ring's father, was a strong, responsible man. At the age of eight, he had begun to learn how to hunt from his father. When he was ten, he began herding livestock. By the age of eighteen, his father was dead, and the next year he married and continued his father's life. Time passed as quickly as flowing water and Stobas ldan had a ten-year-old son named Tshe ring. Everything Stobas ldan attempted he completed very nicely. His wife, his mother, and even the community members admired him.

One day a month earlier when the sun had set behind the mountain, Rdor b+ha, the local leader, came to Stobas ldan's home and shared dinner with his family. Announcing that he had

something to say to Stobas ldan privately, he and Stobas ldan went out of the yak-hair tent. Tshe ring also went outside and herded the livestock into the yard where a Tibetan mastiff lay. The watchdog, as was its character, barked ferociously at Rdor b+ha. His breed was very loyal to their owners, and protected the owner's family and the livestock at all times. But they were very cruel, even merciless, to strangers. No matter whether poor or rich, a leader or a common person, you knew to be careful around Tibetan mastiffs when you were in Tibet.

The community leader and Stobas ldan walked to a small hill far from Stobas ldan's tent to avoid the watchdog's frantic barking. Those living on this particular grassland had the custom that when they had something important and confidential to discuss, they went into the hills or somewhere far from their home to avoid the barking dogs and for privacy.

When they reached the hill, it was dark enough that stars shone brightly in the sky amid an overarching silence.

"Stobas ldan, I have something important to tell you," announced the community leader. "Our area is under attack. Our higher leaders ask every community to send two men to defend it."

"So..."

"Well, I have decided and I want you to join this battle," the leader said, interrupting Stobas ldan.

"Why? Why you and me?" Stobas ldan asked.

"I'm the community leader so I have the responsibility. You are the strongest person in this community, and I think you are also responsible," Rdor b+ha replied.

"If I say no..."

"Yes. You can say no, but think about your family, think about our ancestors, think about our next generation. We have lived on this land for generations. If we let it slip from our hands, where will we live? What would our next generation do? Everyone on this grassland must be accountable, especially men like you and me," answered the community leader.

Stobas ldan remained silent and gazed far into the distance. All was silence. A bit later, he turned, faced the leader, and asked forcefully, "When do we leave?"

"The day after tomorrow. According to the Tibetan calendar that day is a good day," replied the community leader.

"OK, I'll go but not because of you. It is for this land - for my homeland. And I want you to promise not to let my family know this," entreated Stobas ldan.

"I promise," the community leader agreed.

The next day, everything on the grassland was the same as usual. The turquoise sky was crystal clear above dense grass that swayed back and forth. Streams flowed softly. Livestock enjoyed their life on the grassland and birds flew freely and sang melodiously.

Stobas ldan got up early to burn incense and offer pure water to the deities. His wife finished milking, came back into the tent, and prepared breakfast. Tshe ring sat by his grandmother and listened to some of her many interesting stories. A bit later, the family gathered around the stove and had breakfast together. The sun began to rise above the eastern mountain. Soon it was warm and bright, another wonderful day on the grassland.

After the meal, Stobas ldan spoke to his family, "I have something to tell you. Rdor b+ha told me that there was important business to take care of and I must leave to work on it with him. You all do your usual work and don't worry about me."

"Really? Father, don't forget to buy some candies and toys for me," said Tshe ring.

"I won't forget, but I want you to help your mother do whatever needs to be done," Stobas ldan said, patting his son's head. "Listen to your mother and do whatever she says."

"Fine, I promise," Tshe ring responded immediately. Stobas ldan felt good about his obedient, agreeable son.

"How long will you be gone?" asked his wife.

"I'm not sure, but I guess not too long. Maybe several days will be enough," replied Stobas ldan.

"My dear son, I hope you come back as quickly as you can. Wherever you go, home is the best place for you," his mother said before resuming her scripture chanting and spinning the old prayer wheel.

Stobas Idan nodded and said nothing. He didn't let his family know that he was going to fight. He did not want them to worry.

The next morning, the community leader came on horseback to Stobas Idan's tent. The watchdog barked loudly. Stobas Idan was already prepared and quickly mounted his best horse with his rifle slung across his back. They rode away before dawn. The only observer of their departure was the watchdog.

As the sun rose the next morning, Tshe ring's mother woke him and gave him breakfast before sending him off to herd the livestock. From that day, he herded in his father's absence. He herded the yaks to pastures where fresh grass grew and sometimes drove them to streams to drink. He had good herding skills because he had often herded with his father. Though he was still a child, he could herd almost as well as his father.

Time passed, as it always does, without a pause. They woke up every day to find a new day had already begun. Tshe ring herded and sometimes grazed the yaks on the mountains. From the mountain height, he gazed far into the distance, hoping to see his father returning. He dreamt every night that his father was returning with candies and various toys, but dreams are just dreams and not the substance of reality.

Tshe ring's grandmother said little. She chanted scriptures and rotated her prayer wheel, hoping in her heart that her son would soon return. Since her husband had died, her son was everything to her. She waited for him in the same way that Tshe ring waited for his father. They both lived for his return.

Another also waited for Stobas Idan to come back - Tshe ring's mother. A very diligent wife and mother, she got up every morning before anyone else, milked the female yaks, and then cooked breakfast. The rest of her day was filled with many chores, including

collecting yak dung, carrying water long distances to their tent, and putting young livestock in the livestock enclosure.

After breakfast one day, she suddenly thought it has been a long time since her husband had left for "business." But being busy with chores she couldn't remember exactly how long he had been gone. She asked, "Tshe ring, how many days has your father been away?"

"Today is the twenty-first day," Tshe ring replied with absolute assurance. He remembered it clearly because he was urgently hoping for his father's return.

His grandmother exclaimed, "Oh! Twenty-one days! That's not a short time. It's time for him to return. I hope he comes back safely and quickly." Then she continued chanting and turning the old prayer wheel.

Tshe ring went to herd the yaks as usual. He again climbed the mountain and gazed into the distance, wishing for his father's return. He thought, "Today is the twenty-first day. It is not a short time. Why hasn't he returned?"

At dusk, Tshe ring followed his livestock home. As usual, Tshe ring's mother prepared supper in the tent. He sat by his grandmother and asked her to tell a story.

Suddenly, the watchdog barked. Tshe ring's mother asked him to investigate. Tshe ring went out and looked in the direction of the barks. Something indistinct was on the side of West Mountain. It was too far to see clearly.

"Mother, there is something blurry at the foot of West Mountain!" he yelled.

His mother and grandmother came out together. Tshe ring pointed with his finger. Not able to see anything his grandmother asked Tshe ring, "Is it your father?"

"I can't see clearly. It's too far away," he answered, "but it's moving toward our tent."

His mother put one hand to her forehead and squinted.

They stood side by side near the tent, and watched the black spot hopefully. Several minutes later, as the black spot came nearer, they could see it was a man on a horse, but they could not identify him. The sun was now behind the mountain. It was quickly getting darker, and still they stood, waiting.

As the rider got closer, the watchdog barked more loudly and ferociously.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

o tho ཨ་ཐོ།
 rdo rje skyabs རོ་རྗེ་སྐྱམས།
 rdor b+ha རྡོར་བ་མ།
 stobs ldan ལྷོ་བས་ལྷན།
 tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།