CHAPTER 7

At the Nga-chen Power Station Construction Site

IN NOVEMBER 1959, our group of prisoners was loaded on a transport truck and taken to the prison at the Nga-chen power station building site. There I met up with my elder sister Losang Chönyi, who was in one of the women prisoner teams. As soon as we got down from the truck, she came with a thermos of hot salted tea. The weather was foul that day, and we had had nothing but hot water. The delicious taste of my loving sister's hot tea warming and reviving me is something I have not forgotten even now. To suddenly see the face of my sister, who could have been dead for all I knew, was of course a joy. Having arrived at that work site a few days earlier, she had seen for herself how rough and dangerous the work was, and she was full of concern that I would have to suffer such hardship and especially danger. Before we had any chance to tell each other in detail about what we had been through, I had to go and help set up the tents we were to live in. Afterward, the new arrivals were assembled for a meeting where the main leader of the prison, a military officer, spoke to us about what was to be done.

That Chinese officer was the one who had earlier been appointed by the central government as a bodyguard for Ka-lön Samdrup Po-trang. In a very lengthy speech, he told us that the old Tibetan society was extremely cruel, barbaric, dark, and backward, and the reactionary upper strata of the Tibetan local government had not voluntarily accepted reforms, so the heroic PLA had put down their revolt, and now the reconstruction of Tibet could begin. Since the generation of electric power was the foundation of that reconstruction, building the Nga-chen power station had a noble purpose and meaning. "You people not only exploited the masses for generation after generation," he said, "you are also guilty of opposing the state and

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the masses by participating in an uprising. However, in accordance with the correct policy of the Party, you will be dealt with in a humanitarian way by being given the opportunity to become new people through labor reform by working on projects such as this, which is something glorious. The other prisoners at this work site are quite different from you. Apart from some minor involvement in the uprising, they are not guilty of historical oppression, and they will watch you and scrutinize your behavior. If, instead of regretting and accounting for your past actions, you resist and show no enthusiasm for work, you will be strictly punished according to regulations." Having made this distinction, he called on the other prisoners to keep their eye on us.

Then senior and junior leaders (*bCu dpon*) were appointed among our group of 10. Sonam Targyé, the son of Rimshi Shölkhang, was the senior, and Shödrung Lhundrup Peljor of Chakri-shar was the junior. This was because Shölkhang-sé's elder brother Tubten Nyima was one of the famous revolutionary nobles in the Chinese camp, while Lhundrup Peljor had previously served in Ka-lön Sam-po's security retinue and was known to the Chinese officer. The construction site prison was located between the canal for the power station and the Kyi-chu river, and the prisoners' tents were arranged team by team. Some of them were worn-out military-style tents of quilted cotton, others were made of canvas, and in the middle of the encampment was a group of good-quality quilted cotton tents for the officials in charge. Of the five teams in that work camp prison, the first consisted of prisoners sent from Téring prison in Lhasa, the second was prisoners from the Norbu Lingka prison, the third consisted only of monks from Séra and Drépung, the fourth was those of us from the TMD prison plus a few latecomers from Téring, and the fifth was prisoners from Taktsé Dzong in the upper Kyi-chu valley who had been held temporarily at Ganden monastery. As there were a good 400 people in each team, there must have been over 2,000 of us, but the prison was known as Gya-shok number 7 (*brGya shog* = group of 100), because at the time when prisoners were organized in a large number of Gya-shoks, this was the site of number 7, and the name stayed in use. Instead of a boundary wall, there was a barbed-wire fence about 2 yards high around the perimeter, with a few stone-walled circular towers at intervals for the soldiers on guard duty. At that time there must have been tens of thousands of people working at Nga-chen, and it was under the nominal administration of the TMD authority.

We were given food four times a day, twice in our own camp, in the morning and evening, and twice at the work site. It was rice or wheat with

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some watery residue of boiled cabbage. At work, the eating periods were no longer than fifteen minutes, and latecomers would miss out. Near the eating place there was a big blackboard used for displaying big-character bulletins. No one who was imprisoned there then could have forgotten it, because the Chinese officials would use it sometimes for fearsome threats to make the prisoners work harder and sometimes for beguiling exhortations about the noble significance of building the New Tibet at Nga-chen power station. More spitefully still, they used that blackboard to record the scores in a thoroughly resented competition among the different teams to exceed their work quotas. Being obliged to record our scores there caused the greatest of difficulties for all the competitors. Among ourselves, my comrades and I called that notice board "the governor." On the way to work, we had to line up in team order and sing "revolutionary songs" in a loud and clear voice. The most common song at the time was "Socialism Is Great, Socialism Is Good!" and everyone, young and old, had to know it well. At the beginning of our meetings, the teams would have to compete in singing these songs. That was another kind of torment in addition to the labor.

The Gya-shok 7 prisoners were not sent to work at the same time but had to alternate day and night shifts. The morning I arrived, a group of night workers had just returned from their shift. They were dressed in worn-out army uniforms of quilted cotton covered with patches. Their faces were white with dust, most of their eyes were bloodshot from the dust, and they walked as if they were seventy or eighty years old. I remember wondering why only old people had been recruited for such rough work. But many among them behaved as if they recognized us and smiled, and it was only because of their changed appearance, with dusty faces and uniforms, that I did not know them at first. A moment later, when we went to the canteen together, I realized that most of them were young men, and those who had smiled were former acquaintances of mine. In the course of exchanging greetings, they told me to be very alert about safety, and asked me did I have a pad for my back? Were my shoes good? Did I have a strong pair of gloves? On reflection, I realized that this was their way of warning me that the work we had to do was extremely dangerous and hard, as it was not permitted for older prisoners to speak plainly about this with new arrivals. Those people had become so physically reduced in less than a year, and although I had been incarcerated in the imposingly named TMD prison, I had not been exposed to such hardship, so it was evident simply from our physical condition that we had just arrived and they had been there for some time. Before reaching that power station, I had been confident enough to think

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that wherever we were sent we would be given [the same] "corrective labor" (*Ngal rtsol sbyong brdar*), but on the very day of my arrival I was shaken by much of what I saw.

The best thing about the building site prison was that we were allowed to visit with our relatives once every two weeks. While I was in the TMD prison, we could only occasionally catch a glimpse of our relatives from a distance and almost never had the opportunity to actually meet and speak with them. So after getting to Nga-chen I became very conscious of the calendar, in order to keep track of the meeting days. On the Saturday night before the fortnightly meeting I could not sleep and spent the whole night wondering how it would feel when I saw my family, and since we would have no more than a few minutes, thinking what we would talk about in that time. When we got up on Sunday morning and went for our morning meal, peoples' families were already there, outside the perimeter fence, kindling fires in the icy morning wind to boil water for tea. I could see my sister Tendzin Dékyong and my younger brother Jam-pun among them. When we had finished eating, a prison official registered the relatives' names and they were called in turn. When our relatives' turn came, they read my name and the name of my eldest sister Losang Chönyi, calling us to meet them.

My brother and sister held our hands tightly, their eyes full of tears, and asked us with choking voices if we were all right. When I asked them about our mother and the other brothers and sisters, they replied that Mother was seriously ill and could not come to visit us, but had she not been so ill, she would have been put in prison long ago. "Because the two of you were arrested," they continued, "the contents of our house were declared state property, the door was sealed, and we inhabitants given just a minimal allowance of tea, *tsampa*, and clothing to last for a few days." After briefly explaining the situation, they said, "You two look after yourselves! We can come whenever we are allowed to see you." "Please keep taking good care of Mother," I said, but even before I could think of more to say, the meeting period was over and we were abruptly separated.

The prison officials had their day off on Sundays, and for the fortnightly Sunday visits they were there only in the morning, so the prisoners' relatives had to reach the gate of the prison early. That meant that they had to leave their homes in Lhasa in the middle of the night to make the four-hour walk and reach the prison gate at sunrise. Then, since it is the Tibetan custom that when you go to greet someone you pour hot tea for them, they had to kindle fires in the icy morning wind, and since there were no villages nearby where they might have bought firewood, they had to carry it

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on their backs all the way from home. When I thought carefully about the thousand difficulties our relatives willingly undertook to look after us in this way, it seemed to me that as long as I lived I should try to repay their kindness. Anyway, the night before each meeting, and for several days after, I could hardly sleep.

I arrived at the construction site prison just when the Chinese launched a campaign for all the workers to forge ahead, called "Fifty Days of Fierce Struggle." Besides spending 13 hours a day on the job, we had sundry "duties" to do when we got back to our camp, and including the meetings that we had to attend every evening, we worked 15 hours a day. The job given to the prisoners in Gya-shok 7 was to cut through the mountain spur known as the Nga-chen defile (*rNga chen 'phrang*) at the center of the site where the power station's turbines were to be installed. Of all the work sites in the construction area, this was the toughest and most dangerous, because we had to blast the mountain spur with dynamite and the rock shrapnel from the explosions caused a lot of damage. Worse, the blasts loosened the rocks on the mountainside so that even a strong gust of wind could cause a devastating rockfall. There was a group of prisoners from China setting the dynamite, and we had to remove the rubble left by their blasting. Since the place was extremely narrow and all the prisoners in the team could not fit in at one time, they were continually rotated, day and night, so that the work site was never empty. The work target for each member in a group of 10 was to remove 200 basketfuls of rock per day, with two members of the group filling the baskets, one digging the rubble with a pick, and the rest carrying. If you failed to meet this target once or twice, that would be enough for the group to investigate, but if it kept happening, you would have to face struggle at the team level.

I was just eighteen and had not been prepared for this kind of work at the TMD prison, so even with a maximum of effort the target was very hard to meet, and I received criticism and scolding at several nightly group meetings. Most of the older prisoners managed to meet the quota, and I assumed that this was due to their strength and training, but then I started to wonder whether there might not also be some technique. When I asked those I knew, they told me that if you managed to pick up the bigger stones, the basket would count for two [regular loads], and instead of just waiting in line for the team members to fill your basket, you should use that time to do it by your own effort. By thus taking the bigger rocks myself and doing my best to fill my own basket when the basket fillers were busy, I managed to meet the target. But we got wounds on our backs from carrying those big

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stones, and our fingertips split open after a single day of loading our own baskets with crushed rock. We were given new gloves once a week, and our families also brought them for us on visiting days, but they did not last even one day of continually loading broken rock. Just touching it with our raw fingers would make our very hearts tingle with pain, and the only way to heal the wounds on our backs was to stop carrying loads for a few months, or so the older prisoners said.

Under those conditions, it was hard to keep meeting the target, but since we had no choice, I had to trade the food brought to me by my family with the stronger prisoners in exchange for work points (*Thel rtse*), instead of eating it myself. The Chinese gave everyone tokens in various denominations of points, representing work completed, when we filled our baskets. The person with whom I traded most often was a former monk from Ganden Jangtsé who had an astoundingly plentiful supply of work points, even though he did not look strong enough to have earned them himself. He was extremely useful to me at the time, but I never dared ask him if he had really earned these in excess of the required quota. I met him again about eighteen years later, when he was working in one of the main granaries in Lhasa. He had been released not long after we worked together at the power station prison, gotten married, and had children. We reminisced about our time at the power station, and I asked him about the extra work points; he said that if he had really tried to meet that target day by day the strain would have killed him, but he had resorted to a couple of ways to acquire a surplus. One of them was to exchange the tokens for individual points with the bigger tokens of 20, 50, or 100 points, which could be done surreptitiously when the old people who gave out the tokens were dealing with a lot of people. At those times, they were too distracted to count, and we could tell them "Hurry up! Our time is being wasted!" throwing a wad of 50 small tokens into their lap and bluffing them that there were 100. "Another way was that when the markings on the tokens became unclear, we could double the numbers by cutting them in half and hand in as many as we could, making them smaller every day, while those with clear markings could be traded with people like you who were able to meet their relatives."

One day, during the time when I was having to trade all the food and clothing brought by my family, one of the old people who could not work and instead handed out tokens at the place where we dumped our loads of rock just handed the tokens to me without counting and put them in my shirt pocket, making me wonder what he was up to. When I got back to my tent in the evening after work and counted how many tokens I had

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received, to my amazement I found a 50-point token among them. When I thought carefully, I realized it could only have come from the old man, for I had not dumped enough baskets that day to earn it, and I could not help pondering what had made him give me extra. If the officials had gotten him to do it as a test and I were to use the extra points, all the targets I had genuinely achieved would be canceled, and I would undoubtedly have to face struggle at a big meeting. If the old man had given them for my benefit, it was a real boon. That night, I resolved not only not to use them but also, if asked, to make out that I had not met the target, to make sure that the officials had not put him up to it. If they had, I would still be able to deny that any such thing had happened. But even after I'd waited for a few days, no one checked.

Then I started to think that the old man must be a former acquaintance and really wanted to find out who he might be, but he was only occasionally on duty, and in any case he wore goggles, a cotton dust mask, and a woolen hat covering his face. He was a frail old man, his gown tied with a bulky belt, wearing felt shoes from China, who needed a walking stick to get around, but I did not get to see his face and didn't dare ask who he was. Thinking that he would take off his goggles and mask once he got back to his tent from work, I repeatedly passed by the tents of that team, but except when he went to the toilet, he was always inside the tent, and I couldn't find out who he was. Then, while talking with a former schoolmate of mine called Yéshé Tenpa who was in the same team, but without asking directly about the old man, I learned that among those handing out the tokens were Shölkhang Épa Yöndak-la and Reteng Rinpoché's father. Reteng Rinpoché's father was not known to me, but I had worked together several times with Épa Yöndak-la in the office of the palace secretariat, so I decided it must be him. But several days passed before I actually got to talk to him. One day, I suddenly bumped into him at the door of the toilet. He took hold of my hand and asked after my health: "Are you well? Isn't the work too tiring?"

"I am fine," I replied, "but I haven't done this kind of work before and it's hard. In time I will shape up," and asked in turn after his health.

"Basically, there's nothing wrong with me," he said, "but as I am one of the old and decrepit, I am not required to do labor but am one of those who distribute work points. With that opportunity I have been able to benefit my comrades a little bit, but I know that those activities will be discovered one day," bravely giving me the signal that he was passing out extra tokens. I thanked him and told him I would never forget his kindness, and moreover that he need not worry, for I would not say a word about it to others.

Although we didn't speak directly about the extra tokens, we understood each other, and after that, whenever I found him on duty, he would give me extra tokens. In total, he gave me about 500 points, so during that time I didn't have to worry about not meeting my quota, and I could use the provisions my family brought myself. Épa Yöndak-la had served as a secretary since his youth during the reign of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, and he was a great Tibetan who cared about his people and loved his comrades. His passing me extra tokens was not just an individual gesture but an act of resistance against the Chinese plot to break the spirit of the Tibetan people by enslaving them under the pretext of "Reform Through Labor." He looked after the welfare of our people and relieved the hardships of many others like me. Later, after my release, I was extremely sad to learn that he had died after being subjected to struggle in Drapchi prison.

Even though by using the extra tokens I was not in fear of failing to meet the quota, I could not sit idle, and could only catch the odd moment of rest on the night shift by pretending to go to the toilet. One had to squat, since if one sat back on the ground one would be seen by the officials who often came around to check that we were really relieving ourselves. Some of the nastier officials would bring lamps to check carefully. So if one could not go, one squatted above where someone else had been recently, and I managed to fall asleep in that position quite a few times.

Anyway, during that year of the uprising, when large numbers of people were arrested all over Tibet and imprisoned in different centers, of the six or so detention centers in the Lhasa area alone, the Nga-chen power station was the worst. The weather at the Nga-chen work site was much colder and windier than in Lhasa, and since our accommodation was miserable and we had to do difficult and very dangerous work for long hours, my hands and feet were blistered and my back was virtually covered in wounds. Under those conditions, many people of lesser endurance killed themselves in one way or another, by jumping in the river or throwing themselves off a cliff or under the wheels of a truck. At that time, a man I knew called Jampa Yönten told me that he could not stand the hardship anymore and was going to kill himself. I told him, "That will never do. Unlike us, you did not participate in the uprising; you were not employed by the government and are not one of the ruling class, so you can hope to be released soon," and said whatever else I could think of to stop him, but one day he jumped with a basket on his back off a cliff 100 steps in height, by the ravine where we deposited our loads of earth and rock. Strangely and amusingly enough, he was caught on a wire about 30 steps of the way down, and apart from some walnut-sized

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bruises on his head, he was unharmed, and some prisoners were able to rescue him. After that, he decided that he was not destined to die just yet. Later we were together in Drapchi prison.

The story of Jampa Yönten's imprisonment was amazingly ironic. Since he had once lived in Dartsé-do and knew a little Chinese, he started working in the Chinese supply office around 1953. During the uprising, after the assembly moved from the Norbu Lingka to the Shöl printery and registered volunteers to serve as security guards at the Norbu Lingka, he went to register of his own accord, but some people knew him as an official of the supply office and told the others that he was a Chinese spy, so he was immediately detained in the Shöl prison, which at that time was still under Tibetan control. After the uprising, when the Chinese released those held in our prisons, there was a Khampa in his cell who had been arrested during the fighting between the Chinese army and Khampa rebels in Nyémo and handed over to our side, and as the Chinese knew that he was a Khampa fighter they transferred them together, like both losing hold of the reins and getting dragged behind a galloping horse, to a Chinese prison.

As I mentioned, we prisoners of Gya-shok 7 were put to work cutting through the mountain spur where the turbines were to be installed. Every day, there were three scheduled series of blasts, with about sixty or seventy explosions each time, and it was necessary to keep count of the explosions to be sure that they had all gone off. Sometimes the person keeping count made mistakes, and before my arrival there had been a few instances when the workers had reassembled by the rubble, thinking the blasting had finished, and further explosions went off in their midst. By the time we started working there, the spur had been mostly blasted through, leaving a ravine. The workers were crowded into the middle, where even a strong gust of wind hitting the mountainside, which had been loosened by blasting, could bring down rockfalls from either side in which people were wounded or killed.

One of the worst incidents happened in the early morning, at about four o'clock. We had been working the night shift in that ravine, but luckily, once the rubble from the previous blasts had all been cleared, our team 4 was moved to another area to load rocks onto a truck. Then, since we could not see enough in the dark without lamps, we had to leave and return in daylight. After we got back to our tents and lay down to sleep, we heard a lot of shouting around the officials' tents and the truck that was used to transport the injured going back and forth through the night. I fell asleep wondering who might have been killed or wounded, and when I got up the

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next morning I found out that a great boulder had tumbled down where the prisoners from team 2 were at work. About seventeen people were injured, three of whom died on the spot. Among the injured was someone I knew, the husband (*Mag pa*) of the Néchung oracle's niece, who had served as a bursary official (*Shod phyag nang*), and Kundé-ling Ta-tsak Rinpoché's cook. They were all taken to the Lhasa People's Hospital. The next day, when we went to work at the site of the accident, it looked like a blood-stained battlefield. Several people had been trapped under the great boulder, and the members of team 2 told how during the hour or two it took to get them out, their screams from the pain of broken arms and legs and so on echoed terrifyingly around the ravine.

That day, all twenty-four of the ten-man units in team 4 were taken back to our encampment, where a meeting was held with the work site officials and team officials. They made a threatening announcement along these lines: "As you well know, some people have been grievously wounded, and in order to save their lives we need donations of compatible blood. Since you people are from the former exploiting class that lived exclusively on good food, your blood must be very rich and you must now make donations," and that night we were taken to the People's Hospital. When they tested our blood, mine was of no use. They drew the blood of three who had the right blood type, Sumdo Lekdrup Chödar, Losang Tenpa, one of the official physicians, and Késang Rabgyé of the Gonjo Chösur-tsang family, after which they were given about five days' rest. The rest of us went back to work at the ravine just as before. After that, they appointed someone to watch for the danger of rockfalls on either side, although in the event of a slide like the last one happening again, evacuation would be very difficult. During the two months I was in the work camp prison, that was the largest number of people injured in the ravine at one time, but every day a few people would be hit by falling rock.

Soon after, we were put onto the task of building the embankment wall of the reservoir. Sometimes we had to bring sand and pebbles from the river shore, and sometimes we had to dig and carry earth from the foot of the mountainside. The paths leading to both places were open, there was no need for any blasting, and by all appearances there was no danger. Yet, incredibly, one day a landslide came down the mountain and buried eleven people [working there]. They managed to pull two of them out, but the other nine were killed instantly. I still have a vivid memory of the scene.

After the rockfall in the ravine, each team had appointed a "safety officer," and in our team it was Tangpé Tséring, who spoke some Chinese and

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was in my canteen group. One morning, as soon as we arrived to dig and carry earth from the mountainside, he inspected the site for signs of danger and found that a crevice had opened above the excavated pit. This was considered dangerous, and at once a group of workers, with rope tied around their waists and using hammers and chisels, tried to force it open. But after working for half a day, they failed; the crevice had not widened at all. Then the team official and the Chinese foreman said that the crevice didn't seem to be dangerous, that since we hadn't been able to make it collapse when we tried, it shouldn't fall down by itself, and instead of wasting more time, we should carry on digging earth. At the time I was suffering from a cold and not feeling strong, so I took the job of pulling on a rope attached to the spade for digging and filling the baskets. The person digging was the former official physician and compulsory blood donor Losang Tenpa. Around four o'clock that afternoon, one of the earth carriers, Dondrup (a former servant at Shöl-shar), called out that a landslide was coming. I myself was still apprehensive after seeing the crevice that morning, and as soon as I felt a puff of wind like another person blowing on me, I started forward. When I had run a little way, I glanced back to see what seemed like the lower half of the mountainside collapsing and the group of workers being buried by the landslide. It had struck as soon as I had stepped away.

At once, everyone began calling out the names of their friends or canteen group members in confusion, but no one could really tell who had been buried under the landslide. Then we lined up in our groups of ten and were counted, so that it could be seen who was missing. Two people whose limbs stuck out were pulled out alive, but among the nine who lost their lives were my fellow digger, the physician Losang Tenpa-la, and the spade puller working at my side, a relative of Tsawa-rongpa A-ba. My elder sister Losang Chönyi was working with the women's team nearby, and as she knew I had been digging there, she assumed that I had been buried under the landslide, and she came calling my name and wailing fearfully with grief. I went to her and started to tell her I was unharmed, but in her panic, weeping and agitated, she didn't see me. Right away, our section had to line up and go back to camp. The two teams of night workers who were to extract the bodies from the rubble arrived in a state of terror. The "Lhasa volunteers" team (*lHa sa dang blangs ru khag*), who were not prisoners, and the "workers team" (*Las mi ru khag*), former prisoners who had been given work duty on the Nga-chen power station after their release, were not very far away, and because they well knew that a landslide had fallen on a brigade of prison laborers and caused heavy losses, the bad news spread through

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Lhasa that same night. Then the prisoners' families were filled with anxiety, and some of them walked through the night and arrived at the prison camp gate at dawn, trying to find out whether their relatives were still alive. My own elder sister Tendzin Dékyong came, and I made sure she could see me, still alive and unharmed.

Although one or two prisoners had been getting killed or injured almost every day, their deaths were not even considered as important as those of animals, but on that occasion the rumor that a large number of people had been killed in an accident was rife in Lhasa and nearby, without the central office at Nga-chen being able to do anything about it. Since those relatives had come, they made an announcement and then allowed them to meet their family members among the surviving prisoners as a special concession, since this was not the fortnightly prison meeting day, before they had to leave. The relatives of the dead prisoners were called to the officials' tent, where [the officials] told them that the dead had given their lives for the construction of New Socialist Tibet, which was glorious, and consoled them with smooth words, like saying that the bodies could be disposed of according to local custom or however the relatives wished, which was adding insult to injury.

The physician Losang Tenpa from our group of ten who had been killed was his mother's only son and had a close bond with her. When we had been in the TMD prison earlier in 1959, his mother had come almost every day to the main gate to see how her son was doing. Even after we got to Nga-chen, the tiring journey did not discourage her from coming often, and it went without saying that she would be there for every meeting day, so we said among ourselves that she would go mad with grief. When the bedding and effects of the deceased were handed over to their families, the leader (*bCu dpon*) of our group had to deliver Losang Tenpa's, and when he returned, we asked how she had reacted. We were amazed to hear that she didn't weep or even speak. Actually, his mother was in shock, and I heard that as a result she developed "water in the heart" [pericardial dropsy] and passed away soon after. Relatives of the other dead prisoners were similarly afflicted.

Then the Chinese said that the safety officer for our team, Tangpé Tséring, should take responsibility for the loss of life, and he was shackled and handcuffed and placed in a small room under close guard. All the teams in the so-called Gya-shok 7 camp were suspended from work for the next three days, and the Nga-chen central office sent a work team (*Las don ru khag*) to determine who had been responsible for the accident. An army officer in charge of that team questioned all of the assembled members of the twenty-four groups

in our team 4. He asked us who could give the clearest account, and since I had been assisting the digger who was killed, he told me, "If you saw the incident clearly you should speak up." Thereupon, I gave an honest and balanced account of the events of that day: how the safety officer Tangpé Tséring had seen a fissure, a group had been organized to try to force it open but failed after half a day's effort, how the official and the foreman had decided there was no danger, and finally how the event caught the workers unawares. The army officer asked me, "In your opinion, who should take responsibility for the loss of life?" I replied that our team's safety officer had only slight responsibility, since he had seen the signs of subsidence and reported it, and had he not done so, more people could have been affected, but chiefly responsible were those who had decided that the crevice was not dangerous. No one else among us came forward to speak.

At the end of the three days there was a big meeting where they read out the names of many people who had to speak about who should take responsibility for the landslide. The members of the other teams did not have firsthand knowledge of the incident and could not blame the official and the Chinese supervisor, and since they had been encouraged to look down on our group of "oppressors" since we first arrived at Nga-chen, some mindless people put all the blame on Tangpé Tséring. The last name called from the list of those who had to speak was my own. I had not been told anything about having to address the meeting and had not prepared myself at all. Moreover, I had never addressed a large meeting before, and what I had said in front of my group of ten directly contradicted what had already been said by members of other teams. I was shaking with fear and sweating profusely, but once one's name has been called, one has no choice but to speak, so I collected my thoughts and repeated what I had told the army officer in front of my group—that those who had decided there was no danger had the main responsibility, and the safety officer had only the lesser, unavoidable responsibility entailed by his position. Since I had contradicted the members of other teams and I was a member of the same canteen group as Tangpé Tséring, I thought that however one looked at it, the situation was not good, like both losing the reins and getting dragged behind [a galloping horse], but the meeting was reconvened [after the work team had discussed its decision], and the army officer in charge announced in conclusion that the Chinese supervisor should take full responsibility. He was clapped in irons and detained, and Tangpé Tséring was released. In reality, however, the higher officials had full responsibility because that Chinese supervisor, who had been appointed after being released from prison, had to follow

whatever they said and had no authority to make decisions of his own. But the officials made use of their power to shift their own responsibility onto that unfortunate Chinese man.

The story of that landslide became known throughout Tibet, and because of a few individuals from Lhasa who managed to escape to India at that time, my elder brother Yéshé Khédrup-la heard tell that I had been buried in the landslide while he was in India. I was among those departed souls for whom he requested lamas to make prayers right up to 1979, when Tibetans began to get permission to travel back and forth and he could confirm that I was still alive.

My greatest loss in the landslide was my padded cotton jacket, which was buried. Later, one of the people retrieving the corpses gave it back to me, but he took tokens worth about 200 points out of the top pocket. Since I would have had to explain how I'd gotten hold of so many extra tokens if there were an inquiry, I had to stay silent and suffer the loss. From then on, we carried sand and pebbles for the embankment from the river shore and quit bringing earth from the mountainside where the landslide had occurred. Sand and pebbles are the heaviest of building materials, I was weakened by a bad cold, and having lost my extra work points, I had to struggle to meet the targets.

For a few days, I'd had pain in my calf muscle. There was an elementary clinic at the construction site where they would treat visible wounds, but if you had an internal injury they would consider it a ruse to get off work, and instead of rest or treatment you would be given a scolding. So I decided not to go there, hoping it would get better, but on the contrary, the pain in my calf became so severe that I couldn't walk unassisted and had to hold on to the wall. There was another former official physician in my group of ten, Yönten Tarchin-la, who told me that I had dislocated the muscle (*Nyva log*). The cure for that, he said, was to take nutritious food and a long rest, the two rarest things of all in that prison. And many of the older people in the other groups told me remedies, such as eating the egg of a black hen, that I had no means to apply. Even worse than my own suffering from the pain was that my elder sister Losang Chönyi worried about me more than ever. She made inquiries with knowledgeable people about how to treat a dislocated calf muscle, but asking on someone else's behalf under prison conditions where talking to others is difficult, who knows if black hens' eggs was the right answer? Anyway, she managed to get hold of a few eggs and some butter, and gave them to me. But I didn't get any better. Unable to sleep at night and quite incapable of going to work during the day, I ap-

proached the section leader there called Chamdowa Lha-gyel and asked to be excused. He was one of a group of new officials who had come to work at the construction site. At first he was indecisive, saying that he had only arrived a few days before and was not familiar with the routine of the place, and that they could not decide in the case of sick leave but would have to ask what the regulation was. Then suddenly he said, "Without permission from the camp clinic, you cannot take leave!"

"The clinic only accepts patients with visible injuries," I said, "and even though I have actually dislocated a muscle and can't walk straight, they will not take me, as you well know. Please have some compassion and do something to help me out." I pleaded with him pathetically, sinking to my knees and resting my forehead against his leg. At that point my condition moved him. "Poor little Lhasa kid," he said, "let's see what the doctors say," and took me over there. Because he had been asked by an official, the doctor gave me a permit (*sPa se*) for two days' medical leave, and I got to spend two whole days in bed. But there was no improvement, and by this time, my calf muscle had slipped so far it was touching my shin. There was no way to ask the team leader for further leave, and just as I was wondering what I was going to do the next day, a group of policemen from the Lhasa Public Security Bureau came to the camp prison around six o'clock, and the prison authorities read out a list of names of people from our eastern neighborhood of Lhasa, announcing that they had to roll up their bedding and move to another place. Where that was, only the officials knew. Since I was left behind in bed, I did not yet know that my name had been called, and I waited hopefully for those whose names had been called earlier. After a moment, the section official Lha-gyel, with the air of bringing good news, told me to roll up my bedding at once. "Those whose names were called out are off to Lhasa now, they are all east Lhasa people," he said, confidentially explaining, "Your cases are to be decided by the deliberations of the masses." Now I was no longer his problem.

Luckily, my elder sister's name was called out together with ours. Right away, my fellow group members helped me to roll up my bedding, and by the time we left the camp prison the sun was well over the western horizon. My companions dumped me in the truck like a piece of luggage, and we headed in the direction of Lhasa.

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