As surely as sowing must come before the harvest, and as surely as a pebble thrown into a still pool creates ripples, cause and effect are forever related: the cause must precede the effect, just as the effect must follow a specific cause. As simple as this may seem, most people do not immediately understand it; instead, they spend most of their lives fighting hard, pretending that this law doesn’t apply to them. They will pray to a god, if that helps, or pretend to be a god, if that makes matters easier, instead of sitting down to close their eyes, introspect and acknowledge that, indeed, effect follows cause, and that rejecting this law leads to sorrow.

Once upon a time, in a roving settlement of felt tents in the grasslands of Tibet, lived a king blessed with a plentitude of cattle and sheep and horses, a kingdom full of pastures and gentle streams, a son and a daughter, and a queen. His name was Joro. His wife, Lhamo Tsendama, was his true treasure, for she caused his prosperity to grow through diligence and diplomacy. She established ritual friendships with the nomadic traders from south of the Himalayan mountains, and begged them to take the extra trouble of bringing her timber, so that she might build monasteries. Whenever she managed to bring the statue of Milarepa out from a cave high on the face of a cliff to the spacious and well-lit wood-
paneled halls of a monastery, nomads from as far away as four days’ ride would make a pilgrimage, bringing offerings to the monastery and commerce for the people of her husband’s kingdom. When Lhamo Tsedanma received Indian sages versed in the art of healing, the Gyeshe at the monastery obtained invaluable supplies of herbs from the Indian coasts, or even the island of Sri Lanka, and the ailing and infirm among her husband’s subjects benefited. She possessed soft words and grace, which she often had occasion to employ on behalf of her husband and young son, for they lacked these virtues.

Joro and his son Palden possessed the pride that is the particular mark of those who are born into divinely ordained kingship: their word was law, this they knew. They therefore keenly enforced their superiority over their subjects: the fattest sheep and the finest wool in the kingdom were demanded in tribute from all who toiled in Joro’s kingdom. Palden played at being a king and ordered his playmates to carry him on their shoulders. When a merchant arrived from Persia or Mongolia, Joro demanded that they beg for an audience in his stately tent and present him with turquoise and silk. But he didn’t share his wealth with his subjects.

Joro and Palden liked to ride their swift horses and chase and shoot deer and pheasants, while Lhamo Tsedanma taught her daughter Dolma the prayers to the Avalokiteshwor who offered wisdom and protection. With the wind sweeping through the manes of their horses and with their mastiffs running down stags, the men of the family felt their power ripple outwards through the world, subjugating and conquering everything within their dominion. But the women of the family felt their compassion radiate out to bring succor to the suffering of the people, and knew that they accumulated merit for themselves and for every sentient being in the universe. By the time the children had reached adolescence, Dolma’s prayer beads were worn smooth with the oil of devotion whereas Palden’s prayer beads hung around the forearm of his right hand, knocked coarse by mindless action.
On a morning dulled by grey clouds that covered the skies after the southern wind had been beaten back by the cold northern winds, Lhamo Tsendama felt fade. As she watched her husband laugh loudly with his men, the hair on his chin wet with chhang, and as she watched her son wrestle away the rib of a yak from his favorite dog while his playmates pretended to feast on dishes of dry grass, she understood that the men didn’t possess the virtues of kindness or the grace needed for serving others.

“Dolma,” she called to her daughter, who came and sat by her. Lhamo Tsendama took her daughter’s hand and said, ‘Yama, the lord of death, will come to take me to the underworld soon, but you will have a long life ahead of you. Make no mistake, daughter – it will be a life of hardship and trials, for suffering is the nature of the world, and only mindful action and constant compassion will deliver you from suffering. There is nothing I can do to mitigate the vagaries of the world, the miasma that is samsara, but I will give you this gift,’ she said, and handed Dolma a box made of tough ox-hide and tied shut with a leathern cord.

“Your father and your brother will require compassion from you: they do not have the inner eye to see the future results of their actions. Nor do they possess the eye that looks inward in introspection to identify the past causes of their present actions. I fear that they will treat you cruelly and with disdain. Forgive them. But, do not abandon yourself to suffering. When the peril is the greatest – and this you will recognize when the time comes – when you realize that your mortal life is in danger, open this box, read the letter inside, and do exactly as I ask you to.”

“Yes, mother,” Dolma said and quietly accepted the box, for she was obedient.

And, as the air turned colder, as snow first fell like a dusting of tsampa flour and then as heaps of lamb’s wool and then turned into hard stones of ice, the flame of life in the queen’s heart grew dimmer, and her breath turned short as the days turned shorter, until one night she quietly passed away, led by Yama’s servants through the gates of the afterworld. Dolma, who had been attentively praying by
her mother’s side, recognized the passing of the soul. She lit a lamp by her mother’s head and through the night recited mantras to the compassionate forms of the Avalokiteshwor.

Joro was astounded to find his wife dead, and Palden wailed like a child, for Lhamo Tsendama’s death had caught them unaware. Seeing that neither her father nor her brother had the fortitude of spirit to confront the death of her mother, Dolma went to the monastery and informed the Gyeshe, who made arrangements for the funeral. The men of the camp carried away Lhamo Tsendama’s body to the cremation grounds and consigned it to flames. From her tent across the frozen meadow Dolma watched the dark smoke from the pyre rise to the skies.

Dolma gave away her mother’s possessions to mendicants and minstrels who passed through the camp, and she fed the hungry so that they would offer prayers in her mother’s name. After fortynine days, when a portrait of her mother was offered up to a ritual fire to signify the final perishing of Lhamo Tsendama’s mortal form, Dolma set about keeping house for Joro and Palden as if her mother had never existed. From nothing Lhamo Tsendama had passed into nothing, and Dolma was certain that her mother’s noble virtues and accumulated merits would free her from rebirth into the lower orders, perhaps opening the path to rebirth as a highly realized man who would, over the next few births, pass forever into the great nothing. But the actions of her father and brother, who, although they had been born as men and into the light of the Buddha’s teachings, still neglected their duties towards all sentient beings, and towards their own consciousness, worried her.

A few days after the last of the snow had melted, Dolma heard heartrending squeals of pain mingled with laughter of bloodcurdling cruelty outside the tent. Palden’s dog was tossing about a gaunt marmot, its hindquarters mangled, but the life in it still strong. Perhaps it had strayed out of its burrow after the winter, weak from the hibernation, and had been set upon by Palden’s mastiff. Each
squeal of terror made Palden laugh, which encouraged the dog to toss the poor rodent about to elicit more laughter from Palden.

Dolma was transfixed with horror: compassion melded her mind with that of the marmot, and she experienced its pain and fear, along with its strong desire to live. Many moments had passed before she could move to intercede on behalf of the marmot. Joro had emerged from another tent. “What is this noise?” he bellowed, took a brief look, clipped Palden on the side of his head, kicked the dog in the rib and stomped the marmot on its head.

“No!” Dolma screamed, but knew immediately that the marmot had died.

“Did you want the rat to scream more? Did you want it to live in pain?” Joro turned his angry eyes to her.

“No,” she said, eyes downcast to hide the hot tears. “It could have lived.”

“It is a rat. Dogs kill rats,” Joro said, and returned to the tent from where he had emerged.

A few days later, Dolma found Palden alone. “Brother,” she said haltingly, “the dog, the yak, the rat, the men and their horses – they are all the same.” She had given this speech great thought and carefully chosen the words, for she knew these would be the first words he would hear of the path towards compassion, the path that leads away from suffering. But Palden laughed.

“Are you the old Gyeshe at the monastery?” he shrieked with laughter. When the noise made one of his lackeys peep into the tent, Palden repeated Dolma’s words in a high, mocking pitch, making it preachy and singsong. Palden’s friend joined in the mocking.

“The worm and the bird are the same,” one said.

“The mud and the dung are the same,” another said.

Yes, they are, Dolma wanted to say triumphantly, but that was not in her nature. Instead, she turned away from them and found refuge in the corner where her mother used to pray, and where she had given up her spirit.

Over the next month, Joro’s attitude towards her turned from negligence to disdain to something akin to barely suppressed hatred.
As if she had deeply offended him by showing concern for the mangled marmot, he now sought every opportunity to force her into situations of cruelty and degradation: he put her in charge of the hunting dogs.

“Palden, you will learn the son’s trade: you’ll study the horses in our possession, for they are true wealth. Dolma, you will care for the dogs.” Joro intended his son to grow up to be a great king and owner of a prosperous stable, so he taught Palden how to recognize strength and stamina in a horse. He would prop Palden before him on the saddle of his horse, so that he might learn to ride the steed, and chase the other horses through the meadows as he exercised them. Dolma was plopped behind Joro on the same horse, learning to command and bring to heel the mastiffs that ran after their quarry.

But the dogs had eaten from Palden’s hands since they were pups, blind balls of fur and teeth. Palden knew everything about them, as he liked to boast to Dolma, and he relished the opportunity to show how he knew more about the task given to her. Also, it was in his heart to hunt and kill, skin and roast, eat and belch out the flesh of birds and animals. He became more animated each time the ferocious mastiffs stretched their necks and shot through the grass of the meadows. Dolma, on the other hand, could barely see the dogs, since she had to close her eyes tightly and cling to her father’s back as the horses galloped through the grass. She learned to become one with the horse, to feel the dirt and grass through the horse’s shod hooves, to register the tremors of hesitation or excitement in the horse’s muscles and sinews when it prepared to leap over a brook or bank around an insurmountable obstacle. The horse was of the wind, while the dogs were of the earth, and Dolma learned to fly with the horse.

And that was no accident, for her father’s horse was capable of flying; just as it was capable of understanding the suffering of the people around it. Gyadong Syabu, the treasure of the kingdom, and the pride and joy of Joro, could fly into the skies and over the mountain, not merely as metaphor, but in substance and body. Similarly, Senya Chumo, the second best prize in the stable, was like a golden fish in the ocean, for it could glide through the grass of the...
meadows and over the rocks and snow of the mountains, and turn in a flick to face the direction whence it had come, just like a nimble fish in the ocean.

On the day when the sun took the longest to journey across the skies, and the shortest night was set aside for bonfires and feasting, Joro took Palden and Dolma on a hunt and quizzed them about horses and dogs. While Dolma did not surprise her father with the meager amount she knew about dogs, he was dismayed to know how little Palden knew about horses.

“Son,” Joro said, “We are nothing without our horses, for they are the source of our wealth and power. If you can’t learn about the horses in your herd, how will you learn to understand your lieutenants, your allies and your enemies? How will you be king?”

Dolma saw the distress on her brother’s face and out of compassion whispered answers to him. When Joro saw this, he was alarmed. “Does your sister know more about horses than you do?” he asked in disbelief.

“How does it matter?” Palden answered with irritation. “I knew all the answers to your questions about the dogs, just like she knows about the horses!”

“She is a girl,” Joro muttered. “I am not disappointed that she doesn’t know about dogs. But you...” he said, but he didn’t finish his sentence. Instead, he quietly turned around, and without waiting for his son or his daughter, Joro walked his horse back towards camp.

Dolma watched as Joro became more and more restless, sometimes asking for *chhang* even before Dolma had finished her morning prayers. He would stare at her with undisguised hatred and mutter under his breath. One day, late in the night, as she lay in bed, she heard her father growl, “I’ll kill her if I have to, but my kingdom will not pass to a woman. I’ll be mocked by all kings and princes of the world if they learn that my son is unworthy.”

Dolma now understood the extent of her father’s pride, and the utter absence in his heart of any light of compassion or humility. A
man so engrossed with his picture of himself as a man of strength that he would resent his daughter the knowledge of horses! What might she have possibly done in her past lives that she should be born a daughter, only to be murdered by her own father? She wept silent tears, decided to pray for safety through the night and, oppressed by gloom, resigned herself to her fate. She didn’t indulge in the selfish act of counting the merits of her karma to find a way of explaining her present predicament. What shall come shall come, she thought: I can only be righteous in my actions; I cannot be responsible for the thoughts and actions of others.

Yet, the next morning, when her father left on yet another hunt, seating Palden behind him on the horse, Dolma sought out the box made of ox-hide. Inside were a pendant of silver and a letter in her mother’s hand.

“Go to the kingdom of Lo, to the south. There, present this pendant to the king, for it once belonged to his house, and was given to me as a token of respect. Lose not a moment, daughter – make haste. Take with you the flying stallion Gyadong Syabu, for he is the fastest, and not even the second treasure of your father’s stable, the mare Senya Chumo, who can outrun the wind, can catch him.”

Dolma was too afraid to be seen flying through the skies in the day, so she waited for the night. In the night, when she stole to the stable with nothing but the ox-hide box and a handful of tsampa, she hesitated to steal Gyadong Syabu: after all, the flying stallion was her father’s favorite horse. The loss of the flying horse would cause immense anger and grief in Joro’s heart, and his anger and grief would amplify upon learning that his daughter had stolen his beloved steed. Dolma, through her compassion, felt just a fraction of Joro’s emotions of disappointment, loss and anger. She turned away from Gyadong Syabu and defied her mother’s wish. She felt a barb of regret for disobeying her mother, but she put away that feeling, like an oyster does a grain of sand, or a wound does the sting of a thorn, not knowing what fruit it would bear far into the future.

She said to herself – “Flying through the skies could bring me face to face with the siddhas and dakinis, those who traverse the skies on their magical tasks. What if they take my flight as an insult and
punish me for my hubris?” And, so, Dolma took the mare Senya Chuma and rode towards the kingdom of Lo.

The next day, as she was resting the mare in the shade of a large rock in the desert plateau between the meadows of her father’s kingdom and the fertile lands of Lo, an old man in a long, worn robe approached her. “Where do you go, daughter?” he asked.

“To the kingdom of Lo, old father,” Dolma replied. The old man regarded the mare and smiled at Dolma.

“I have water to share if you are thirsty,” the old man offered. Dolma accepted the water with gratitude, but she shared it with her mare before wetting her own lips.

“Why do you go to the kingdom of Lo?” the old man asked. Dolma’s eyes welled up with tears, but she didn’t want to speak ill of her father. “My fate takes me there, old father,” she said.

Dolma offered the old man half of her tsampa and watched him eat it. When he had finished, she made the rest of the tsampa into a ball, divided it into halves, and gave one portion to her mare.

“Ah, daughter!” The old man scratched his head. “You show compassion, yes, but daughter, she is a mare. She will happily eat grass when she reaches the valley.” Dolma then laughed, because her stomach did growl with hunger still.

The old man and the young princess traveled towards Lo. Sometimes the princess rode on Senya Chuma, and sometimes she dismounted to beg the old man to rest his feet astride the mare, and sometimes they led the mare as they walked. This they did not merely out of compassion for the mare, but also because there was joy in conversing, and telling each other stories about their lives and the sights they had seen along the road.

“My mother asked me to visit the king of Lo, old father,” Dolma told her fellow traveler after they had exchanged enough stories to build trust.
When they reached the gates of the walled city of Lo Manthang, the old man bid Dolma to stay outside the city. “But, do give me your mother’s pendant,” the old man smiled.

Soon, a young man came running out of the gates, and begged Dolma to ride the mare while he led them into the city, his hand on the bridle, until they reached the house of the Gyalpo, the king of Lo. The old man, still in his robes, sat to the right of the king’s throne, on a chair piled high with yak pelts and sheep skin.

“Bring her to me, my son,” the king commanded in a kind voice.

“Yes, father,” said the young man by Dolma’s side, and with a sweep of his arm, begged her to approach his father, the king.

“Your fate and mine met on the road, didn’t they?” the old man said with a chuckle as she approached the king of Lo. “Nephew,” he addressed the king, “This young woman is the treasure born to the wise and pious Lhamo Tsedanma, wife of Joro, to whom our house had sent this pendant as a token of our esteem. It is true that I failed in my embassy to the kingdom of Amdo to return with the princess betrothed to your son. But, instead of a lotus from the gardens of a mansion, I have brought you a blue poppy of the vales. Instead of a painted doll swathed in silks, I have found a compassionate heart and boundless virtue.”

Dolma slowly understood what was happening, and with astonished eyes looked at the king, the old man and the young prince by her side. The prince smiled back kindly; there was no spark of mischief in his eyes, but they pooled deep with a constant light of compassion. Dolma saw that she had been delivered into a new family that welcomed her. She would respect and love her father as long as she lived, but this would be her new home and family to which she would forever be devoted.

She bowed with gratitude and prayed to the *siddhas* and Avalokiteshwor to bless every sentient being in the universe.

Many years passed. Joro tried to forget his losses – a daughter who would have made a good bargain as a bride for a merchant or a prince, along with the jewels of his possession, his miraculous horses.
Years of increasing poverty had forced him to part with the flying horse. Joro had entrusted the money from the sale of the horse to Dorje, a nephew, who then bought a large herd of horses and trained them to be sold to warring kings in India. Palden and Dorje had crossed the mountains to the south to sell the horses. But when they returned, Palden had brought Dorje home bound in ropes. Refusing to believe Dorje’s protests that he was innocent, Joro had his nephew’s eyes put out with hot needles for stealing the money earned from the sale of his herd. When Dorje shouted, rolling in the dust outside Joro’s tent, that someone in the king’s caravan had stolen the money, and that he was innocent, Joro had the blind man’s tongue cut out for his lies.

Joro treated his other subjects no better, and Palden learned no better from Joro than to bully and exploit. His subjects began pitching their tents farther and farther away from the large tent of their king, until, one winter night when Joro came out of his tent, desiring more beer with which to warm himself, he could barely make the outline of the nearest tent, pitched a hundred yards away, and with a blizzard raging in between.

“Fetch me a bowl of beer,” he growled at Palden.

“Do it yourself,” the prince muttered as he turned around on his pile of sheepskin and went back to sleep.

Joro kicked Palden. “I am your father! Is this how you show obedience?”

Palden reluctantly got out of bed, grumbled under his breath as he swaddled himself in a coat of fur, braced against the cold and went into the blizzard. When he returned an hour later, most of the beer had spilled or frozen into slush. Joro glowered at Palden, but the prince laughed derisively and said – “Are you the only one who feels the cold?”

As Palden lay snoring drunkenly in his corner, Joro thought of his tent, his grasslands and his kingdom. When merchants came from the south or the west, they rarely stopped with him for the night anymore. Instead, they quickly paid their respect in reluctant bows and tribute in goods of inferior quality, and journeyed with their
caravan to the edge of his kingdom. Although his subjects grazed their sheep and yaks on the greenest and sweetest grass of his kingdom, the cattle he received as tribute rarely had a shiny coat or fat thighs. The tent was always dim, even in noon when the sun glimmered fiercely outside. A pall lay over everything that he touched.

Joro closed his eyes and tried to find the signposts along the path of life that had brought him to a place where he found no love or respect, but only barely concealed contempt and fear. He remembered the manner in which he had treated his daughter, and realized that she had run away because of his own conduct. He remembered the insolence Palden showed him. Doesn’t the tree show what seed it came from? Joro had never taught his son kindness and grace: he had only taught him strength of arm and roughness of voice. Joro thought of his wealth and influence: he had scared away his kinsmen by forcibly taking from them without ever giving them anything in return, so that when his people fell away from him, just as birds flee a blazing tree, he had been left with nothing. The monks at the monasteries built by his wife no longer invited him to the many ceremonies to which people flocked from miles around because he had once tried to strong-arm them into paying him a tithe instead of offering them his share of wool and sheep. As he lay there in the dark, Joro saw that every misfortune that smothered the peace of his mind now had its origin in an act of unkindness or a hurtful remark. For the first time in his life, in the autumn of the breaths left to his name, tears of remorse wet Joro’s cheeks until he fell into a sweaty, uneasy sleep.

“Father!” Palden awoke him the next day. Joro sat up with bitterness clinging to his tongue, his breath foul even to himself. A merchant stood by the entrance, cap in hand, confusedly studying the tent.

“Am I in the right home?” the merchant asked. “Am I before our king?”

Joro waved him towards a low table by the stove gone cold in the middle of the tent. The merchant took out a sack of hulled rice, a
bundle of incense sticks, silver coins from the valley of Nepal, which was now the currency at Lhasa, and a small lump of deer-musk. He bowed deep and started walking backwards towards the mouth of the tent.

“Wait,” Joro said. “Sit.”

The merchant looked at the lackluster surroundings.

“Where do you come from, friend?” Joro asked as politely as he could.

“From Leh, south of the Shang Shung,” the merchant replied. A curious smile spread on Joro’s face. He walked to the merchant and held him by the arm and sat him down.

“Son,” Joro said to Palden, “Go to Dorje’s and ask his wife to come here. Without a woman’s graces in the house, hospitality is incomplete.”

Dorje’s wife arrived with dried *jmibu* grass, the rare pods of red chili, flakes of sun-dried yak meat and anything else her neighbors could afford to share to welcome their king’s guest. Palden watched the sudden turn in his father’s behavior until, his belly filled with warm food and beer, the merchant boasted of his kingdom’s splendors and his king’s riches. After drinking some more, he raised his arms and made swooshing sounds, as if flying, and then neighed and snorted like a horse.

“It is a splendid horse, but it keeps trying to fly back to where it came from,” the merchant said with a twinkle in his eyes. “Do you know where my king bought it?”

Joro smiled broadly and slapped the merchant’s back and roared with laughter. Palden also laughed.

“It is your horse!” the merchant pointed to Joro and giggled.

“My horse,” Joro laughed. “My flying horse!”

A scheme had suggested itself to Joro’s mind, and, for the first time in his life, he was putting aside his pride in order to plot, scheme, deceive and trick someone. One aspect of evil had shielded itself from him while another aspect now befriended him and whispered
into his ears. Was it really stealing if he could affect the theft without once setting foot into the house of the owner of the goods? Was it collusion if his partner in crime knew nothing of what he was doing, and why?

The day came for the merchant to leave for his home. Joro bowed before him and said, “Sir – have we not become the best of friends over the past week?”

The merchant blushed at being addressed so intimately by a king, albeit a poor king in a shabby tent. When Joro took his hand, the merchant began nodding vigorously in agreement.

“Have you not made me happy, my friend, by sharing my hospitality?” Joro asked again, and the merchant stuttered in agreement, “Yes, my king, yes! The honor has been immense.”

“You will go home and brag to your wife about sharing a table with us!” Palden joined in on the ribbing. The merchant beamed brightly.

“I beg you this small favor, my friend,” Joro said as he took off a boot and pulled out the insole. “Take this to your king’s stables and burn it in a place where my beloved Gyadong Syabu lives now. When I had to sell him to your king, a piece of my heart withered and died. I am sure my horse grieves for me, too. If he smells the odor of the insole of my boot he will remember the fond hours we spent together, roaming through the grassland and climbing to the night sky. It will bring him solace to know that I still remember him, and it will bring me solace to know that he will embrace me once more, through the joy in his heart, over these vast distances that separate us.”

The merchant was overcome with sorrow for Joro and the horse, and immediately agreed to do as instructed. He took his leave and headed homewards.

“A day will come when I will need your help, Palden,” Joro said to his son. “You will do exactly as I ask you to, and our fortunes will turn for the better.”

And so the father and son waited for the day when the merchant would reach Leh, steal into the king’s stables and burn Joro’s insole at
a spot where Gyadong Syabu could smell it. The scent would be the magical signal to put the horse into a frenzy; it would break all chains and fly into the skies and race swiftly over meadows and valleys, rivers and mountains to alight outside the tent. Joro’s wealth would return after years of want and penury!

Joro would close his eyes through the long autumn afternoons and imagine the path to Leh, just where the merchant would rest for the night, or just when he would approach a village late in the evening. Joro counted the days on his fingers, then with knots of grass outside his tent, then with scratches into the tent-pole nearest to his bed. He forgot the taste of food and the comfort of his bed because the constant coveting of the mere possibility of wealth grew too big inside him and made him restless. Until one evening, he suddenly sat up in his bed and shouted.

“Palden!” he said, “prepare for Gyadong Syabu’s return!”

“From where?” Palden asked. “It has been many years since we sold him. Why would he return to us now?”

“You don’t know of the scheme I have effected, and you don’t know of the magical bond I have with the horse. Just do exactly as I say, and we shall have our wealth return to us.” Joro told Palden to find a wide clearing with soft soil underfoot and burn a bright line of torches to guide the horse safely to the ground. “Go now!” Joro shouted, “And do exactly as I have said. When the horse approaches the torches, it will neigh loudly. You must shout out his name at that exact moment, so that he knows he is awaited. If you fail to do this, all will be lost!”

There always comes a moment in a story, just as in the pages of our lives, when events shape up in defiance of our expectations; these are either moments of unexpected joy, or of undeserved violence and grief. When they happen in our lives, such accidents make us wail in grief and disbelief and ask the skies – “Why?” The mind searches for reasons why something should have occurred in the manner it did; then it fantasizes about all other possible alternatives. Then it seeks to lay blame on anybody or anything at all, and, if nothing surfaces,
it tries to make sense of the strange thing called coincidence. The mind resists seeing it for what it truly is: the inevitable result of a past action. It resists giving credence to the inevitable bond between a moment and the next: an action and its consequence. The mind tries to live in fantasies of how an event would have turned out if, at the most crucial juncture, an event or intention or word or action had been ever so slightly different; it desperately invents fantasies of alternate futures. The mind bathes in the kaleidoscopic pictures of fictional pasts and fictional futures, while stubbornly refusing to see the plain, unadorned nature of everything that unfolds in the present.

What happened next wouldn’t have come to pass if Dolma had obeyed her mother and escaped with Gyadong Syabu. It certainly wouldn’t have happened if greed hadn’t entered Joro’s heart, or if Palden had obeyed his father. But, these three actions were already in the tomb of the past, and in the womb of the future the consequences were sliding towards the moment when they would become actions in the world, the echo in the *samsara* of past deeds.

Palden found a wide, soft clearing, but he didn’t bother to light the torches. A magical flying horse should have enough sense not to fall to the ground. What is a torch to a fantastical beast that can fly over fortresses of snow and rock, high in the southern skies? When Gyadong Syabu approached the meadow near his former master’s dwelling, he saw no beacon to guide him. Palden didn’t see the horse rapidly approach him against the dark sky, and therefore didn’t call out Gyadong Syabu by his name, which was itself the magic and talisman, and thereby caused the horse to slam headfirst into the ground, break the bones in his neck, and instantly die.

There is a story, repeated over the ages in many books, about two birds sitting on the branches of a fruit tree. One bird feels hunger and thirst; it feels also the sweetness of ripe fruits and the bitterness of the unripe. So it pecks at the fruits, titters in delight when the flesh is juicy and sweet, and screeches in dismay when it is raw and bitter. The other bird doesn’t feel hunger or thirst; it feels no need for the
sweet or bitter tastes of the fruit. It merely witnesses the first bird, for it is the first bird, snared inextricably in the senses, and it is also the second bird, aloof from the material world. It is aware of its separation from the world of sensations and desires. The first bird doesn’t know that it also exists as the second, on a different and higher branch of the same fruit tree. And, so, the first bird thrashes about in briefest agony or joy, never once looking up to watch the serenity and majesty of the second.

When Joro was brought news of his horse’s death, Joro suddenly understood what had happened: he had murdered Gyadong Syabu! His greed had called the horse over the mountains. His conduct towards Palden had made the young man disobedient and insolent, lacking in industry but brimming with arrogance. There was no such thing as a coincidence: no effect arises without a precedent cause. Just as joy is a consequence of a past action, so is grief a consequence; and all are ripples on the mirrored surface of the great lake of Time.

A bird flew out from Joro’s body and climbed to the top of his tent and watched down, detached from this world of words and signs, attachments and desires, the incessant deluge of consequence after consequence that tumbled forth from all the nodes and moments in the past, incessantly being devoured by a million different possible futures. It watched itself, Joro, as the old king went blind in a flash of comprehension, for the sudden confrontation with the light that separates this world from its eternal and unblemished second self is too terrible to behold.