



THE TULPA

A
HORROR
TALE
BY
I.A.
WATSON

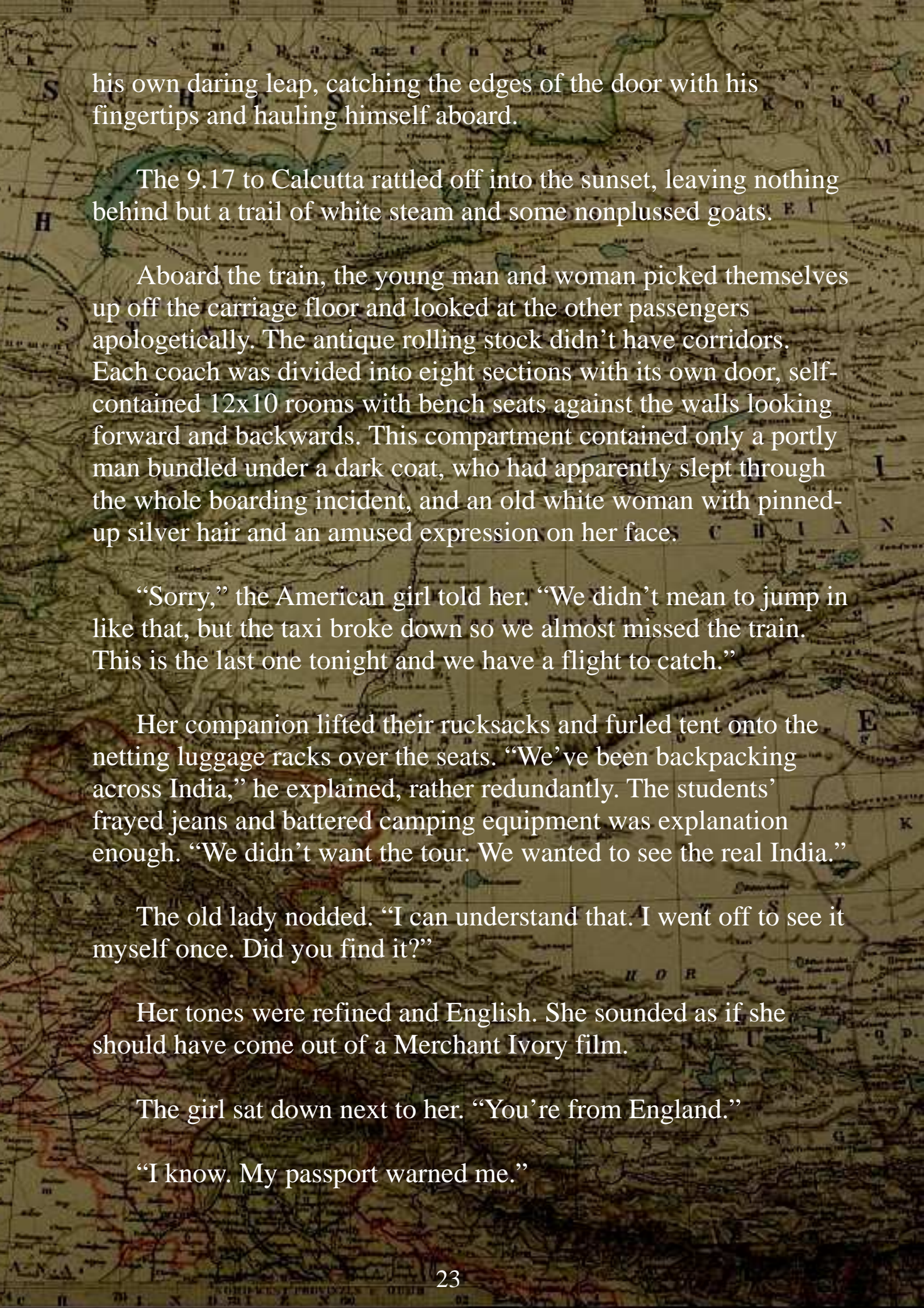
“Calcutta! Last call for Calcutta!”

The station-master waved a green flag. The old-fashioned steam train jerked into motion and began to pull away from the rural halt. The whistle blew to chase a pair of goats off the branch railway’s single line.

As six wooden coaches and two goods wagons were hauled into motion a pair of Westerners dodged their way through the cluster of local travellers who’d disembarked. They ignored the shouted warning of the platform manager and raced alongside the moving train.

The young male grabbed hold of the door handle of the rearmost carriage’s last compartment. He yanked it open and hurled his rucksack onto the train, then reached back to grab the girl travelling with him and haul her after his luggage. As the train picked up speed and the end of the platform approached he made





his own daring leap, catching the edges of the door with his fingertips and hauling himself aboard.

The 9.17 to Calcutta rattled off into the sunset, leaving nothing behind but a trail of white steam and some nonplussed goats.

Aboard the train, the young man and woman picked themselves up off the carriage floor and looked at the other passengers apologetically. The antique rolling stock didn't have corridors. Each coach was divided into eight sections with its own door, self-contained 12x10 rooms with bench seats against the walls looking forward and backwards. This compartment contained only a portly man bundled under a dark coat, who had apparently slept through the whole boarding incident, and an old white woman with pinned-up silver hair and an amused expression on her face.

"Sorry," the American girl told her. "We didn't mean to jump in like that, but the taxi broke down so we almost missed the train. This is the last one tonight and we have a flight to catch."

Her companion lifted their rucksacks and furled tent onto the netting luggage racks over the seats. "We've been backpacking across India," he explained, rather redundantly. The students' frayed jeans and battered camping equipment was explanation enough. "We didn't want the tour. We wanted to see the real India."

The old lady nodded. "I can understand that. I went off to see it myself once. Did you find it?"

Her tones were refined and English. She sounded as if she should have come out of a Merchant Ivory film.

The girl sat down next to her. "You're from England."

"I know. My passport warned me."

The young man grinned. "I'm Tom. Tom Denning, of Oakapple, Nebraska. This is Katie Plummer of Kentucky. My girlfriend."

"Not if you'd missed us on this train, Tom Denning," the girl warned; but she grinned as she spoke. Then she sobered up as a thought occurred to her. "This isn't a private carriage, is it? I mean, we don't have first-class tickets."

"It doesn't matter," the Englishwoman assured them. "I'm glad of the company. When we stop at the next station and the guard comes round just slip him a few rupees and it'll be fine."

Tom nodded. Three weeks in India had taught him how the local economy worked.



"I'm Elizabeth Carshalton," the old lady introduced herself. "And it is many years since I jumped aboard a moving train."

"But you did?" Katie wondered.

The senior had a twinkle in her eye. "I was young once - about the time this rolling stock was new. My husband and I came here for an adventure. We too wanted to see the real India. And the real Tibet."

“You got into Tibet?” Tom had wanted to try and get that far, but the border regulations were murder and the red tape for a visa was damn near impossible to untangle.

“Back in ’32, it would be. Long before the present unpleasantness with the Chinese. Back in the days of the Simla accord.”

“I imagine it’s all changed since then,” Katie reflected. “When I think of Tibet I think of little temples clinging to mountainsides, and cattle-bells, and prayer-bowls and... I don’t know... yetis! But it’s probably shopping malls and McDonalds now like everywhere else.”

“Well, Charles and I saw the little temples and we heard plenty of those cattle bells and prayer bowls, but we only saw the Yeti the one time,” Mrs Carshalton replied.

“The yeti. Right!” Tom assumed she was joking.

The old lady remained quite serious. “Oh, we saw him, as clearly as I see you now. Clearer, in fact, since I didn’t need spectacles in those days. But we only saw him for a short while, no more than a minute. He was not the most terrible thing we saw while we were in the Himalayas.”

“You didn’t really see it,” Katie checked. “You’re just spinning us a traveller’s tale, to pass the journey.”

Elisabeth Carshalton smiled faintly. “Would you like to hear what happened when Charles and I went to Renqing Xiubuchu? It’s some while since I recounted the story... but I think it’s time.”

Tom and Katie exchanged looks. “Sure, why not?” Tom shrugged. After all, they’d invaded the old lady’s carriage. The



least they could do was listen to her reminisce.

“Very well,” she told them. “This is how it happened...”

“The last half-decent road – that is a road any motor vehicle can traverse, takes travellers as far as Hui’erbaxiang. Or at least it did in the 30s. From there one hires mules and guides to follow the passes up to Jilaxiang, which is a quiet little place that specialises in cheeses. Another twenty-five miles straight, which is three days travel in that country because it’s fifty miles through the mountain crevices plus what feels like another ten up and down, takes you to Palong Lake.

Most people stop there. It’s got some good fishing and some excellent views and you can say you’ve really been somewhere few other people have ever got. But Charles had heard about a tiny monastery another fifteen miles north, beyond a village called Renduoxiang, where the priests make special incense candles that burn with coloured flames. He wanted to buy some to take back home as gifts. So we pushed on.

The great danger that high up is the weather. Even in the summer season a sudden squall can drop two feet of snow. We were half a day off Renduoxiang when the snow started drifting down. Within two hours it was a blizzard. Our guides were as worried as we were. The passes close up fast in those kinds of conditions.

We lost the trail. But before the weather turned we’d seen the waters of Renqing Xiubuchuo, the wide basin lake that the village sits beside, so we struck out in that direction.

I can’t tell you how cold we got, trudging in that white-out, or how numb my fingers and toes got. After a while it becomes –

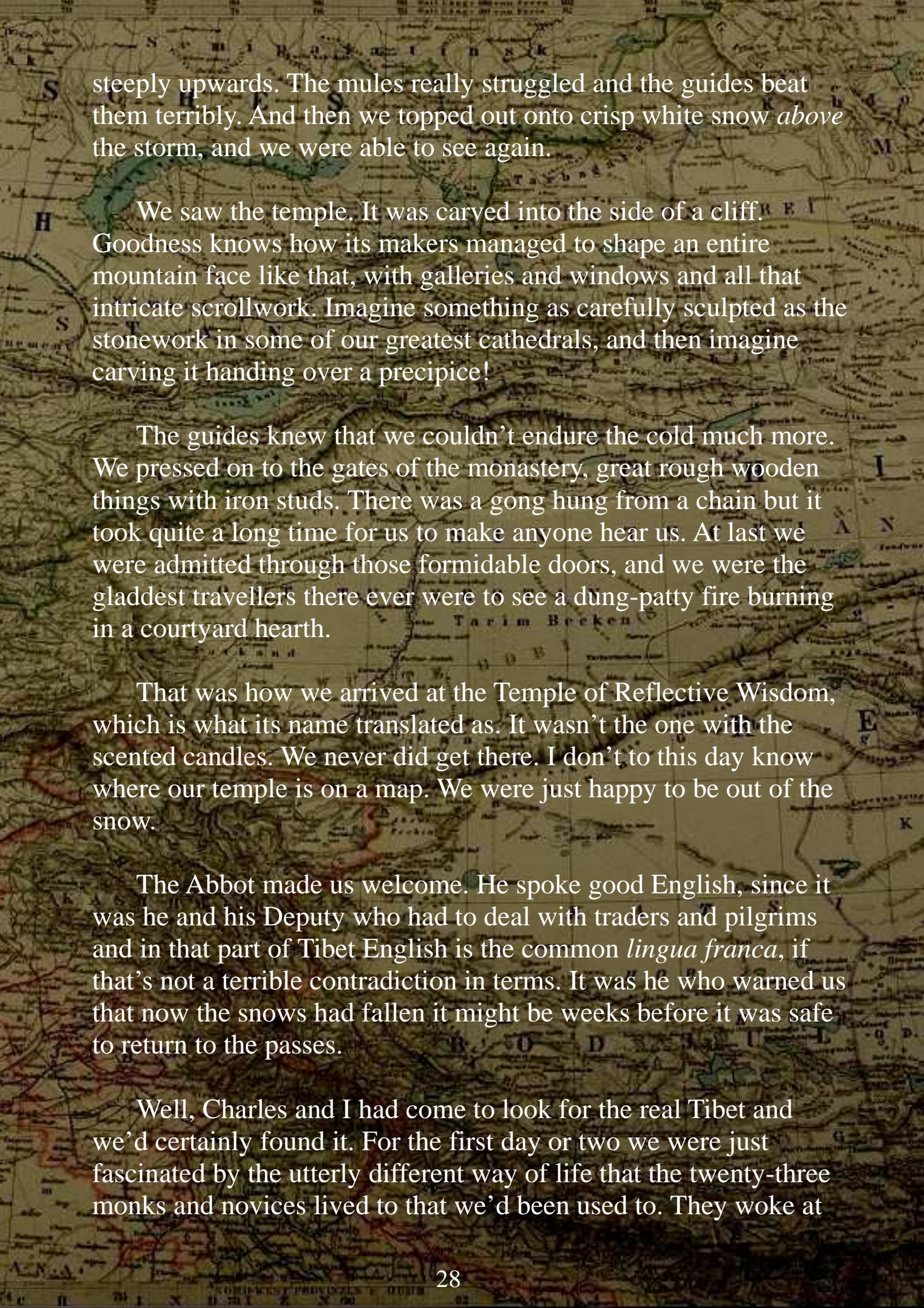


what's the term they have now for it? – It's sensory deprivation, nothing but chill white silence, smothering everything.

I remember Charles reaching out to hold my hand, as if this was the end and he wanted to touch me one last time before we were smoothed by that white eternity. But then we saw something up ahead.

It was a carved stone. I don't know how tall it actually was, but even in that blizzard it stood twelve feet above the snow. It was ancient, carved with curious swirling patterns. Ten paces further we found another. And another. They were like signposts, guide-markers for people like us lost in the storm.

We trudged on, following the chain of old dolmens, marvelling at the effort that must have gone in to chiselling and erecting them. They led us to steps cut into the mountainside and a tiny sheltered gully that shielded us from the worst of the snow. The track took us



steeply upwards. The mules really struggled and the guides beat them terribly. And then we topped out onto crisp white snow *above* the storm, and we were able to see again.

We saw the temple. It was carved into the side of a cliff. Goodness knows how its makers managed to shape an entire mountain face like that, with galleries and windows and all that intricate scrollwork. Imagine something as carefully sculpted as the stonework in some of our greatest cathedrals, and then imagine carving it hanging over a precipice!

The guides knew that we couldn't endure the cold much more. We pressed on to the gates of the monastery, great rough wooden things with iron studs. There was a gong hung from a chain but it took quite a long time for us to make anyone hear us. At last we were admitted through those formidable doors, and we were the gladdest travellers there ever were to see a dung-patty fire burning in a courtyard hearth.

That was how we arrived at the Temple of Reflective Wisdom, which is what its name translated as. It wasn't the one with the scented candles. We never did get there. I don't to this day know where our temple is on a map. We were just happy to be out of the snow.

The Abbot made us welcome. He spoke good English, since it was he and his Deputy who had to deal with traders and pilgrims and in that part of Tibet English is the common *lingua franca*, if that's not a terrible contradiction in terms. It was he who warned us that now the snows had fallen it might be weeks before it was safe to return to the passes.

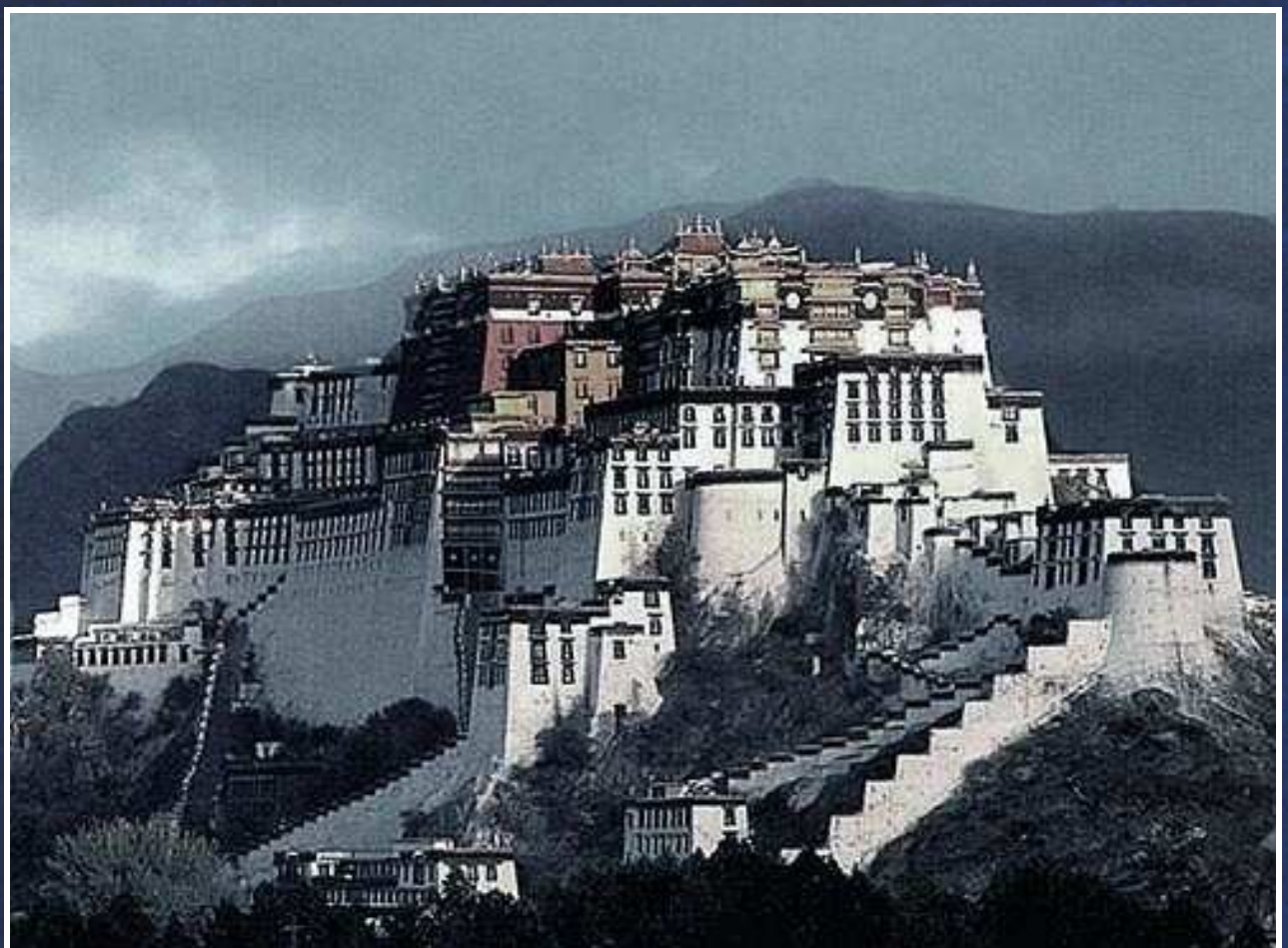
Well, Charles and I had come to look for the real Tibet and we'd certainly found it. For the first day or two we were just fascinated by the utterly different way of life that the twenty-three monks and novices lived to that we'd been used to. They woke at

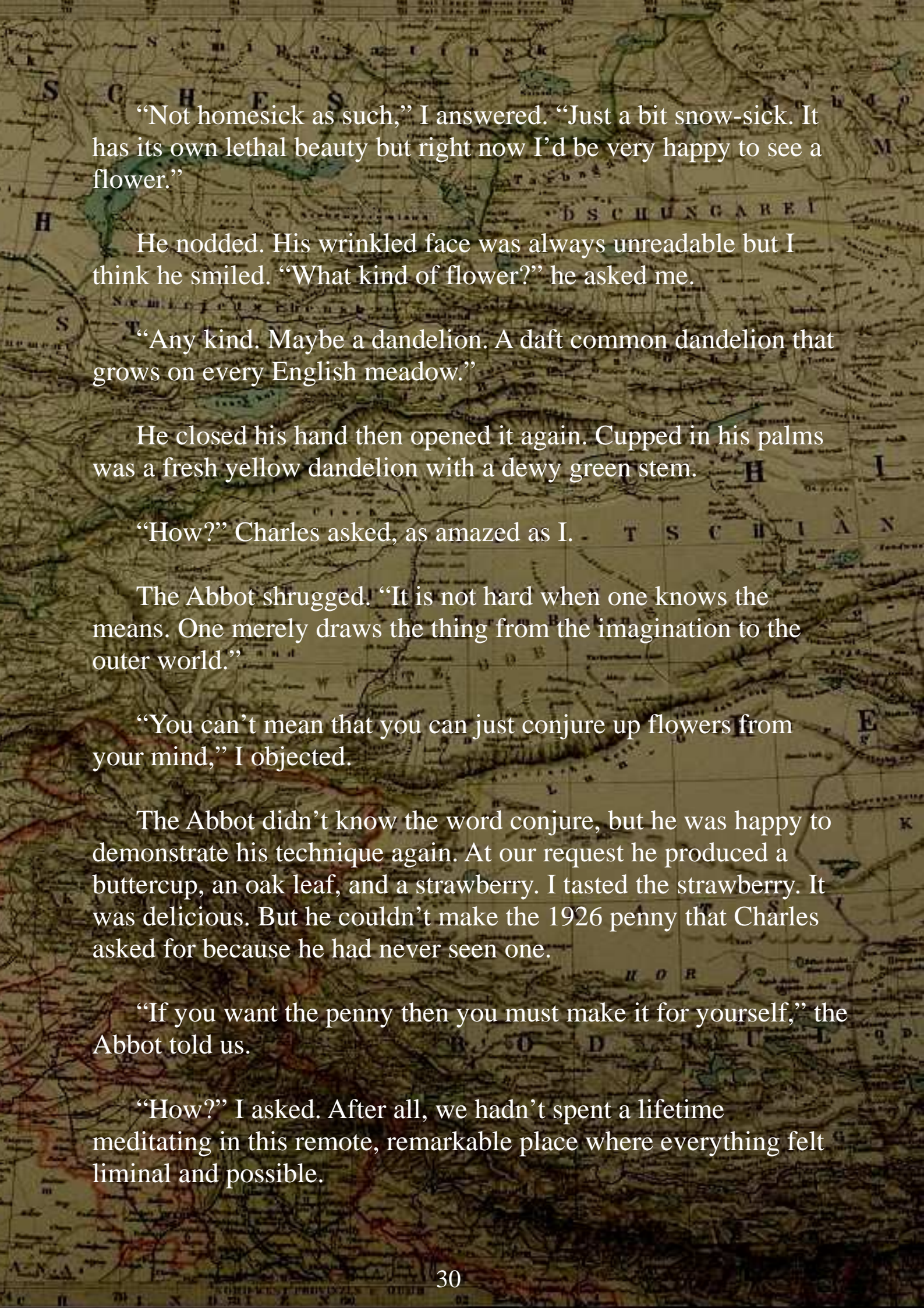
dawn, prayed, studied, worked at their chores, then worshipped some more. They prayed physically as well as mentally, turning great stone prayer-wheels whose motion was itself meant as a devotion to their gods. Things like leisure time, individual ambition, even sense of self seemed alien to them.

Charles and I became bored, of course. We were young and active – and the presence of twenty-three monks and seven sherpa guides somewhat inhibited the form of recreation to which two happily-married young people might otherwise resort while away the time. We explored the temple. We marvelled over the old stone scripture tablets and the laboriously-duplicated scrolls. We helped out a little tilling the terrace gardens and tending to the livestock. But as the days approached a week we felt our spirits flagging.

The Abbot must have realised it too. He came to speak with us one dull snowy afternoon.

“You are homesick,” he suggested.





“Not homesick as such,” I answered. “Just a bit snow-sick. It has its own lethal beauty but right now I’d be very happy to see a flower.”

He nodded. His wrinkled face was always unreadable but I think he smiled. “What kind of flower?” he asked me.

“Any kind. Maybe a dandelion. A daft common dandelion that grows on every English meadow.”

He closed his hand then opened it again. Cupped in his palms was a fresh yellow dandelion with a dewy green stem.

“How?” Charles asked, as amazed as I.

The Abbot shrugged. “It is not hard when one knows the means. One merely draws the thing from the imagination to the outer world.”

“You can’t mean that you can just conjure up flowers from your mind,” I objected.

The Abbot didn’t know the word conjure, but he was happy to demonstrate his technique again. At our request he produced a buttercup, an oak leaf, and a strawberry. I tasted the strawberry. It was delicious. But he couldn’t make the 1926 penny that Charles asked for because he had never seen one.

“If you want the penny then you must make it for yourself,” the Abbot told us.

“How?” I asked. After all, we hadn’t spent a lifetime meditating in this remote, remarkable place where everything felt liminal and possible.

“I can show you,” the Abbot offered. “It will help to pass the time for you – and you may learn something that helps you in your next incarnations.”

“It took study and discipline and a good deal of fasting and praying to learn the Abbot’s trick – and a certain way of twisting the mind to look at the world differently.

“Everything you see is only that way because you imagine it is,” the Abbot would tell us. “Light is but a ray that blisters biological sparks from your eye to your brain. How you choose to react to it, to perceive it, is up to you. The world is how we agree to view it. Thought is much more important than matter.”



At first we thought he was fooling us, making a show to baffle the Westerners. Then we wondered if this was some sinister plot to drag us into his cult. But finally we realised that he was just a teacher, and we were students whom he wanted to set free.

And Charles and I made a joyous little discovery. The monks would starve themselves, work themselves to exhaustion, deprive themselves of sleep, to get into that dazed trance state where the mind is ready to let go of the rules of logic and cause-and-effect we set ourselves. My husband and I discovered that much the same effect could be achieved by excessive amounts of sex. Once we'd worked that out our studies went much faster.

By the end of the third week of our snow-locked stay at the Temple of Reflective Wisdom I had managed to create a sad crumpled wad of crushed vegetable matter in my cupped palms. Charles took a few more days before he could imagine a rosebud into existence. Our creations were much weaker than the Abbot's. They hardly lasted a few minutes before melting back into our thoughts. But we did it.

The Abbot wryly suggested that since we were practicing so hard together we might learn to combine our efforts and so make more robust manifestations. By the end of the fourth week Charles could hardly walk but we could create a small singing robin and have it fly around the room for half an hour.

I know all of this must sound fantastic to modern listeners like yourselves. Perhaps you think that isolated there in that strange and unfamiliar environment we were somehow brainwashed, drugged, convinced by peer pressure that these things were happening. We felt that we had begun to explore the boundaries of reality, delving into the secrets of the mahayoga discipline. You must make up your own minds, of course. The Abbot said that to us a lot.

On the day we first created the robin – it was always the same one, we felt – Charles and I rushed into the Abbot's chambers to tell him of our triumph. We were surprised to find him talking with a stranger. We had thought by then to have met all the inhabitants of that lonely snowbound monastery, but here was another ascetic, robed and beaded much like the Abbot himself, chatting away in U-Tang.



The Abbot introduced him as Set-Do, Abbot of the Temple of Inner Harmony over the mountains towards Yongbucuo.

“How did he get here?” I asked. “Are the passes open again?”

“The passes are not open,” the Abbot told us. He bowed to his counterpart – and the Abbot of Inner Harmony dissolved like our little robin had!

“He wasn't real?” Charles gasped.

“Of course he was real,” the old monk told us. “But it is more practical for him to project his *tulpa* over the mountains and set his spirit in it than it is to venture through the ice and winds at this time of year.”

Tulpa was the Abbot's word for those imagination-forms he'd been teaching us to conjure. “You can actually create bodies like

that? And... live in them?" demanded Charles.

The Abbot shrugged. "Some can. I find it uncomfortable and cold after too long. Perhaps in my next incarnation?"

"Can we learn to do that?"

The old man was doubtful. "It requires much discipline to make a *tulpa* of a man. More to make it right. Only then can one project one's self into it at a distance." He looked candidly at us. "I do not know whether your methods of focussing your thinking will be sufficient to achieve that."

He meant that Charles might die of a heart attack or I might die of bliss before we made a *tulpa* like that. But what a way to go!

Charles was determined to try, though, and I had no objections. The Abbot explained that permanent *tulpas* were possible through constant and regular summoning. The more we imagined the same thing into existence the longer it would stay and the more it would become a creation unto itself; like our little robin.

"I will demonstrate," he offered. "When the weather is bad like this, when we have difficult physical tasks to do outside our walls, we often dress in *tulpas* appropriate to the task. Like this..."

He closed his eyes and concentrated. A shadow shifted in the corner of his candle-strewn chamber. Then a loping shaggy form, tall and gaunt, lumbered forward to regard us with watery yellow eyes. It was the yeti!

The Abominable Snowman was around six feet tall, but gangling. Its hair was grey and white, ridged at shoulders and spine. Its hands and feet were prehensile, almost human-like. Its face was flattened like an ape but its eyes were very like the Abbot's. It balanced on its toes, swaying from side to side, ready to

fight or flee.

“This is one of our regular work-forms,” the Abbot said. He turned and bowed to the yeti. “You may go now,” he told it, and it unwound before our eyes until there was nothing left.



“That...” Charles whispered. “It wasn’t human.”

“Nor is your robin. The *Meh-Teh* are a traditional thought-form amongst our order. Who knows how old that one is?”

“There have been traveller’s tales of a Snowman...” I breathed.

The Abbot shrugged. “Sometimes the stronger thought-forms manifest quite unconsciously without waiting for invitation. The *Meh-Teh* like to play on the high ridges. Sometimes they slip into life unbidden.”

“Could we learn to make a yeti?” I asked.

The Abbot hesitated. “I do not know. He is not of your culture. You may find it difficult. If you want to conjure a permanent *tulpa* to wear you might do better to visualise something from your own experience, something appropriate to your background and sentiment.”

Charles and I discussed that long into the night, cuddled under our furs in the tiny cell that had been provided at last for our privacy – and to assist with our diligent studies! We decided that we should combine our efforts and attempt a *tulpa* that we could

inhabit. We curled together in the fusty darkness and planned what we should make.

The Abbot had recommended something familiar to us, something that resonated with our culture and beliefs. He warned against anything we might associate with ferocity or violence. In the end Charles and I settled on visualising a fat old Franciscan monk, something like Friar Tuck from the legend of Robin Hood.

We set to work the next day. Constructing a man was far more complicated than incarnating a little bird, and it took us over a week to get it right. We pictured our friar in his humble grey robes, a jolly fat man with wobbling jowls and a bald head except for a grizzled ring of hair round his tonsured pate. His belly wobbled a little when he moved. His sandals were laced round gnarled horny feet. Details like that are essential to draw a *tulpa* into being.

I can't really describe how much one has to leave this world to draw something from another. One's sense of groundedness absolutely vanishes. The casual certainty we usually have that one and one make two, that gravity will hold us down, that flame will burn and night will blind are all eroded. To reach into the void where things exist in potential one must lean far out from the little ledge we carelessly call reality.

So Charles and I leaned, one of us holding the other to dangle off the precipice above the abyss to see what we could grasp. That's the best analogy I can make. And at last it worked. Quite suddenly, our fat friar blinked into being and appeared in the corner of our cell, regarding us with a mild scepticism as if *he* did not quite believe in *us*.

Each day made him more real. He began to follow us around to the dining hall, to the animal pens, to the fish pond. The sherpas who'd brought us to the mountains shunned him and muttered behind our backs, but the monks welcomed him with small bows of

respect, which he sometimes returned. We kept him in existence for hours until he had become almost a constant companion.

The Abbot inspected our work but shook his head. “He is well visualised,” he told us, “but I do not think you will be able to wear him in the manner of a proper *sprul pa*. Perhaps it is because you have combined to create him. You may need to each make a separate *tulpa* to occupy. Or maybe because you are Westerners you have imbued him with your Western sense of individuality. He will not let you ride him.”

The friar never spoke, though he often listened and looked as if he might speak. At the Abbot’s last words he nodded and folded his hands into the sleeves of his habit. Our creation did not wish to be our garment or our mule.

We decided to abandon our friar and try again. This time Charles and I would each visualise *tulpas* for ourselves, our first attempts to do such a thing alone since our earliest experiments. And that was where things began to go terribly wrong...”

Elizabeth Carshalton was interrupted then, as the train steamed into another halt station and wheezed to a stop at the



little single platform. It was fully dark now and only a handful of passengers disembarked and embarked from third class and from the roof of the carriages.

As the mail was being loaded and unloaded the guard finally came to check Tom and Katie's tickets. Mrs Carshalton was right about a few rupees being enough to secure their continued travel in the rearmost compartment.

The locomotive juddered and began to piston forward again. Soon the little lamplit station was left behind, and the train pressed onto into the moonless Bengal night.

The antique carriages had no electricity. The light came from elegant oil lamps screwed to the interior carriagework of each compartment. The guard topped the reservoirs as he did his rounds. The flickering oil lights cast a pale yellow glow over the travellers and made ghostly reflections in the window glass.

"You were... telling us a story," Katie ventured to Mrs Carshalton. The American girl's hand found Tom's again. What might have seemed like a fantastic fabrication in full daylight in a bright American diner took on a lurid reality in an old railway carriage rattling through the Indian darkness.

"You decided to make more individual *tulpas*," Tom prompted. "But something happened?"

The old lady looked out of the window at nothing, or perhaps at her own parchment-pale face staring back at her. "Something happened," she agreed.

"Young people always believe that they have discovered sex. I assure you that you did not. Tom and I had a good and varied

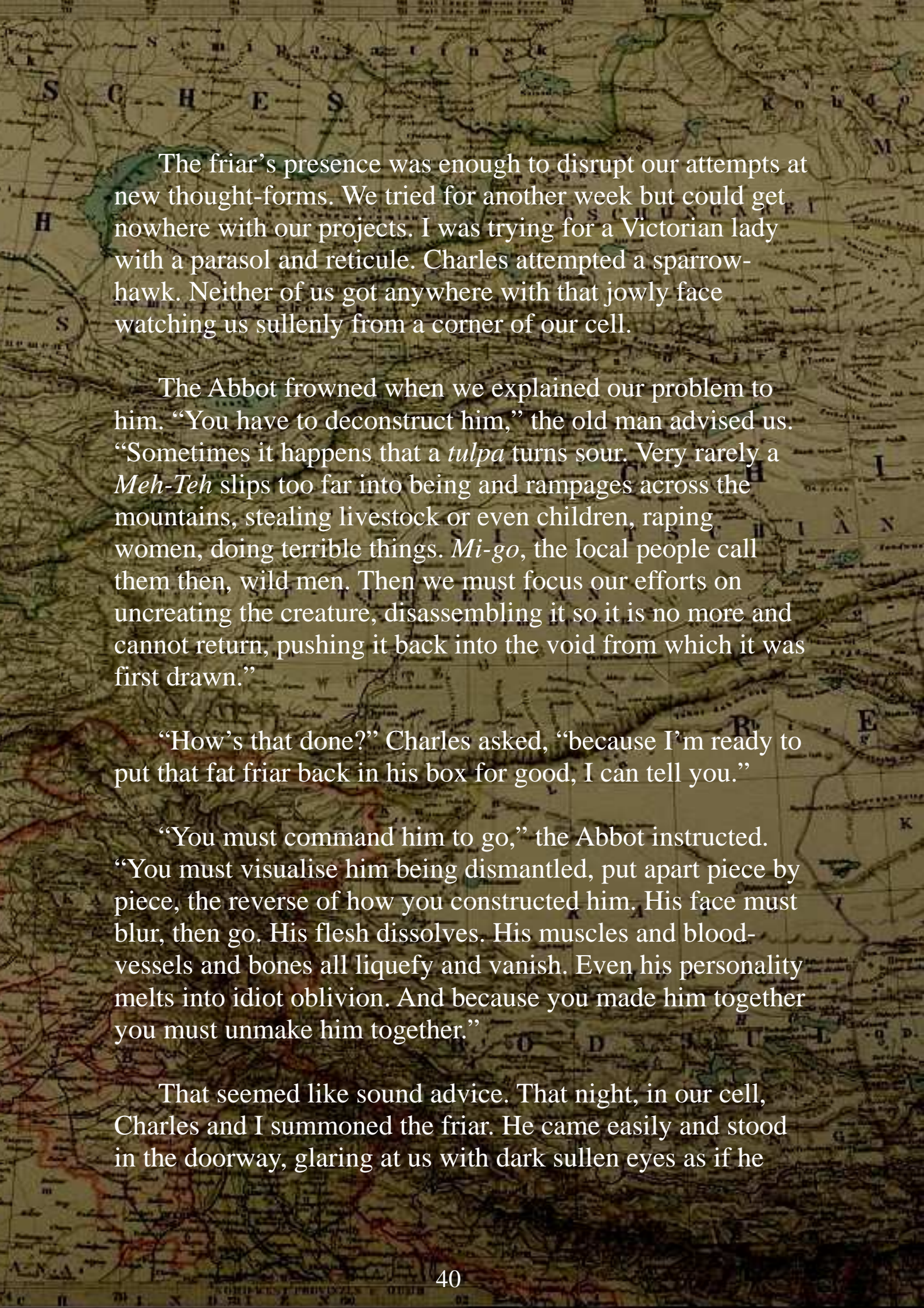


bedroom life in our marriage – how varied I shall not go into for the purposes of this account – but it stood us in good stead for our yogic preparations. Nowadays they call it *tantric*, but back then we just thought it a good deal nicer than rotating a prayer column for twenty hours straight.

What rather spoiled it was our friar. There's

something terribly offputting about being in, well, a very delicate situation at a very intense moment and looking up to see a jowly old monastic crouching over one with an intent expression.

Yes, our Franciscan didn't go away. Like those yetis that sometimes danced across the snow-fields he kept on popping in, bidden or unbidden, and often at the most inconvenient moments. I can tell you, dears, that Tibetan monastery toilet arrangements are bad enough without having a *tulpa* slipping in to observe things.



The friar's presence was enough to disrupt our attempts at new thought-forms. We tried for another week but could get nowhere with our projects. I was trying for a Victorian lady with a parasol and reticule. Charles attempted a sparrowhawk. Neither of us got anywhere with that jowly face watching us sullenly from a corner of our cell.

The Abbot frowned when we explained our problem to him. "You have to deconstruct him," the old man advised us. "Sometimes it happens that a *tulpa* turns sour. Very rarely a *Meh-Teh* slips too far into being and rampages across the mountains, stealing livestock or even children, raping women, doing terrible things. *Mi-go*, the local people call them then, wild men. Then we must focus our efforts on uncreating the creature, disassembling it so it is no more and cannot return, pushing it back into the void from which it was first drawn."

"How's that done?" Charles asked, "because I'm ready to put that fat friar back in his box for good, I can tell you."

"You must command him to go," the Abbot instructed. "You must visualise him being dismantled, put apart piece by piece, the reverse of how you constructed him. His face must blur, then go. His flesh dissolves. His muscles and blood-vessels and bones all liquefy and vanish. Even his personality melts into idiot oblivion. And because you made him together you must unmake him together."

That seemed like sound advice. That night, in our cell, Charles and I summoned the friar. He came easily and stood in the doorway, glaring at us with dark sullen eyes as if he

knew our intention; perhaps he did.

“You have to go away now,” Charles told him. “We dismiss you.”

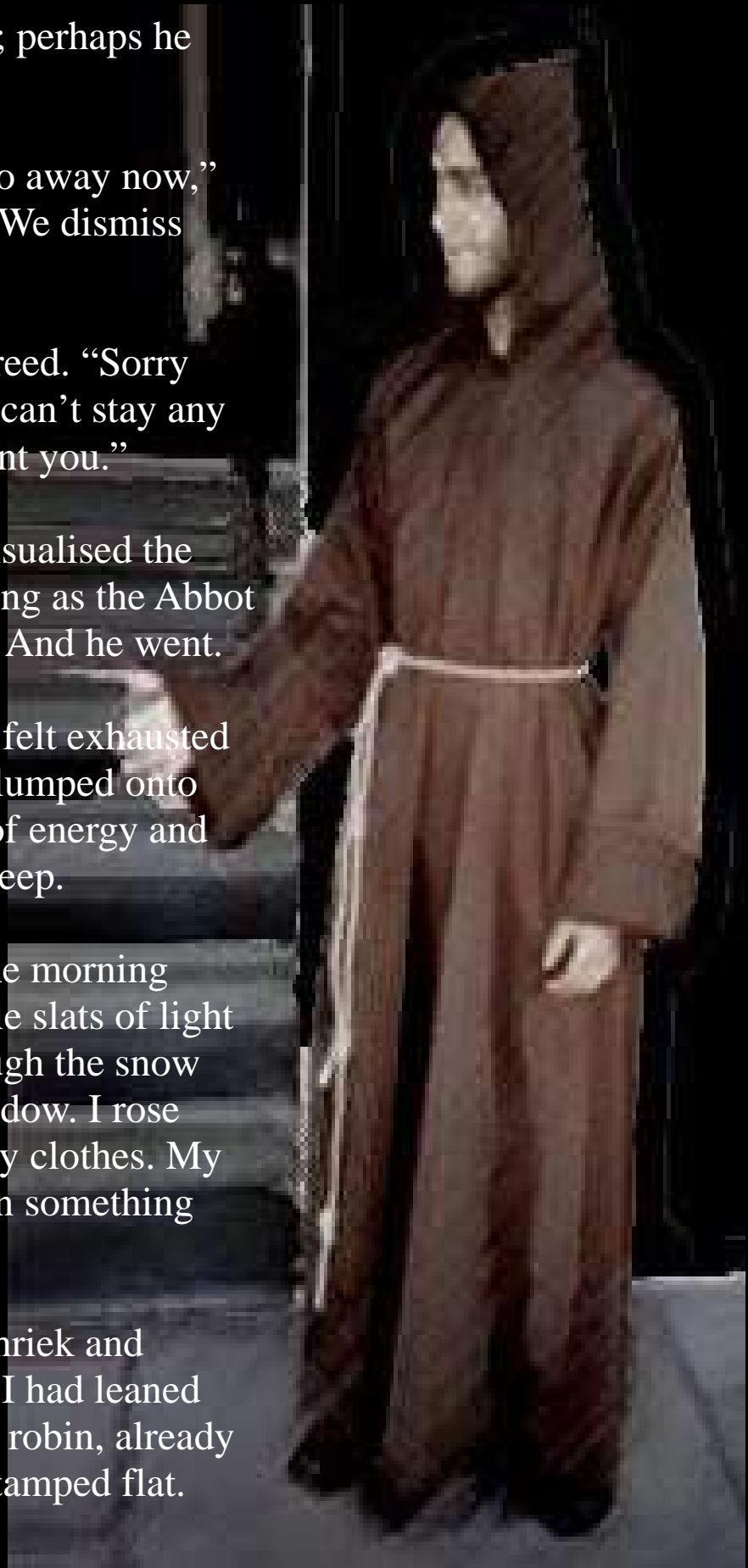
“Yes, go,” I agreed. “Sorry about this, but you can’t stay any more. We don’t want you.”

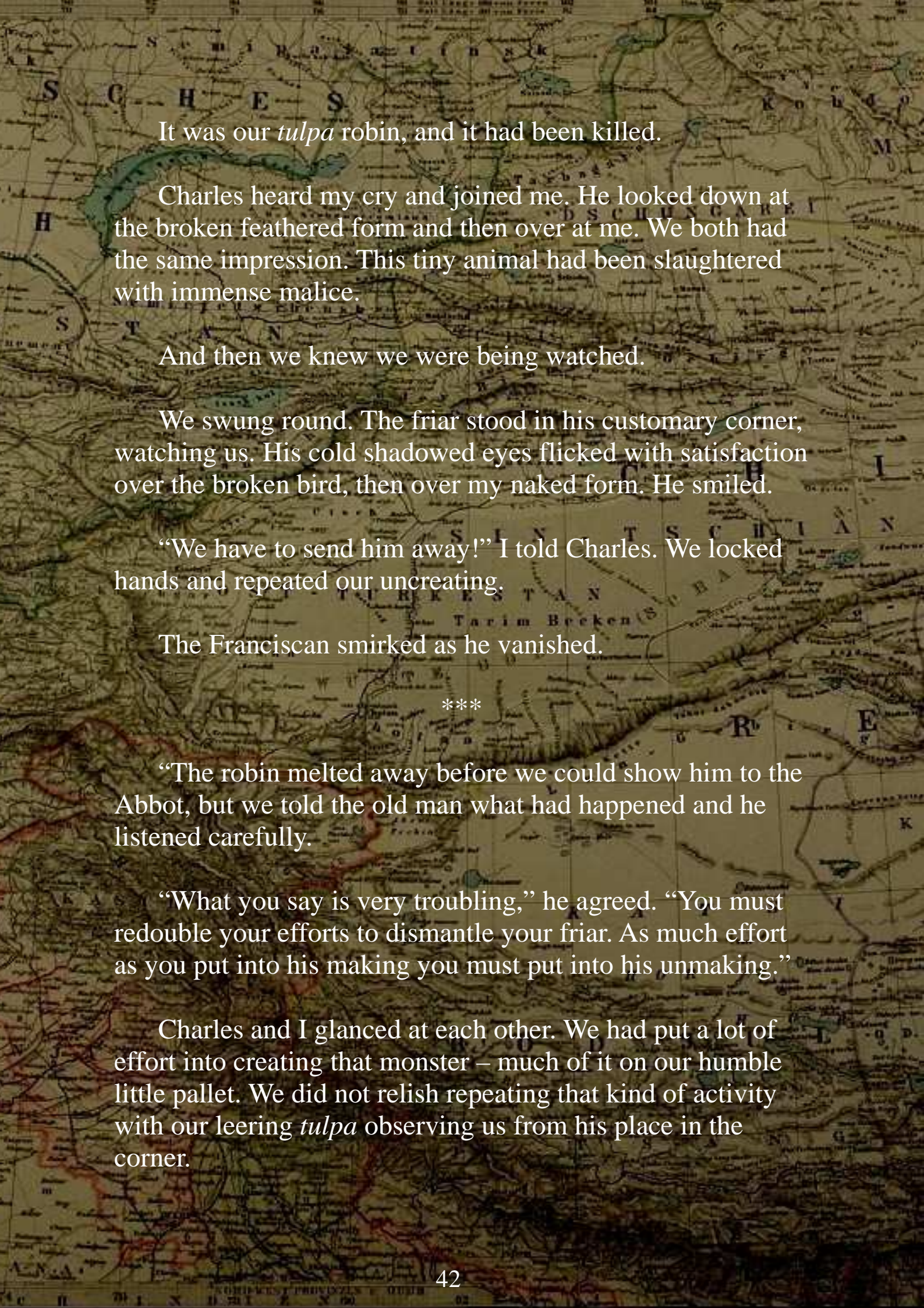
And then we visualised the Franciscan dissolving as the Abbot had recommended. And he went.

Afterwards we felt exhausted and unhappy. We slumped onto our pallet drained of energy and fell into troubled sleep.

It was late in the morning when we woke. Pale slats of light were filtering through the snow shutters on our window. I rose first, groping for my clothes. My hand came down on something small and sticky.

I gave a little shriek and looked to see what I had leaned on. It was a bloody robin, already dead. It had been stamped flat.





It was our *tulpa* robin, and it had been killed.

Charles heard my cry and joined me. He looked down at the broken feathered form and then over at me. We both had the same impression. This tiny animal had been slaughtered with immense malice.

And then we knew we were being watched.

We swung round. The friar stood in his customary corner, watching us. His cold shadowed eyes flicked with satisfaction over the broken bird, then over my naked form. He smiled.

“We have to send him away!” I told Charles. We locked hands and repeated our uncreating.

The Franciscan smirked as he vanished.

“The robin melted away before we could show him to the Abbot, but we told the old man what had happened and he listened carefully.

“What you say is very troubling,” he agreed. “You must redouble your efforts to dismantle your friar. As much effort as you put into his making you must put into his unmaking.”

Charles and I glanced at each other. We had put a lot of effort into creating that monster – much of it on our humble little pallet. We did not relish repeating that kind of activity with our leering *tulpa* observing us from his place in the corner.



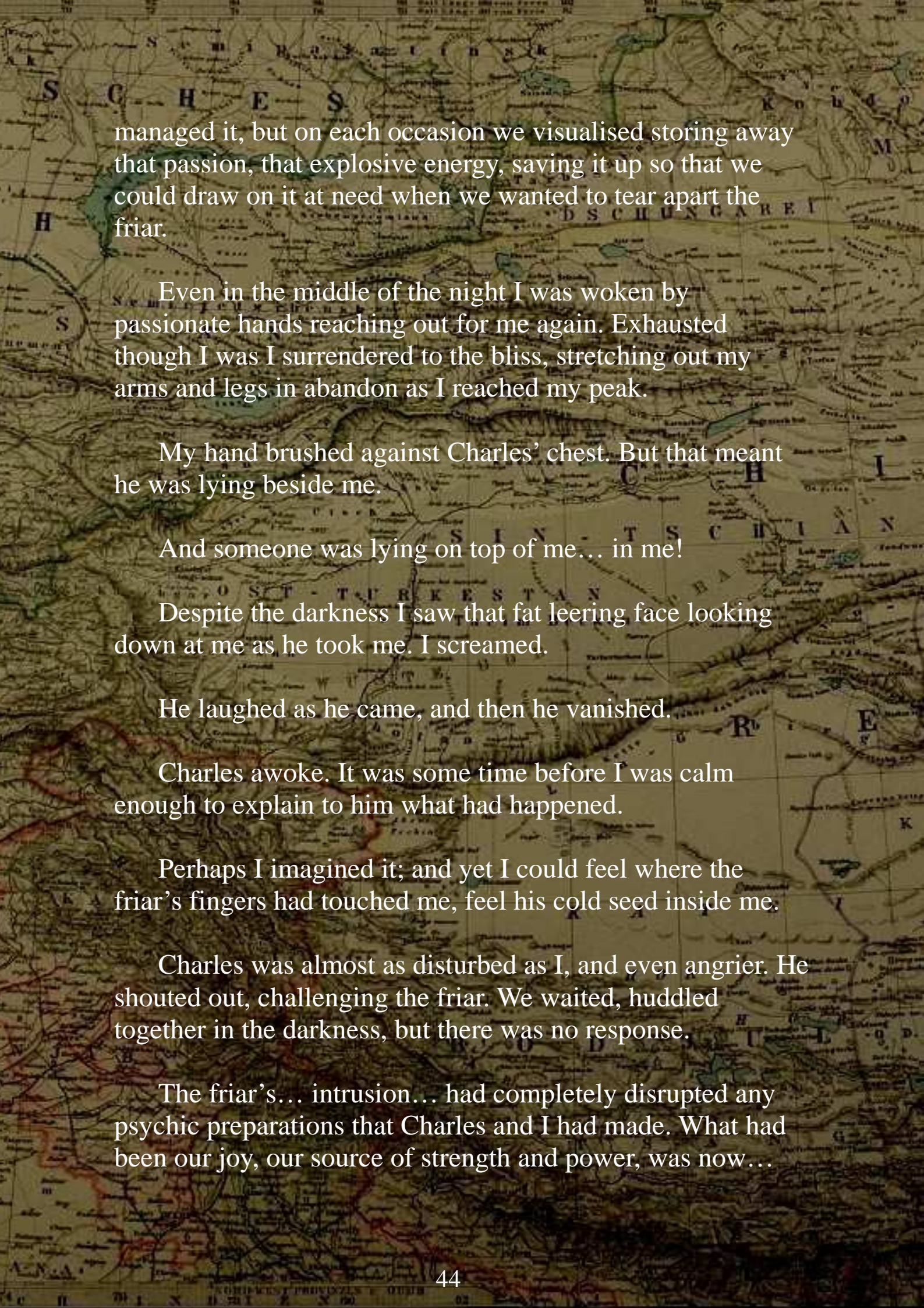
Perhaps sensing our reluctance and understanding the reason, the Abbot offered to return with us to our cell and remonstrate with the friar. The old man wheezed his way to our little chamber, called the *tulpa* with a peremptory voice, then chided him to begone. The friar came when bidden and vanished when told.

“He is not dismissed for good,” the Abbot warned us.

“When he comes back he will be sourer yet. Be ready for him.”

Charles and I agreed. The nervousness we felt about the growing malevolence of our creation somewhat inhibited our lovemaking at first, but at last our natural passions got the better of us and we pleased each other again and again in that intimate darkness.

It was intense. Can you imagine having to achieve orgasm to save your life? I lost count of how many times we



managed it, but on each occasion we visualised storing away that passion, that explosive energy, saving it up so that we could draw on it at need when we wanted to tear apart the friar.

Even in the middle of the night I was woken by passionate hands reaching out for me again. Exhausted though I was I surrendered to the bliss, stretching out my arms and legs in abandon as I reached my peak.

My hand brushed against Charles' chest. But that meant he was lying beside me.

And someone was lying on top of me... in me!

Despite the darkness I saw that fat leering face looking down at me as he took me. I screamed.

He laughed as he came, and then he vanished.

Charles awoke. It was some time before I was calm enough to explain to him what had happened.

Perhaps I imagined it; and yet I could feel where the friar's fingers had touched me, feel his cold seed inside me.

Charles was almost as disturbed as I, and even angrier. He shouted out, challenging the friar. We waited, huddled together in the darkness, but there was no response.

The friar's... intrusion... had completely disrupted any psychic preparations that Charles and I had made. What had been our joy, our source of strength and power, was now...

spoiled. Fear had replaced passion. The *tulpa* was grown both cruel and cunning.

I became terrified at the thought that he might visit me again; that having tasted me he would want more. Charles kept beside me as much as he could, and when the Abbot granted us audience we went before him clasping hands as if that might protect us.

I confessed my night's experience, blushing when the Abbot demanded details. Charles' face got redder and hotter.

"You have created a very strong spirit," the Abbot declared when I had told him all. "It has drawn upon many of the qualities you both possess, including your intelligence. It knows you. It knows how to thwart you. It knows how to frighten you."





“It does frighten me,” I confessed. “I... don’t know how to be free of it.”

“We have to kill it,” Charles declared. “It is the only way.”

The Abbot nodded gravely. “This is a Western *tulpa*. It is different from what I have seen before. It may have different rules.”

“You said the rules changed by how we imagined them,” I remembered. “What if we imagine a way that would kill the friar and then do it?”

“That might work,” the old man adjudged. “Disassembling, returning to nothing, those are our ideas, the completion, the *dzog-rim*. Perhaps your *tulpa* needs a different solution.”

Charles snapped his fingers. “I’ve got it!” he cried. “Lizzie, we need to visualise something else. Not an animal or a flower. We need to visualise a gun!”

“A gun!” I breathed. Of course! A spirit weapon to kill a spirit. It seemed obvious and logical to us; a very Western solution.

“If we can create a thought-form pistol together, perhaps one of those ornate old duelling guns with the engraved barrel and pearl handle-grip, and make it strong enough to shoot even that Franciscan, then we can be rid of the creature for good!”



Charles and I were sure it would work; and if we were sure then it meant that it would.

The Abbot insisted we prepare formally for our combat. We fasted and prayed for two days, always surrounded by a ring of chanting monks. We drank only snow-melt. We bathed in perfumed water and were anointed with oils. We repeated mantras ten thousand times until our minds were mere blurs inhabited only by the words.

When the Abbot judged us ready he bade us create our weapon. Charles and I joined our imaginations and conjured up the duelling pistol that we had discussed in such detail. It appeared in our hands, loaded and primed, solid and deadly.

We retired to our cell and barred the door. What happened next had to be personal and private. Nothing could escape until it was over.

“I love you,” Charles told me. “Be strong. Be brave.”

“I love you too,” I told my husband.

We settled on our pallet and concentrated, summoning the



monk one last time.

But he did not come.

“He knows what we’re planning,” Charles guessed. “He knows we can destroy him now.”

“He’s waiting for the thought-form pistol to melt away,” I replied. *Tulpas* of living things can take on an existence of their own. Inanimate objects tend to fade before too long.

“We have to force him to come,” insisted Charles, “before he finds some way to neutralise our means of destroying him. Concentrate harder, Lizzie. We can do this.”

We bent our minds to the task, recalling all the lessons that the Abbot had given us. The problem is that concentration is only part of it. There’s a sense of yielding required too, of letting oneself slip away from the laws and bounds of our sane safe world. Doing that when there’s an angry lustful *tulpa* lurking in the nothingness is far from easy.

The night dragged on. The friar resisted us.

“You know what we have to do,” Charles said. He reached for me and kissed me. “He always comes for this.”

I trembled at his caress. It was the first time Charles had made love to me since my experience in the darkness with the Franciscan. “Leave the oil-dish lit,” I asked him.

Our love-making was soft and tentative at first, but as our passions caught it grew more abandoned. Charles grew fierce;

I thought perhaps he responded to some primal urge to claim his territory back from an invader. Even when he became rough I yielded to him.

Until he giggled.

I looked up at him, at his face. It was Charles – except for the eyes. The eyes that burned down on me bore the intense malicious gaze of the Franciscan!

The monks at the Temple of Reflective Wisdom create *tulpas* to wear when they need to travel abroad. Nobody told us that a powerful *tulpa* could instead wear its creator.

I screamed and struggled, but
Charles – or the friar – was
inhumanly strong.
And





cruel, so cruel.

At last I was cast aside, battered and weeping. Charles rose and stood over me. “I will not be destroyed,” he whispered in a high nasal whine. “I will be with you forever, and you shall be mine. You will feed me and I will be strong.”

“I’ll destroy you!” I promised the *tulpa*. “Charles and I – and the Abbot – we’ll see you dead!”

“Charles?” sneered the Franciscan, curling my husband’s lips with his disdain. “It took both of you to summon me. It will take both of you to dismiss me. So...”

Then he raised the spirit pistol to Charles’ temple – and fired.

The spirit bullet hammered into Charles’ skull, shattering it as well as any corporeal ball would do, splattering his brains over the wall of our cell.

And so the friar became immortal.”

Mrs Carshalton paused for a moment, overcome by her memories. Katie and Tom looked at each other in dismay, uncertain how to react to this remarkable claim.

“Are you alright?” Katie asked the old woman tentatively.

Mrs Carshalton snorted. “Never,” she replied. “I don’t tell this story often for obvious reasons. But sometimes I have to,

so people can understand.”

Tom had privately decided that the old woman was disturbed. She seemed to believe what she said. “What happened then?” he asked from morbid curiosity. “After Charles... did that?”

The old lady dabbed her tears with a lace handkerchief. “The Abbot arranged things. Tom’s body was cared for, wrapped in linens, coffined. When the snows melted he was finally sent home for interment. I had to suffer a very great deal of paperwork then became a widow of independent means. I travelled a good deal. I still do.”

“But with the friar?” Katie persisted. “If what you said was true, if he became immortal...”



“Nothing is immortal,” Mrs Carshalton told her. “Everything is born, grows, feeds, dies eventually.”

“Did you see him – it – again though?”

The old lady stared out of the window again. “Oh yes. I was his now. His to have and to hold. When it became clear that the Abbot could not protect me from him I fled the monastery as soon as I could. The friar followed me. No matter how far I fled, how far I travelled, he was with me like a shadow. He had been born and he grew. And of course he fed.”

“Fed how? What?” Tom frowned.

“On death,” Mrs Carshalton answered as if it were self evident. “When Charles and I made him he must have drawn upon all kinds of dark things we’d brought to that monastery with us. We’d taught him to value his independence and his life. To lust. To destroy an enemy to survive. When we created that spirit gun we taught him how to kill. In the end that’s how he decided to feed – through cruelty and lust and killing.”

Katie shuddered. Her hand gripped Tom’s tighter than she realised. “Your *tulpa*-friar killed again? After Charles?”

“Yes. Not often, but when the need came, to sustain himself now one of his creators was gone. He took lives so he could continue to haunt me, to have me. How many years now? How many years more?”

Tom shook his head. “That’s the scariest ghost-story anyone’s ever told me, lady, but I’m not buying it. If you can make things appear by thought then show us. Except that’s a

conjuring trick they do on TV all the time now.”

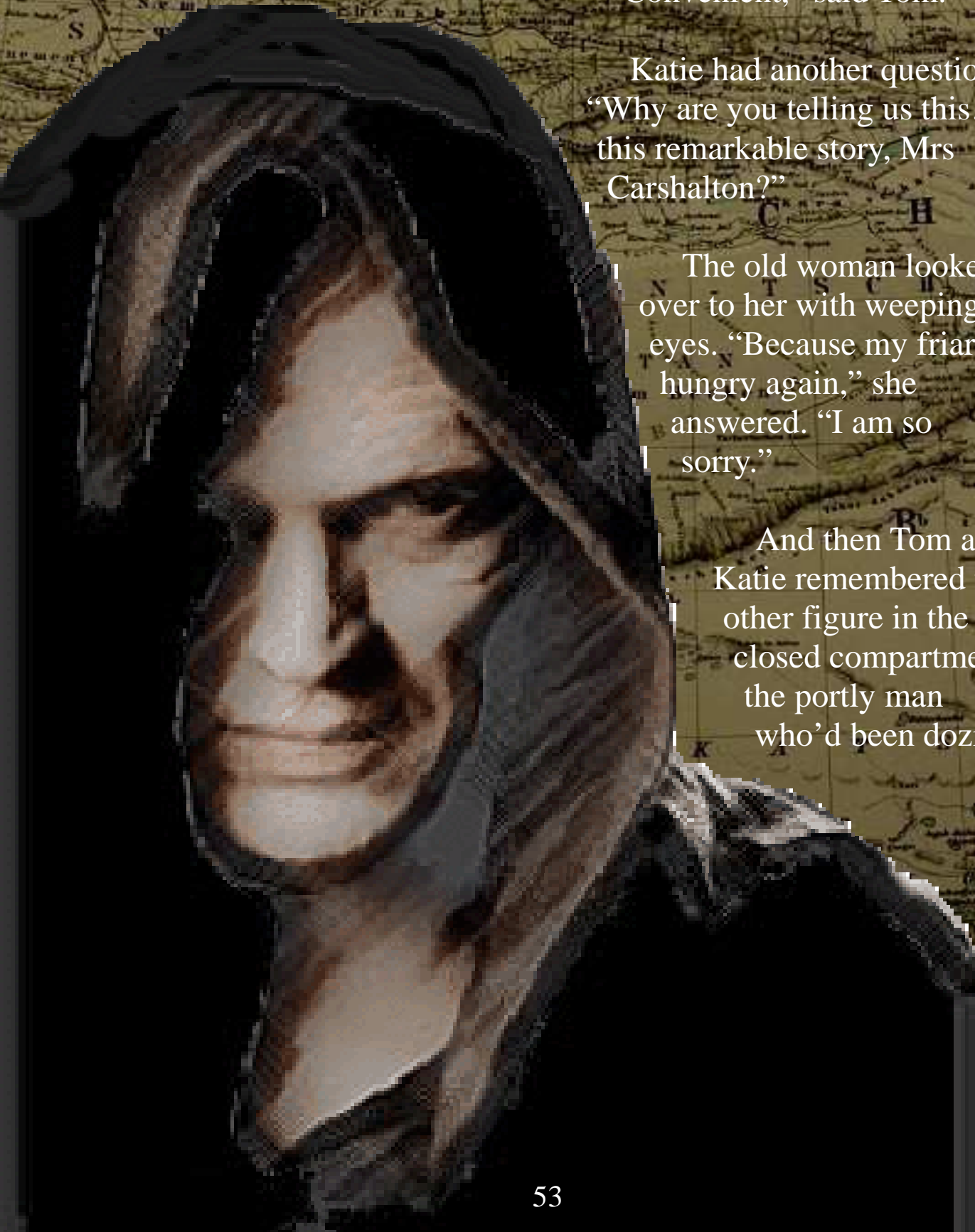
“I don’t create anything now,” Mrs Carshalton confessed.
“He doesn’t like it.”

“Convenient,” said Tom.

Katie had another question.
“Why are you telling us this...
this remarkable story, Mrs
Carshalton?”

The old woman looked
over to her with weeping
eyes. “Because my friar is
hungry again,” she
answered. “I am so
sorry.”

And then Tom and
Katie remembered the
other figure in the
closed compartment,
the portly man
who’d been dozing



all the time, huddled up in his grey mantle in the far corner, ignored, overlooked.

The friar woke up and grinned at them. He giggled.

He pounced.



Author's Note:

This story was inspired by the travels of Alexandra David-Néel (1868-1969), the remarkable Belgian-French adventuress, explorer, spiritualist, and writer. Amongst her extensive memoirs she includes the account of how, while visiting forbidden Tibet, she learned how to create a *tulpa* and conjured up a fat friar who later turned malevolent (*Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, 1929).

I.A. Watson is the award-winning author of the novels *Robin Hood: King of Sherwood*, *Robin Hood: Arrow of Justice*, and the upcoming *Robin Hood: Freedom's Outlaw*. He is also a prolific contributor to short story anthologies including *Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective* volumes 1 to 3, *Blackthorn: Thunder Over Mars*, *Gideon Cain: Demon Hunter*, and *The New Adventures of Richard Knight*. A full list of his publications, along with some free online stories and samples, are available at <http://www.chillwater.org.uk/writing/>

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