

### Beijing Releases Five

Beijing, January 12, 2114 (Xinhua). Department of Public Security officials today announced plans to release five persons currently serving prison terms for their roles in the Tibetan nationalist uprising of 2099. Mila Lakpa, Puntsok Denpa, Jamyang Tashi, Basang Uri Garma, and Kunchok Gunru, all of New Tibet City, were convicted of conspiring with Tara Gyatso, the Seventeenth Dalai Lama, to create an independent Lamaist state. "The men will be released during the coming year," said Chu Si-Chuan, spokesman for the Department of Public Security. "However, there is no plan to release the Dalai Lama at this time. She is a long-time stubborn secessionist who has tried to split her Chinese motherland."

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Within a few hours Mila came to the edge of the forest. He stood at an artificial tree line beneath which the forest had been sawn down. A hundred meters of stumps led to a tall chain-link fence topped with razor wire, securing the perimeter. Beyond that fence was a run for the military dogs, their genetically altered vision well-adapted to hunting in darkness. Finally, far below, stadium lighting illuminated the prison's inner defenses, administrative compound, cellblocks, and yards. According to the map device, the Dalai Lama's cell was somewhere between two thousand and twenty-one hundred yards from here—depending on where she was held within the walls of the prison.

Mila retreated back into the trees until he came to a sheltered bowl of fallen rocks. Mila sat on a flat rock and composed his thoughts. He felt tired, but it was necessary now to write a letter; a letter he had been contemplating as he walked. There was moonlight, there was paper, there was a biro pen. Everything he needed was right there in his tunic.

Mila began writing, using a shorthand *kyuk* script familiar to Tara Gyatso but unlikely to be decipherable if discovered by a passing soldier. He wrote:

*To Kundun, Seventeenth Dalai Lama—*

Mila paused, licked the nib of his pen, and thought a moment, looking very much the schoolboy.

*My dearest Tara,*

*If you are reading this letter then my plan has worked. Sitting here above Narkang prison, I have managed to snatch you out through the walls, past the guards, over the wire to this rocky place, my dearest friend, where you sit reading this letter. Also, of course, the reverse has happened. It is now my own unworthy consciousness that inhabits your form. I hope you will forgive me for liberating you in this unorthodox way, without your prior knowledge and consent. I could think of no other method.*

*Forgive me also for not having taken better care of this body I leave here to you. Rather stupidly, I lost its right arm—an accident in the woods. I don't miss it much, but now I wish I had been more careful. Please think of this body as a durable beast. Do not pamper it; it is used to hard work.*

Here Mila paused and massaged his left temple with his five fingers, as though a sudden pain had come to them. Then he wrote again:

*Look carefully through the pockets of the clothes you are wearing. You will find some items to help you escape back into the hills. In particular, I have left you with a map device. The password is "Jimmy." I have entered the coordinates of a place called Freetown. There you will meet patriots who will aid our cause. They will know you on sight. Ask for one named Jamyang.*

*In prison I will pretend to be Tara Gyatso as long as I can. You will need some time to organize your plans. Of course, the Tibetans must know your identity. From Freetown the word will spread. Even if they suspect me I will tell them nothing—at least for a while. They will not believe in the possibility of transposing two minds—not at first!*

Mila paused in his furious scribbling and looked around the sky. The sky was dark, and the moon was low in the west. Soon the heavens would show the violet light of dawn. He wrote one more line:

*My dearest Tara, you have been very patient for fifteen years. Forgive me for taking such a terribly long time. I am coming for you tonight.*

*P.S.—Please do not concern yourself about me. I am used to prison life and I will make out fine.*

Mila folded his letter and slid it into the breast of his tunic. He arranged his bundles carefully beside his seat and opened the leather bag containing the polished skull. He detached the skull's cup and set it aside. He pulled his beads from the skull where they lay coiled like a serpent. They rattled across the cold bone. Starlight filled the empty blue space inside the skull. Mila began chanting the familiar ritual. Mila closed his eyes...

When he opened his eyes again, he saw he had been transported to a divine palace. Its walls were translucent green marble veined with gold. They were inlaid with sumptuous jewels and adorned with hundreds of dazzling golden statues. Through the walls he could perceive other areas of the palace, vast halls populated with magnificent and grotesque beings, radiating light. The air was scented with incense, and the music of a thousand lyres thrummed delightfully in his ears. He was seated on a magnificent throne covered with luxurious furs. An attentive and respectful retinue of devas and bodhisattvas stood admiringly on all sides, their palms pressed together in prayer. Mila looked down at his body. It was elegant and graceful, beautiful and youthful. More divine than human—and startlingly green—it radiated clear light from within its skin. His elegant garments were woven from adamantine threads and embroidered with complex designs. A garland of blossoms gave out their sweet smell. His feelings were of pure bliss, and his mind was focused one-pointedly on the meaning of reality. Mila had never felt so wonderful. He had not expected this divine transformation. He realized immediately that he had entered a mandala created through the power of Tara Gyatso's mind; an imagined world, a perfect visualization she had created out of nothing from within a union of calm abiding and special insight. It did not exist in actuality but was the appearance of her meditative state. Mila's transposition with the Dalai Lama had occurred while she was absorbed in this trance of exquisite beauty—a trance so thorough and profound that even sliding his own impure consciousness into its mere imprint was a sublime and convincing experience.

Still, he knew that his mind was not the powerful agent of visualization that had created this mandala. He could not sustain its lovely proportions and perfect detail. Even as he knew this he felt the stability of the visualization decrease, saw the colors become less vibrant, heard the music less harmoniously, and felt a sharp pang of hunger in his green belly. Gradually, but quickly, the visualization faded. The magnificent golden walls lost their luster. The light that radiated from his body became dim. The garland of flowers wilted and the scent of sandalwood turned stale. The sounds of music began to seem like cries of despair. The retinue of devas and bodhisattvas holding offering chalices collapsed into a swarm of vermin drinking water from a tin bowl. The jeweled ornaments that surrounded him resolved into piles of straw. His throne was a meager palette of dry husks, and the smell of incense was the sour reek of human sweat. The walls of the palace were covered in grime and black mold. The golden floor was sodden stone, only dimly perceivable in the absence of light. The feeling of bliss in his body was missing, now replaced with the familiar ache of hunger, bruised ribs, freezing feet, and itching scalp. He felt the sting of open sores on arms and legs. His nostrils filled with the smell of prison.

He was home.