

The Wilderness Wrangler

Rinchen

(Translated into English by Tsemdo)

This screenplay is adapted from Sonam Tsering's novella *The Little Horse Herder*

Abstract: Lobsang, an orphaned seventh-grader raised by his older sister Yangbe, disheartened by bullying and disillusioned with school dreams of returning to a life of herding after middle school. When a rescued vulture he had cared for is prematurely released by an animal rescue center, he learns that Yangbe is getting married. Lobsang runs away into the wilderness with his beloved mare and her foal. He finds temporary shelter with Mongolian herders and learns essential survival skills from a solitary nomad named Kunsang. But soon, Lobsang is left to face blizzards, wolves, and starvation on his own. Surviving only by sharing his mare's milk with the foal, he endures the brutal conditions of the highlands. A hermit eventually helps him reunite with Yangbe and Kunsang, who is revealed to be her fiancé. Now a newly formed family, the three embark on a pilgrimage to sacred Mount Dongri. There, they spot the once-released vulture soaring above, a symbol of survival and freedom. Together, they begin their journey home.

Keywords: Wilderness; Tibetan nomads; horses; grassland; Tibetan Plateau

1 INT. SEVENTH-GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

Chinese teacher MR.HAN stands at the blackboard, writing “The World’s Tallest Mountain” with an arrow.

MR.HAN: Who knows the name of the world’s tallest mountain?

Several students raise their hands. MR.HAN notices Lobsang in the second-to-last row staring out the window, distracted. Everyone follows MR.HAN’s gaze to Lobsang, and Lobsang laughs. Only his deskmate Yangchen nudges his arm, snapping him back to reality.

MR.HAN: Lobsang, what are you thinking about? Daydreaming?

Lobsang stands up awkwardly, silent and head bowed.

MR.HAN: Tell us, what is the world’s tallest mountain?

Lobsang remains silent, head down.

MR. HAN: Yangchen, tell him what the world’s tallest mountain is.

YANGCHEN: Mount Everest.

MR.HAN: Now you know, Lobsang.

Lobsang glances at MR.HAN and murmurs.

LOBSANG: Yeah, I know.

Child bully Sonam, sitting behind Lobsang, signals to his lackey Dondrub. Dondrub pulls a bottle of red ink from his desk and secretly pours it on Lobsang's chair.

MR.HAN: Sit down.

Lobsang sits. After a moment, he feels dampness under him. He touches it, and his hand is covered in red. Startled, he cautiously sniffs his hand and realizes it's red ink. He looks back at Sonam and Dondrub, but they pretend to be engrossed in the lesson. Lobsang turns back and forces himself to listen.

2 EXT. OUTSIDE CLASSROOM - DAY

Students play freely on the school grounds. Lobsang walks alone from the building, his jacket tied around his waist to cover his stained pants. He hurries toward the dormitory.

3 INT. DORMITORY - DAY

Lobsang enters the dorm, pulls clean pants from his metal locker, and changes quickly. He hides the dirty pants under his bedding just as the bell rings. He rushes out, running toward the classroom building.

4 EXT. SCHOOL GATE - DAYS LATER - DAY

A beautiful woman, around 25, Yangbe (Lobsang's sister), peers into

the schoolyard near the gate. She glances at her motorcycle parked by the wall.

Lobsang appears in her line of sight. Her face lights up as he approaches. He waits at the security booth by the gate. She picks up her backpack, enters after signing the visitor log, and they walk toward the dorms.

5 INT. DORMITORY - DAY

Yangbe places beef jerky, red dates, raisins, bread, and a new woolen blanket into Lobsang's locker. Lobsang nibbles on biscuits she brought.

YANGBE: Share some raisins with your roommates tonight. Don't be selfish.

LOBSANG: Ok.

Yangbe locks the locker and feels his quilt.

YANGBE: This needs airing. I'll hang it out. Remember to bring it in this afternoon.

LOBSANG: Don't bother. We have scheduled sunning days. You should go; I have class.

YANGBE: Then air it yourself, okay?

LOBSANG: Ok.

They exit the dorm. Lobsang walks ahead quickly.

YANGBE: Wear more layers when it gets cold. Use the new blanket at night. Listen to your teachers and study hard.

LOBSANG: I know. Aren't you going to Aunt's? Hurry, or it'll be dark.

YANGBE: It's fine. I'll be back before dark.

Lobsang seems impatient. He walks her to the gate, where she mounts her motorcycle.

LOBSANG: I'm heading back.

YANGBE: Okay, go ahead.

Lobsang takes a few steps, then suddenly turns and runs back.

LOBSANG: Sis, did the Animal Rescue Station call? Is the baby vulture's injury healed?

YANGBE: Not yet. They'll notify us when they release it into the mountains.

LOBSANG: What if they forget to call?

YANGBE: They won't. We agreed they'd invite us to the release.

LOBSANG: Alright. Bye.

YANGBE: Go on. Class is starting.

Lobsang hurries toward the classroom building. Yangbe watches him disappear, then rides away.

6 INT. DORMITORY - DAY (NOON)

Lobsang returns to the dorm. Bully Sonam and his two lackeys are waiting. Habitually, Lobsang takes his key, opens his locker, and lays all the food his sister brought on his bed. Sonam samples everything while the lackeys watch. Lobsang stands aside.

SONAM: Is this all? You didn't hide anything, did you?

LOBSANG: No. This is everything.

Sonam leaves a small portion of dried fruit and half the bread for Lobsang. He and his lackeys take the rest. At the door, Sonam turns back.

SONAM: Got any money?

LOBSANG: No. Sis didn't give me any this time.

Sonam eyes him. Lobsang fidgets. Lackey Dondrub pats Lobsang's pockets.

DONDRUB: There is nothing.

SONAM: Bring cigarettes after the next break.

Without waiting for a reply, Sonam leaves with his lackeys. Dejected,

Lobsang breaks off a piece of bread, places it on his pillow, returns the remaining food to his locker, and sits on the bed to eat.

7 EXT. WILDERNESS HIGHWAY - DUSK

Yangbe rides her motorcycle on a wide highway. A large truck passes, heading in the opposite direction.

8 INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

All students are asleep. Lobsang takes a piece of bread from under his pillow. Tashi hears him eating and turns.

TASHI: Give me some? I skipped dinner.

Lobsang breaks off a piece for Tashi. They eat quietly in their beds.

LOBSANG: Do you know where the Animal Rescue Station is?

TASHI: No. What's that?

LOBSANG: They treat injured animals and release them back to the mountains when they're healed.

TASHI: How do you know?

LOBSANG: I rescued an injured baby vulture while herding. The rescue people took it for treatment.

TASHI: Weren't you scared? Vultures can eat a whole yak!

LOBSANG: No. It was hurt—couldn't peck anyone.

TASHI: Do they have tigers or lions in the Station?

LOBSANG: Not sure. Probably. Ever seen a snow leopard?

TASHI: On TV.

LOBSANG: The Rescue Station has one.

TASHI: How do you know?

LOBSANG: The rescue staff told me when they came to my home.

TASHI: Oh.

9 EXT. GRASSLAND ROADSIDE - DAY

Yangbe waits by the road, her horse “Leopard” tied to a concrete pole. Cars and trucks occasionally pass. Soon, a bus stops nearby. Lobsang disembarks. Yangbe takes his backpack.

LOBSANG: Where's the motorcycle?

YANGBE: The chain broke. So I brought “Leopard” instead.

LOBSANG: “Leopard” looks thinner.

YANGBE: We lost some yaks recently. Just found them two days ago. “Leopard” hasn’t rested enough from the trip.

LOBSANG: If he’s too tired and can’t rest, he’ll die.

YANGBE: He won’t. Who told you that? Don’t say unlucky things.

LOBSANG: Should we walk home?

YANGBE: No, too much work at home. Get on.

Lobsang mounts the saddle. Yangbe sits behind him.

YANGBE: Take the reins. “Leopard” isn’t as tired as you think.

LOBSANG: He is. I can tell.

Lobsang takes the reins and guides “Leopard” slowly forward.

10 EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

Yangbe and Lobsang ride “Leopard” across the grassland near home.

LOBSANG: Is “Flower Deer” about to foal?

YANGBE: Not yet.

LOBSANG: Why not?

YANGBE: It is not time yet.

LOBSANG: I bet she'll foal before I go back to school.

YANGBE: Maybe.

LOBSANG: What will it be?

YANGBE: Probably a filly.

LOBSANG: I want a colt.

YANGBE: Might be a colt.

LOBSANG: What color?

YANGBE: Maybe white.

LOBSANG: I bet it'll be black.

YANGBE: You like black?

LOBSANG: Mm.

They chat and laugh as they ride.

11 EXT. HOMESTEAD - DUSK

At dusk, smoke curls from the chimneys of distant herders' homes.

Yangbe steps out with a milk pail, heading toward a tethered cow. Lobsang herds sheep toward home in the distance.

A white sedan pulls up nearby. Lobsang quickly corrals the sheep. Yangbe pauses milking, looks back, and sees a man her age in sunglasses stepping out. She sets the pail aside and approaches cautiously. The man removes his sunglasses, and it is Tsering, her childhood friend and former fiancé. They smile awkwardly.

YANGBE: Where are you going?

TSERING: I am visiting my hometown, and thought I'd stop by.

Lobsang approaches, eyeing the white Santana.

LOBSANG: "Big Brother" Tsering, what are you doing here?

TSERING: I was looking for good horses in the area.

LOBSANG: Oh.

YANGBE: Lobsang, go inside and have some food first and put the sheep in the pen later.

LOBSANG: Mm.

Lobsang glances at them and enters the house. Yangbe and Tsering stand silently.

TSERING: You don't want to invite me in for tea?

YANGBE: The sun's setting.

TSERING: Alright... Did you hear about me?

YANGBE: Hear what?

TSERING: I got divorced.

Tsering watches Yangbe. She looks down silently.

12 INT. INSIDE HOUSE - DUSK

Lobsang stands by the window, eating sliced mutton from a rib bone. He watches Yangbe and Tsering outside, overhearing their conversation. After a long silence, Yangbe returns to milking. Tsering gets in his car and drives away.

13 EXT. GRASSLAND - NIGHT

The grassland is silent, dotted only by faint lights from distant homes. Occasional dog barks echo.

14 INT. HOME - NIGHT

Lobsang finishes a bowl of noodles and hands it to Yangbe.

LOBSANG: That was great! Another bowl!

YANGBE: There's yogurt later. Will you have room?

LOBSANG: I'll move around a bit.

He grins. Yangbe refills his bowl.

YANGBE: How's the school food? Do you have enough to eat?

She hands him the bowl. He eats as they talk.

LOBSANG: It is enough, but it's always the same dishes. I am getting tired of them.

YANGBE: Should I talk to your headteacher or principal when I take you back?

LOBSANG: Better not. "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down."

YANGBE: True... Did a teacher teach you that proverb?

LOBSANG: Yup, MR.HAN.

YANGBE: How did he explain it?

LOBSANG: I don't remember exactly. But do you know how "rubbing sticks to make fire" was discovered?

YANGBE: From burning wood?

LOBSANG: No! Monkeys invented it—rubbing sticks together makes smoke and fire.

YANGBE: Monkeys?

LOBSANG: I think so.

YANGBE: I don't remember that lesson. I think it was cavemen.

LOBSANG: Let's check the textbook.

Lobsang fetches his textbook and flips to the “rubbing sticks for fire” chapter.

YANGBE: What does it say?

LOBSANG: It shows two foreigners making fire. No monkeys.

He shows Yangbe the book. She points at the text.

YANGBE: See? It says cavemen invented it. Not monkeys.

Lobsang checks, sets the book aside, and keeps eating.

LOBSANG: Guess I misheard. I thought it was monkeys. They look similar anyway.

YANGBE: It seems you don't listen carefully in class.

LOBSANG: I do listen.

YANGBE: Well, matches and lighters make fire easy now.

LOBSANG: Yeah.

YANGBE: You haven't skipped class lately, have you?

LOBSANG: No. Ask the teacher if you don't believe me.

YANGBE: Good.

Lobsang finishes his noodles. They keep talking.

LOBSANG: Can I herd tomorrow?

YANGBE: Sure. With you out, I can do the housework.

LOBSANG: Is Uncle Pema home? I want to show him my bridle.

YANGBE: He asked when you'd be back. He'll be happy to see you.

LOBSANG: Will Uncle Pema move to the city?

YANGBE: Probably. His son's in Xining. He might retire there soon.

LOBSANG: Can we buy his livestock then?

YANGBE: Don't dream. We can't afford it, and I can't manage alone.

LOBSANG: I'll help you!

YANGBE: You should focus on school. Maybe attend university, become a civil servant.

LOBSANG: I'm not cut out for that. Finishing middle school would be an achievement.

YANGBE: If you can't even finish middle school, people will laugh at us.

Silence hangs between them.

LOBSANG: Can I have 100 yuan this time?

YANGBE: What for?

LOBSANG: For the school uniform and a book.

YANGBE: How much are they?

LOBSANG: About 80-something.

YANGBE: Okay.

Pause.

YANGBE: You're not getting into trouble at school, are you?

LOBSANG: No.

YANGBE: Good.

15 EXT. OUTSIDE LOBSANG’S HOME – DAWN

The horizon glows pale. Silhouettes of mountains and houses are faintly visible. The light turns on in Yangbe’s home.

16 EXT. OUTSIDE HOME - DAWN

After washing up, Yangbe yawns, carrying a milk pail into the yak pen.

17 INT. INSIDE HOME - DAWN

Lobsang sleeps deeply.

18 EXT. OUTSIDE HOME - MORNING

Yangbe helps Lobsang herd livestock out of the pen. Lobsang rides “Spotted Leopard,” carrying his bridle as he follows the herd uphill.

LOBSANG: I’ll have lunch at Uncle Pema’s.

19 EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

Lobsang lies on the grass, using his bridle as a pillow, watching clouds drift. “Spotted Leopard” grazes peacefully nearby.

20 EXT. OUTSIDE UNCLE PEMA'S HOME - DAY

Uncle Pema drinks tea on the grassland with two Hui men (one old and one young). Roast lamb sits on the table. Bones suggest they've eaten well. A tin box sits near Pema. About 20 sheep bleat loudly in a pen despite the noon hour. Pema counts the last stack of money before him.

OLD HUI: The milk is good.

YOUNG HUI: Pure milk is the best.

Pema finishes counting and sets the money down.

OLD HUI: Are they all there?

PEMA: Yes.

OLD HUI: What about the caterpillar fungus? Not selling?

Pema sighs.

PEMA: I'll hold onto it. The price isn't right.

The old Hui opens the tin to inspect the fungus. Pema watches.

OLD HUI: Fine. We're old friends. I'll take the sheep. Can't profit much on these anyway. Just covering costs.

He stands. Pema hands him the tin. The young Hui pulls money

from his bag, counts it, and gives it to Pema, who places it on the table.

OLD HUI: Aren't you counting it?

PEMA: No need.

OLD HUI: We'll head off then.

They shake hands. The three walk toward the sheep pen. Pema opens the gate. The young Hui drives the sheep out onto the road. Pema and the old Hui stand watch.

OLD HUI: We're leaving.

The young Hui waves goodbye.

PEMA: Safe travels.

Pema watches them go. The young Hui herds the sheep erratically. The old Hui follows. Suddenly, the old Hui turns back.

OLD HUI: Friend, if you lease your pasture next year, contact me first.

PEMA: Will do.

Pema watches them disappear. He spots a boy on horseback approaching from a distant hillside.

21 EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Lobsang rides toward Pema's home. He sees the two Hui men driving the small flock away.

22 EXT. NEAR UNCLE PEMA'S HOME - DAY

Lobsang sees someone moving in and out of Pema's house. Riding closer, he finds Pema adjusting a satellite dish. Pema smiles warmly at his approach.

LOBSANG: Sold some sheep?

PEMA: Yeah. Pasture's stretched thin. Are you on break?

Lobsang dismounts.

LOBSANG: Yes. Since yesterday.

PEMA: Do you know where Australia and New Zealand are?

LOBSANG: I heard of them in geography class.

PEMA: Close to China?

LOBSANG: Far. One's in the north, and the other's in the south of the globe. Why?

PEMA: Ever since lamb from Australia and New Zealand flooded in, our

prices have kept dropping. I wonder why it's so cheap.

LOBSANG: The internet says Australia's summer is all year round. Grass grows everywhere. Sheep are ready at two years old. Only 300 yuan each.

PEMA: That cheap? And a place with eternal summer? That's strange.

LOBSANG: That's what they say online.

Pema ponders, then drops the subject.

LOBSANG: Is the satellite dish broken?

PEMA: It stopped working last night, but was fine yesterday.

LOBSANG: Maybe the wind knocked it crooked.

PEMA: Could be. Go check the TV. Call me if it shows a signal.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Lobsang enters and watches the "searching for signal" screen. Pema slowly adjusts the dish outside.

PEMA: Anything?

LOBSANG: Not yet.

Lobsang keeps watching.

23 EXT. OUTSIDE PEMA'S HOME - DAY

Pema continues adjusting the dish. Lobsang directs from inside.

LOBSANG: Hold there... Turn back slowly... Oh! Lost it again!

PEMA: How about now?

LOBSANG: It flashed just now. Turn back gently.

Pema makes micro-adjustments. Lobsang guides.

LOBSANG: Stop! Perfect! Hold it!

Pema freezes, carefully releases the dish, and secures it with bricks before entering.

24 INT. INSIDE PEMA'S HOME - DAY

Pema brings meat to the table and pours tea for Lobsang.

PEMA: Please have some. It's fresh. A sheep was mauled by wolves days ago. Had to put it down.

Pema changes TV channels, settling on a Sino-Japanese war drama.

LOBSANG: If we had guns, wolves wouldn't dare.

PEMA: True. But guns are banned now. Even if we had one, couldn't kill wolves—just scare them. They're protected.

LOBSANG: If wolves are protected, why aren't sheep? Who pays when wolves kill sheep?

PEMA: Bad luck. Even pheasants are protected now. If you kill one, go to jail. Maybe there's sense in it.

LOBSANG: Hard life.

PEMA: It is.

Pema examines the bridle Lobsang left by the door. Lobsang eats meat with tea.

PEMA: You made this?

LOBSANG: Yeah. I'm stuck on the next part. I need your advice. Pema studies the half-finished bridle.

PEMA: Not bad. Impressive for your age. Leave it. I'll fix it up. Pick it up during next break.

LOBSANG: Okay.

PEMA: When do you go back?

LOBSANG: Day after tomorrow.

PEMA: Do you like the school?

LOBSANG: Not really. I prefer herding at home. But I'd never tell my Sis.

PEMA: Your parents are gone. Listen to your sister.

Lobsang stays silent.

PEMA: You need to get an education. Times have changed. Even to be a good herder, you need education now.

Lobsang ponders while eating meat and watching TV. Pema fiddles with the bridle, also watching.

25 EXT. HOMEWARD PATH - DAY

Lobsang rides "Leopard," carrying a newborn lamb.

26 INT. INSIDE HOME - NIGHT

Yangbe cleans after dinner. Lobsang bottle-feeds the lamb.

LOBSANG: Could it be Uncle Pema's lamb?

YANGBE: Maybe. But his herd doesn't graze there. Could be Darlo's. I'll ask neighbors tomorrow.

LOBSANG: Why would a ewe abandon her lamb?

YANGBE: They usually don't.

LOBSANG: Maybe it got lost? Can we keep it?

YANGBE: Can't keep someone else's lamb.

27 EXT. GRASSLAND PATH - DAY

Yangbe and Lobsang ride a horse across the grassland.

28 EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

They dismount at the highway. Yangbe ties the horse to graze. They wait for the bus. Yangbe pulls 120 yuan from her pocket.

YANGBE: Spend it wisely. Only buy food if you're really hungry.

LOBSANG: Okay.

LOBSANG: Sis, show me the vulture photo again.

Yangbe shows a photo of her, Lobsang, and the baby vulture on the phone. Lobsang zooms in.

LOBSANG: Let's visit the Rescue Station next time.

YANGBE: Do you even know where it is?

LOBSANG: We can ask.

YANGBE: The motorcycle's still broken. Better wait for their call.
Lobsang sulks, staring ahead. Yangbe watches him, knowing he's upset.
A breeze stirs her hair and the grass. A bus can be seen in the far distance.

YANGBE: The bus is coming.

She grabs his backpack, helps him put it on, and flags down the bus.
Lobsang boards quickly.

YANGBE: Study hard!

Lobsang doesn't reply. He finds a window seat. The bus pulls away. He
doesn't wave goodbye. Yangbe watches it leave.

29 EXT. SCHOOL STORE - DAY

Lobsang shops for cigarettes to give to Sonam. An old man runs the
store. Lobsang eyes different brands.

LOBSANG: (Pointing to a red pack) How much for that one?

STOREKEEPER: Don't sell cigarettes to kids.

LOBSANG: The teacher sent me.

STOREKEEPER: Which teacher?

LOBSANG: Mr. Han.

STOREKEEPER: Twelve yuan.

LOBSANG: What's the cheapest?

The storekeeper points to a white pack.

STOREKEEPER: Ten yuan. Cheapest.

LOBSANG: That one. And a cola, and a one-yuan spicy strip.

The storekeeper gives him change, cigarettes, cola, and a snack. Lobsang leaves. Outside, he checks if anyone's watching, crouches, lifts his pant leg, and stuffs his remaining five yuan into his sock. He eats the snack and drinks cola as he walks to school.

30 EXT. SCHOOL GATE - DAY

Lobsang spots Sonam and his lackeys leaving school. He hides, chugging his cola to finish before they arrive. Unable to finish, he has an idea. He walks to a corner, urinates into the bottle, wipes it with his pant leg, shakes it, and walks casually toward school. They meet near the gate. He hands Sonam the cigarettes.

SONAM: The serial class-skipper bought the cheapest.

LOBSANG: I didn't have enough money.

Sonam notices the cola and snacks. He takes a strip of the snack and tastes it.

SONAM: Bring the food from home tonight.

Lobsang stays silent, head down.

SONAM: Got a problem?

LOBSANG: No.

SONAM: Good. Go on.

As Lobsang turns to leave, Sonam stops him.

SONAM: Wait.

Sonam takes the cola bottle from Lobsang's pocket and drinks. He smacks his lips, tasting the "special" cola.

SONAM: Tastes different. How much?

LOBSANG: Three yuan. Different factories, different taste.

Sonam checks the label and drinks again.

SONAM: Go back.

Lobsang hurries off. The lackeys eye the cola thirstily. Lobsang looks back to see Sonam pass the bottle to them. A victorious smile crosses his face.

31 EXT. OUTSIDE CLASSROOM - DAY

During the break, students play outside. Lobsang and Tashi chat quietly in a corner.

LOBSANG: Wanna go to the Animal Rescue Station?

TASHI: When?

LOBSANG: During the break on Sunday afternoon.

TASHI: Do you know where it is? Far?

LOBSANG: Behind Amnye Dongso Mountain. We'll take a taxi.

TASHI: I'm scared of the teachers.

LOBSANG: If we're back before evening study, it's fine.

Tashi hesitates.

TASHI: Still scared.

LOBSANG: I'll buy you a burger if you come.

Tashi thinks.

TASHI: I want iced cola.

LOBSANG: Deal.

TASHI: Promise you're not lying?

LOBSANG: I've got over eighty yuan left from Sis. We'll eat burgers and take a taxi.

TASHI: Okay.

LOBSANG: Deal. No backing out.

TASHI: Deal.

32 INT. BURGER SHOP - DAY

Lobsang and Tashi exit with burgers and iced colas. They eat while waiting for a taxi on the street.

33 INT. TAXI - DAY

The taxi heads into the mountains. They sip cola.

LOBSANG: How long does it take, driver?

DRIVER: About an hour.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Silence.

DRIVER: Why are you going to the Rescue Station?

LOBSANG: To see a baby vulture I rescued.

DRIVER: You rescued a vulture? Impressive!

Lobsang and Tashi exchange smiles, then watch the scenery. The taxi winds up a mountain road.

34 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The taxi makes its way through loop after loop of winding mountain roads. Tall mountains flank the road, dotted with forests, shrubs, and grassland.

35 EXT. ANIMAL RESCUE STATION - DAY

The taxi climbs a slope and stops at the Rescue Station gate.

36 EXT. RESCUE STATION GATE - DAY

Lobsang and Tashi get out. The small side gate is locked. They look back at the driver.

DRIVER: Do you need a ride back?

Lobsang and Tashi look at each other.

LOBSANG: You go ahead first.

They stand at the gate, peering in. No one in sight.

37 EXT. OUTSIDE RESCUE STATION WALL - DAY

They try to peek over the wall at the animals, especially the vulture, but the wall is too high.

38 EXT. RESCUE STATION GATE - DAY

Defeated, they wait under the scorching sun, sweating. Finally, a pickup truck arrives and honks. A young man sleepily emerges from a building and opens the gate. Lobsang and Tashi approach.

YOUNG MAN: What do you want?

LOBSANG: We're here to see the baby vulture. I rescued one brought here two months ago.

The young man looks at a woman getting out of the truck.

YOUNG MAN: Lhamo! These are for you!

Lhamo recognizes Lobsang.

LHAMO: Hey! What are you doing here?

LOBSANG: I am here to see the baby vulture.

LHAMO: Oh... it was released already.

Lobsang's face falls.

LHAMO: We tried calling your sister when we released it near Dongri Sacred Mountain, but her phone was off. So we went alone.

Tashi watches Lobsang's dismay.

TASHI: Should we go back?

LHAMO: Since you're here, tour the other animals! Come on!

She takes Lobsang's hand and walks toward the enclosures. First is a Chinese mountain cat sheltering in its hut.

LHAMO: This is a mountain cat. Bigger than house cats. See the tufts on its ears? Thicker tail, too.

They watch through the glass. Lhamo leads them on.

LHAMO: This is our snow leopard. There's a famous film called Snow Leopard. Have you seen it? This one broke its right leg while hunting on cliffs. Now it's in the post-surgery period, almost healed. We'll release it when it's fully recovered.

TASHI: (To Lobsang) Have you seen that movie?

LOBSANG: Yeah. That leopard was whiter, cleaner, prettier.

They whisper. Lhamo shows them red deer, antelope, Pallas's cats, etc.

Fascinated, they interact closely with deer and antelope along a wooden walkway. Finally, they reach a large aviary holding an old vulture with a broken wing.

LHAMO: (Pointing) Himalayan vulture aviary. Your baby vulture stayed here after surgery until it could hunt again. We released it 4 kilos heavier thanks to our care!

Lobsang stares at the aviary and the old vulture.

LOBSANG: Can vultures fly over Mount Everest?

Lhamo is stumped.

LHAMO: Huh? Um... I'll ask the director.

She calls.

LHAMO: Director, two students asked if vultures can fly over Everest. I didn't know.

DIRECTOR (V.O.): Stumped you, eh? Yes, vultures can fly over Everest. They're among the few birds that can.

LHAMO: Thanks, Director! (Smiling at Lobsang and Tashi)

The director says yes, vultures are among the few birds that can fly directly over Everest!

They tour more animals. Time flies. Before leaving, Lhamo gives them booklets and snacks from her office and walks them out.

LHAMO: Hurry back. Follow the road. Don't get caught in the dark.

LOBSANG: Okay.

TASHI: Thanks.

LOBSANG: When you released it... did you see its mother?

Lhamo pauses, then improvises.

LHAMO: Oh! Yes! Its mother was waiting on the mountain. We released it near her. It flew straight to her. They circled together and flew off.
Lobsang looks relieved.

LOBSANG: Okay. Bye.

They wave goodbye. Lhamo watches them walk away.

39 EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DUSK

At dusk, Lobsang and Tashi reach the mountainside. Sunset bathes the valley town and the red cliffs of Tsenmo Mountain in golden light.

They both look toward the school. Students dot the playground.

TASHI: There are people in the field.

LOBSANG: Evening study hasn't started. We can still make it.

TASHI: Let's hurry.

LOBSANG: Yeah.

Relieved, they rest briefly, then rush downhill. By the time they reach town, streetlights are on. They dash across streets toward the school.

40 EXT. STREET NEAR SCHOOL - NIGHT

Lobsang jogs down the sparsely populated street near school.

LOBSANG: Evening study must've started.

TASHI: What do we do?

LOBSANG: Sneak over the wall.

TASHI: Okay.

41 EXT. SCHOOL WALL - NIGHT

Lobsang helps Tashi climb the wall into the campus.

42 EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - NIGHT

As they sneak toward the classroom building, a patrolling teacher spots them.

TEACHER: Hey! You two! Come here!

They walk over reluctantly. The teacher questions them in the distance.

43 EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

The whole school assembles before the podium. Homeroom teachers stand behind their classes. Lobsang and Tashi hang their heads onstage. The principal announces their punishment for sneaking out, skipping class and “stealing oil bread” from the cafeteria.

PRINCIPAL: For leaving campus without permission and tardiness, seventh-grade students Lobsang and Tashi receive a warning and one week of classroom cleaning duty!

Students murmur. Lobsang glances down. Sonam smirks and gives him a thumbs-up.

44 EXT. OUTSIDE PRINCIPAL’S OFFICE - DAY

Lobsang waits outside. Sonam, his two lackeys, their homeroom teacher, and two police officers enter the office. The bullies look dejected. Soon, Yangbe exits. Lobsang gives her an awkward smile. She shakes her head.

YANGBE: You are hopeless. Let's go.

LOBSANG: What about them? Are the police arresting them?

YANGBE: Worry about yourself! Move!

LOBSANG: It's your fault! You wouldn't take me to see the vulture!
They released it already!

YANGBE: I didn't have time!

LOBSANG: They called you! Your phone was off!

YANGBE: I probably had no signal while herding.

LOBSANG: They released it near the Dongri Sacred Mountain.

YANGBE: Good. At least it can fly now. Better than being caged forever.

Lobsang looks thoughtful as he follows Yangbe downstairs.

45 EXT. SCHOOL GATE - DAY

End of the month, the school was on break. Yangbe starts her motorcycle.
Lobsang mounts the back, wearing his backpack. They ride off.

46 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - AFTERNOON

They ride along winding mountain roads.

47 EXT. GRASSLAND PATH - AFTERNOON

They turn off the highway onto a dirt path. Livestock graze on both sides.

48 INT. INSIDE HOME - NIGHT

Lobsang bottle-feeds the lamb. Yangbe serves mutton from a pot.

YANGBE: Done feeding?

LOBSANG: Almost. Do you think its mother was eaten by wolves?

YANGBE: I don't know. I asked all the neighbors. No one's missing a lamb. Strange.

Lobsang finishes, puts the lamb in its makeshift pen, and sits to eat. He devours his food.

LOBSANG: Maybe thieves slaughtered its mother. Now it's an orphan.

Yangbe stays silent. They eat quietly.

YANGBE: You'll start herding tomorrow. Since school's hopeless for you.

LOBSANG: Never liked it anyway. I'm dumb.

YANGBE: You are hopeless. Who throws away their future like this?

LOBSANG: Sis, ask the principal if I can quit? I'll help you herd. I learn nothing at school.

YANGBE: Impossible. The law says you have to finish middle school. School won't expel you. I wanted you to go to university... Look at you now.

Pause.

YANGBE: Fine. You can come back after middle school.

LOBSANG: That's years away! Too long!

YANGBE: There is no other choice. Eat and sleep. Get up early tomorrow.

49 EXT. OUTSIDE HOME - DAWN

Snow covers the ground. A bitter wind blows. Lobsang stumbles out to urinate. An unusual sound comes from the stable. Peering through the window, he sees "Flower Deer" has returned and seems to be struggling. He runs inside.

LOBSANG: (Repeatedly) Sis!

YANGBE: (V.O.) What?

LOBSANG: "Flower Deer" is back! I think she's having trouble!

A light flicks on. Yangbe and Lobsang rush to the stable.

50 INT. INSIDE HOME - DAWN

Yangbe carries a feed plate from the storeroom, adding flour to it. Lobsang boils water by the stove. Steam rises. The lamb bleats softly in its pen.

LOBSANG: It's a black foal, right? I have a name.

YANGBE: Thought of one already?

LOBSANG: "Jade Deer." I picked it long ago. Like it?

YANGBE: Nice. Water's almost boiling. Go back to sleep.

She adds water to the feed plate. Lobsang heads back to bed.

51 EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

Morning. Lobsang rides "Leopard" behind the herd into the mountains. The vast landscape holds only scattered yaks. Occasionally, he shouts like an experienced herder. For stragglers, he uses his slingshot.

52 EXT. MOUNTAINTOP - DAY

Livestock graze leisurely. Lobsang rides to the summit and surveys the land. Soon, the lead sheep nears a bend beyond the mountain. Lobsang gallops ahead to block them. The herd turns back to graze.

He dismounts, letting "Leopard" graze. From his backpack,

he pulls out dried meat, tea, and bread for lunch. Following herders' tradition, he scatters breadcrumbs for birds and insects.

After eating, he plays with his slingshot and shoots at a plastic bottle. Later, he lies on the grass, studying insects and plants, then gazes at the clouds, lost in thought.

53 EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

At dusk, livestock return home. "Flower Deer," unseen for days, is tethered outside. A black foal plays nearby. Lobsang rides "Leopard" home. Yangbe watches from a window.

He dismounts and rushes to "Flower Deer," stroking her face and neck, then interacts with the foal. Yangbe brings a bucket of beans to the feeding trough.

YANGBE: Hungry? Come eat.

LOBSANG: Not yet. "Jade Deer" is taller now.

YANGBE: Really? In just a few days?

LOBSANG: I can tell. Taller and stronger.

YANGBE: Maybe.

Lobsang fetches the bridle Uncle Pema helped finish. He tries to put it on the foal, but it dodges playfully. Exhausted, Lobsang grabs its

flank. The foal startles, kicking slightly before hiding behind its mother.

LOBSANG: So stubborn! Won't let me touch it or put on the bridle!

YANGBE: It's just a newborn! Not used to strangers. Give it some time. Eat first. We need to count the livestock later.

She heads inside. Lobsang gives up, washes his face, and enters. Yangbe serves potato stir-fry kept warm on the stove and pours Lobsang some tea. Lobsang eats while watching TV.

LOBSANG: Let's name the foal.

YANGBE: What name is good? You choose.

LOBSANG: "Jade Deer."

YANGBE: Nice. "Jade Deer" it is.

LOBSANG: Mother "Flower Deer," daughter "Jade Deer." Perfect! He eats proudly. Yangbe watches him, hesitant.

YANGBE: Um... Auntie came today...

LOBSANG: Yeah?

YANGBE: Said... she found a match for me.

Lobsang looks confused.

LOBSANG: What match?

YANGBE: (Speaking softly) Said he's a good man... willing to be a live-in son-in-law.

Lobsang understands. He stays silent.

YANGBE: I have to marry someday, Lobsang. I am not leaving you.

LOBSANG: Who is he?

YANGBE: Dargye. From Santala. You might've heard of him? He won second place in the horse race a few years back.

LOBSANG: Never heard of that bastard.

YANGBE: Don't swear! He's a good man.

LOBSANG: How would I know? I have never met him.

YANGBE: You wanted riding lessons, right? He can teach you.

LOBSANG: Hmph! I don't need him! I'll beat him easily someday!
Silence.

YANGBE: I...

Lobsang storms out before she finishes. Yangbe watches through the window as he unties "Leopard," mounts, and gallops away.

54 EXT. HILLSIDE OPPOSITE HOME - DUSK

Lobsang whips “Leopard” fiercely up the hill. Exhausted, the horse trembles and refuses to move higher. Finally realizing his cruelty, Lobsang dismounts, hugs “Leopard’s” neck, sobs and apologies.

LOBSANG: I’m sorry! Sorry! Didn’t mean to hurt you... I...

Choked with tears, he clings to the horse. Boy and horse stand silhouetted against the dying light, a picture of desolation.

55 INT. INSIDE HOME - NIGHT

Yangbe, in her bed, stares at the ceiling. Lobsang lies facing away, pretending to sleep. The lamb bleats softly.

YANGBE: Lobsang?

There is no response from Lobsang. He holds his breath, eyes shut tight.

YANGBE: Asleep?

Silence. Yangbe gives up. Tears well in Lobsang’s eyes.

56 INT. INSIDE HOME - DAWN

Yangbe is already up and busy. Lobsang feigns sleep.

YANGBE: Butter tea’s ready. I’m going to go for herding. Get up and eat later.

Lobsang stays silent. Once she's gone, he jumps up. He feeds "Flower Deer" and the foal, eats breakfast while bottle-feeding the lamb, then puts the lamb in the pen.

He rummages through the house, packing tack, clothes, camping gear (blankets and firecrackers), and food into saddlebags. Thoughts of Yangbe make him pause; he unpacks items several times, but hardens his resolve and repacks.

Worried riding "Flower Deer" so soon after foaling might harm her, he walks, leading her. The foal "Jade Deer" follows.

They head west across the grassland.

After an hour, crossing a pass, he stops and looks back toward home. Seeing nothing, he continues.

57 EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

Journeying for a long time, Lobsang deliberately chooses open terrain. During the journey, "Jade Deer" attempts to suckle several times, but to save time and exit familiar territory, Lobsang forcibly leads "Flower Deer" onward, giving no opportunity to nurse.

58 EXT. GRASSY MEADOW - DAY

It is already afternoon. Lobsang rests and eats lunch in a lush grassy meadow, allowing "Flower Deer" and "Jade Deer" to rest and fill their bellies.

59 EXT. GRASSY HILLSIDE - DAY

Lobsang leads “Flower Deer” and “Jade Deer” onward, walking along a mountainside. By the time he reaches the hilltop, dusk is falling. Dark clouds gather over the distant peaks, swallowing the sun’s last rays. Far off, a storm is brewing. Fortunately, scattered households are visible nearby. Lobsang quickens his pace towards the nearest one, but finds only a cute little girl, about six years old.

LOBSANG: Where are your parents?

Lobsang asks her in both Tibetan and Chinese, but the girl just stares silently. Lobsang has to leave. Before going, he takes a small snack from his pocket and gives it to her. As he leaves, the girl smiles and waves. Lobsang walks on, sometimes breaking into a run, heading towards a more distant house. Dozens of minutes later, he finally reaches the door of the far house.

LOBSANG: Anyone home?

Almost as he calls out, a young woman emerges. She looks only slightly older than his sister Yangbe. Seeing Lobsang, she seems surprised, then turns and says something into the house in Mongolian, which Lobsang can’t fully understand. The woman turns back to Lobsang.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Hello.

LOBSANG: Hello, may I take shelter from the rain at your place?

He speaks to her in the Tibetan-accented Mandarin he learned at school.

MONGOLIAN WOMAN: Ah, yes, come in quickly.

She takes the reins from Lobsang and glances at the saddlebags on the horse.

MONGOLIAN WOMAN: Bring your saddlebags inside.

Simultaneously, a young Mongolian man with curly hair comes out and smiles at Lobsang.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Where are you headed, young brother?

LOBSANG: Hello, brother. I'm looking for horses. I came from the Nihaning area.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Come on in.

The Mongolian man takes the saddlebags from Lobsang.

60 INT. MONGOLIAN HOME - DAY

The Mongolian man leads Lobsang inside. Lobsang looks around; the room is tidy. The man places the saddlebags in a corner and gestures for him to sit.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Sit, brother.

The woman comes in from outside, pours Lobsang a bowl of milk tea, and refills the man's tea.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Drink some milk tea, young brother. Warm yourself up.

MONGOLIAN WOMAN: Please have some tea.

The woman sits down beside her husband. Lobsang takes a sip of tea, hesitates, then speaks.

LOBSANG: If it's convenient, I'd like to ask to stay the night.

MONGOLIAN MAN: No need to go anywhere. It's no trouble at all. Stay tonight.

LOBSANG: Mm, thank you.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Hey, young brother, relax, no need to be so formal.

LOBSANG: Mm, okay.

MONGOLIAN MAN: When I was your age, I wouldn't dare travel alone like this.

LOBSANG: My father said it's to train me.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Mm, that's how a grassland man should be.

The man gives Lobsang a thumbs-up and signals for his wife to bring food.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Hurry up and bring him something to eat.

LOBSANG: No need, I'm not hungry yet.

The woman still brings out a plate of meat and places it before him.

MONGOLIAN WOMAN: Fill your stomach a little first. Dinner will be ready soon.

LOBSANG: I'm really not hungry. I'll eat later with everyone.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Alright then. We'll eat once we gather the sheep flock.

The woman gets up to prepare dinner.

MONGOLIAN MAN: How many days have you been searching?

LOBSANG: Two days.

MONGOLIAN MAN: What kind of horses?

LOBSANG: Three horses. One is a pale-bellied horse.

MONGOLIAN MAN: That's easily recognizable, but I haven't seen any around here.

LOBSANG: Maybe they followed other herds far away or got lost.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Probably.

A pause.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Sit for a while. I'll go gather the sheep flock.

LOBSANG: I'll come too.

MONGOLIAN MAN: Mm, fine.

The Mongolian man and Lobsang stand up almost simultaneously and go out.

61 EXT. HILLSIDE OUTSIDE MONGOLIAN HOME - DUSK

The Mongolian man and Lobsang drive the sheep and cattle herd back from a nearby hillside. Under the overcast sky, raindrops begin to fall.

62 INT. MONGOLIAN HOME - NIGHT

The Mongolian man and Lobsang warm themselves by the stove while the Mongolian woman makes hand-pulled noodles nearby.

MONGOLIAN MAN: By the way, young brother, what's your name? I forgot to ask earlier.

LOBSANG: I'm Lobsang. What's your name, brother?

MONGOLIAN MAN: I'm Mönkh. Your sister-in-law is Bayintana. Her name is beautiful, right?

He looks at his wife, then winks at Lobsang.

LOBSANG: Beautiful.

MONGOLIAN MAN (MÖNKH): And she's not bad-looking either.

Lobsang smiled sheepishly.

LOBSANG: Mm, very pretty.

BAYINTANA: Mönkh, don't talk nonsense in front of our young brother.

Bayintana has finished cooking the noodles. She serves Lobsang a bowl first.

BAYINTANA: Eat quickly. You must be starving.

LOBSANG: Mm, okay.

MÖNKH: Don't be polite. Make yourself at home.

Bayintana serves Mönkh a bowl and finally sits on a small stool beside him to eat.

63 EXT. OUTSIDE MÖNKH'S HOME - NIGHT

“Flower Deer” grazes leisurely on the grassy patch outside Mönkh’s home. “Jade Deer” frolics around its mother.

64 INT. INSIDE MÖNKH'S HOME - NIGHT

Bayintana cleans the dishes and pots. Mönkh and Lobsang remain seated. Mönkh fiddles with his phone. Bayintana glances back at him.

BAYINTANA: Let’s play cards later. Our TV is broken, haven’t gotten it fixed.

LOBSANG: Okay.

MÖNKH: You know how to play cards, right, Lobsang?

Lobsang: Mm, a little. I played occasionally at school.

MÖNKH: You’re still in school?

LOBSANG: Yes, but I graduated from middle school this year.

BAYINTANA: Where did you go? Near Wajok?

LOBSANG: No, near Yulong.

MÖNKH: That’s a bit far.

LOBSANG: It's okay.

MÖNKH: I met your sister-in-law near Wajok. I was a grade above her. Back then, she was still a snot-nosed little girl.

Bayintana, searching for cards nearby, hears Mönkh badmouthing her. She glares at him, brings the cards over, kicks him lightly, sits down, and begins shuffling.

BAYINTANA: Shut up! When did I ever have snot? You were the one with snot! Listen, Lobsang, Mönkh was no good. Always getting into trouble at school.

MÖNKH: Heh, bad boys get the pretty girls, right? I was shameless; I pestered her every day. That's why she married me in the end.

BAYINTANA: Exactly! His skin is thicker than cowhide. No shame at all.

Lobsang watches Mönkh and Bayintana tease each other with a smile. Mönkh took the cards from Bayintana and starts dealing for the three of them.

MÖNKH: Young brother Lobsang, do you plan to go to university?

LOBSANG: No. My grades aren't good enough.

BAYINTANA: If studying really isn't for you, it's fine. I think you'd make a fine herder. So young and already traveling the grasslands alone

like this.

MÖNKH: Being a free herder is good too.

LOBSANG: Mm, that's what I think too.

Lobsang, Bayintana, and Mönkh pick up their dealt cards and arrange them.

65 INT. INSIDE MÖNKH'S HOME - DAWN

At dawn, Bayintana gets up, washes, and starts working. She gently shakes Mönkh awake. Lobsang also wakes up and gets up.

BAYINTANA: It's still early. Sleep a bit more. I'll wake you up when breakfast is ready. Or maybe rest here today?

LOBSANG: No. If the horses have gone far, it'll be troublesome.

BAYINTANA: Maybe they've already gone back by themselves?

LOBSANG: They won't have, sister-in-law. One horse was just bought recently. It must have led them away. I need to find them quickly.

66 EXT. OUTSIDE MÖNKH'S HOME - DAY

Lobsang leads "Flower Deer" and the fawn. Mönkh helps him saddle "Flower Deer." Bayintana brings a bottle of water, a jar of yogurt, and a lump of fried barley flower from inside, placing them in the

saddlebags. Lobsang prepares to leave with the deer.

MÖNKH: Brother Lobsang, you should ride.

BAYINTANA: Yes, you're light. As long as you don't let her run, it should be fine.

Lobsang thinks they made sense and mounts "Flower Deer" to leave.

LOBSANG: I'm off then, brother, sister-in-law.

BAYINTANA: Don't forget to visit when you have time.

LOBSANG: Okay. I will definitely come back to visit.

Lobsang rides "Flower Deer," "Jade Deer" following behind. Bayintana leans against Mönkh as they watch Lobsang ride away.

67 EXT. BASE OF A BARREN SLOPE - DAY

Lobsang rides "Flower Deer" along the shaded base of a barren slope. The vegetation on the sunny side isn't lush, but the shaded side is even sparser, sand and soil almost exposed. Lobsang dismounts and begins leading "Flower Deer" and "Jade Deer" up the slope.

68 EXT. BARREN SLOPE - DAY

Under the scorching sun, Lobsang leads "Flower Deer" and "Jade Deer" up the barren slope. He stops occasionally, wiping sweat from his

forehead before continuing.

69 EXT. BEND IN A WASTELAND - DAY

Lobsang rides “Flower Deer” towards a bend in the wasteland, “Jade Deer” following closely. He looks up at the sun; it is past noon. The sparse grass and plants are yellowing. Looking around, all he sees is wasteland. Feeding “The Deer” here is impossible. He decides to eat first, slowly pulling the reins to stop the horse at the bend. He dismounts, takes things from the saddlebags, and prepares lunch.

Lobsang eats the fried barley flour and half a jar of yogurt given by Mönkh and Bayintana. After drinking some water from the plastic bottle, he feels drowsy. Just as he is about to lie down, a man on horseback, around 40, suddenly appears less than ten meters ahead to the right. The middle-aged rider looks dusty and unshaven, wearing a dirty black Tibetan robe, trousers, and boots. He doesn’t look ordinary, especially with the dagger at his waist and the rifle-shaped object wrapped in canvas. Lobsang also sees dried blood seeping from the rider’s bulging saddlebag, covered by army-green cloth. The rider adjusts the cloth to cover it.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Hello, brother.

LOBSANG: Hello.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Seen any ranger patrols, or two or three people together, on the road?

LOBSANG: I haven't met anyone on the road.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Got water?

Lobsang shows his water bottle. The rider gestures for him to throw it to him. Lobsang stands and throws it. The rider drinks half and throws the bottle back.

Just then, the rider sees another horseman approaching in the distance. He grips the canvas-wrapped rifle defensively. Lobsang also spots the rider approaching from the left.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Brother, don't say things you shouldn't say to others. You know what trouble that brings, right?

Lobsang glances at the young rider approaching from the left, then back at the middle-aged man.

LOBSANG: Mm.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Good.

The young rider draws closer. He rides a silver-maned horse, wears sunglasses, a sun hat, a brown leather jacket, blue jeans, and martin boots. He looks about 27, dashing. He stops about ten meters away. The two riders stare at each other. Seeing the dagger on the middle-aged man's waist, the young man deliberately reveals his own. They stand facing each other in silence. Lobsang stands near the middle-aged man. After a moment, the middle-aged man nods at the young man, who nods

back.

MIDDLE-AGED RIDER: Thank you, friend.

The middle-aged man thanks Lobsang, then spurs his horse, detouring around the young man and disappearing over a hill. The young man watches him leave, then rides straight to Lobsang, scrutinizing him.

YOUNG RIDER: Young brother, who was that?

LOBSANG: Don't know.

He asked for water and left.

YOUNG RIDER: What did he say?

LOBSANG: Didn't say anything.

YOUNG RIDER: Okay. I thought you were together.

LOBSANG: No.

YOUNG RIDER: Where are you headed?

LOBSANG: I am looking for horses.

YOUNG RIDER: What a coincidence. Me too. How many horses?

LOBSANG: Three of my family's. Yours?

YOUNG RIDER: About a dozen, probably. Three blue roans. One's a big bright bay, and very noticeable.

LOBSANG: Haven't seen them.

YOUNG RIDER: Your three probably aren't alone. Might have joined a bigger herd.

LOBSANG: Possibly.

YOUNG RIDER: Where are you from?

LOBSANG: From Niha.

YOUNG RIDER: Sunny Side of Niha or Shady Side of Naha?

LOBSANG: Shady Side.

YOUNG RIDER: Okay. I know people near Sunny Side, but not Shady Side, I think.

LOBSANG: And you?

YOUNG RIDER: Me? Far from here. Over there.

He points in the direction he came from.

YOUNG RIDER: I've been out for days. Haven't even seen horse dung on the road.

LOBSANG: Horse dung?

YOUNG RIDER: If it's dung from my horses, I can tell at a glance.

Lobsang gives him a faint smile.

YOUNG RIDER: What? Don't believe me?

LOBSANG: No one is going to believe it. Go ahead and fool a ghost with it.

The young man finally dismounts and sits beside him.

YOUNG RIDER: Since that's how it is, let's make a bet. I'll show you if I'm bragging or not.

LOBSANG: How?

YOUNG RIDER: It's simple. You're looking for horses too, right? Maybe they got mixed together. Let's look together. I'll show you how I find them.

LOBSANG: But you wouldn't recognize my horse's dung. Wouldn't I just be helping you find your horses?

YOUNG RIDER: You don't get it. If the dung isn't too old, I can tell when they passed. If it's not from my horses, it must be from yours, right?

LOBSANG: I don't know. You go look yourself. We'll each search alone.

Lobsang mounts "Flower Deer" and leaves with "Jade Deer." Soon, the young rider follows.

YOUNG RIDER: Brother, no offence, but pushing a mare that just gave birth a few days ago like this...Make sure she doesn't get sick.

Lobsang ignores him and keeps walking.

YOUNG RIDER: I suggest you go slow. This horse shouldn't get chilled right now.

LOBSANG: You mean if she doesn't get cold, she'll be fine?

YOUNG RIDER: Anyway, my horse went through something similar. She was fine later.

Lobsang pulls the reins and dismounts, leading "Flower Deer" forward, "Jade Deer" following. The young rider still follows.

YOUNG RIDER: Come on up. Ride behind me. Walking like this, you won't get far.

LOBSANG: No. I'll go alone.

YOUNG RIDER: Searching together is better. We'll have company. How about that?

Lobsang ignores him. His attention is fixed on “Jade Deer.” He constantly checks the horses’ condition, touching “Flower Deer’s” chest and neck to see if she is sweating, and watching if Jade Deer can keep up. The young rider follows silently, smiling as he watches Lobsang worry.

YOUNG RIDER: Do you know my horse’s name?

LOBSANG: No.

YOUNG RIDER: Silvermane.

LOBSANG: Oh.

YOUNG RIDER: He’s a good horse. Ran in horse races.

LOBSANG: When?

YOUNG RIDER: Years ago, when he was young. He’s a bit older now.

LOBSANG: What do you think of my horse?

YOUNG RIDER: What’s her name?

LOBSANG: “Jade Deer”.

YOUNG RIDER: Special name. Seems like she has potential. Depends on how she’s trained later.

Lobsang is silent. They walk on.

YOUNG RIDER: Do you know how to train horses?

LOBSANG: Not yet.

YOUNG RIDER: Find someone experienced to teach you. Otherwise, you'll waste a good horse.

They reach the edge of a small valley. It looks like a dead end, but Lobsang turns into it, walking calmly. The young rider rides ahead of him and turns his horse around.

YOUNG RIDER: Brother, what are you doing?

LOBSANG: I want to go into that valley. If you're in a hurry, leave. No need to follow me.

YOUNG RIDER: That valley's a dead end. There's no way through.

Lobsang ignores him.

YOUNG RIDER: Meeting is fate. Besides, we're both looking for horses. It is safer together, right?

LOBSANG: We'll each search alone. Why do you insist on following me?

Lobsang walks on without stopping. The young rider stands still, watching him leave.

70 EXT. WASTELAND LEFT OF VALLEY - DAY

Gradually, Lobsang becomes a small dot moving towards the valley on the left. The young rider heads across the flatter wasteland on the right.

71 EXT. INSIDE VALLEY - DAY

Lobsang leads “Flower Deer” and the foal long the valley floor, filled with oddly shaped boulders. He occasionally looks back towards where the young rider has gone.

72 EXT. VALLEY EXIT (RIGHT) - DUSK

Lobsang leads “Flower Deer” out of a valley exit. He checks the horse, then looks at the setting sun. He looks tired.

YOUNG RIDER: Brother, you’re too slow. I’ve been waiting forever.

Lobsang looks up. The young rider is resting on a hillside to the right of the pass. Lobsang still doesn’t want to engage and keeps walking. The rider watches him, then mounts and follows.

YOUNG RIDER: Look, the sun’s almost down. We need to find a place to camp and make a fire, or we’ll freeze tonight.

Lobsang glances at the setting sun and keeps walking, head down.

YOUNG RIDER: Let’s walk ahead, see if there’s a good spot. Might get

rain or snow tonight.

No reply.

YOUNG RIDER: I'm Kunsang. What's your name?

Silence.

YOUNG RIDER (KUNSANG): Hmm?

LOBSANG: I'm Lobsang.

YOUNG RIDER (KUNSANG): Mm. We need to find a place with dry dung, preferably near water. No fire, no hot water, no warmth. Big trouble.

Lobsang listen to Kunsang's reasonable analysis. He begins to feel this guy might be reliable, but doesn't respond immediately, pretending he knows it all. He walks alongside Kunsang, leading the Deer.

YOUNG RIDER (KUNSANG): Get on. You must be tired after walking all day.

Kunsang holds out his right hand, offering to pull Lobsang up behind him on Silvermane.

73 EXT. WASTELAND - DUSK

They ride double on Silvermane across the vast wasteland. Scattered animal bones lie on the ground nearby.

KUNSANG: See those bones? It means wolves are around. It is dangerous. We need to keep going and find water if we can.

They ride for a long time. Kunsang spots a dilapidated prefab building nestled against a sunny slope.

KUNSANG: Look! A prefab hut! Might be water nearby too.

Lobsang looks over Kunsang's shoulder. There was indeed an old prefab building.

LOBSANG: If people lived here, there should be water.

KUNSANG: Smart! But it might be dried up by now.

74 EXT. DILAPIDATED PREFAB BUILDING - EVENING

Kunsang and Lobsang reach the building. It has no roof. The door is smashed off. Window glass lies shattered everywhere. Probably left by a grassland rodent control team years ago. Lobsang dismounts first and peers inside. Animal and livestock dung is scattered inside. Kunsang dismounts and also checks.

LOBSANG: Livestock and other animals have been in here.

KUNSANG: We'll camp here tonight. Shame there are no pheasants around. Pheasant tastes way better than rabbit.

Kunsang takes his saddlebags off the horse, places them on the ground, and hobbles Silvermane. Lobsang unsaddles "Flower Deer" and brings his gear inside.

LOBSANG: Can you catch rabbits?

KUNSANG: I'll set a snare with this wire. We'll have rabbit meat soon. You gather dry dung. See if there's water nearby.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Lobsang takes off his outer robe, ties the sleeves to make a bag, and goes to gather dung. Kunsang starts to make a snare with wire, glances around, and heads in the opposite direction.

It's almost dark. Lobsang has gathered a large pile of dung. He returns with another load. Kunsang already has a fire going.

LOBSANG: There's water by the marsh over there.

KUNSANG: Oh, great! Get some more. We need it, or we'll freeze. I'll fetch water and check the snare.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Lobsang leaves with his robe-bag. Kunsang grabs his small blackened

teapot and also heads out.

75 EXT/INT. DILAPIDATED PREFAB BUILDING - NIGHT

Night falls. A fire blazes in a hearth made of three stones. Steam rises from the teapot. Kunsang cuts the rabbit meat into chunks, tells Lobsang to put them in the teapot to boil, and skewers the two hind legs on a wire for roasting.

KUNSANG: Here, hold this. Soon we'll have rabbit soup, then grilled meat. Warm food, then a good sleep. Perfect.

Kunsang hands the skewers to Lobsang. He takes a small bottle from his saddlebag.

LOBSANG: You brought seasoning?

KUNSANG: Yep. Essential for the wild. Salt and spices make it delicious.

LOBSANG: Do you travel around all the time?

KUNSANG: Have to. I'm a wandering herder. Drifting, but feels free. It's okay. Here, give it back.

He takes the skewers back.

KUNSANG: But I might get married by year's end. After that, responsibilities. Can't wander anymore.

Kunsang glances at Lobsang, turning the rabbit legs over the fire. Rabbit fat drips, sizzling on the coals. A rich aroma fills the air. Lobsang swallowed.

LOBSANG: Why aren't you married yet at your age?

KUNSANG: Reasons. Besides, I'm not that old. Only 27.

The meat in the teapot begins to bubble, but isn't fully cooked yet. Lobsang stares hungrily at the roasting meat. He feels a hunger like never before.

LOBSANG: Ready yet? Can I eat?

KUNSANG: Almost.

Kunsang hands Lobsang a roasted leg.

KUNSANG: Eat. Have some soup later. Guaranteed sleep till dawn.

They eat the legs and finish all the boiled meat and soup in the teapot.

KUNSANG: Well? Full?

LOBSANG: Almost.

KUNSANG: Your stomach's full, but your mind isn't satisfied.

LOBSANG: Then let's catch another one tomorrow.

KUNSANG: Tomorrow I need to go towards the Sunny Side of Niha. I'll be back the day after for sure.

LOBSANG: What's in the Sunny Side of Niha? Giving up on the horses?

KUNSANG: Important business. Maybe my friend already found the herd.

LOBSANG: What important business?

Kunsang hesitates slightly, then continues.

KUNSANG: Tell you the truth. I'm not looking for horses. I've been guiding the State Grid construction crew these days. Job's almost done, so I left early. Going to see someone important.

LOBSANG: You left early? What if they get lost in the mountains?

KUNSANG: It's fine. There's a cook, a local guy. He can lead them back.

LOBSANG: Oh, right.

KUNSANG: Do you have someone you like?

Lobsang smiles faintly and stays silent.

KUNSANG: You're young. But you will someday.

Hearing Kunsang is going to see someone important, Lobsang thinks of his sister preparing for marriage. His mood suddenly drops. Just then, Kunsang takes out his phone, turns it on. Still no signal.

LOBSANG: You have a phone?

KUNSANG: No signal at all. Don't you carry one?

LOBSANG: No signal in the mountains. Didn't bring it.

KUNSANG: Mm, makes sense.

Full and satisfied, they use their robes as blankets and lie down. When the dung fire is almost out, Kunsang gets up and adds more yak dung. Lobsang also turns to watch the fire.

KUNSANG: You're not asleep?

LOBSANG: Mm, can't sleep.

He looks up at the night sky.

KUNSANG: You're not scared, are you?

LOBSANG: No.

KUNSANG: With me here, don't be afraid. I'm the king of the wilderness.

Lobsang stays silent.

KUNSANG: Cold?

Lobsang: No.

A period of silence.

Lobsang gazes at the stars, lost in thought. After a long while, he asks.

LOBSANG: Do you know how far the stars are?

Kunsang is stumped. He turns to Lobsang.

KUNSANG: No idea. Really far, I guess.

LOBSANG: You must see them very clearly from the Himalayas.

KUNSANG: Himalayas?

LOBSANG: Yeah, the world's highest mountains.

KUNSANG: Isn't Mount Everest the highest peak?

LOBSANG: Everest is the highest point of the Himalayas.

KUNSANG: You know a lot. You're a student, right?

LOBSANG: Went to school before. Stopped later.

KUNSANG: Why?

LOBSANG: Didn't want to. Hey, have you heard of Dongri Sacred Mountain?

KUNSANG: I think I have. Dongri Sacred Mountain is a famous holy mountain around here. Especially for men, you have to go there before you turn 18. Looks like you haven't been.

LOBSANG: I'm far from that. Where is it? Far?

KUNSANG: On horseback, a day west of here. Walking, maybe two days. You'll go someday.

LOBSANG: Oh, okay.

A pause.

LOBSANG: Have you seen vultures at Dongri Sacred Mountain?

KUNSANG: No, but...there should be. Vultures go where there's carrion. If there were carrion here, they'd fly here.

LOBSANG: Mm. Where do they usually live?

KUNSANG: Probably in caves on the mountain somewhere.

LOBSANG: Oh.

76 EXT. DILAPIDATED PREFAB BUILDING - NIGHT

Early morning. Lobsang returns with water. Kunsang is still asleep. Lobsang breaks dry dung into small pieces and places them on the dying embers. He blows gently, but blows too hard the first time, covering himself in ash. The second time, he controls his breath, and the fire catches. As the tea water boils, Kunsang wakes up. He gets up, relieves himself, then comes back for a simple breakfast of flatbread and tea.

KUNSANG: Today, you search west. If you don't see fresh dung within a day, it means they didn't go that way. Come back here and wait for me.

LOBSANG: Okay. What if you don't come?

KUNSANG: I'll be back. If I really can't make it, just head home. The horses you're looking for aren't in this area.

LOBSANG: Can't go back.

KUNSANG: Why? Must find them? Will you get scolded if you go back?

LOBSANG: Not really. It's just...

KUNSANG: What?

Lobsang ignores.

KUNSANG: Okay, since you don't want to say, forget it. Just listen to

me, you won't go wrong.

After breakfast, they set off in their respective directions. Before leaving, Kunsang gives Lobsang the knife he used to cut the meat last night.

KUNSANG: Take this knife. Walking alone in the wild without a knife? You'd starve to death.

LOBSANG: Mm.

KUNSANG: I'm off then. Be careful. Goodbye.

LOBSANG: Goodbye. Hey, can I ask you a favor?

KUNSANG: What?

LOBSANG: Can you take a message to my family?

KUNSANG: Absolutely. Word for word.

LOBSANG: I lied last night. I'm not from the Shady Side of Naha. I'm from the Sunny Side of Niha, by the Tsechu River. There are three households downstream. The furthest one is mine. If no one's home, tell any of them.

KUNSANG: No problem. We're brothers now. I'll deliver your message faithfully.

LOBSANG: But promise me one thing.

KUNSANG: Say it.

LOBSANG: Keep my whereabouts secret. Don't tell anyone. Not even roughly where I am. Okay?

KUNSANG: Why?

LOBSANG: I'm not looking for horses. I ran away from home.

KUNSANG: I knew it. Someone searching for horses wouldn't forget binoculars and wouldn't keep walking into empty places.

Lobsang looks embarrassed.

Silence.

KUNSANG: But I still admire your courage. How old are you?

LOBSANG: Twelve.

KUNSANG: I'd never gone out alone at twelve. That much, you're braver than me.

LOBSANG: So you promise?

KUNSANG: Are you really determined to run away? Not going back?

LOBSANG: Not forever. I'll go back. But I need to be out for a few days, toughen myself up. Maybe go to Dongri Sacred Mountain.

KUNSANG: Then what should I tell your family?

LOBSANG: Tell them I went to see Dongri Sacred Mountain and will be back soon.

KUNSANG: Deal.

LOBSANG: Mm.

KUNSANG: Then go see Dongri Sacred Mountain and turn back. If you get there first, wait for me. We'll meet back here.

Kunsang thinks for a moment.

KUNSANG: Oh, the State Grid crew might come back north of Dongri Sacred Mountain. If you meet them, say you're my nephew. The cook is Phurba. You can follow them back. If you don't meet them, come back the same way. We'll meet here. Got it?

LOBSANG: Okay.

Kunsang gives Lobsang some firecrackers, matches, and the knife from his saddlebag.

KUNSANG: Take these too. If you see or hear wolves, light a fire and set off firecrackers. They won't dare come close.

LOBSANG: Thank you, brother Kunsang.

KUNSANG: No need. Be careful on the road.
Oh, and starting today, you can ride. Just don't go too fast.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Lobsang waves goodbye, watching Kunsang ride away until he disappears into the golden light. After Kunsang leaves, Lobsang packs up, carefully placing Kunsang's teapot, rabbit snare wire, knife, and firecrackers into his saddlebags. He stamps out the last embers and sets off.

77 EXT. WASTELAND - DAY

Lobsang rides "Flower Deer," "Jade Deer" trotting behind. Today, his mood is exceptionally good. The guilt of secretly running away vanished. He heads towards Dongri Sacred Mountain as Kunsang describes. Gradually, as the terrain rises, the vegetation grows denser. The warm sun and cool breeze refresh him. He looks around from horseback, gazes into the distance, enjoying the wildness and freedom, occasionally bursting into song.

78 EXT. STREAMSIDE - NOON

By a stream, he lets "Flower Deer" drink. Judging by the sun, it is well past noon. He takes leftover flatbread from home from his saddlebags, dips it in water for lunch. Just then, an airplane flies overhead. Lobsang watches it happily, shouting until it disappears.

“Jade Deer” isn’t ready to drink yet. Curious, it touches its muzzle to the water. The cold startles it, making it jump back. Lobsang laughs heartily at its reaction.

After resting, he fills the jar Bayintana gives him with water, puts it back in the saddlebags, and mounts “Flower Deer.” Worried she might sweat and get sick, he rides slowly.

79 EXT. CAMPSITE - AFTERNOON

After about thirty kilometers, the sun hangs low over the western mountains. Lobsang needs to find shelter for the night. Rounding a bend, he sees over a dozen yaks on a sunny slope to the right of a grassy area. Thinking it is a herder, he is delighted. Closer, he sees they are wild yaks. He knows their temper; a slight mistake could provoke an attack, so he doesn’t dare get too close. But as a herder’s son, even with wild yaks nearby, he feels somewhat reassured. He finds a spot that looks like a previous campsite. The grass here is much richer than the barren land he’d crossed. He unsaddles “Flower Deer,” hobbles her, and lets them graze. Then, taking Kunsang’s snare wire, he goes to set a trap, placing it near a path after finding fresh rabbit droppings.

While he is gone, “Flower Deer” wanders to his saddlebags and eats most of his flatbread. Returning to find only a small piece left, he is dismayed. But exhaustion outweighs sorrow. He eats the remaining bread, then lies down leaning against the saddle.

Leaning back, exhaustion hits him instantly, and he falls asleep.

When he wakes, a gentle breeze blows. It is afternoon. His head feels foggy, and sweat beads on his forehead, nose, and neck. Hunger and discomfort make him reluctant to move, but he forces himself up to check the snare. He hasn't caught a rabbit, only a marmot.

Mimicking Kunsang, he skins and guts the marmot, nearly vomits from the smell and his discomfort, but holds it in. After cleaning it, he uses his lighter to start a fire and begins roasting it. The marmot meat smells odd. Impatient, he wolfs it down before it is fully cooked, barely tasting it.

After eating, his discomfort gradually fades. This was his first night alone in the wild, hunting and cooking his meal. His spirits lifts. Gradually, a dull ache comes from his feet. He takes off his shoes and socks. His feet are covered in blisters, some burst. He squeezes out the fluid, dries his shoes and socks by the fire, cuts his scarf in half, and wraps his feet. Then he goes to gather dung for the night.

That night, the rising moon is obscured by clouds. The surroundings are hazy. Occasional unknown sounds come from the darkness.

The firelight would protect him from wolves. This requires lots of dung and branches. Gathering courage, he makes several trips to collect enough, plus some dry weeds. Lobsang lights the dung ring around him, spreads his blanket, and lies down. He surrounds himself with a ring of burning dung, and arranges himself in the center.

Gathering courage, Lobsang makes several trips to collect dung and some dry weeds. He makes a ring with these and lights it. The firelight should protect him from wolves. He spreads his blanket in the center and lies down.

Late at night, nature calls. He gets up, walks a few steps behind the camp, and begins relieving himself. A huge shape suddenly rises and runs off! Lobsang freezes, trembling, urine splashing his pants. It takes him a while to calm down. It's just a wild yak.

Returning, he can't sleep. He keeps getting up to add dung. Gazing at the bright star in the western sky, he finds the solitude thrilling. Hearing "Flower Deer" grazing nearby calms him slightly. Eventually, exhaustion wins. He adds a large pile of dung and falls asleep.

Lobsang wakes and sleeps fitfully until dawn breaks. Relieved, he sleeps soundly, well into the afternoon.

80 EXT. DANXIA LANDFORM HILLS - AFTERNOON

Lobsang crosses valleys and meadows to reach a barren area dotted with Danxia landform hills. Low, colorful hills flank the sides. Deep in the wasteland is a small lake, about 80 square meters. He sees no sign of the towering, snow-capped, eagle-wing-shaped Dongri Sacred Mountain Kunsang described. He begins to doubt his direction.

81 EXT. SMALL LAKESIDE - DUSK

Lobsang dismounts by the lake. He lets “Flower Deer” drink, then plays skimming stones on the water, finding rare joy, forgetting his troubles for a moment.

Leaving, he eats the last small piece of flatbread from his saddlebags for a late lunch. Dark clouds gather on the horizon. Worried about rain, he mounts “Flower Deer” and rides on. Crossing a narrow wild grass patch, the land opens up. He scans constantly but sees no sign of human life or animals, only a few black dots far away. As he gets closer, he sees it’s a cairn of large stones, as if deliberately placed.

82 EXT. CAIRN OF STONES - EXT DUSK

The distance to the cairn seems short, but “Flower Deer” keeps stopping to graze. He pulls the reins, lets her eat, then pulls again. It takes over an hour. The sun had vanished. The gloomy sky brings a sharp temperature drop. Snow seems likely.

83 EXT. CAIRN OF STONES - DUSK

The cairn is larger than expected. While it wouldn’t block rain, it offers a windbreak. Lobsang decides to camp there. He quickly unsaddles “Flower Deer” and hobbles her and the fawn on nearby grass, letting them graze before snow covers everything. He hurries to set rabbit snares in nearby thickets, then gathers enough dry branches and dung for a fire while waiting for prey.

He should have been near Dongri Sacred Mountain by now, but

looking around, he sees no towering, eagle-winged snow mountain, not even a decent, small snow-capped peak.

Snow begins to fall, heavier and heavier. Soon, everything is blanketed white. He goes to check the snares but finds nothing. Disappointed, he returns to the cairn, boils snow water, and drinks weak tea to stave off hunger.

Near dark, he checks the snares again. Still nothing. Exhausted, he lies down and falls asleep instantly. In the middle of the night, cold wakes him. The fire is out. He quickly relit it and adds dung. He checks on the deer, but can't see them. Though scared, he gathers the courage to look. All is silent. The horses are lying in a nearby depression, sheltering from the snow. He leads them back to the fire, trying to get them to lie down and warm up, but they stubbornly stand. Helpless, he rearranges his bedding and lies down. Despite the time, sleep doesn't come. His hunger vanishes, replaced by chills. His earlier cold symptoms have worsened. Enduring the discomfort, he adds fuel to the fire, wraps himself tightly in his robe, and lies there shivering, drifting in and out of consciousness all night.

84 EXT. CAIRN OF STONES - DAY

In the pre-dawn hours, distant howls echo – wolves, Lobsang thinks, but sounding very far off, which reassures him slightly. The snow also eases. Lobsang feels a bit better. He gets up, takes the knife from his saddlebag and tucks it in his belt, puts some firecrackers and matches in his pocket, relieves himself outside, and checks the snares again. Still empty.

Returning, he picks a small bundle of wild onions he'd spotted the day before. He remembers his sister saying wild onion tea could cure a cold. Starving, he eats half raw and boils the other half in snow water. Despite the foul taste, he forces himself to drink the whole pot once it has cooled.

Half an hour later, lying on his side, intense nausea hits him. Greenish onion water gushes from his mouth, followed by chewed bits of onion. He vomits violently before collapsing back down.

Time passed. Lobsang feels his stomach burning hot. He is ravenous yet feverish and sweating. Hallucinations begin: Kunsang and his sister Yangbe are beside him. Yangbe is by the fire making his favorite lamb noodle soup; Kunsang is roasting a pheasant nearby. Lobsang tries to get up but can't move or speak. He reaches out to them, but they remain indifferent, slowly fading from view. He realizes it was just a hallucination.

Clearing his head, Lobsang thinks of another way to eat. He stands up, stumbles to "Flower Deer," and starts milking her directly into the teapot. But he is too hungry. Halfway through, instead of boiling it, he drinks the warm milk right there. It soothes his stomach. He pushes "Jade Deer" under her mother to nurse. Feeling slightly better, he returns to rest.

Regaining some strength, he packs his things, deciding to head back. He doubts if Kunsang comes or not. He feels he can't search for Dongri Mountain now. All he wants is to get home safely to his sister.

85 EXT. WASTELAND - DAY

In the heavy snow, Lobsang turns back, leading “Flower Deer” and the fawn. The snow is half a foot deep; every step is a struggle, burying his ankles. Soon, snow starts falling again. His feet, shoes, ears, hands, and face are freezing. He has to constantly rub his hands to prevent frostbite.

86 EXT. THICKET AND FOREST – DAY

The snowstorm and gloom limit visibility to barely ten meters. He loses all landmarks. He walks blindly, guided only by instinct, feeling lost in a vast white void. He walks for a long time. Suddenly, a large thicket appears. He hadn’t seen this on his way in. He fears he is lost. He stops, looking around helplessly.

Snow keeps falling. After a moment’s thought, he decides to enter the thicket. At least he could make a fire there. “The Deer” could eat twigs. He could drink milk again. Better than starving on the open plain.

Lobsang quickly leads the deer into the thicket. Inside, he spots a path, like a herding trail, leading into a forest. Following it, he might find a ranger station. Even if empty, he could shelter there safely for the night.

He walks on, but soon loses the path. The thicket is just the forest’s edge. The forest is deep, seemingly endless. Dusk approaches. He walks for nearly an hour with no sign of a station. Exhausted and hungry, the

deer move slowly. Surveying the area, he decides to camp under a large poplar tree ahead. He ties the deer to the tree trunk, then clears snow from the ground with his hands and feet. He gathers firewood and dry grass from the nearby forest to start a fire and warm up.

Once warmer, he goes for more wood to last the night. On his way back with a large bundle, he sees bird tracks in the snow. Occasionally, mournful bird cries echo in the forest. At first scared, he gradually grows used to the sounds and calms down.

After bringing back a large bundle of wood, he makes two more trips. On the third return trip, he sees a flock of pheasants foraging nearby. Armed with a stick, he hides behind a large tree, waiting. As they approach, he springs out and hurls the stick. It seems to hit one. The bird shrieks pitifully, and the flock scatters. The injured bird flies erratically for a moment, then crashes down somewhere. Lobsang rushes to find it but searches in vain, finding only a dropped feather. Giving up, he gathers more wood and returns to camp. Looking at his pile, he feels it isn't enough. He makes several more trips, clearing all usable brush within meters of the poplar.

87 EXT. THICKET AND FOREST - NIGHT

Night falls silently. Lobsang arranges his sleeping spot at the base of the poplar. He builds three fires around the tree in a triangle, forming a protective barrier for himself and the deer. This requires far more wood than he can gather. Exhausted, he sits leaning against the tree after finally gathering what he hopes is enough.

Lobsang half-reclines against the tree. The fire warms him. But another problem has arisen: he hadn't eaten all day except for the morning's milk. Hunger gnaws at him. He has to ask "Flower Deer" again. Too weak to milk her and boil it, he crawls over and kneels beneath her, suckling directly. "Flower Deer" stands patiently for a while, but Lobsang soon stops, remembering "Jade Deer" needs milk too. The warm milk in his stomach brings some comfort and energy.

He adds wood to the fires, rearranges his blanket, leans back against the saddle, and sighs deeply. Looking up at the grey sky, he sees that the snow has nearly stopped. His tense nerves relax slightly. Only then does he feel his feet are freezing, soaked through. He takes off his shoes and socks, places the insoles on sticks near the fire to dry, and moves the blanket and saddle closer, barefoot. He picks up a thicker log to rest his feet on while warming them, but his right foot lands squarely on a sharp splinter! He screams in pain and falls. Gritting his teeth, he pulls out the splinter. Blood stains his entire foot sole. Pain and fear bring cold sweat to his forehead.

Lobsang crawls to his saddlebags, takes out the torn scarf he'd used earlier, and bandages his foot tightly. He tries to stand to add wood to the fires but wobbles dangerously. Finding a sturdy branch to use as a crutch, he limps painfully to each fire, adding fuel.

As he turns back from the last fire, he hears movement behind him. In the darkness beyond the firelight, he senses a hidden danger approaching. Tension snaps him to full alert. He can even hear the scrape of his back against the poplar bark as he stands up, trembling. Slowly, he draws the knife from his belt, ready. "Flower Deer" also senses danger,

straining against her tether. “Jade Deer” becomes restless, too. Lobsang calls their names softly, trying to calm them.

Moments later, soft “hrrr, hrrr” sounds grow closer. Suddenly, a group of dark shapes rush past through the darkness just beyond the firelight — a low, continuous rumble of many feet, like machinery. Lobsang can’t see clearly, but the sound suggests wild boars. He knows they are dangerous, too. Overwhelmed by fear, Lobsang grabs a half-burnt brand from the nearest fire and throws it towards the sound. The boars are already gone, crashing away. Only the crackle of the brand landing in the snowy brush breaks the silence. He grabs another burning log, then five or six more, throwing them wildly in different directions. Bushes ignite, casting a fiery red glow over the camp, offering Lobsang and the deer fleeting comfort. The fires burn down to the roots, meet the snow, and gradually die out.

Lobsang knows he needs a defensive barrier fast. Limping, he stands and connects the remaining piles of wood to the three fires, building a kind of nest-like shelter. It feels safer, but he still has to constantly add fuel. His only hope is to survive until dawn.

He starts counting: 1, 2, 3... up to 1500. Only half an hour passes. Time has never felt so slow. He deeply regrets running away, endangering himself and the deer. Yet another part of him feels this is a necessary trial for a grassland boy to become a man. He remembers the saying: “Survive great peril, find great fortune.” He prays silently and resolves to face this danger bravely.

This time, he counts to 3000. The fire is dwindling. Summoning

courage, he limps around adding wood. He returns to his spot by the tree, leaning back but not lying flat – afraid he'd fall asleep and be vulnerable.

After a long while, an idea strikes him. He sits up quickly, selects a long, sturdy branch from his woodpile, and uses his knife to sharpen one end into a crude spear. Gripping it tightly, he feels slightly more secure. He then moves closer to the fire to warm his damp pants and body.

88 EXT. FOREST EDGE - DAY

As he waits, the eastern horizon slowly pales. His anxiety eases slightly. He gathers some tender twigs for the deer to nibble, then milks “Flower Deer” into the teapot and boils milk tea, waiting for full light. To his dismay, the overcast sky thickens instead of brightening. Lobsang quickly packs up, stamps out the fires thoroughly, and hurriedly leads the deer onward. Walking through the snow, he finds a winter pheasant, its head bitten off by some animal. He puts it in his saddlebags and continues. After a long walk, he realizes he is back near last night's campsite. Panic surges. He doesn't know which way leads out of the forest. He stands still, scanning helplessly. Suddenly, he has an idea. He mounts “Flower Deer” and lets her choose the path – horses have a better sense of direction. Riding like this for about an hour, they finally reach the forest edge.

89 EXT. SNOWFIELD - DAY

Beyond the forest lies a vast snowfield. Lobsang rides “Flower Deer,” “Jade Deer” struggling behind, as they trudge forward with great

difficulty.

90 EXT. SNOWFIELD - MOUNTAIN SPUR - DAY

Lobsang and the deer press on. Ahead is a long mountain spur. Crossing its curve leads to another open area flanked by east-west valleys. As they round the spur, Lobsang spots five or six riders about three or four kilometers away in the eastern valley. He can just make out their yellow hard hats – the State Grid crew! Seeing a lifeline, Lobsang urges “Flower Deer” faster, shouting desperately. But the crew disappears into the snowy expanse. Lobsang spurs the horse, screams hoarsely, but they are too far to hear. Overwhelmed by despair, Lobsang weeps. Tears and mucus freeze on his face as he rides on, the horse slowing to a steady pace, his sobs fading into exhausted silence.

Suddenly, “Flower Deer” slows, shakes her head, and refuses to go forward. Lobsang scolds and spurs her, but she resists. Puzzled, he looks around. Something moves in his peripheral vision. Focusing to the right, he sees it: on a snowy slope ahead, a thin wolf lies watching them. Scanning carefully, he sees only one. Strangely, seeing the wolf calms him. Fatigue and fear recede; his mind sharpens.

He quickly dismounts, calms “Flower Deer.” Gripping his makeshift spear, he leads the Deer forward, glancing back constantly to the wolf. Once past the wolf’s position, he remounts. This time, “Flower Deer” moves forward briskly at his urging.

Being watched by a wolf, even a thin one, makes crossing this open snowfield dangerous. If other wolves are nearby, it is deadly. He

needs shelter immediately, then to wait for luck, or to hope Kunsang will find him on his way back.

Lobsang rides on, searching the landscape. About a kilometer east of the wolf's position, near a valley mouth, he spots a cliff face. Looking closer, he sees an overhang – a perfect shelter. He decides to head there fast.

He keeps glancing warily towards the wolf. Thankfully, it remains lying down, staring intently as they move away. Lobsang flicks the reins, urging “Flower Deer” to trot.

91 EXT. HERMITAGE - AFTERNOON

High on the cliff face opposite, a small hermitage clings to the rock. Inside, a hermit with long, unkempt hair and beard is visible.

92 INT. HERMITAGE - AFTERNOON

The emaciated hermit opens the hermitage's small window. He breaks part of his food into thumb-sized pieces and places them on the sill as an offering. As he finishes and is about to close the window, he sees Lobsang and the Deer on the snowfield below. At first, he thinks it a trick of the eye. He looks again. Then he spots the wolf on the slope. A ripple disturbs his calm mind. After a moment's thought, he closes the window, sits down cross-legged, and resumes his meditation.

93 EXT. CLIFF FACE - AFTERNOON

After about thirty minutes, they reach the cliff face. Bushes grow along one side - firewood! Relieved, Lobsang unsaddles “Flower Deer.” He takes his torn shirt from the saddlebags and quickly rubs the sweat from her back to prevent sickness.

He surveys the terrain. Deep in the valley recess, to the left, is a crevice like a shallow cave. It seems made for him. He hobbles thenear a large boulder and begins the now-familiar routine: gathering wood and building a fire.

But the matches are damp from the snow. He strikes several, but no spark. Only two left. He strikes both together – a weak flame sparks but dies instantly in the cold wind. Desperate, he tries the ancient fire drill method. He rubs two dry sticks together furiously until his palms bleed. Still no fire. He tries another way: carves a small hole in one stick with his knife, sharpens the end of another, inserts it, and twists rapidly. Sweat pours down his face; his hands are raw and bleeding. Finally, smoke rises, then a tiny ember! He coaxes it gently onto tinder, blows softly, and a flame leaps up! He feeds it carefully with dry grass and twigs, then adds larger branches. Once the fire is strong, he leaves the cave again to find forage for the “deer.” He uses more branches and brush to partially block the cave entrance.

94 EXT/INT. INSIDE CLIFF CAVE - AFTERNOON

“Jade Deer” is hungry, kneels to nurse. Lobsang uses his knife to sharpen over a dozen long sticks into crude spears, jamming them point-

outward into the brush barrier to form a defensive wall. He makes six longer spears to fight the wolf if it attacks.

Perhaps from exhaustion, tension, or hunger, sweat beads his forehead. He wipes his bleeding hands. Watching outside, he thinks about roasting the frozen pheasant. But it is rock-hard; he can't even skewer it. He gives up. To save time, he crawls under "Flower Deer" to drink the milk "Jade Deer" left behind. As he drinks, he freezes. In his peripheral vision, beyond the barrier, a large shape with a dragging tail moves. He looks carefully. It's the wolf.

Lobsang stops to drink. Trembling, he crawls back, grabs one of the long spears, and waits. Waiting is agony. Time crawls. He doesn't know if it is afternoon or dusk – likely afternoon. He stares intently, waiting for the attack or praying the wolf will leave. Suddenly, he sees it. It stands just outside the brush wall, even closer than before, staring cunningly at him. He stares back, gripping the spear, using his right foot to drag another spear within reach. In that tense moment, he can hear his own pounding heart. Fear and pressure make it hard to breathe.

95 EXT. OUTSIDE CLIFF CAVE - AFTERNOON

Looking closely, the wolf is a filthy old animal, its hind leg visibly injured. Lobsang feels a flicker of hope, but the wolf's low and rumbling growl forces him back to alertness. Should he attack first or wait? Finally, he gathers his courage and roars at the wolf, jumping up and down once! The wolf flinches, almost fleeing, then snarls in fury. It charges! But stops short as its head hits the spear-tipped barrier. Lobsang instinctively steps back. The wolf charges again, trying to push through

the barrier. Lobsang roars again, bracing himself, and thrusts his spear at its head! The wolf jerks back just in time. The spear tip grazes air. Another thrust misses.

A long standoff follows. The exertion aggravates Lobsang's foot wound. Blood seeps into his shoe. Every slight pressure sends sharp pain shooting through him. Lobsang retreats, grabs the frozen pheasant, and throws it towards the wolf. Keeping his spear ready, he adds wood to the fire. Suddenly, he snatches a half-burnt brand from the flames and hurls it at the wolf! The wolf yelps and jumps back, then snarls, baring its teeth, still watching. The violent movement has caused its injured leg to bleed anew. An idea flashes in Lobsang's mind: burn the brush barrier to drive the wolf away. He hesitates – it is risky. The wolf watches intently from outside.

96 EXT. CLIFF CAVE ENTRANCE - DUSK

Suddenly, Lobsang acts. He throws the burning brand directly into the base of the brush wall! Then grabs another burning stick and jams it in elsewhere. Enraged, the wolf lunges! Lobsang thrusts his spear instinctively! Once! Twice! The third thrust pierces! The wolf shrieks! Lobsang feels a violent tug – he lets go. The spear pierces near the wolf's shoulder blade. It bleeds. The wolf retreats with a low, pained whine, limping away to lick its wound a short distance off. Lobsang gasps for breath. They are locked in a stalemate, waiting for the other to break. Just then, a loud, guttural shout (a noise to drive animals away) echoes from the cliff top above! The sound startles the wolf. It backs up, head swivelling, trying to locate the source. That shout fills Lobsang with hope of rescue! Seizing the wolf's distraction, Lobsang scrambles back,

reaches into his saddlebags, grabs all the firecrackers Kunsang gave him, and hurls them into the burning brush wall! Instantly, the shout from above is drowned by an earsplitting BANG! BANG! BANG! as the firecrackers exploded explode amidst the flames!

Smoke billows from the burning barrier. The shouting voice grows closer. The heat and noise agitate “Flower Deer” and “Jade Deer.” Lobsang slowly backs deeper into the cave, spear still raised, eyes wide, staring through the smoke and flames. He can’t see the wolf. Did he flee? Is it a trick of the smoke? He blinks, straining to see. The wolf is truly gone.

Lobsang scans the entrance area carefully. No sign of the wolf. The shouting continues, drawing nearer. Lobsang feels a wave of relief but stays cautious. Even as he leans back against the cliff wall, he keeps the spear tight in his grip. Gradually, exhaustion overwhelms him. As the shouting grows loud, a figure holding a long staff appears at the cave entrance – the hermit. Half-asleep, half-awake, Lobsang watches him approach. The hermit gestures for him to rest, then places his own robe over Lobsang and moves the fire closer to him.

97 INT. INSIDE THE CLIFF CAVE - DUSK

Suddenly, he wakes up, drenched in sweat. He thought he heard shouts — a man and a woman. He tries to stand and move forward, but he can’t rise.

LOBSANG: It’s my sister. She’s calling me.

The hermit thought thinks Lobsang is hallucinating. He listens intently into the distance but hears nothing.

HERMIT: You must have misheard. Rest now. When the weather clears tomorrow, I'll take you back.

Lobsang is utterly exhausted.

LOBSANG: Okay.

Lobsang closes his eyes and falls asleep. The hermit adds branches to the fire. Soon, faint shouts echo, growing louder and closer. Lobsang lacks the strength to stand. Leaning against the stone wall, he tries to call back, but his voice is too weak. The hermit helps Lobsang stumble out of the cave. The wolves have vanished. As the shouts draw nearer, Lobsang recognizes his sister Yangbe and Dargye's voices. Then, he and the hermit spot two riders — dark silhouettes on the snowy plain to their left. Lobsang tries to shout to them, but his throat fails him. The hermit calls out for him.

HERMIT: Hey! The child you're looking for is here!

He waves toward the riders. They shout back and ride closer. Seeing them approach, Lobsang sways with excitement, breaks free from the hermit's support, and collapses. The hermit holds Lobsang and presses his philtrum, trying to revive him. By the time Lobsang awakes, Kunsang and Yangbe are beside him. He finally sees them. Yangbe holds him, tears streaming as she checks for injuries.

YANGBE: Don't scare me like that! Are you hurt?

HERMIT: He's fine — just overwhelmed and exhausted.

Kunsang also checks him from head to toe. Thankfully, no serious wounds.

LOBSANG: I'm okay.

Yangbe hugs him tightly and sobs.

KUNSANG: It's nothing serious. Thanks to the master for saving him.

YANGBE: If not for you, Master, I might have never seen my brother again.

She sets Lobsang down and prostrates to the hermit.

HERMIT: Rise, no need for that. The wolf was already gone when I arrived. Last year, when I came here, it was the alpha of its pack. But it aged, the pack chose a new leader, and it was cast out. It's been roaming nearby ever since.

KUNSANG: Master, you must stay safe too.

HERMIT: Mm, no worries. It can't reach my place.

Yangbe pulls Lobsang back into her arms, stroking his hair.

YANGBE: You scared me to death! If anything happened to you, how could I go on?

Seeing his sister's tears, Lobsang realizes how reckless he'd been. Guilt washes over him. He hugs her and weeps. Watching them, Kunsang's eyes grow moist. He comforts the siblings. Once everyone has calmed down, the hermit suggests returning to his retreat. Dargye and Yangbe offer him and Lobsang dried provisions and freshly brewed tea.

YANGBE: Master, please eat something.

KUNSANG: Yes, please. Sustaining a retreat deep in these mountains can't be easy.

HERMIT: I've already eaten lunch. I fast in the afternoon.

YANGBE: Oh, I see. Then take some to have another day.

KUNSANG: Yes, please.

Full and warmed, Lobsang falls asleep beside his sister.

HERMIT: Since the child is safe and you're reunited, I'll return now.

KUNSANG: Did rescuing him disrupt your retreat?

The hermit stands up.

HERMIT: What matters is his safety. Everything else can be restarted.

YANGBE: We're truly sorry for interrupting your practice.

As the hermit walks out, he glances at the sleeping Lobsang.

HERMIT: It's nothing. If one retreats merely for retreating's sake, that's attachment. I must go now.

YANGBE: Thank you, Master.

KUNSANG: We're deeply grateful.

The hermit doesn't reply. Kunsang and Yangbe watch him walk back through the shrubs, leaning on his staff.

98 EXT/INT. Cliff Cave - Night

Night falls. Kunsang and Yangbe decide to camp there and leave at dawn. Kunsang prepares the campsite and lights a fire for dinner.

Much later, the smell of meat rouses Lobsang. Yangbe is bandaging her foot. Kunsang hands Lobsang a piece of meat, which he devours ravenously. Kunsang and Yangbe smile at him; he grins back. They exchange meaningful glances — Yangbe refusing Kunsang's silent urge to reveal something to Lobsang. Lobsang nearly notices.

LOBSANG: What is it?

YANGBE: Nothing.

LOBSANG:

Are you hiding something from me?

KUNSANG:

No, what would we hide?

YANGBE:

You should thank him. Without him, I might never have found you.

LOBSANG:

Thank you, Dargye.

KUNSANG:

No need, brother Lobsang. We're brothers now — no need for thanks between brothers.

After their ordeal, Lobsang had warmed to Kunsang. He secretly watches his sister and Kunsang, hoping Kunsang is Yangbe's fiancé — the "Dargye" she'd mentioned. For a moment, he suspects Kunsang is hiding his true name. Lost in thought, he drifts off.

99 EXT. The Return Journey(Snowfield; Wilderness; Grassland) - Day

The next morning, under the dawn light on the snowfield, the trio sets

off on two horses: Kunsang rides his own, while Lobsang rides behind Yangbe, leading “Flower Deer” and her foal.

100 EXT. Wilderness Beyond Dongri Sacred Mountain - Day

They ride across the wilderness until the majestic Dongri Sacred Mountain comes into view.

LOBSANG: Look! That must be Dongri Sacred Mountain!

KUNSANG: See? Just as I described. Doesn’t it look like a garuda spreading its wings?

YANGBE: It’s especially beautiful today.

LOBSANG: It’s so high! Kunsang, have you climbed to its peak?

KUNSANG: Several times. Five, I think.

LOBSANG: Sister, what about you?

YANGBE: I’ve only come here — never summited.

101 EXT. FOOT OF DONGRI SACRED MOUNTAIN - DAY

The group halts at the mountain’s base. Kunsang and Yangbe remove their hats and scarves in reverence. Lobsang gazes up in awe.

LOBSANG: So tall!

KUNSANG: Lobsang, take off your hat to pay respect.

Lobsang hastily removes his hat.

LOBSANG: How long to climb to the top from here?

KUNSANG: Start at dawn, reach it by afternoon.

LOBSANG: So almost a full day?

KUNSANG: Mm.

YANGBE: Let's go. If it snows, we'll be in trouble.

Just then, Lobsang spots vultures circling the summit.

LOBSANG: Look — vultures! That little one might be there too!

KUNSANG: There is a smaller one!

YANGBE: Now Lobsang has no regrets, right?

LOBSANG: Mm.

They watch the vultures circle the sacred peak for a long while before finally riding away.

102 EXT. DISTANT WILDERNESS - DAY

The three journey across the wilderness, far from the mountain.

YANGBE: Lobsang, when summer break comes next year, let's return and climb the mountain.

LOBSANG: Mm, okay.

KUNSANG: It's even more fun in summer!

103 EXT. GRASSLAND - DAY

The trio ride across a broad, flat grassland.

KUNSANG: Brother Lobsang, feel like racing?

LOBSANG: Mm!

KUNSANG: Then mount "Leopard." Let's race!

LOBSANG: Okay!

Lobsang asks Yangbe to switch horses since "Flower Deer" isn't fit for galloping yet.

LOBSANG: Sis, I'll ride "Leopard."

YANGBE: Alright — don't ride too fast!

They dismount and swap.

KUNSANG: Ready, brother Lobsang?

LOBSANG: Yeah! Go!

They spur their horses forward.

YANGBE: Dargye! Race only to that pass — don't go farther!

KUNSANG: Got it!

Kunsang leads at first, but Lobsang gradually pulls ahead. Elated, Lobsang cheers as he races. It's clear Kunsang is letting him win.

104 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Lobsang reaches the pass first and waits, eyeing Kunsang sternly as he arrives.

LOBSANG: You liar.

KUNSANG(DARGYE): What?

LOBSANG: Your name isn't Kunsang. You're Dargye — the one marrying my sister!

Kunsang (Dargye) smiles placatingly.

LOBSANG: You hid it well.

KUNSANG: That day, I guessed you might be Yangbe's brother.
But I feared you'd reject me, so I didn't give my real name.

Both look toward Yangbe riding toward them.

LOBSANG: Fine. I approve.

KUNSANG: What?

Kunsang glances at Lobsang, who is watching Yangbe.

LOBSANG: But you have to take me to school.

Kunsang smiles faintly at Lobsang, then looks toward Yangbe.

105 EXT. GRASSBANK NEAR HOME - DUSK

Kunsang, Yangbe, and Lobsang ride side by side across the twilight grassbank, laughing.

YANGBE: Lobsang, the school wants you back. Rest tomorrow and return to school.

Lobsang stays silent.

YANGBE: It's your choice. Stay home for a few days. Going late is fine

too.

LOBSANG: I'll go back on time. I...kind of miss school. Also, next break, I'm taking food to the master.

YANGBE: Mm, we'll deliver it together.

KUNSANG: Agreed.

Lobsang happily spurs his horse ahead, leaving Yangbe and Dargye riding side by side, chatting and laughing as they follow.

The End