

## HimMaya, the Last Yeti..... and Dolma



On a full moon day in September, nearly two decades ago, I was following a Sherpa. I, too, called him Sherpa Dai (elder brother, for obvious reason). We were walking from Simikot, in far Western Nepal to Raling Gumba about 12 hours away.

“We must reach Raling Gumba, a Buddhist Temple high in the mountains, before dark,” I said anxiously. “Brother,” the Sherpa replied, “If that is the case, then we must walk a little faster. As you know Aani Dolma, the nun, says her evening prayers and does her worship at sunset. Then she eats her dinner and goes straight to sleep. If we do not move faster we will end up sleeping in a nearby cave, starving,” he added.

Since the time of my first visit, I had promised Aani that I would bring whatever she needed. She told me, “There is no need except enough blankets for guests. You know, people like you, and yes . . . we need packets of ready-to-eat noodles. They are easy to make and serve to those who arrive here too late for dinner. You know the villagers only bring food to share in the mornings. There is nothing here at night.” So there I was with a bundle of 12 blankets and four large boxes of noodles (off course, donated by a friend who lived in Japan then). We were carrying it all the way to Raling Gumba. It somehow seemed my duty and responsibility.

The sherpa took the lead at a faster pace and I followed best as I could. But I asked him, “Brother have you ever seen a yeti out here?” “What is there to see, Brother? All the yetis have vanished or they are dead and gone. As I understand it they were killed when I was a small child. There is not a single one left. No, I have never seen a yeti. They are gone forever!” Then there was silence and only the sound of the wind rustling through the mountains.

The way to Raling Gumba is very hard. It sits at 4200 meters, nearly 14,000 feet in altitude. The steep climb takes one through dense green forests, craggy hills, across frigid streams and through cold rivers. It is a painful journey requiring great endurance. Even though I was born and raised in Nepal, I found the journey taxing, very taxing, due to both the rough terrain and the extremely high altitude.

Upon reaching Raling Gumba, one is struck by how simple and basic it is. It is like stepping back in time. Following the ancient tradition of Buddhism, it is not a temple in the traditional sense. Inside the cave is a very traditional ancient depiction of the Buddha. It is flanked by statues of other Buddhist deities and the visage of the most revered and holy Guru Rimbushe. In front of the statues are rows of small butter lamps. The scent of burning incense and the thick buttery aromas from the flickering lamps fill the air creating a heady experience. It is as if one has entered another world. And one perhaps had. Between the altitude and light from the lamps, one can believe that one is anywhere in the spiritual realms. It was there, in front of the Buddha one evening, arriving after dark for my very first visit, that I saw her. Aani Dolma, the old nun, as she reverently moved in her worship. In one hand she held the traditional *damaru* (a two headed drum used in worship) which she played by waving the drum, using a twisting wrist motion, the strikers beat on the drumhead. In the other hand, a *ghanta* (a bell), which she rang as she chanted her prayers. In the deep quiet mountain cave at Raling Gumba the sounds of the *damaru* and *ghanta* reverberated off the rock hard surfaces establishing a drone against which her mantra was chanted. Through the riveting sounds one can feel the heart opening. It is a curiously potent combination establishing its own sacred hum. Here worship becomes a total bodily experience of sound and chant, thrumming to the beat of the human heart. From the center of one's being the vibrations move the chakras in the deeper recesses of the human soul.

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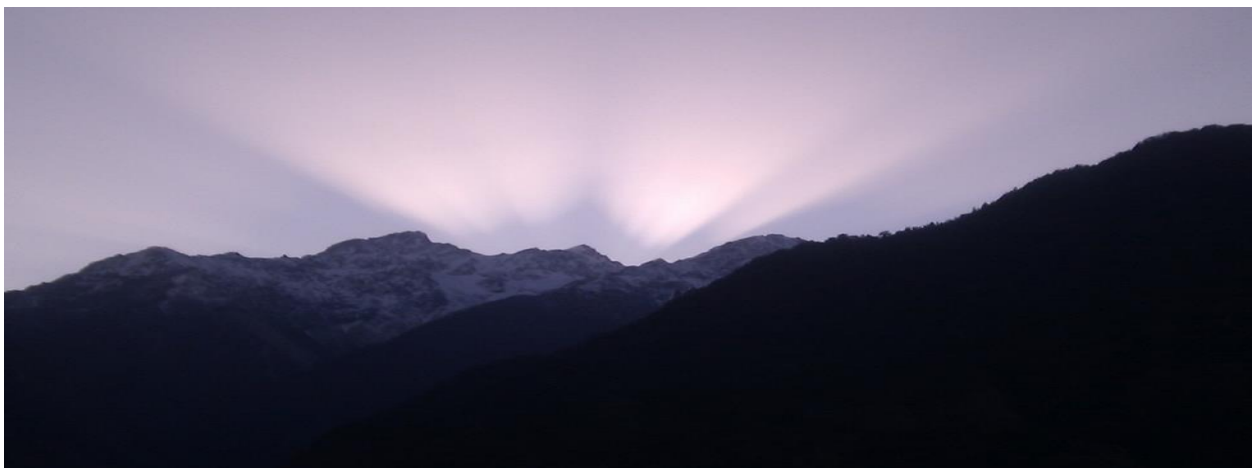
Sitting quietly, hands folded in an attitude of devotion, and feeling the waves of exhaustion from the steep climb and rapid pace now completed, I nearly feel to sleep. But was kept focused by the sheer power of the experience. After an hour or so the *Aani* ceased her prayers, looked at me with the countenance of my own grandmother and said, "You must be very tired after your arduous journey. Does your body ache? Please come to my kitchen where I can feed you." I nodded still nearly in a trance and followed her out into the night and back to her little kitchen some distance from Raling Gumba.

As we headed quietly to the kitchen she asked me again. "Babu (like 'son' in Nepali) you are hungry after your journey? And tired, too, I suspect." I nodded again. She read my heart and body before I could summon the words to answer. With that she handed me a bowl of broth and *shampa* (roasted barley flour combined with sugar) and glass of hot tea. I wolfed them down, yet it was the sound of the *Aani's* words which provided

healing for my heart and body as the pain diminished and then vanished altogether. Nothing specific was said, yet the way she said her words were a healing balm.

The bright moonlight now shone through the doorway giving an unearthly light into the enclosure. The wind, now blowing fiercely, was icy. Adding wood to the fire and then stoking it by blowing through a bamboo pipe, Aani Dolma spoke again. "It must be hard for you to be here with this cold all around us. Most lowlanders do not understand how cold it can be in the mountains. Here is blanket. It is indeed very old and worn but it will keep you warm." Wrapping me tight in the blanket we sat quietly in front of the warming flames. Amidst the crackling logs I became quiet enough inside to hear water moving in the distance, falling over rocks. I couldn't tell whether it was a river or stream or waterfall. It sounded cold, yet rhythmic in its rising and falling. Then I began to perceive my own heartbeat and the movement of my own chest through its inhalation and exhalation. As my eyes began to force themselves shut, Aani Dolma handed me a traditional brass cup filled with *rukshi* (home-brewed wine). "Babu! Drink this. It will warm your bones, heal your body and grant you the deep rest and well-earned sleep you need." I did. The warm wine coursing through my body sent it into a sleeping state. Then silently laid my head on the warm pavement of the floor, covered and wrapped in the warm blanket, and enveloped in a warm fog of wine and good food, I fell to sleep, gazing into the dancing flames.

Morning came along with a cold splash of water. Awakened by the sounds of *damaru* and *ghanta* nearby in the Raling Gumba, I didn't know where I was and what had happened. I was startled awake by the call to prayer. Uncovering my face, I was awestruck by the scene outside the door. Arising quickly, I kept myself wrapped with the blanket as a shawl, and threw on a hat. As the sun rose I cast my eyes across a transformed landscape. I was truly high up in the mountains, and all around from this vantage point I could see small villages on the laps of the hills. Bursts of color presented themselves as patches of flowers, forests and trees. The sounds of birds commingled with the sound of prayer, and the Karnali River flowing within the canyon below. Behind the *gumba*, a snow-covered mountain rose sharply against the cobalt sky as the rays of sunrise transformed the mountain to a golden glow which shone all around.



This is the first time that I had seen the holy mountain so close at hand. Thin smoke wafted over this scene of splendor like a bridal veil, designed to reveal and conceal all at the same time. The aroma of fresh-baked bread and brewing tea emerged gently, like incense, from the kitchen. Into this scene of comfort and safety, the piercing call of Aani Dolma reached me, calling me to breaking the fast with warm fresh bread and hot tea.

I had a million questions running around in my head since the last evening. I wanted to know all about the Aani and how she came to this place and how she became a nun. So I asked, "Aani Dolma, how long have you been nun? Have you been here all your life and do you have any loved ones living nearby?" It was too much to ask. I could see the immediate pain in her eyes as unbidden tears streamed silently down her face. It was as if I had pierced something in her soul with sharp needles. Feeling uneasy for inflicting such discomfort especially so early in the day, I realized that I might have been too hungry for such personal knowledge to which I had no right or reason to know. Perhaps I should have never asked? I dropped my head in embarrassment. It was clear that I had overstepped the bounds of respect.

But Aani Dolma sensed my embarrassment and reassured me that it was alright. She continued, "Since when I have been the only one here? When all of the Lamas passed away a long time ago. I am all that is left of that time, but I am very old now. All I can do are the daily offerings of prayers and devotions. I am also here to receive guests and look after the *gumba*."

"Long ago," she went on, "I think I was maybe six or seven years, I had a very good friend. I'm not sure what her parents called her, but I called her HimMaya (meaning: Him-snow, Mayan-my love or sweet one). She was a yeti. As everyone knew, the yetis used to live higher up in the mountains where there is snow all year long. My friend was covered from head to foot with very white fur. She looked to me like a white snow mountain when we stood next to each other. I loved her very much, even though everyone around her called ugly or a demon. We used to take the sheep, cattle and yak to graze in the pastures in summer. We would collect grasses and hay and bring it all back down the mountain to our home. HimMaya loved my singing. So much so that she would tell me to sing, in her distinctive sign language, as she couldn't speak very well. She would say, 'Don't work. I will do the work, you just sing.' So I used to sing and she did the work for both of us.' "

Then Aani Dolma explained their life in the village. "We lived together; played together all of the time, and became very close, so that we even ate from the same plate. Because she was so much taller than most of us, she could easily reach fruits way up in the trees and pick them with no effort. She could climb any mountain and was very fast and strong. She had great endurance and strength. She carried very heavy loads on her back climbing up the mountains. She also carried the very large water pots to help everyone in the village and worked faster than anyone in our village. I didn't notice her differences any more than I noticed her as the person I loved and admired."

“HimMaya had a very large appetite and had to eat a great deal, and often. We had small appetites, thus no one made big meals at home. So she remained hungry all the time, never really having enough to eat at any one meal. To get more food, she started working in other homes as well. The villagers would call upon her to do all the heavy work. They took advantage of her simplicity and willingness to work hard and quickly. The villagers teased and bullied her saying, ‘Are you a Demon or a ghost or what? You eat too much and are very large, covered with white fur. You are strange and don’t belong here.’ But that never kept them from demanding that she work and work hard for them. It made her very sad and she cried often at their mistreatment. Because she did not know our language, people would call her ‘Dumb.’ ”

“Sometimes during these very sad and painful occasions , she would cry and cry and call out for her parents and relatives in the mountains. But no one came. She would become agitated and fearful and cry even more loudly. It was an unearthly cry and sent shivers through me. I would then tell her, ‘Don’t worry HimMaya. Don’t cry. I am here for you.’ ” Even as the Aani spoke more unbidden tears streamed down her face. They were the result of a story lived very long ago. She wiped the tears again with her red shawl.

I was shocked and surprised at this story about HimMaya, so asked another question. “Why did not her mother and father come back to take her with them? Where did they go leaving her behind, alone and fearful?”

“Well, Babu, who would come to rescue her? There was no one left.” Now with tinges of anger in her voice, Aani Dolma stood up and pointed toward the village below: “Babu look. Look down there. That was our village. That was my home. It was in this time that the villagers gathered together for a special meeting. One of the old men said, ‘The Yetis are problem for all of us ...for everyone here. It is too much for us to bear any longer. We must get rid of them. Sometimes they are good to help us in work, but they are terribly unreliable and unpredictable. They seem to do what they want and when they want.’ Another villager echoed the same sentiments and then added, ‘Yes. Yes. This too much. They stole my sheep, the day before yesterday. They ate some of the barley that was to be planted in our fields. They are hard to see in the daytime, because they are the color of the snow and blend into the snow-covered hillsides. And all the while, we know that they are spying on us and watching everything we do. Then at night they copy our movements, albeit badly.’ ”

“Still another said, ‘This is too much for us. We cannot chase them away because they are bigger than us. They are stronger than we are and can overpower us. But we must deal with them now because they could take over everything we value. Just last week, they stole my chickens and then chopped them up, leaving the remains all over the place. Such a waste. Such a loss. Our food and livelihood are gone.’ Even my mother would say, ‘Dolma, don’t go outside at night and never alone. If you come across a yeti, that would bring bad-luck and perhaps even make you sick.’ ”

Aani Dolma continued, "I was shocked and surprised by mother's fierce and unkind comments. So I asked, 'How can seeing a yeti bring about bad luck or sickness?' 'Everyone knows that it's true,' my mother quickly replied. 'No more from you.' But everyone wanted the yetis to work for them, so it made no sense what people thought of them, especially my mother."

She paused her tale for a moment, allowing me time to take it in and feel the warmth of the sun on the mountain. After another moment to sip our tea, she said, "Let us walk to the *gumba*. Babu, the yetis are a strange species. During the day they hide themselves. No one knew where. Then at night they would quietly climb down the mountain to the villages. Whatever the villagers did in the daylight, they copied at night." I look quizzically at her wondering what she was telling me.

"It works like this. If the villagers are digging in a field during the day, the yetis dug in the field at night. Whatever humans did, they would copy it, not really knowing what these actions meant or why the humans were doing it in the first place," she told me. "It got out of control when the yetis took the sheep and the yak to graze in the night and lost them. If you did not put your clothes away carefully, then the yetis would come in the night and try to put them on. Being larger than us, the clothes would be ruined from rips and tears."

A smile crossed her lips for just a moment, then she said, "We discovered that they couldn't dance, though they tried. After celebrating one *Losar* (Tibetan New Year) they copied our dancing, but all they could do was move their feet in funny ways and make strange noises. It made us laugh to see them and they seemed to enjoy our laughter. My uncle didn't like them, though. The yetis sneaked up to our home to look in one night and my father chased them away with burning firewood. The yetis hated fire and were frightened of it."

"Once, the yetis nearly killed one of their own copying us. An old woman had died and the villagers buried her remains near a small *stupa* in the village. That night the yetis brought one of their own old ones and tried to bury her alive. The villagers chased them away and freed her. No one understood why they copied us, and while the villagers seemed to delight in fooling the yetis and tricking them into completing their own work, they really thought of them as a nuisance to be driven away. But the yetis would do no harm to a human, no matter how cruel the humans could be."

"Only harvest time seemed to redeem their presence in our village. The villagers would do a bit of harvesting during the day and then the yetis would complete their work in the night. They were also good at building walls and fences. Curiously these actions caused the villagers to realize that the yetis could be very smart in certain things. Thus they had to be careful of what they did in front of the yetis during the day. Then for no particular reason that we understood, they would disappear for months on end, leaving the villagers angry and frustrated at the work that didn't get done when they vanished. So while everyone wanted to depend on them to do their work, the yetis were not dependable. They were free."

The Aani continued, “One day the frustrations with the yetis spilled over into rage from the whole village. People said that they would ‘leave the village and move farther down the valley where the yetis did not come.’ Others said they ‘could not live with the yetis any longer. My maternal uncle said, ‘These crops, our animals, our children and old people, how can we leave our homes? We cannot leave; we must deal with the yetis who are a nuisance here and now. And we must do it once and for all.’ He was unequivocal about this.”

“My father disagreed saying, ‘With a little caution and preparation, we can live together with the yetis. We can do what our ancestors have always done. The yetis have been among us for a thousand years or so. Why have we suddenly decided that they are bad? They have never attacked or hurt us in anyway. In fact, if a snow bear or other wild animal tries to attack our children, the yetis have always protected the children. They have been of great support to us, we need to leave them alone. Let them live.’ ”

“When my other uncle, my father’s brother who shared half of our house, heard my father’s words, he became angry and scolded him. He announced that he was in favor a plan to deal with the yetis once and for all. Many villagers agreed that something had to be done and end this problem. So my two uncles were charged by the village to solve the yeti problem.”

Her face darkened as she began to relate the story of the plan. “ *Samya Dolade* is an annual festival celebrated with great energy and emotion. The whole village is engaged. Men, women and children. The Lamas from Raling Gumba come with the other monks to bless the field and the events of the day. Children have their faces painted. Colorful jewelry and dresses are laid out in the sun as the performers pick which dresses and jewelry they will wear. By late afternoon, the people are gathered in the open field near our home. Children are running to and fro. Everyone is excited.”

“The women were busy preparing an abundance of foods for the celebration, including *rukshi*, *dhindo* (similar to halva without sweetener), soups, breads and meats. They did ask the uncles though, ‘Why so much food and drink this year? We will never be able to eat all of this. Who will finish these?’ The uncles rudely answered, ‘Why do you ask silly questions? Do whatever you asked to do. Now let’s get on with it.’ ”

“The uncles added a new part of the celebration with an enactment, using wooden knives and red powder and water combined to make something that looked like blood. The uncles prepared 30 or so wooden knives with plaster and silver paint to look like real knives; and, they also brought out 30 or so real ones! My maternal uncle, caught up in the excitement of the moment, cackled, ‘Today we will tackle the copy-cats with real tools (holding the real knife in the air).’ ‘Right,’ said my other uncle, ‘Yes, my brother in law, yes, we will deal with these yetis forever.’ ”

“My father overheard them and asked, ‘Who are the copy-cats, and what real tools are you talking about?’ One Uncle replied, ‘Brother, just keep quiet and concentrate on your

job. Besides why do you need to know everything now? It's a secret.' My father said, 'Brother, I am a little worried about what both of you are up to. Don't do anything stupid, OK?' 'Don't worry, brother-in law, everything will be fine.' "

"So the feast of *Samya Dolde* began. The boys and girls were dressed in their best costumes. The village had gathered. *Rukshi*, meats, breads, *dhindo*, soups, cheese, yogurt, milk and all kinds of delicacies were served. Everyone was having a wonderful time, eating and drinking and feeling good. It was at that very moment that my uncles observed that everyone was a bit tipsy. They had been waiting for weeks to play out their vicious plan to deal with the yetis. Now that moment had come."

"The yetis have been watching everything we are doing. It is now time to act,' said one uncle. 'Yes my brother in law, you are right. We must act. I will distribute the fake knives and you distribute the fake blood.' And that is what they did. Each group receives a bowl of fake blood and fake knives. Everyone was asked to put on a mask and then they were invited to attack each other as they were angry. The fake blood covered the bodies of the masked actors. Blood was spilled everywhere as the people screamed and shouted. The children were frightened and then people began to fall to ground as if they were dead! It was a terrible thing to see. Everyone was too drunk to question this strange and terrifying game. As the finale, one of the uncles attacked the other uncle, who then fell to the ground as if dead. The remaining uncle then pretended to slit his own throat and cried out as if dying and then he fell to the ground as dead. Then there was a strange silence. After a while everyone got up and went home, leaving the blood and knives and food. One of the uncles replaced the fake knives with the real ones! The plan was set and now the waiting began."

"The uncles climbed the nearby trees and hid themselves in the dense foliage to watch the yetis. As expected, the yetis quietly crept into the festival ground. They started playing and eating the food, putting on the clothes and jewelry and started wielding the knives, imitating what they had just seen."

"Copying everything from drinking *rukshi* and eating the delicacies, to laughing and trying to dance. They did it all. And they were fascinated with the masks and knives. They had no idea that what they had seen was staged and used fake knives. They saw those attacked scream and cry and fall to the ground, and then wake up again. So they start attacking each other, but with real knives. They screamed and cried as their throats were slit. And this time, real blood flowed over the festival ground. There were dying screams and cries of terror."

"The villagers were now terrified and closed their windows and locked their doors amidst the screams and panic. The villagers didn't understand what was happening either; only the uncles, who were in the trees witnessing the completion of their gruesome mission. Even so, with the roaring and screaming, the yetis falling down dead, one after another, killing each other, one by one, along the side of the field were the innocent survivors, who thought that this was a game, were still playing happily as if nothing serious or dangerous were happening."



“My father and I watched in horror from our small house near the festival ground. After a while, the screaming subsided, and then there were only two remaining: a small yeti child and HimMaya. HimMaya’s own parents had attacked and killed each other leaving only these two survivors. HimMaya stood over the bodies of her parents trying to rouse them. But nothing happened. They were dead! HimMaya, still not understanding, called out the chilling moan for her mother and father. But only silence returned across that bloody field, strewn with the dead. After failing to rouse them by calling out, she tried to waken them by moving them; but again, nothing. Finally realizing that something was terribly wrong, she cried out once more, screaming and became fearful.”

Tears now rolled down Aani Dolma’s face, but she went on with the tale of terror and death. “After hearing the pathetic scream and weeping of HimMaya, my father and I went out to her, alone on that field of death. I could not look. My father put his hand on HimMaya’s hand. She said something to my father. We did not understand. I told my father, ‘Maybe she is asking you to help wake up her parents?’ We got ready to leave, and she looked back at us. He got her up and asked her to come home with us. She came. My mother thought she must be hungry, and offered her food. But HimMaya could not eat. She just cried and cried.”

“In the early morning, my uncles were very happy. They ran through the villages telling people to come to the ground to witness the completion of their successful plan to bring an end of the yetis. They said, ‘We wiped out the yetis! Come to the festival ground and see. We wiped out the yetis forever.’ The villagers came from miles around, many feeling deep sorrow. Only a few, very few, seemed pleased to see the horror. Then my uncles said, ‘Everyone is killed, except on yeti girl who is still alive. She shall die to, let’s find her and kill her now!’ “

“My mother stood up to them saying, ‘Shame. Shame. Shame on you. You don’t know what you are saying. Who could commit such a sin and feel nothing? Who could commit such a heinous crime?’ My father then piped up and said, ‘I am ashamed that I have brothers like you. You are murderers. Do not even come near the girl. Do not touch her. You will have to kill me first.’ Others gathered in the ground added their voices. ‘What can this child do to anyone? Indeed what can this little one do? She is alone. She won’t cause anyone harm. You will not kill her!’ “

“The eagles and vultures started gathering, flying closely over the ground, looking for their own food. Finally the people said, ‘Let us care for these dead and provide them a fitting burial.’ So they dug up the festival ground, and there they buried all the dead yetis together, where they would be forever. My parents kept HimMaya in our home for her security and safety. She could not even witness this last rite of her entire species.” Suddenly there was silence and HimMaya was all alone.”

“She did not know where all her relatives and parents had gone. She did not understand what had happened to them; where they had disappeared to. She wandered the ground where they were buried for days, looking around, screaming and weeping, looking

towards the mountains. Sometimes she screamed looking down towards the Karnali River. And with that HimMaya started living with us in our home. She still cried often looking up at her mountains. She slept on the cold floor, and did not like sitting by the fire. She did not like heat from it. It also took quite some time for her to get used to eating what we ate all the time. And it often left her hungry.”

Aani Dolma paused and seemed lost in her memories. We paused in our walking as I gazed at the sunlit mountains and valley below. Then she began again. “After a while, we started eating together, playing together. She would get hungry often. Once again, to add to her food, she started working in other people’s homes. Once again the villagers abused her and called her names, like ‘demon’ or ‘ghost’. They bullied her just like they used to. It was as if it all had not happened.”

“One day when we were out grazing the sheep and yak I asked her, ‘What is your name?’ I touched my nose and said, ‘My name is Dolma. I am Dolma.’ I then pointed to her nose and asked again, ‘What is your name? Who are you?’ She could not reply, only shake her hands as if she were saying, ‘I do not know.’ ‘I will call you HimMaya, if you will let me?’ She smiled at me as she always did when I spoke to her. ‘Then HimMaya is your name. You are HimMaya.’ She repeated it after me, ‘HimMaya. HimMaya. HimMaya.’ Then she smiled at me and then nodded. Now she had a name and from that day onward, everyone called her HimMaya.”

“Her life changed. She would do all kinds of work. She carried heavy loads, dug the farmland, cleaned out the yak dung and collected water for the villagers from the spring. She worked for all the villagers just to be fed. She tolerated it all very well though people still treated her badly, bullying and calling her names. But at other times, she would carry me up into the mountains. She showed me all the snow caves where they used to live. We had wonderfully good times together. She showed me her toys and her parents tools. We played in the snow and slid on the ice of the glacier. It was such fun, which I could not have done without her.” Aani Dolma again paused and smiled as the memories flooded over her. But she continued:

“For nearly a year we lived that way. It seemed that we could not live without each other. Every temporary separation of even a few minutes, could start us looking for each other. HimMaya began to learn and understand some of our language. Villagers still were calling her bad names and now she understood what they were saying. Also she was continuously bullied. HimMaya became very sad at the treatment of the villagers and she missed her parents. She became very frustrated. So she asked me one day, ‘What more can I do to make these people happy? Where are my parents? Why don’t they come and visit me? I am so alone and frightened without them.’ I had no good answers to her painful questions.’ ”

“Another year passed and it was again time to celebrate the *Samye Dolde* festival again. The villagers gathered on the same ground where the dead yetis were buried. They danced, played the music, ate lots of food, drank *rukshi* and wore masks. Again the real knives were brought out, but this time for the sacrifice of chicken, sheep and

yak. Blood flowed all over the ground as the whole community screamed in their chorus delighting in the deaths. HimMaya became agitated at the sight of these familiar horrifying images and terrifying sounds. The villagers eagerly chopped up the flesh of their animal sacrifice and cooked up all the remains, adding to the feast. But HimMaya could not enter in. She was terrified.”

“She kept weeping and could no longer control herself. After a while some of the villagers offered her some of the food, meat and tried to serve her. But she could not be there any longer. She stood up and tried to run away. I bolted after her trying to stop her. ‘HimMaya. Stop. Stop. Stop HimMaya.’ As she crossed the end of the festival ground, she looked back and waved her hand and then suddenly jumped off the cliff into the deep chasm of the valley below. I tried to run as fast as I could yelling and screaming for her to stop. But she didn’t. I reached the edge of the cliff and looked down. It was very very deep. It was very far down. I knew. I knew that I had lost her forever. ‘HimMaya. HimMaya’ I called out into the emptiness of the valley. My voice echoed back to me. But there was no sound of her, nothing from HimMaya. My love was lost forever. I felt too sad; I could not even cry real tears. I just pined for my lost love. My father held me and dragged me back from the brink of the cliff, fearing I would follow her. He said to me, ‘She is no more my child. Our HimMaya is gone. Her entire species was wiped out by the cruelty of humankind.’ ‘Shame on us. Shame on us humans. Shame on us.’.... I cried.”

The Aani wiped her tears again with the corner of her red shawl. “I was so so sad. I could not sleep. Realizing that I would never see my best friend ever again. I had lost my beloved friend forever. It left me feeling frightened as I felt so lonely and alone. I also felt sorry for those who had committed such evil. I was disappointed with humans and their lives of jealousy and hatred. I felt the whole world was meaningless and filled with misery. After a time, my only vision of life was to become an Aani, a nun, who would spend her days in *gumpa* praying and worshipping.”

“Babu. From that time onward I was determined to become an *Aani*. I became one that very same year and I was just eight years old. All these moments are still very close to me in my mind and heart today, as if it had all just happened. My heart feels heavy when I see HimMaya in my dreams. I pray for her all that time, so that in her next incarnation she is in *Sukhabati* (the highest heavenly realm in the Buddhist tradition).” She went on, “and I still pray for the yetis and for their reincarnation to the *Sukhabati*, as well. I pray for the villagers and for their sin to be washed away, so that they will become wiser and more considerate towards other sentient beings. I pray that we all can live together in harmony and peace.”

With this swirl of memories in my head, and our gentle journey with the thoughts of Aani and HimMaya, I did not realize how we had covered the distance, walking slowly to Raling Gumba. In this serene mountain place, with the cool breeze washing over me, I could hear the now-familiar heart sounds of the *damaru* and the *ghanta*, and Aani Dolma’s mantra as she chanted the familiar,

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*I thank my dear friend Ted Karpf for editing and polishing this story so beautifully.*

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