

Memories to Keep of Bhutan



Hootoksi Tyabji

Foreword

My poems were inspired by the cheerful, laughing faces of the children of Bhutan. They were written for these children, to read, enjoy and identify with.

My heartfelt thanks go to Mr. Ugyen Wangchuck who visualised and illustrated the poems for me.



Hootoksi Tyabji
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Introduction



Bhutan -- can you find it on the world map? Look for the mightiest mountain range on earth, the Himalaya. Now, look closely between Tibet and India. Do you see Bhutan, tucked away between those two countries?

Bhutan is also called *Druk Yul* or The Land of the Peaceful Dragon and it is unique in many ways. How many countries have you heard of that are completely filled with mountains?

There are fewer than 675,000 people in Bhutan and the money used is called *Ngultrum*, pronounced 'Nultrum.'

until 100 years ago, Bhutan's valleys were ruled by chieftains who frequently quarreled amongst themselves and fought wars to keep away Tibetan invaders from the north and west. In 1907, the country was united under one leader, King Ugyen Wangchuck, and since then Bhutan has remained at peace.

In 1998, King Jigme Singey Wangchuck, the 4th hereditary king, who is deeply loved by his people, voluntarily began giving up his absolute powers to the government and the people's Parliament. How many kings have you heard of who have done that? In December 2006, after 34 years of rule, he stepped down from the throne and named his son, Prince Jigme Khesar Namgye Wangchuck, to succeed him as fifth *Druk Gyalpo*.

Bhutan has always remained quietly hidden in its mountain corner. The people live simple and peaceful lives and the kings allowed change to come in only very slowly so that the ancient culture and style of Buddhism is protected. That is why very few people have actually visited Bhutan and so little is known about it.



government offices and the Buddhist monks are housed in fortress- like buildings called *dzongs*. These are magnificent structures that were designed by high *lamas* (Buddhist priests) around the 1600s to protect the valleys from invasion. The *dzongs* were built out of mud, stone and wood,

so perfectly fitted together that not a single nail was used! .

Traditional Bhutanese houses are also made of mud and wood with beautifully painted window frames and carved beams.



Bhutanese men wear a traditional dress called the *Gho*, and women wear the *Kira*. The *gho* is a knee length robe that comes down to the ankles and is hoisted up and tied at the waist with a cloth belt. The fold formed in the front is used as a pocket to carry all sorts of useful things. The *kira* is an ankle-length dress which is fastened at the shoulders by beautiful silver clips and tied at the waist with a cloth belt. A long-sleeved blouse, the *toego*, is worn underneath the *kira*.



You can tell the social status and class of people by the texture, colours, and decorations of their garments. Scarves and shawls must be worn and the colours indicate rank. The *Jey Khempo* is the head of the Mahayana Buddhist religion in Bhutan and only he and the King may wear the yellow scarf. Ministers, senior officials and people's representatives wear their own distinctive colours, while common people wear white.

Most Bhutanese eat rice, maize, meat and a delicious chilli and cheese dish called *ima dasi*. Tea made with yake's butter, rice wine and beer are the favourite drinks!



Archery is the national sport, and competitions are held frequently in Every village and town. Targets just a foot wide are placed 120 meters apart and teams shoot from one end of the field to the other while people dance in front of the targets waving scarves to distract the archer!

People love to dance at festivals. They wear beautiful masks and dance to traditional music. Their costumes are very colourful and the dances tell stories of heroes, demons, animals, and common people.



Wherever you go in Bhutan you will see lots of tall bamboo poles with flags fluttering in the breeze. These have prayers printed on them to keep you safe, well, healthy and strong.



Would you like to visit Bhutan and get your own prayer flag for your home to keep you safe and happy?

On Children

Children are people who live in a land
Made of raindrops and roses and pebbles and streams.
Their world is secure and their needs are so simple
And what they don't have they create in their dreams.

Children are people with simple minds,
They accept life and live it well.
They discover things we seldom notice,
They always have a story to tell.

Children are people with trusting hearts,
They know not deceit or fear or lies.
Their troubles are small, a little love
Is all it takes to soothe their cries.



Children are people who mime and play-act,
They want to be teachers, or mums or dads.
They have to be taught what we want them to learn
For they don't know what's good from bad!

Children are people of the world of tomorrow,
Education, hygiene, love and care
Play a vital role in their short young lives;
Can we deny them, is it fair?

Children are people who live in a land
Made of raindrops and roses and pebbles and streams.
Their world is secure and their needs are so simple
And what they don't have they create in their dreams.

Weaving Dreams

Pemzang sat outside her house,
Her baby was asleep.
Her son had gone to school, her girl
Went out to graze the sheep.

Her husband left to work the fields
Of buckwheat, rice and corn.
And she cooked the evening meal
When she awoke at dawn.



Sitting outside her house she was
Busy as a bee!
Her hands worked fast, as threads were pulled
So fast you couldn't see!

The loom went *clickety-clack* and back!
The shuttle from left to right,
With colours of every shade and hue
Oh! What a pretty sight!

As Pemzang worked she wore a smile,
To me it really seemed
She wove her cloths so fine and rare
In patterns of her dreams.

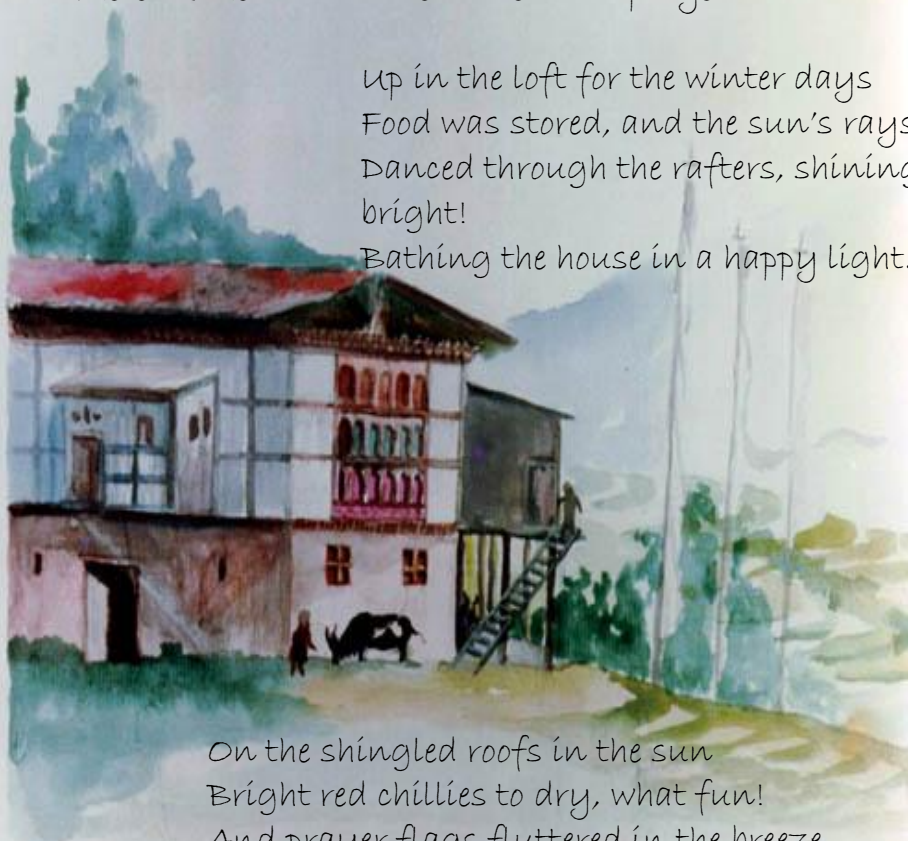
Dorji's House

Dorji's house of mud and wood
With carved windows and paintings good.
And terraced fields with paddy green
Made the prettiest picture I had seen!

Cattle and pigs lived on the ground floor.
Steep steps from a tree trunk led to the door
Where the kitchen, the altar and family stayed,
Where brothers and sisters lived and prayed.

Up in the loft for the winter days
Food was stored, and the sun's rays
Danced through the rafters, shining
Bright!

Bathing the house in a happy light.

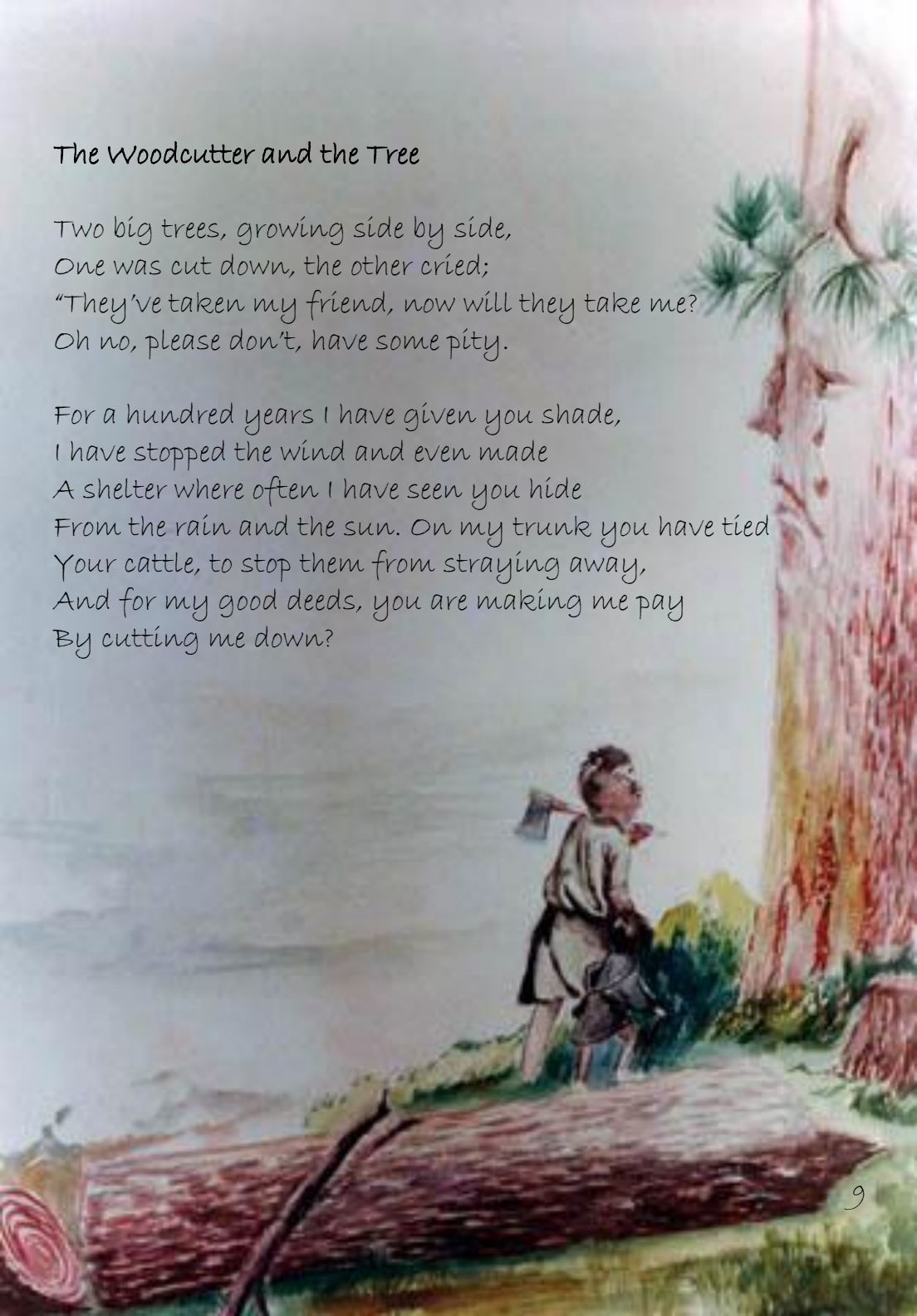


On the shingled roofs in the sun
Bright red chillies to dry, what fun!
And prayer flags fluttered in the breeze
Protecting the house, the cattle and trees.

The Woodcutter and the Tree

Two big trees, growing side by side,
One was cut down, the other cried;
“They’ve taken my friend, now will they take me?
Oh no, please don’t, have some pity.

For a hundred years I have given you shade,
I have stopped the wind and even made
A shelter where often I have seen you hide
From the rain and the sun. On my trunk you have tied
Your cattle, to stop them from straying away,
And for my good deeds, you are making me pay
By cutting me down?



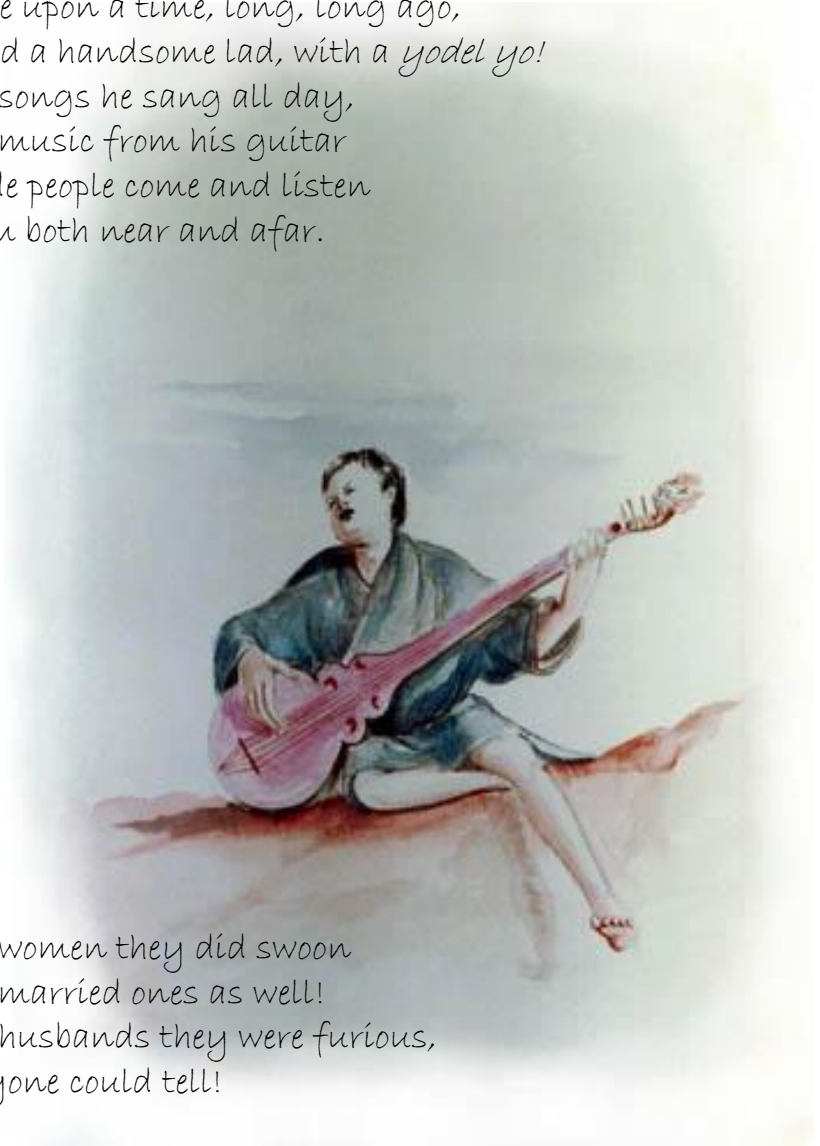
Stop for a while, with you axe in your hand;
Think of my plight, try and understand,
That in turn for my trunk which will benefit you
Others will suffer by what you do!
You have taken my friend, now you come for me,
And soon it will be another tree.
Before you all know it, the forest is bare,
And then it will be ... too late to care.

Please listen, and protect me today,
For I promise you that all your efforts will pay!
You have cut down my friend and given me sorrow,
Which will turn to joy if you can tomorrow -
Plant ten more trees where he once stood alone,
Which, in the future, you will all own!

The Singing Lad

Adapted from a Bhutanese folk tale

Once upon a time, long, long ago,
Lived a handsome lad, with a yodel yo!
The songs he sang all day,
The music from his guitar
Made people come and listen
From both near and afar.



The women they did swoon
The married ones as well!
The husbands they were furious,
Anyone could tell!

They begged the noble King:
"Drive out the handsome lad!"
So a date was arranged,
A trial to be had.

The King talked to the boy,
He answered loud and long,
And everything he said
Was sung in a song!

His Majesty exclaimed:
"A Marvelous voice, so strong!
No one can be angry
With this boy for too long!"

The husbands they were furious,
The wives blushed and ran
To hear another song
That the handsome boy sang!

Child's Song

I love all the forests, the trees that grow there,
I know life without them would really be bare.
No paper, no pencils to write and to learn,
No wood to warm me, no fire to burn.

The table I use and the chair I sit on,
The tiger of my dreams, where has he gone?
His home in the forest was burnt to the ground,
The friends that he knew, none of them are around.

The house that I live in is all made of wood,
In winter it's warm, in the summer it's good.
My Dad is a doctor, he travels so far
To collect herbs from forests wherever they are.

I love all the forests, the trees that grow there,
I know life without them would really be bare.
No paper, no pencils to write and to learn,
No wood to warm me, no fire to burn.





The Peasant Boy

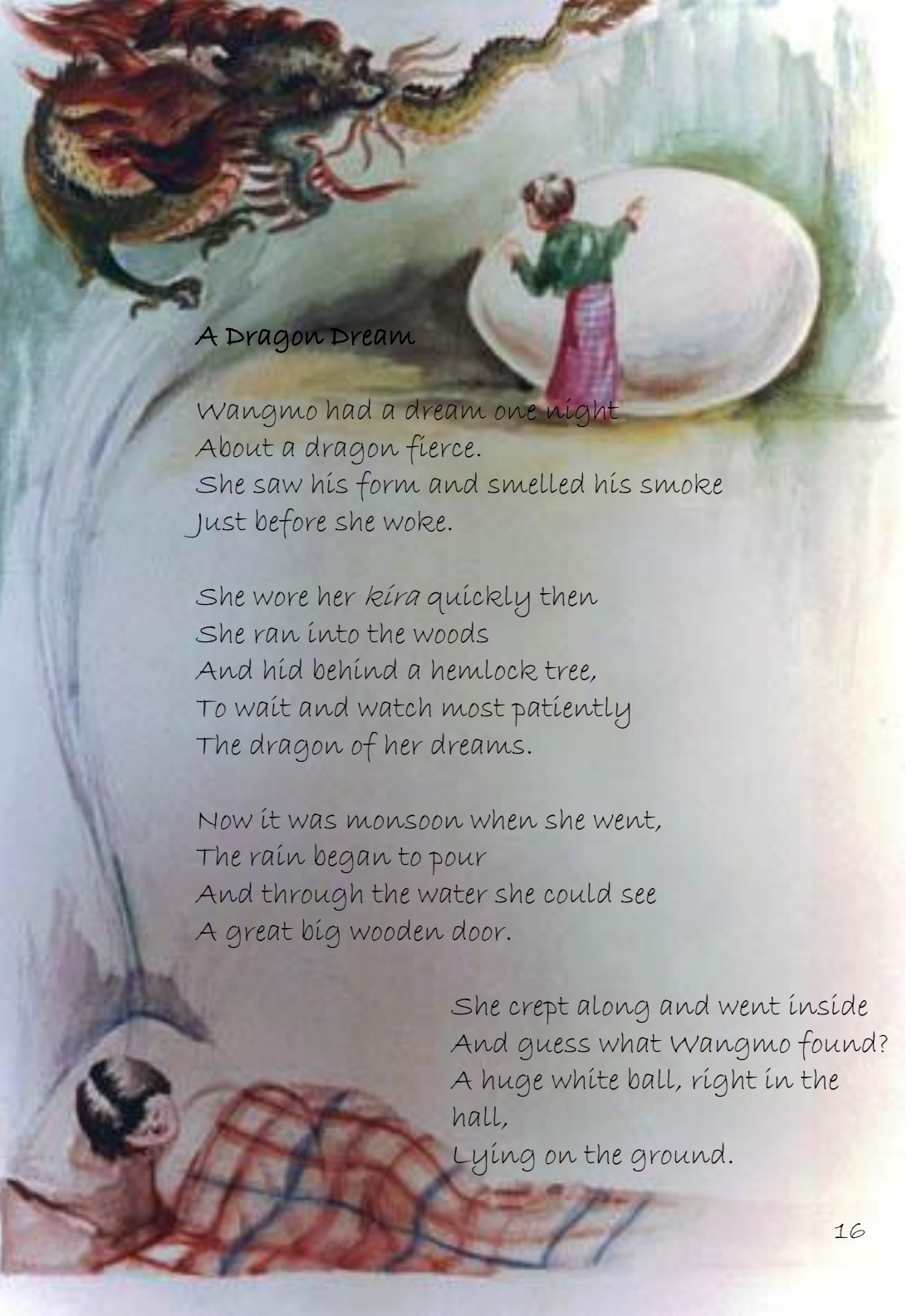
Walking up a mountain high,
Walking up to touch the sky,
Singing songs of love and joy
Was this little peasant boy.

Up he climbed with his sheep,
Walking fast, a date to keep
With the squirrels, birds and bees,
Insects, butterflies, and trees.

Talking to them as he went,
Every day of his was spent
Close to nature, seeing new
All the things his friends would do.

He knew of trees and why they grew,
He knew of flight, how birds flew,
He knew the time from stars and sun,
He knew how nature's world was run.

Alone at peace, tending sheep,
Climbing paths through forests steep,
Singing songs of love and joy,
Content with life, this peasant boy!

A colorful illustration of a dragon with orange, red, and green scales breathing fire. A woman in a green shirt and red skirt stands on a large white oval platform, looking up at the dragon. In the bottom left corner, a person is shown sleeping under a red and blue plaid blanket.

A Dragon Dream

Wangmo had a dream one night
About a dragon fierce.
She saw his form and smelled his smoke
Just before she woke.

She wore her *kíra* quickly then
She ran into the woods
And hid behind a hemlock tree,
To wait and watch most patiently
The dragon of her dreams.

Now it was monsoon when she went,
The rain began to pour
And through the water she could see
A great big wooden door.

She crept along and went inside
And guess what Wangmo found?
A huge white ball, right in the
hall,
Lying on the ground.

She touched it gently first, then hard,
Wondered "What could it be?"
And then she heard a fierce sound
Just by the hemlock tree.

She hid behind the ball and watched,
Her heart began to pound
With fear and wonder, soon she knew
Her dragon she had found.

He stomped into the room and boomed
"Young girl, why are you here?
That egg is mine, don't touch it, please,
There is no need to fear!"

"Sir, truly I have never seen
an egg so big and fine.
Give it to me, I'll take it home
And really make it mine!

"Impossible!" boomed the dragon loud,
"I think you ask for fun,
The egg will hatch, soon I will have
My own beloved son!"

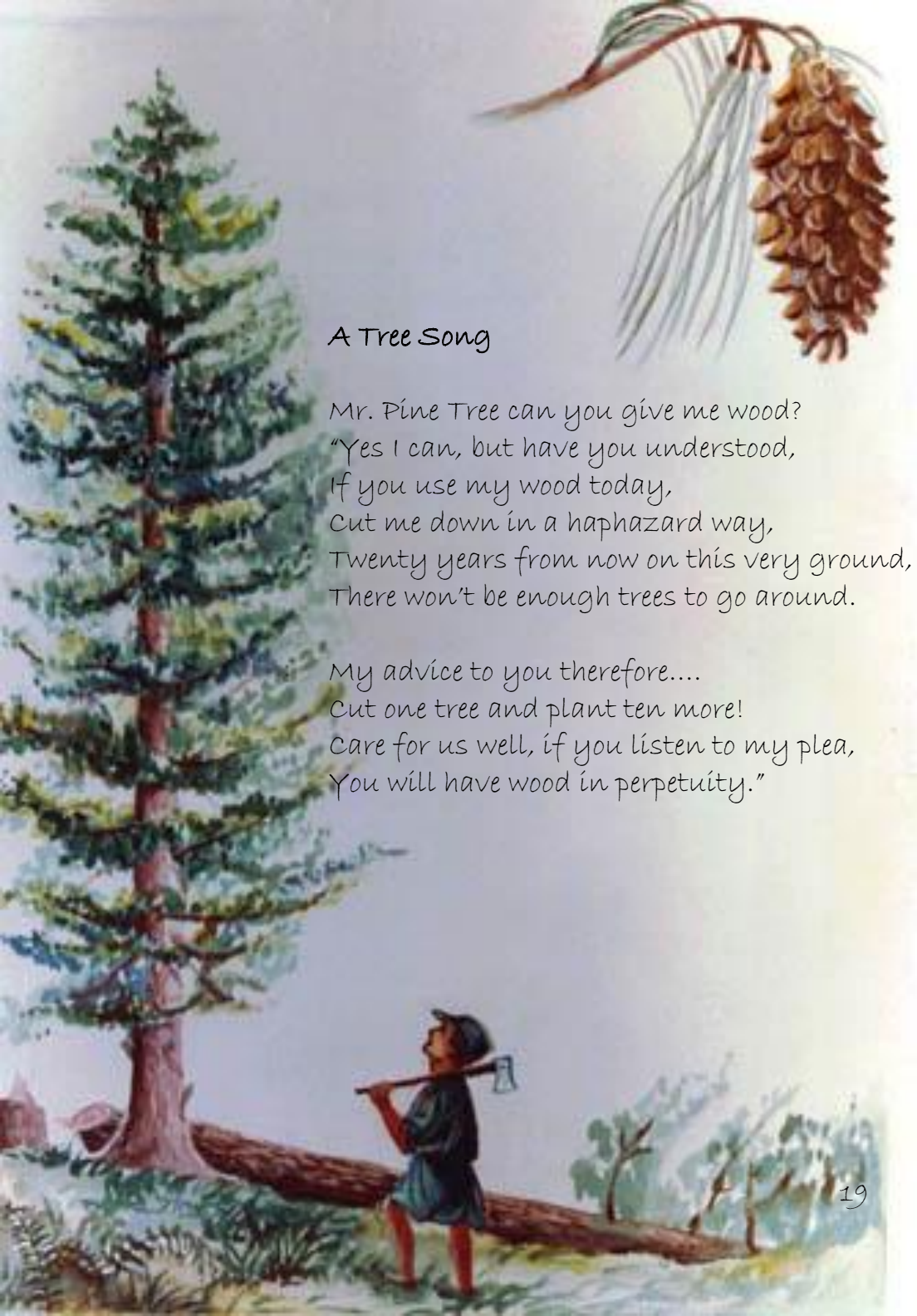
Wangmo's face lit up with joy!
For she had never heard
Of baby dragons born from eggs,
She only knew of birds.

Imagine all the fun she'd have
Frolicking in the sun,
With baby dragons she would be
The envy of everyone.

"Wangmo, you're late, the sun has set."
That was her mother's call.
She swiftly ran down mountain slopes
And through pine forests tall.

A baby dragon, a silver star,
A yak, a cloud, a bird,
They were her friends, who told her stories
She had never heard.

And so Wangmo went to sleep
Snug and warm in bed.
She thanked the good Lord for her dreams,
Locked safely in her head.

The illustration features a tall, green pine tree on the left side of the page. In the top right corner, there is a detailed drawing of a pine branch with long, thin needles and a large, brown, textured pine cone. The background is a light, hazy landscape with some distant trees and a small building on the far left.

A Tree Song

Mr. Pine Tree can you give me wood?
"Yes I can, but have you understood,
If you use my wood today,
Cut me down in a haphazard way,
Twenty years from now on this very ground,
There won't be enough trees to go around.

My advice to you therefore....
Cut one tree and plant ten more!
Care for us well, if you listen to my plea,
You will have wood in perpetuity."



If I Were.....

If I were a Lion I would
Roar at my teacher if I could!
If I were a bird I'd fly
Away from school, up in the sky!

If I were a monkey I'd ring
The school bell early, and I'd swing.
If I were a little mole
I'd sleep all day in my hole.

If I were a mum or dad
I'd never make my children sad!
If I were a king I'd be
Remembered forever in history!

If I were a shining star
I'd see the world from afar!
If I were a Lama I'd pray
That children get love and food everyday!

Blub Babble Glug Glee

Pem sat on a mountain ever so high
And watched a river rushing by.
Pem looked into it and she saw
A family of trout - one, two, three, four..



The mother had eyes that sparkled bright,
The babies made a pretty sight.
She looked much closer and she heard
Mother Trout speak, these were her words....

"We'll go down the river, swim hard and long,
Now do your best, let's sing a song!
Blub babble glug glee... blub babble glug glee"
Sang the fish in harmony.

Pem clapped her hands in pure delight!
She thought herself so very bright.
Listening long she heard the trout say
"We must reach Paro Chu today!"

Pem rushed down the mountain to the banks of the Chu.
She sat and waited, what could she do?
She stared at the water, silent and long
Waiting to hear the trout family song.

Her mother was worried, it was getting late.
She went searching for Pem, past the school gate,
And down by the river where she saw
Pem gazing into the water with awe!

"Come away Pem, it is late and cold"
Said Mother out loud, beginning to scold.
"Please wait a moment, I want to see
and hear the song of the Trout Family."

"Now Pem, don't be silly, fish never talk!"
Said Pem's mother, beginning to walk
Away from the river, dragging her along,
"What a silly notion, fish singing a song!"

"Oh Mother, please stay, stay awhile and look!"
Begged Pem, but Mother had to go and cook.
Pem walked away sadly, and then suddenly
She heard a soft sound... Blub babble, glug glee!



Thinley and Jigme

Thinley a cowherd from the east
Met Jigme from the town.
Both boys began to talk, I heard,
One wore a smile, one frowned.

“You talk of cars and aeroplanes,
These I have never seen.
But I run up a mountain slope
And through lush valleys green!

Do I have toys with wheels and springs?
These I don't know or need.
I carve my bow and arrows fine,
Play music on my reed.

Have I a watch to tell the time?
What would I need one for?
I know that day will follow night
As it has done before.

Do I have books and pens to learn?
No, but I know and see
New things that happen everyday,
The things surrounding me.

Do I speak languages more than one?
Of course I do, you see,
I speak to people and to all
The birds and beasts and trees!"

I heard enough and walked away
Wishing I could be
As simple as that cowherd boy,
As innocent and free!