
 HERDING, ROMANCE, AND A LETTER

Lcags so lhun 'grub ལུགས་སོ་ལཱུན་འགྲུབ། (Klu sgrub ལུ་སྐྱུབ།)

One summer when I was about thirteen years old, Brother-in-law and I were herding sheep. When summer comes, all the local families move to the summer pasture and live in black yak-hair tents. The summer pasture is enormous. Some mountains resemble gigantic pillars holding up the sky.

Rdza rgan Mountain is important to us. We often herd sheep on that mountain in summer.

One day, Brother-in-law and I drove our flock of about 1,000 sheep to the mountain. At the same time, other families also drove their flocks of sheep and yak herds. The livestock seemed as countless as stars in the sky. As we all herded our animals toward the mountain it began raining as though the sky had been ripped open. We all held umbrellas while following our livestock. Brother in-law held a black one that we both sheltered under.

At about ten AM, I drove the sheep to the right side of the mountain, near the *lab tse*. Thick fog covered the mountains and the muddy tracks were full of water. As I walked along, sloshing sounds and the sensation of squishing mud were my constant companions. Nevertheless, I was feeling fine.

I was just a child and sometimes Brother-in-law shouted at me to walk faster to mind the sheep. He wore a brown hat, which he pulled down to shield his face when he lit a cigarette. The smoke from his cigarette slowly wandered into the sky in tiny clouds. He often blew smoke rings and sent twin plumes of smoke out through his nostrils.

We drove the sheep to the foot of the mountains, and then walked in front of them with Brother-in-law shouting to frighten wolves that were surely lurking hungrily inside the thick fog.

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Meanwhile, he sang love songs to any young women who might be in earshot.

He entertained me by telling me about his romantic adventures before his marriage:

I had a relationship with a Muslim girl who worked in a restaurant in our township town. My parents really loved me and, to make me happy, they let me often go to the township center where I typically ate in restaurants where, at one, I met this Muslim girl. She had big eyes as bright as stars and was tall and slender. Although not a beauty, her gentle character and the joy she took in life made her very attractive. She had worked in that restaurant for a few years and could speak some Tibetan. We had many conversations when I was in the township town. One time, with a hopeful smile, I asked her how she felt about me. After we became more intimate, loved echoed in our hearts and our relationship became like a blend of water and milk. We met every night in a single room near the restaurant.

We understood that our relationship would not be permanent because of our different backgrounds. This realization grew more painful, day by day. Finally, we said goodbye to each other tearfully, and then she left and returned to her home in Ka cu.

We reached the mountaintop without being conscious of the time. Interesting, intimate conversation minimizes time. The thick fog surrounded us so we couldn't see some of our sheep. Sometimes, Brother-in-law shouted to the sheep. He said, "We once drove the sheep over the mountain behind our place. It is a place with lush grass that belongs to the Kan lho government. The government has no livestock, because there is no one to care for that place. We often fearfully herd sheep there where the grass is plentiful. When we drive the livestock to that place, some of us scout ahead. If it is safe, we take our livestock over the mountain."

This time was just like that. Brother-in-law told me to stay on the left side of the sheep and be ready to flee if strangers came.

"Today is especially dangerous. We can't see much because of the fog. We must be extra careful," he cautioned.

Other herd-mates' sheep rushed past us. I relaxed and napped. I dreamed that a man came and took some of our sheep. This so frightened me, that I woke up abruptly, just as Brother-in-law shouted for me to come so we could eat together. I ran to him. When our sheep reached the bottom of the valley, we ate.

Brother-in-law reported, "Everything is fine. We no longer need to worry about the masters of the grassland. They will never come after lunchtime."

We sheltered behind a small hill, away from a cold wind. It rained and rained. Thick fog reached the middle of the mountain. It was like being in an airplane. He soon snored like an angry yak. I no longer felt sleepy. I was bored. I took a blade of grass and pricked his face like a mosquito. I laughed secretly as he swatted at this vexation.

Meanwhile, some herd-mates had vanished into the distance. I was anxious to go home, sit near the fire, and warm up. I woke Brother-in-law, who told me to drive the sheep on the right side. He went below me and drove the sheep up the mountain.

Suddenly, two men riding horses appeared. Brother-in-law shouted for me to quickly drive the sheep back to our territory. I knew something was wrong. I fearfully ran after the sheep as fast as I could. The two men were getting closer. One man in his twenties had long curly hair that he silently shook from side to side. The other man was around forty. The younger man held a rifle. The older man shouted for us to stop.

We ignored him until he shot into the sheep five or six times.

One of our sheep rolled down the mountain. I was exhausted and I thought my heart would stop beating. Anyway, Brother-in-law and I were fast and escaped, although we lost that one sheep.

Eventually, the two men loaded the dead sheep on one horse, rode into the distance, and vanished into the thick fog. We headed for home, both happy and sad. We had escaped, but had lost a sheep. We were certain Father would scold us.

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The next year when I was about fourteen, we were in our summer camp in the mountains. Long, thick fog embraced the middle of the towering mountains, hiding the green grass. It was dawn. Every bird was awake and chirping. I got up and was soon ready to drive the yaks to our tent. It was time to milk the female yaks and the fog lifted, revealing countless livestock. Thousands of flowers gracefully showed off.

After I had rounded up the yaks and taken them back near where my family's tent was located, some fellow herders had already made a fire behind a tent to make an offering to mountain deities. The sound of the men and boys chanting resembled the buzzing of bees.

Meanwhile, the girls and women were milking the yaks into wooden pails.

Inside the tent, I added fuel to the fire to get ready for breakfast. During the half-hour my family had breakfast together, Father told me to drive the sheep into such-and-such pasture because he had to go to town to buy some things. He added, "It will be hard for you to tend the flock. This is your first day to be responsible for our entire flock all by yourself. Be careful of wolves and thunder when you are on top of the mountains."

I grabbed an umbrella and drove our flock of sheep to the mountains in the distance. Some other young men were also driving their own flocks of sheep. As Sko b+hes drove a flock toward me I realized he wanted to herd together with me. He had told me a few days earlier about falling in love with a pretty girl and had expressed the hope that I would write a letter to her on his behalf. So up we went together. Other flocks were also climbing up the side of the mountains.

When my flock reached the mountain top, the sheep scattered across the landscape and I thought, "My home place is the most beautiful place in the whole world."

At midday, Sko b+hes came over. I was eager to talk with him. He asked how the herding was going, sat by me, put out some food, and exclaimed, "Eat! I brought some good food today because I knew you would be here." Then he took off his bright robe and acted as though he was exhausted. "What good weather today!" he enthused. "I now have a chance to finish my love story. Then we need to discuss writing a letter to her immediately."

After eating a little he asked, "Do you remember Klu mo?"

"Yes! You told me about her earlier," I replied.

He sighed then told me this story:

Oh, right! Last summer I fell in love with her. You surely know that. From the day after I fell in love with her, I visited her every night after dinner. I told her my feelings. The first night when I met her, she shouted at me to go away, and said, "You are so troublesome. Why did you come here?"

I didn't give up and visited her for more than ten nights in a row, telling her that I wanted to love her. By then, she was talking more to me.

Two months later she was living alone in her family's winter house. I knew no one would bother us there so I got on my motorcycle and drove near her home. Dismounting, I stealthily crept to the side of her house. It was about ten-thirty in the evening. Eventually, I tiptoed inside over to her bed. I woke her up and told her very gently about my suffering and lonely life, and how I was scared she would reject me. I thought it was my last chance to tell her of my real love. It was my final hope.

She didn't believe me. I had no more words in my brain, or maybe those words have not been invented yet. I turned on my flashlight, took my knife, and plunged it deep into my left hand. She cried and held my hand.

"This colorful blood shows my real love for you. It is my last hope," I protested.

She said, "I totally accept you."

I wiped away her tears and comforted her.

She continued, "Before, I didn't believe you, because I have heard many sweet speeches. Most are just sugary words. I didn't care about you but, after you stabbed yourself, I trust you completely. You said you loved me a month ago, but I didn't believe that. I'm sorry, Sko b+hes. Tomorrow I will belong to you. I love you and will wait for you always. I have no other man. Only you are in my mind."

She said all this tearfully and hugged me tightly. When I first embraced her, I wondered if it was a dream. She had been constantly in my mind for a long time. I hugged her again and kissed her. Then we slept together and talked a lot about our feelings.

Time passed as quickly as a splendid horse gallops across the grassland. Our bed was warmer than before and, though I didn't want to leave her, I had to. We hugged and kissed again, and then I left.

At daybreak, many birds had awakened and were flying near me as I rode the motorcycle back to my home. My feeling was as nice as the sky was wide.

Sadly, her family and mine are at odds. I am an only son and she is an only child. Both our families refuse to accept our relationship. Her father hates me and beats me whenever he finds me with her. He has told me to never visit her again, but our love is as deep as the ocean. It's impossible to destroy true love.

I'm at a loss as to how we might be together. Her parents really love her, and are very protective. I miss her so much. Sometimes I can't sleep at night, because I am thinking about our relationship. I think constantly about how to pass the time if I can't see her.

On the twelfth day of the first lunar month, I got a chance to meet her for the first time in three months. Her parents had gone to a prayer festival at Reb gong Monastery. I went to see her at night. When I reached her home, she was waiting for me and said not one word. She embraced me tearfully. I stayed with her for four days.

The last day we were suffering, but we were also happy. As I left she said, "Don't fret about me. I'll wait for you tomorrow. I'll talk to my parents again. If they won't accept you, I don't want to continue to live in this world." Her eyes were full of tears.

As I drove home on my motorcycle, I was a little afraid of my parents, because I had not been home for several days. However, my parents said nothing, because I am their only son. When I make mistakes, no one scolds me.

A day later she phoned me and said, "I talked to my parents and they don't agree that we can be together. Our only choice is to run away."

We agreed on a place and time to meet and then go far away. Three days later at dusk, after chanting in my family's shrine room I set out to meet her on my motorcycle. I told no one where I was going. We met as agreed. It was about nine at night when we started out for Bla brang County. We rested on the way in a large grassland near Bsang khog. She leaned against my shoulder and said, "I have forsaken my family members for our love. It's unforgivable. I choose you for my whole life. I love you."

My feeling was the same, "I understand. For you, I am also leaving everything. I willingly give up everything for you my dear!" I replied.

We started off again and headed toward Bsang khog Town, which we reached that evening. We bought new clothes in a shop by the street and checked into a hotel. Afterwards, we went out again and had a good dinner.

Two days later in the early morning, we started out for Mgo log, which we reached about three hours later. I found a job for us, because we didn't have enough money to live in that strange place. The job was herding thousands of sheep and hundreds of yaks for a rich family. We lived in a single-room building near the family. We worked hard for them and we were both very busy every day.

Some days later I heard my family members were searching for us. We stayed for another month. I phoned my uncle and asked him to decide our wedding date. Our relatives said that we could be together if we returned soon.

Trusting our families, we left Mgo log, but they tricked us. When we got back to our home place, Klu mo's father beat her and was preparing to beat me. It has been very hard for us to meet since that time.

I think this should finish. I want to do something about her father. Please write a letter to Klu mo about my feelings. We don't have enough time for you to write it today. Please finish by tomorrow. I'll meet you here again.

I said, "I will try my best to write a good letter my dear friend."

At six that evening we prepared to drive our flocks home.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bsang khog བསང་མོག་

ka cu ཀ་ཚུ།

kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།

klu mo ཀུ་མོ།

klu sgrub ཀུ་སྐྱུབ།

lab tse ལའ་ཙེ།

lcags so lhun 'grub ལམས་སོ་ལུན་འགྲུབ།

lhu b+ha ལུ་བ་མ།

mgo log མག་ལོག་

rdza rgan རྩ་རྒྱན།

sko b+hes སྐོ་བ་མེས།