

NEARLY GORED TO DEATH

Lcags so lhun 'grub ལཱགས་སོ་ལཱུན་འགྲུབ། (Klu sgrub ལཱ་སྤྱུབ།)

I was ten years old. It was spring. The ground was mostly green. Some locals would soon leave to collect caterpillar fungus. Others were anxiously preparing to move their livestock and tents to new pastures.

My family did not see me as very helpful because I was younger than my two sisters and brother, who were old enough to help my parents with everything. On the other hand, I was lucky to be young and so mischievous that my parents decided to send me to primary school, hoping my personality might change. This was the only reason they sent me to school.

When we had a holiday, I stayed at home and did little but, one day, one of my sisters asked me to help her herd our yaks on a mountain.

I didn't much like herding.

Aware of that, she put some candies in a bag.

I calculated I could get some even if I played with the little yak calves. I put on a red, tattered robe and tied it with an old, faded sash. Mother stuffed a little food into a yellow bag and said, "Don't go near a new mother yak. She will charge and gore you."

I assured her I wouldn't and rushed outside. Sister and I followed our yaks. She said, "Hey! Can you climb up that high mountain? I don't believe that you can do it. If you will stay with me all day, these candies will belong to you."

I confidently promised that I could do it and we started herding our yaks up the mountain.

At about eleven AM, the sky was as blue as a pristine mirror. A bright sun shone moving ever higher up a high mountain peak. I

Lcags so lhun 'grub. 2017. Nearly Gored to Death. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 47:60-63.

felt good, but realized that my sister was unhappy. When I asked why, she said, "You're too young to understand."

I then found an excuse to make her laugh and was glad when I saw her pearly teeth. I continued talking as we climbed up the mountain.

At midday, we ate on the mountain top. I hoped to get some candy but I said nothing.

She asked suspiciously, "Don't you want some candy?" and then gave me all the candy, saying, "If you will come with me to herd after your holiday, I'll buy you many candies and toys."

"You really want me to herd every day?" I asked.

She replied, "You must study hard. Don't drop out of school. You are much luckier than me, because you'll have the chance to choose your future. That's wonderful. Maybe you don't understand what I'm saying. Anyway, just remember to never stop your schooling."

I had never realized that she had ever wanted to go to school. I knew she had never attended school, even for a few days. Mother was sometimes ill and very much needed her help.

We have a proverb, *Bu mo 'gro sa gnas, ban de 'gro sa sgar* 'Women must marry, monks must be in a monastery'.

Sister was now at the age to marry.

Around two PM the sun ended its upward ascent and began descending. Sister told me to look for the yaks. I did so and found them. A bunch of little calves were playing with each other.

I was fascinated by little calves, particularly Dkar ril 'white faced calf'. It ran back and forth in front of the other calves.

When I and my siblings were little, we each had our own lamb, foal, and calf. We were very aware of their different coloration and named them accordingly. We also took very good care of "our" special livestock, which we didn't let Father sell.

I had often stolen milk from our milk bucket and given it to Dkar ril. He followed me wherever I went.

I climbed to the foot of the mountain where the calves were running and went near Dkar ril, even though his mother was nearby. I was a little scared because Mother had warned me, "Never go near a new mother yak. Her horns can be eighteen arm spans long and she may injure a child like you."

Dkar ril ran to me and began nursing my thumb as though it were a teat. Meanwhile, the other calves raced to their mothers.

I pulled out a piece of bread from my robe pouch and tried to give him, but it scattered on the ground. Dkar ril seemed to think that Mother's delicious bread was poison. I decided then that yaks and people have a different sense of taste.

Sister called me once, then twice. She didn't notice me, but I could see her on the peak of a hill, holding her slingshot. Wanting to frighten her, I didn't reply. Instead, Dkar ril and I hid behind a boulder out of her sight.

Sister began climbing down. A bit later, I heard her scold, "Where is that little snot?"

When she got close, I rushed out and yelled, "Hey! Hey!"

She was shocked, not by me but by Dkar ril. When she was five a dog had bitten her so terribly that Father shot the dog. At first glance she had thought Dkar ril was a dog.

My shouts disturbed the yaks. Some ran off, but a new mother yak rushed at me, tossing her long horns. I had no choice but to run, looking back as I ran into a valley. I imagined a sharp-pointed horn laying me open and then wearing my intestines on its horn.

"Hide in a cave! Hide in a cave!" Sister shouted.

I suddenly remembered a small cave just a bit in front of me. As I scrambled into the cave, the yak's horn caught and broke the string of my amulet. Meanwhile, the yak charged down into the valley, unable to stop its forward movement.

My heart nearly jumped into my mouth. I stayed in the cave until Sister ran to me and cried in a trembling voice, "Are you hurt?"

'No!' I exclaimed and then remembered to cry, warm tears running down my cheeks, plopping onto Sister's blue, long-apron.

"You're fine now! You're as brave as Father. That mother yak won't come back. I'll beat her if she does. I'm right here," comforted Sister.

Dkar ril also ran to us and butted my shoulder with his head as if checking to see if the mother yak had injured me. After a while, I remembered that I had lost my amulet so I quickly retrieved it and put it back around my neck.

We drove our yaks back home around six that evening.

Years later when Sister told Mother about this incident, Mother said, "Your amulet is very special. It protects you from harm. Never take it off, especially when you are in school or far from home."

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

bu mo 'gro sa gnas, ban de 'gro sa sgar བུ་མོ་འགོ་ས་གནས། བཅ་དེ་འགོ་ས་སྐད།
 dkar ril དཀར་རིལ།
 klu sgrub ལུ་སྐྱུབ།
 lcags so lhun 'grub ལཱགས་སོ་ལྷན་འབྲུབ།