

SILENT AS A WINTER CUCKOO: MY GRANDPARENTS' LOVERS

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When my grandparents were children, parents were gods and their decisions about such issues as marriage and the choice of marriage partners were final. Children had no right to choose a spouse. Many parents found a daughter-in-law with a blood relationship for their son, believing this would better ensure family harmony. Consequently, many Tibetans struggled in sad marriages. Of course, parents hoped their children would have a good, stable life and not all arranged marriages were unhappy.

When Grandfather was eighteen he herded sheep on our pastureland everyday. At that time, sheep and goats covered an enormous mountain that resembled a member of the Himalayas. Herders stayed together, played, told folktales, and sang folksongs. Some wrestled and others talked about their lovers. In many ways this daily gathering resembled a celebration of victory in battle.

Grandfather and his lover, Dkon mchog mtsho, herded and had lunch together everyday. They went home from the pastureland and soon met again after supper, because they loved and needed each other as fish need water. They felt that they were the happiest people in the world, and hoped to marry. Everyone understood their intimate relationship and envied their loyalty to each other.

Some other girls were especially jealous because Grandfather was handsome.

In time, Great-grandfather discovered their relationship and resolved to end it. Grandfather was as silent as a winter cuckoo, because he was afraid of his father. However, he thought about how to convince his parents, or how to have a life with his lover. After some days he decided to elope, went to the place where he usually met Dkon mchog mtsho, and found her there. They looked longingly at each other as Dkon mchog mtsho's tears streamed down her red cheeks and seeped into the earth.

Grandfather embraced her tightly and told her what he had

planned. Dkon mchog mtsho thought a moment and agreed.

The next morning, Grandfather took some bags, met Dkon mchog mtsho, and prepared to run away. They walked, hand in hand, for a long way until a familiar voice suddenly boomed behind them. They turned and saw Great-grandfather, who had pursued them. He then forced them to return home.

Grandfather's plan thus became like autumn leaves that fall from trees onto the earth.

When they got home, Great-grandfather warned Grandfather, "If you meet Dkon mchog mtsho again, I will disown you, my dear son."

Grandfather did not reply because he knew all their relatives would scold him for opposing his father's decision. It was unthinkable that a son would disobey his father's decision. Such a man was regarded as worthless.

Great-grandfather said, "Next month, we will visit Sangs rgyas mtsho's home."

"Why must you dictate my marriage? I only want to marry Dkon mchog mtsho. Father, please permit me to marry my true love – don't force me," Grandfather said sadly.

Great-grandfather said, "Please understand that our family is poor. Two years ago, I went to Uncle Rin chen's home and arranged your marriage to Sangs rgyas mtsho. If you marry her, I can work with Rin chen, a well-known and successful businessman. This will greatly improve our poor life. Do you want our family members to starve?"

Speechless, Grandfather nodded in apparent agreement.

Grandfather's torment lasted for a half-month, and then Great-grandfather took him, a bottle of barley liquor, and two hind quarters of mutton to Grandmother's home. My grandparents met and chatted about their childhood and then Grandfather told her that he had a sweetheart.

Grandmother was happy to hear this and confided that she also had a lover. She said, "We herd together, which allows for frequent contact. My lover and I have shared one quilt and what happens between lovers happened. My father doesn't know. Thank you for telling me about your lover. Continue your relationship with her.

Maybe she is still waiting for you. Also, we have a blood relationship that makes our marriage unsuitable."

Grandfather thought for a bit and then murmured, "You're right, but we dare not oppose our parents' decisions. Let's solve these problems. Let's marry according to their arrangements and then I'll escape with my lover when the chance comes. You can return home and marry your lover. We will thus all achieve our hopes."

Grandmother thought for a moment and said, "Your father will kill you if you do this."

At that moment, Grandmother's father appeared and said, "You will marry on the fifteenth day of next month."

My grandparents nodded their heads in reluctant agreement.

After a meal, Great-grandfather very happily said goodbye to Grandmother's family. Grandmother nodded to Grandfather, signaling again that she agreed with his idea.

Grandmother knew that opposing her father was useless, but she cried loudly for two or three days and ate nothing. Then her father said, "If you live, you are his person and if you die you are his ghost."

When he got back home, Grandfather met Dkon mchog mtsho as quickly as he could and told her his idea. She listened, embraced Grandfather, and agreed.

The wedding day came and my grandparents married as planned. Though Dkon mchog mtsho understood why Grandfather had gone through with the marriage, the scene of her lover's marriage made her so sad and angry that she then married the man her father had arranged for her to marry.

Grandfather was devastated that his plan was shattered and that he seemed to have lost his true love.

Some days passed. Grandfather gathered his courage and decided to go to Dkon mchog mtsho's husband's home and kidnap his lover the next morning. When he arrived, he found Dkon mchog mtsho and her husband doing family chores. Grandfather walked over to them, spoke to Dkon mchog mtsho, and grabbed her hand.

Dkon mchog mtsho was at a loss, but did not resist. Then her husband stepped in, and the two began fighting. Suddenly, Dkon mchog mtsho's husband took out a dagger and stabbed Grandfather in the gut. Grandfather continued to beat him with his fists. A few

minutes later, blood had soaked Grandfather's long robe and he stumbled and fell.

Dkon mchog mtsho's husband squatted nearby, holding his head in his hands. Dkon mchog mtsho wept loudly and embraced Grandfather tightly, her head on his chest. She thought if Grandfather died, she would soon join him in the afterlife. Her husband just stared at them.

Dkon mchog mtsho's father-in-law came, took in everything that had happened with a single glance, and angrily beat his son. He then took Grandfather to a small, distant hospital where, fortunately, he was saved. Nearly as bad as Grandfather's wounds was the gossip about what had happened. Grandfather and Grandmother were deeply humiliated.

After three months, my relatives brought Grandfather back home. This was followed by a long period of dispute between the involved families. Finally, expensive items were given to Grandmother's family in apology. Great-grandfather begged Grandmother's family to accept their apology, and Grandfather promised to never do such things again and swore to be good to Grandmother. Grandmother's family was touched by Grandfather's sincerity. They also realized Grandfather was young and impetuous, so at last the families were reconciled – but only after 2,000 RMB was paid to Dkon mchog mtsho's family after many of her husband's relatives came to Grandfather's home demanding compensation.

The conflict was solved.

Dkon mchog mtsho decided to never meet Grandfather again, because she was afraid it would again lead to horrible events.

Grandfather felt sorry for the pain he had caused Grandmother and determined to be good to her.

Grandfather and Dkon mchog mtsho's love resembled a short-lived rainbow that vanishes in the summer sky.

My grandparents needed a house and prepared the construction materials. There were many things they needed to do. Grandmother found that there was no way for her to escape the marriage her father had arranged for her and soon stopped contact with her lover.

The old adage 'Love will come in time' proved true and my

grandparents slowly grew to love each other and eventually had a happy life together.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Dkon mchog mtsho དཀོན་མཚོ་གམ་ཚོ།

Pad+ma dbang chen པདྨ་དབང་ཚེན།

Rin chen རིན་ཚེན།

Sangs rgyas mtsho སངས་རྒྱས་མཚོ།

Xi'an 西安