



## TAIGA LAW

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Taiga forest has its own laws. People there speak rarely and in low voice. Though they do not welcome outsiders, they do not chase them away. When I happened to visit their places, they did not paid much attention, nor cheered up when I was leaving. Some friends of mine warned me to be careful and watch my tongue while speaking. I still do not know whether taiga people are fierce or calm but here I would like to relate a story told by two Tsaatan tribe elders, Regsel and Jambaldorj. Regsel was an old man in his 70s, short and stodgy. He has been through everything in his life, except death. While Jambaldorj was taller and more resembled a Khalha Mongol. I heard afterwards that he died a year later while hunting a bear.

"Our people moved here across the border, from Tuva, escaping from the war. When we crossed over the mountains, an old man named Moyun was already living here together with his daughter Tetei. She was young and so beautiful that her face would have lightened even on a dark night.

That times Russians, Mongols and Tuvinian man alike were hiding in the nearby forests escaping from conscription. Among them were two young men, one Tuvinian named Doiduus and another is Aldaan from the Hamnigan tribe. I think it was the spring of the last year of the war.

The two would come occasionally to our hearth. Although the municipal officials issued an order to arrest and, if impossible, to shoot any deserters or runaways spotted, hardly any did follow it. Though we heard of cases of deserters stealing cattle from Darkhat nomads, or even raping their women.

We were also young then. One day Doiduus with whom we maintained good relations treating him as fellow Tsaatan, came over our hearth. Said he: "Together with Aldaan of Hamnigan, we have abducted the old Moyun's daughter. Now Aldaan keeps her locked in his hideout cave."

When we heard this, cold rashes went through our spines as if facing a bear during a hunt. We all deeply respected old Moyun. "You two did a wrong thing," finally one of us uttered.

"I know. That is why I am telling you this. If you will see old Moyun, please, tell him that I am not involved." Saying this, he jumped to his feet, mounted the horse and disappeared into night.

When first night stars popped up, old Moyun himself ride to our place. He slowly mounted down and sat near an open fire. After a long silence he asked, "You have heard?" We two just nodded our heads. Even through his thick beard and long hairs we could see that the old man's wrinkled face was dead pale, lips barely moving.

"Did Doiduus came to you?" he asked. We nodded again. "Tell him to get out of my way if he can not bring back my daughter." He stood up and disappeared behind the trees.

We both felt sorry for the poor girl and disapproved of what Aldaan has done to the old man, but since we do reserve our words, none of us said a word.

We have not heard about them for two days. Finally, feeling brewing impatience inside, we decided to find out what's happening. The tracks of the old Moyun's horse were clear yet, and after a whole day of ride we reached the Chach stream branching out from the Tengis River.

On the stream bank we came across an awful scene of murder. The mutilated body of old Moyun could be seen in a forest opening. Apparently, the murderer took away his horse as it was not around.

It looked like Aldaan was so furious that he even dared to scalp the old man after murdering him. Moyun was an excellent marksman and probably he wounded Aldaan. Judging from the fresh blood covering the body the murder happened in the morning. As we learned soon our assumptions turned to be true.

Suddenly we heard a weak groan from near the stream. Again... As we cautiously approached a rock upstream, we found Doiduus lying powerless, his face covered with blood. He was seriously wounded but gathering last strength he told us what happened.

"Yesterday evening I went to the cave where Aldaan was hiding in. But it was empty and neither he nor Tetei were there. I followed their tracks and in the morning reached the Chach stream.

"As you know, this stream is protected by the spirit of Charchaan Shamaness, and it is not allowed to wash anything, not even to put a drop of milk or blood into the water. But there I saw Aldaan, sitting on the bank and washing his blooded penis. Few steps behind him lay Tetei, naked and motionless. Her hands were tightly bonded, and she was apparently just raped.

"Suddenly old Moyun stepped out from trees and began to walk towards his daughter. When Aldaan saw the old man he jumped to his feet stretching his hand for a gun.

"Stop there! " Moyun's voice was so fierce and threatening that Aldaan instantly froze.

"You dishonored my daughter, and though I am old I will smash such a cub as you. Let's fight like men!"

Aldaan was tall and strong man, while Moyun short but well built. Moyun put his gun next to daughter and stood waiting for approaching Aldaan. They come together and for a while stared keenly at each other.

Then Aldaan suddenly burst forward. When he passed by, the old man started to sink and a blooded blade flickered in Aldaan's hand. Kneeling down, Moyun managed to pull out his knife and threw it at Aldaan. Though young man managed to jerk out of its way, the knife got him at his feet. The wound was a light one and Aldaan easily pulled out the knife and walked back to Moyun.

The old man still held his left arm at his chest. Apparently Aldaan got him into the heart. The old man stood up, waving, made two uneven steps and then fall next to Tetei. Aldaan came closer, kicked him once. Then he lifted the old man by hairs and slowly began to scalp the man who was still alive.

"I was so scared to see this that I yelled "No!" When Aldaan heard my shout he leapt to the old man's gun and aimed it at my direction. "Came out! Or I will kill you! "

Recognizing me, he was so relieved that he began to laugh. I can not stand to see blood so I stood idle. Aldaan again lifted his gun and ordered me to come closer, "Come over here! Or I will kill you! " You know how afraid I am of Aldaan known for his cruelty.

"Now shoot the old man! Shoot him! " he shouted. Moyun was all covered with blood, his feet twisting in last agony and fists held tightly. "Shoot or I will kill you... " I fired a shot at the old man... I think it was right thing to do as he was dying in such a pain anyway?"

"Only later I learned that Aldaan fired at me as well."

"When I become conscious nobody was around. Aldaan took the girl and disappeared. Eagles were already circling over the Moyun's body. I decided to move away from the dead so I crawled upstream... "

These were his last words as his head suddenly sunk. We buried the two bodies according to our taiga custom and started back to our hearth suspecting that Aldaan might go there to get some food and treat the wound.

We were right. Aldaan was already there laying and waiting for bear meat to be cooked. He has cleaned his wound and applied some medicine. He was alone, and we did not know whether he killed Tetei or hide her somewhere.

Three of us did not say a word and went straight to our tents. While having a cup of tea we all have had the same thought -- to find and rescue the girl. But it was only a thought, as we all knew there was no need to help her.

This is the law of taiga. If Aldaan did harm to our hearth, we would have revenged him. But since he did not do any bad to us, we were not supposed or ought to interfere. If old Moyun asked for our help, we would gladly help him to catch and do justice to Aldaan. But he did not ask. We had no choice but to leave Tetei to her destiny.

The spring passed. Then summer. In early days of autumn there was the first snow. It is easy to track game on a fresh snow, so two of us went for hunting. Once we entered thick forest, we saw traces of a big elk. We followed the tracks but our hunt led nowhere.

When we came across a tree preached by Charchaan the Shamaness, we saw a strange and unbelievable picture. First we saw a woman under a tree with a knife handle sticking out of her abdomen. Her breasts were full and the abdomen enlarged, as she was pregnant.

Then we recognized the woman to be Tetei, the daughter of old Moyun. She was still alive breathing slightly. She opened her eyes and then her soul flew away. In her hands she held a clump of black hairs. Few steps behind the tree we saw a body. It was Aldaan, dead. He was scalped and the head skin lay near.

We understood what happened. Tetei took a bloody revenge killing and scalping Aldaan as he did to her father. She could not bear the shame of bearing a child of the very man who murdered her father? She could not bear repeated humiliation from the man who disrupted her life and took her by force? Not only she killed him in revenge but his child too.

Taiga does not tolerate sins. Those who commit sin in taiga do bear the consequences. Runaway Aldaan breached this law and lost his life.

Only Tetei lost her life so pitifully..."

Two old men sat silent and sad. Only flames of an open fire flickered at night.

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