Aming Niwa


Dingbo...o...o Dingbo...o...o... a small group of houses stood on a mountainside. This was a quiet picturesque village that was surrounded by willow trees. Nearly everybody in the village owned some sheep but all the sheep were herded by a poor orphan girl. She was the village shepherd. Every day she would take them to the pastures near the blue pine forests where there was always ample grass and shade for the sheep. While the sheep grazed she would sit on a big rock and spin the wool. She would drop here spindle down from the rock and watch the long lengths of wool twirl and spin into a smooth thread. She never tired of watching this and every time she would try and drop the spindle further and further down to see how far she could get.

Every day, when the sun was directly overhead she would eat her lunch of kaptang, a flat circular bread made of buckwheat or wheat flour, and chili paste. When the sun began to sink towards the western mountain she would round up the sheep and guide them back to the village. She did this day after day and she had done it for as long as she could remember.

Now one day as usual she was sitting on the rock and spinning when she saw that the sun was directly overhead and she knew it was lunch time. So she began to unwrap the kaptang from the torrath, the cloth in which here lunch was packed, when the whole thing slipped out of her hands and rolled down the hill. The shepherd scrambled off the rock and ran after her kaptang. The packet rolled down the hill, bouncing off the boulders, dodging between the trees until it was nearly at the bottom of the hill. Just as she was about to get it, the packet fell into a mouse hole. She stood there quite helpless. Then she called out, “Aming Niwa, even if you eat the kaptang, please give me back the torrath.”

“Why don’t you come down?” came the prompt reply.

“How can I come down? The hole is too small.”

“Just close your eyes and step right in” advised the mouse.

The shepherd closed her eyes and stepped into the mouse hole. Instantly she found herself in the home of the mouse. The mouse at once said, “Night is falling, why don’t you sleep here tonight?”

The shepherd was surprised but agreed. The mouse then asked her what she would like for her supper. To this the shepherd replied, “I am a very poor girl, I can eat anything. Some leftovers would be fine for me.”

But the mouse prepared her a sumptuous meal fit for a king. After the meal was over the mouse asked her, “How shall I prepare your bed?”

“I can sleep on some rags,” said the shepherd.

The mouse made her a comfortable bed. She slept that night on a boden with soft blankets and a pillow stuffed with the softest cotton. Before she went to bed the mouse warned her that there might be a lot of hustle and bustle in the night and she might actually feel her hair being touched but that she must try not to be disturbed. Indeed, there was much noise and movement in the mouse’s house and she could feel little pulls and tugs on her hair throughout the night.

Next morning when she got up the mouse was already busy preparing her morning meal. After a hearty breakfast she was just about to leave when the mouse gave back her torrath, which was made into a packet.

“Don’t unwrap the torrath until you reach home. Now close your eyes,” said the mouse.

The shepherd took the torrath and closed her eyes. When she opened her eyes she was back in the pasture with her sheep. She felt her hair, and every strand of her hair was strung with a precious jewel, turquoise, zis, and corals. She ran home and opened the torrath and it was full of more jewels.

The rich girl in the village soon heard about the shepherd’s lucky adventure and she asked her about it. The shepherd in her simplicity and kindness told her everything. The rich girl was filled with greed and she too wanted to get the jewels. So the next day she took the sheep to graze and did everything that the shepherd had done. But when the mouse asked her what she wanted for supper, the girl stated confidently, “I am a rich girl, and I am used to eating well, so I expect a very good supper.” The mouse gave her some old khuli. The cold buckwheat pancakes were served with some even colder turnip tsavem.

When she was asked, “How shall I prepare your bed?” she replied, “I am a rich girl, I am used to sleeping very comfortably!” The mouse pulled some rags from a corner and gave them to the girl. So she had to sleep on some rags and cover herself with some more rags.
Before she went to bed the mouse cautioned, “Do not be disturbed by the noises in the house tonight.”

The girl thought she knew exactly what she was to expect. So when the noises started and there were little pulls and tugs at her hair she could hardly contain her excitement. As she peeked through her half-closed eyes she saw many mice around her and they started stringing things on her hair. The rich girl was extremely excited as she imagined all the jewels in her hair.

The following morning the mouse gave her back her torrath and told her to close her eyes. When she opened her eyes she was with the sheep. She felt her hair and every strand of her hair had been strung with mouse dung. She did not wait to go home but unwrapped the torrath. I was full of more dung, dried grasses, and mosses. The rich girl was fuming with anger as bitter tears of shame and humiliation stung her eyes. This was the price she had paid for her greed and condescension.

How peacocks came on this earth (Garo)


In olden times there was a rich Garo who had a very beautiful daughter. According to the custom among the Garos she was to be the heir of her father’s property. When she grew up married one of her maternal cousin as the custom with the Garos. Her father owned a very attractive piece of silk woven with many coloured threads. This was a magic silk. A goddess had given it to the great grandmother of the Garo’s wife. There was a mantra or incantation which one had to utter while touching this silk. Otherwise something grim was predicted.

In course of time, the Garo and his wife grew old and died. The girl and her husband got all the property of the rich Garo. They also got the magic silk. They were living happily. On a bright day the girl put the piece of silk out side to sun it. She was feeling carefree and joyful and wanted to go to catch some prawns in the nearby stream. She took a chakka (triangular fishing basket) and a Koksi (fish creel) with her. Before going out she asked her husband not to touch the silk even if there be heavy rain.

It was a matter of chance that she did not tell her husband about the magic quality of the silk and did not teach him the incantation which one should recite while touching this silk. But now there was no time for it. She was not worried, as there was very slight chance of rain on such a sunny day.

But the will of God is unknown. The clear sky darkened. A mass of black clouds gathered and it rained heavily. The silk cloth got soaked. The husband anxiously shouted for his wife at the top of his voice. The girl came running fast. But as soon as she reached home she found that, in his excitement, her husband has forgotten what she told him about the piece of silk and he had touched it.

And lo! as soon as he touched it, the cloth stuck to him and his body slowly underwent a change. He started changing into a bird with splashing colours on his wings and tail. The girl was very sad and was moved by what had happened. Lost in grief she touched the bit of silk left, forgetting to recite the incantation and she was also turned into a female bird. Her plumes became less colourful as most of the silk was already absorbed into her husband’s body.

Therefore they live as peacock and peahen. Whenever clouds gather, in the sky, lightening flashes and thunder roars, they cry with fear lest the rains should away their garment of many coloured plumes.