BITTER TEARS ON NEW YEAR'S EVE

by

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Myadagma, the landlord's daughter, would allow Tserma to put on one of her old worn deels for the holidays. Having beaten the mattresses, she picked up the rubbish into a basket, placed it on her back and headed toward the gate. People were carrying gifts and foodstuff wrapped in white cloth. Tserma went past them with the basket on her back but did not make way for them. The merchants cried out angrily:

"What's the matter with you, are you blind or something? What are you shaking your dirt and trash on our gifts for? What a dumb girl!" Anybody who felt like it could order Tserma around.

After the girl carried out the trash and returned, Myadagma again called out to tell her to take out some more trash. Then in the afternoon firewood had to be sawn. It's very hard to saw alone. At that moment, Tsultem, a young man who was watering horses in the yard next door came up to the fence and looking through a crack, called Tserma.

Tsultem and Tserma, working for the owners of two neighboring ger were in love with one another, but their masters did not take their love seriously, convinced that "the common people don't know happiness, and the poor can't love." They made fun of the young couple and wouldn't even allow them to meet.

Suddenly a man came up to the gate. Seeing her boyfriend, Myadagma quickly came forward to meet him. Holding hands, talking cheerfully and laughing, they went toward the ger. That was when they caught sight of Tserma at the fence.
"Hey, what are you doing there?" Myadagma called, ridicule in her voice.

Hearing those words, Dagdan's wife threw open the felt ger door and came rushing out shouting, "What a rotten good-for-nothing! Now why aren't you sawing firewood, you dumbbell?"

This time Tserma screwed up her courage and replied, "Sawing alone takes too long and I'd have no time to do the other chores, so I asked Tsultem here to help me."

"Well, then don't waste any time and start sawing," Dagdan's wife retorted and went back into the ger.

Tserma was happy; Tsultem could now enter Dagdan's yard and saw together with her.

Dusk began to fall. The weather got worse and fluffy snowflakes started coming down, but Tserma and Tsultem kept on working, the rasp and whine of the saw merging with the strains of a shanz coming from the warm ger where Myadagma was enjoying herself with her boyfriend. This made the hired hands a bit sad, but they went on sawing, every once in a while blowing on their frozen fingers to keep them warm. They kept saying gentle and loving things to each other, trying to hide the depth of their suffering behind light remarks. It was all very touching. Tserma told him that her masters were getting special clothes and fine food ready for the holidays, and Tsultem told her about his master who had brought home a fine pacer from his herd. Suddenly Tsultem brought out a silk kerchief from under his shirt and handed it to Tserma. This little gift seemed to the girl a million times more precious than Myadagma's new silk deel.

She told him sadly that with the approaching New Year there had been much more work to do and that her masters were all the time berating her for trying to meet him more frequently. As they talked and worked, time flew by.

When they finished sawing, it was already late and Tserma
had to start doing her housework. Parting with Tsultem, she entered the ger. There, in good old tradition, plates with meat dumplings, cold meat and other delicacies were laid out around the hearth. All this had been prepared by Tserma.

The guests in new holiday dresses were cheerfully getting ready to sit down and to partake of all these delectable tidbits. But Tserma saw the New Year in at the cauldron over the fire.

Myadagma brought in her silk deel and ordered Tserma to put it on, but Tserma said in a hesitant tone: "I'll put it on tomorrow," and laid it aside. Then she took out Tsultem's gift, the kerchief, and every once in a while pressed it to her face. Suddenly
Dagdan's wife caught sight of the kerchief and cried out, "Where did you get that? That's probably from among our gifts."

It hurt Tserma to be so wrongly accused but neither could she readily admit that Tsultem had presented it to her. And so she said nothing.

Many guests gathered that evening to see in the New Year. The ger was resounding with merry laughter and voices. Only Tserma was sitting sadly at the stove and sighing bitterly. She didn't get any sleep that night again; she had to do the cooking for everybody for the next day. The next day her master and mistress were going out and she had to prepare everything they needed. At the same time she managed to meet respectfully and serve all those who called at the ger. She somehow managed to pull through the next day, but in the evening guests arrived again. They made merry, drank a lot, were noisy, played music, and Tserma cleaned up after them, making their beds, bringing in pillows for them, and so another night passed for her.

They were carousing at her master's ger for several days on end. Tserma was exhausted body and soul, but no one paid any attention to her, and she just had no choice. Only in moments when she was alone did she let her misery-laden tears flow. And only once in a while did she unburden herself by talking to Tsultem through a crack in the fence.

So two more years passed. Again New Year's was approaching. The Dagdans were planning to leave the city and move out to the steppe for some reason. The mistress wanted to take Tserma along with her. But Tsultem sneaked out one day, called her quietly and, when she came out of the ger, said to her, "Let's get out of here and live together."

Tserma was too excited to understand everything he said to her, but when she heard his last words she was overjoyed. She quickly gathered her few belongings and left with Tsultem.
Tsurtem's ger was black and tattered, but Tserma felt a million times happier there than in Dagdan's white ger where she had to sleep by the threshold. Now she would be able to get up when she wanted and do her own work and rest when people are supposed to rest. Now she would be living with her beloved Tsurtem.

Another New Year came around. Never since her arrival in the city had Tserma slept so peacefully on this festive night. In the morning she got up early and dressed. Her deel wasn't of silk and beaver but it was beautiful.