

## The Witty Shepherd: Translation

They once said, may God keep us from the tattlers unless they are raiders or wealthy.

A man called S'ayd used to work as a shepherd for his uncle. The duties he had to carry out were so demanding that he felt ill-treated and humiliated. But he was bound by a moral contract with the family: he had to shepherd their sheep until a bird tweeted "dokkoy."<sup>1</sup> His daily tasks consisted of shepherding the sheep until they were full, watering them and taking them to wherever grass was abundant, and watering the other animals of the herd as well. This is what he used to accomplish diligently.

Once, the uncle asked him to guide the herd back and forth down the plain, making sure that he would allow them to breed at their own pace; an order that he intentionally took to mean what it did not, that is to say, he chose to believe that he was being asked to kill one animal when he set off and to kill another when he came back home.<sup>2</sup> He thus shepherded the animals and killed two mares. He killed one when he departed and killed another when he came back. His uncle asked furiously: "Why would you kill the animals, S'ayd?" He replied: "Isn't this what you asked for; kill one on my way and another back home? I killed one when I took off for the shepherd and killed another when I got back." They said: "This is not what we meant."

As the uncle became aware that he had to deal with a stubborn shepherd, and in order to terminate his mission as soon as possible and send him away as agreed, he asked an old woman of his own to climb a nearby tree. The woman should hide herself amid the branches and reproduce the "dokkoy" tweets instead of the real bird whose arrival was still far ahead. The woman climbed the tree and started to imitate the bird's singing: "Dokkoy, dokkoy, dokkoy!" Seized by the make-believe tweets of the bird, the family said to him, "S'ayd, dokkoy has now shown up! You should leave." He replied, "If it's a real bird, then it should fly away after I throw a stone at it!" He headed to the tree and threw a stone at it, and the woman fell off the branch. "S'ayd, this is not what we agreed upon!" the family members were furious and started shouting at him. He replied, "You said it was a bird and I had to chase it away."

---

<sup>1</sup> Also known in Moroccan Darija as taykuk; an uncontrolled hysterical behaviour of cows. This is mainly caused by flies that lay eggs on the cow's skin, which turn into worms, or maggots, and penetrate the skin. This usually happens in the late spring and early summertime. In the collective imagination of the community where the story is told, "Dokkoy," the name of which is borrowed from the sound it makes, is associated with the hysterical condition of the cows. In this story, it is the shouting of the bird that causes the uncontrolled condition of the cows.

<sup>2</sup> "nxtntid tnxntin" refers to the movement of walking cattle back and forth. However, the root of the verb "nx" alludes to the act of killing. So, although the shepherd knows exactly what the family's real request is, he subverts the explicit meaning to suit his capricious intentions.

His uncles decided to invite the Telba<sup>3</sup> for a family ceremony. S'ayd was asked to lead the Telba to the house but on the condition that they should not touch the ground. Then, S'ayd had to fully abide by the uncles' condition. He slaughtered all the sheep, turned them into steps using their carcasses, and asked the Telba to cross them on the way in. The Telba entered the house, and their host welcomed them courteously saying, "Eat and drink as you wish. However, there is no meat in our dinner." "How come! We have been stepping on meat all the way in," said one of the Telba. The host went out of the house immediately and found that all his sheep were slaughtered. He said angrily, "You have gone too far S'ayd!" S'ayd answered teasingly, "You told me the Telba should not touch the ground on their way in. This was my solution."

Yet another time, one of his uncles consulted his wife and asked her to wash S'ayd's clothes. The wife went over to him and told him, "Give me your clothes so I can wash them." So he gave her his clothes. The uncle asked his wife: "Don't dry his clothes. He can sleep between us (since it is cold and he has no clothes). I will then hand you the end of a rope and I will have an end myself. When I say pull, you pull; and loosen up if I say so." And so, the woman washed the clothes and brought them back. When bedtime came, she told him: "S'ayd, come over here, your clothes have not dried yet and the weather is cold." S'ayd agreed. However, he was aware of their plan because he had been eavesdropping earlier. When they went to sleep, he cautiously switched places with the wife. The uncle said: "Let's do what we have planned. When I say pull, you pull." So, he handed the rope end over. He pulled it and asked her to do the same. S'ayd pulled the rope and the woman was strangled. In the morning, the uncle said: "What have you done, S'ayd?" S'ayd replied, "You told me to pull and I did. I did not know why you said so."

Another day, they herded the sheep to the mountain where grass was abundant. The uncle, in a caring gesture, asked the shepherd to put on his cloak, as it was freezing, and sit on the edge of a rocky hill to have a better view down on the grazing sheep. S'ayd knew exactly what his uncle was plotting, so he dressed a tree trunk with the cloak he had on and hid himself away, as the uncle had been planning to get rid of the shepherd forever. S'ayd had the same plan as well. The uncle furtively came behind the tree trunk, believing that it was S'ayd, and pushed the trunk down the slope. Triumphantly, the shepherd secretly pushed the uncle down the hill and put an end to the schemes of the family.

Thus ends my story, from the wicked may it be kept; in peace shall I find my path.

---

<sup>3</sup> Singular of tāleb; usually a man of elevated status, elite of the countryside, because of his capabilities to recite and teach the Koran.