

FIVE STANS 12

Posted on 2024-02-18 by spd_wp_admin



Dear Reader (2024-02-18),

Before we leave Kyrgyzstan bound for Tajikistan here is one more post from Kyrgyzstan.

A tour like this has a guide that is with us for the full length of the tour. In our case her name was Kara, and she can be thought of as a general contractor. As such she picks up local guides and drivers as necessary, usually on a country-by-country basis. Sometimes drivers and guides change within a country. Guides come in varying degrees of expertise. A great guide can dramatically enhance the travelling experience. Our Kyrgyzstan guide was one such person. Though M was only in her mid-twenties, she already had a long list of linguistic and scholarly accomplishments behind her. Her father was a guide and his father had been a guide. Maybe an uncle had also been a guide. M had grown up with Kyrg folk tales and had one or two at her fingertips at every stop and on many a drive. Sadly, for many of the maidens in these stories their short lives ended badly and abruptly.

M, this story is for you.

Roadside fruit stands are plentiful throughout the Fergana Valley in Kyrgyzstan. At one fruit stand where our guide stopped to buy apricot and walnut jam, we were told the following. Now, I don't speak Kyrg. The storyteller barely spoke English, and vodka was drunk in glasses made from empty water bottles. So, I may not have understood all we were told, and many of the facts (if there are any) may have been lost in translation.

Long ago in the time before empires were won and lost the king of the winter snows had his heart warmed by the queen of the spring blossoms. They had a daughter Umel whose favourite flower was the mountain crocus, and her favourite colour was burgundy.

Now the winters high above the valley in the Tien Shan range (the one fact I could check) are hard, long, cold, and white. When the sun becomes a little higher and a little warmer, the snows begin to melt and water races down mountain streams. In those years where the snow melts not too fast and not too slowly, the land becomes fat with growth, horses and goats get a good price at the market.

In those fat years when the morning light catches the tumbling water just so, people say they can see the ghost of Umel, and those sightings bode well for the coming year.

Now, not everyone ties a burgundy scarf onto the ropes of the summer yurt. But there are those who keep the old stories alive. Like a pair of empty chairs on the banks of a lazy river that is both a memory of previous laughter, and hope and promise for smiles to come, a burgundy scarf is both a memory and hope for a year when once again Umel will be seen, and the land will be fat.

You are welcome to share a link to this page with others.
As always, all comments are welcome and sought.
Cheers, Sean

From Facebook

Michelle Aldridge
Michelle Gear Kilty

Sean, you are an amazing storyteller
This is an incredible read, thank you

Copyright © 2024 [Sean P Drysdale](#). All Rights Reserved.