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From *The Secret History of the Mongols*

This Mongol account records the early years of Mongol expansion under Chingis Khan, the founder of the empire. Born Temujin in 1155 or 1167, the young son of a minor tribal chieftain attracted the support of Mongol princes in the years between 1187 and 1206 through a series of decisive military victories over other tribes and competing Mongol claimants to the title of Great Khan.

Mongol Conquest of Tatars

... Temujin came up against the Tatars at Dalan Namurgas, on the Khalkha, east of Buir Nor, and defeated them in battle. They fell back; the Mongol armies pursued them, slaying and capturing them in large numbers.

The princes, Altan, Khuchar, and Daritai, were less assiduous in the pursuit. Finding a great number of animals roaming the steppes in the absence of their Tatar owners, they followed the usual custom of rounding them up, and collecting anything that took their fancy in the abandoned Tatar camps.

Temujin, having issued a clear order [against looting], could not tolerate their disobedience. He detached portions of his army, placed them under the command of Jebe and Khubilai, and sent them off after the disobedient princes, with orders to take away from them everything they had captured. The outcome was what might have been expected. Prince Altan and Khuchar, retiring in haste with as much of their booty as they could take with them, departed from their allegiance to him. They re-established themselves as independent chieftains, entering into such arrangements with Ong Khan, Jamukha, and other rulers as seemed desirable.

Daritai, however, seeing a little more clearly than the others, submitted to having his booty taken away from him.

Owing to his determined pursuit of the Tatars, Temujin found that he had a very considerable number of Tatar prisoners. They were kept under guard in the Mongol camp, and for the most part they were not greatly perturbed by their situation. Some of the chieftains might expect to be executed, but the lesser men had a reasonable hope of surviving. Some might have to serve as warriors under the Mongols, or even be enslaved, but a slave of talents could always hope to become a warrior again.

Temujin held a council to decide what to do with them. It was a great matter, and nobody was present at this council but his own family. The Khan's intention [was] to wipe out his enemies on a large scale. . . .

Belgutai had . . . made friends among the Tatar prisoners. One of these was Yeke Charan, the principal Tatar leader. . . . When Yeke Charan asked him what decision the family council had come to, Belgutai did not hesitate to tell him.

"We agreed to measure you against the linchpin,"¹ he said.

Yeke Charan told his fellow prisoners of the Khan's decision. Having nothing to lose, they rose up against their guards and fought their way out of the camp, taking with them what weapons they could seize. They gathered themselves together on a hilltop in a tight formation of fierce warriors. Men who are going to be killed whatever happens, and know it, fight well. The destruction of the Tatars, which was in due course accomplished, cost many Mongol lives.

Temujin was remarkably lenient towards Belgutai.

"Because Belgutai revealed the decision of the family council," he said, "Our army suffered great losses. From now on, Belgutai will take no part in the council. While it is being held, he will remain outside, keeping order in the camp, and he will sit in judgment during that time over the quarrelsome, the thieves, and the liars. When the council is finished and the wine is all drunk, then Belgutai can come in."

He ordered at the same time that Daritai should be banned from the family councils, for disobeying his *yasakh*.²

The Khan acquired a new woman from among these Tatars. She was Yesugen, the daughter of the chieftain Yeke Charan. He found her pleasing, and treated her with favour. Yesugen was wise enough not to quarrel unduly with fate, which had ungently disposed of her father, but provided her with some measure of fortune herself.

While they were still in the Tatar country, she said to Temujin: "The Khan, showing favour towards me, takes care of me well and provides me with goods and servants. But I have an elder sister, Yesui, who would please the Khan even more than I. She is married; Yeke Charan acquired a son-in-law, who came to live with her. But at present, in this dispersion of the people, I do not know where they have gone."

Temujin . . . [said]:

"If your elder sister is even more beautiful than you are, I will send men in search of her. But if she comes, will you give up your place to her?"

"If the Khan pleases, as soon as I see my elder sister, I will give up my place to her."

¹ This was a not unknown procedure, though it had never been applied on quite such a vast scale. Prisoners were led past the wheel of a wagon. Those who were taller than the linchpin were beheaded; the children, who were smaller, survived to be taken into the Mongol armies when they grew up.

² Order, law.

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Temujin gave the order that Yesui must be searched for; and the warriors found her hiding in the forest, with the son-in-law who had been given to her. The husband fled, but the lady Yesui was brought in.

Yesugen, as soon as she saw her elder sister, rose, made her sit on the seat she had lately occupied, and herself took a seat lower down. . . .

One day the Khan was sitting outside the tent, drinking with some friends. He sat between the lady Yesui and the lady Yesugen; and he heard the lady Yesui suddenly catch her breath. Temujin said nothing to her; but after reflecting for a time he called the princes Bo'orchu and Mukhali to him and said: "Have all the people here divide themselves up into their clans. If any find a man with them who is not of their clan, let them set him aside."

When the people were arranged, clan by clan, a young man, good-looking and alert, was standing apart from all the clansmen. When they asked him who he was, he replied: "I am the son-in-law of Yeke Charan the Tatar, to whom was given his daughter Yesui. When we were surprised by the enemy, I was frightened, and escaped; then I came here, telling myself that it would be safe here. In the middle of so many people, how should I be recognised as a stranger?"

When these words were reported to the Khan, he said: "He was already an enemy; he is now a masterless man. What has he come to spy on us for? We have measured people of his kind against the linchpin of a wagon wheel. There is no need for any further investigation. Take him out of my sight."

They cut the young man's head off immediately. . . .