

THE UNWELCOME GUEST

That day, on May 2, 1940, the weather in Kazakhstan was exceptionally warm. After three hours and 120 kilometres of non-stop driving east from Pawlodar, bouncing on the dirt road, we were very dusty, thirsty and exhausted. When the truck stopped in the village, the soldiers dumped us in the middle of the road and drove off without any concern for what would happen to us next. It was obvious that we were left to fend for ourselves.

While we were waiting, sitting on top of our belongings, the local onlookers lined up on both sides of the road and kept staring at us. I thought that we landed on a different planet. I was surprised and scared by what I saw. I asked myself: "What in the hell was this place, and who were those people?" As it turned out, the spectators were from various ethnic groups: *Uzbeks, Kirgiz, and Mongols.*

In our hopeless situation, nobody offered us any assistance. Luckily for us, mother had clothes to barter, and I spoke Russian, so we managed to rent a place temporarily from a Russian family. The house was constructed with rough logs and had only two rooms. The landlord occupied the first room, while the remaining room served as guests' quarters.

The landlord had two children, a daughter Shura, age 8, and a son Alosha, age 17. Alosha was mentally ill and unpredictable in his actions. One day, somehow it happened that the children were left alone in the house when Alosha went crazy. With an eerie grin on his face, he wielded a large kitchen knife and chased my sister and me around the table. When he threatened to cut us up, we didn't hesitate to jump through the window to save ourselves. I talked about this incident with his father and he asked me not to mention it to anyone because he was afraid to lose his son, who would surely be placed in a mental institution. Apparently, patients admitted to Russian mental institutions rarely returned home.

In this so-called guestroom, we slept on the floor. My mother's friend, who had also been married to a policeman, slept on the only available sofa. One day, our landlord invited some vagabond to stay overnight. This person looked suspicious to me. He had a swarthy, weathered face, slanted eyes, and a droopy moustache and goatee. I think that he must have been Tartar. The idea of him sleeping in the same room with us held little appeal, but we realized protesting would not make any difference. That night I was awakened from my sleep when I felt someone behind me. With my heart beating fast and my body trembling, I felt an arm embracing

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me, and at the same time I heard a whisper in my ear, "Sleep, do not ask any questions now." For obvious reasons, sleep was not possible.

In the morning at the first light, I saw the man quietly sneaking out of the room. When all of us woke up, our friend explained what had happened. Apparently that Tartar joined her on the sofa in the middle of night and proceeded to hug and kiss her. Shocked and terrified by the assault, she quickly jumped from the sofa to take refuge in my bed.