



Silent Steppe: The Memoir of a Kazakh Nomad Under Stalin

Mukhamet Shayakhmetov

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This is a first-hand account of the genocide of the Kazakh nomads in the 1920s and 30s. Nominally Muslim, the Kazakhs and their culture owed as much to shamanism and paganism as they did to Islam. Their ancient traditions and economy depended on the breeding and herding of stock across the vast steppes of central Asia, and their independent, nomadic way of life was anathema to the Soviets.

Seven-year-old Shayakhmetov and his mother and sisters were left to fend for themselves after his father was branded a "kulak" (well-off peasant and thus class enemy), stripped of his possessions, and sent to a prison camp where he died. In the following years the family traveled thousands of miles across Kazakhstan by foot, surviving on the charity of relatives. Told with dignity and detachment, this central Asian *Wild Swans* awakens the reader to the scale of suffering of millions of Kazakhs, and also astonishes and inspires as a most singular survivor's tale.

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