

Tangsulu ('Morning Beauty')

A Kazakh Love Story

By Garifolla Yesim

Part 1

"*Apa*¹, *apa*" a girl's voice was heard and *baibishe*² ran out of the *yurt*³ as fast as she could. Tangsulu was her youngest daughter; she was also the most beloved girl in the village. Tangsulu was running toward her mother. Tangsulu's dress and hair were messed up; her face was pale. *Baibishe* ran toward Tangsulu and hardly made it on time to catch her before Tangsulu went unconscious. Holding her daughter in her arms, *baibishe* whispered: "What happened sunny? What is wrong, baby?" In the meantime people who heard the noise started coming out of their *yurts* trying to figure out what had happened. Neighbors were standing in the distance and were staring at the mother and the daughter. Finally, *baibishe* realized that people were all around. She looked at everybody suspiciously; and people started to leave. One woman, however, came up to the girl, picked her up tenderly, carried her inside of the *yurt*, put her in bed, and quietly left.

Baibishe sat down near her daughter's bed. The village *mulla*⁴ came and said a prayer. He also put water on Tangsulu's forehead—this was supposed to cure her from any spell. The *mulla* tried several tactics to bring Tangsulu back to life, but she stayed unconscious. Then *baibishe* invited a medicine woman, who was known in the village as a very perspicacious and wise woman.

The woman came inside of the *yurt* and looked around. She was surprised how beautiful Tangsulu was. Then she sat down on the floor and started saying something in a foreign language. In several minutes she got quiet she pointed to the door meaning that she wanted *baibishe* to leave. Any other time *baibishe* would not have liked it, but this time she humbly left.

¹ Kazak term for "mother".

² Kazak term for "oldest wife" in cases where a husband had taken more than one wife.

³ Kazak circular tent.

⁴ Muslim religious leader.

Tangsulu was her youngest most beloved child. Everyone in the family loved Tangsulu very much. People thought that she was a very special girl. Tangsulu was getting ready to turn ten. She was a very healthy child, and that is why *baibishe* was so surprised that Tangsulu got sick so suddenly.

The medicine woman was swaying and singing. Her sad monotone voice made everything seem dejected. Every once in a while the medicine woman would touch the string of her *dombra*¹, and the harsh sound of it would make *baibishe* shudder. Even though the medicine woman sang a Kazak song, *baibishe* could not understand the meaning of it.

Several hours passed. The medicine woman stopped singing and put her palm on Tangsulu's forehead. The medicine woman said: "Where did you go, Tangsulu?" Without opening her eyes, Tangsulu whispered: "I went near the lake." The medicine woman continued: "Did you go to the high mountain?" "Yes!" The medicine woman sat straight and started her song again. She sang for a long time, but finally she stopped again.

- Whom did you see there, girl? - she asked.
- A beggar woman.
- What did she look like? Was she young or was she old?
Was it an angel or was it an evil spirit?
- She was scary... very old... very scary... I am afraid of her!
She had no nose... She is coming... save me...
- Poor girl! - said the medicine woman, and it was hard to understand whom she was talking to: the girl, *baibishe*, or the noseless beggar woman.

The medicine woman came out of the *yurt* and talked to *baibishe*:

- Your daughter is well. She just got scared. When she wakes up, do not ask her anything and she will forget her fear. Feed her well and she will be fine!
- Let your words come true! - said *baibishe* to the medicine

¹ Kazak stringed musical instrument

woman.

However, *baibishe* noticed that the medicine woman was worried about something. She would sit down and then get up again; her eyes were full of anxiety. The medicine woman took some beans out of her pocket. *Baibishe* understood that the medicine woman was getting ready to tell fortunes. The two of them, *baibishe* and the medicine woman, sat on the floor and the medicine woman started:

- Beauty can bring happiness as well as grief to any woman. Today Tangsulu saw her fate. The noseless beggar woman is Tangsulu in the future... oh, no!

Suddenly the medicine woman got up and ran out of the *yurt*. Nobody saw the medicine woman ever again. She disappeared. People had different beliefs about the mysterious disappearance of the medicine woman, but with time everyone forgot about her.

Baibishe was the only one who never forgot the strange and ominous prediction of the medicine woman. *Baibishe* wanted to find a groom for Tangsulu as soon as possible - and soon many men were seeking Tangsulu's hand.

When *baibishe* first saw the man who would be Tangsulu's husband, she thought: "He is smart, handsome and strong. He is the perfect match for my Tangsulu.

Part 2

Many years passed and Tangsulu became a beautiful young woman. She was in love with her future husband, whom she imagined according to *baibishe's* stories. She would repeat his name over and over again. She thought this name was the most beautiful name in the world - *Zhoikyn*. She imagined herself near him; she imagined his strong arms around her. Each time she would blush because of these thoughts, but each night she would desire him shamelessly.

One day a holiday was announced in the village. This holiday

was arranged to honor a truce between the *Kalmiks*¹ and the Kazaks. One day, Tangsulu's father invited the neighboring *Kalmik* village to visit his village. The entire week, the youth sang, danced and arranged competitions. The most famous competition in the village was their archery competition. The day of this competition, the entire village gathered at the square to watch. Tangsulu went too. The ten best archers missed the target. People were trying to find a volunteer in the crowd to shoot next. One man agreed to try. He was tall and strong - handsome and proud. He did not seem to be even twenty yet. The crowd fell silent - people realized that this man was a *bek*.²

Tangsulu was looking at the *Kalmik bek* and suddenly became embarrassed. She thought about *Zhoikyn* and wished that he was just as brave and handsome as the *bek*. She was embarrassed about her thoughts: "Why am I comparing my *Zhoikyn* to some *Kalmik*?"

The *Kalmik bek*, however, had a secret plan in his mind. Ever since he saw Tangsulu for the first time, he wanted to impress her somehow. The fact that all of the other archers would miss the target had been agreed upon in advance. The young *Kalmik bek* knew that Tangsulu would come to watch the competition.

Now he was standing in the center of the crowd and was looking at all of the people. One of his servants brought his bow and arrows. He took the bow and without even taking aim, made his shot. The target, a red sack with coins inside, fell to the ground. The *Kalmik bek* picked up the sack, came up to Tangsulu and handed the gift to her. Tangsulu accepted the gift. Their eyes met for a fleeting moment and a silent dialogue happened between them: "I am in love with you," - his eyes said. "My heart belongs to another man," - her eyes replied.

A new game began, but Tangsulu left and went home. She started crying as soon as she was left alone. Later, however, her aunt noticed her tear-stained cheeks and asked: "Did you fall in love with the *Kalmik bek*?" Tangsulu sighed and said: "I want *Zhoikyn* to come soon! If I am really his bride, I do not see any reason to wait." This was the moment when *baibishe* understood that Tangsulu was ready to get married.

¹ Turkic tribe in Central Asia.

² Turkic honorific title.

They sent people to Zhoikyn and asked him to come. Soon after that, he came to the village and proposed to Tangsulu. Tangsulu was very happy with Zhoikyn, but sometimes she would remember the *Kalmik bek*, and these thoughts would make her worry. Tangsulu and Zhoikyn had a wonderful life together until one day Zhoikyn left to go to war.

Part 3

While all of the village men were away, the women, children and elders had to find ways to protect themselves. Often, villages would be attacked by different enemies.

Zhoikyn's village was no exception.

One afternoon an enemy army came into the village and kidnapped ten of the most beautiful women in the village, including Tangsulu. As it was later found, the head of this army was the *Kalmik bek*. Zhoikyn's younger brother tried to help Tangsulu, but the warriors ruthlessly slaughtered him. With terror, Tangsulu realized that she had caused his death. She felt so badly that one day she let the *Kalmik bek* think that one day she might reciprocate his feelings. She thought: "I promise that I will be strong in front of him. "

Part 4

An old Chinese woman looked at all of the women prisoners of the *Kalmik bek*. She took off all of their clothing and looked at Tangsulu. The Chinese woman looked at Tangsulu carefully, and whispered something to her servant. The servant left, but came back shortly. The Chinese woman talked to Tangsulu: "We will get rid of your baby and you will be the servant of our *bek*. This is his will." Tangsulu answered: "Listen to me, crazy woman. I need to meet with the *bek* and then we will decide what to do." The old woman was confused. She was surprised by the young woman's bravery, so she decided to let her talk to the *Kalmik bek*.

Tangsulu herself was surprised at how confident she was. She took out a little knife that Zhoikyn had given her and hid it in her pocket. She remembered that she had not wanted to take it from him, but he insisted: "When a woman stays alone, she needs to be able to

protect herself!"

Tangsulu sighed, remembering the happy days of her life. Then she went in to meet the *Kalmik bek*.

The *bek* was alone, waiting for Tangsulu. Playing with his dog, he asked: "Your name is Tangsulu, right?" Before he heard the answer, he saw that his dog had swallowed a bloody piece of meat. The *Kalmik bek* looked at Tangsulu and saw that blood was running down her face. He came up to her and saw that instead of her beautiful nose, there were two holes in her face. He realized that his dog had swallowed Tangsulu's nose. The *Kalmik bek* was furious. He took out his dagger and stabbed his dog with it.

Tangsulu said: "I have only one request of you. I know that you are a noble man. I killed my beauty, not myself, only because I knew how noble you are." The *bek* interrupted her; "But I loved you, Tangsulu. If you did not agree to become my wife, I would have let you go!" Tangsulu said: "You know that your desire for me would not have let me go!" The *bek* interrupted again: "Ever since I met you, Tangsulu, I couldn't think of anything else except how to make you my wife. When I learned that you got married, I became a crazy man! Now, please, let me be your servant. I will do anything you wish."

Tangsulu continued: "Can you promise that you will do anything for me?" "I promise!" said the *bek*. She said: "Now everyone who looks at me will be disgusted and frightened. People will only feel sorry for me." The *bek* replied: "I want to share your grief with you, but know that you are free, and I will do anything you wish me to do!" Tangsulu said: "Listen, then, even though you said that I was free, I cannot go back. I will remain here. Let all of your prisoners go, but before, I will choose one of them to be my servant. If she gives birth to a boy, let her go. I will raise this boy. Among your prisoners, find a lady named Sagila. Give my knife to her, and tell her that I am dead. She will go to my village and tell everyone that I have died. Also tell her to find my husband. She must tell him, so that he will dream of me. This way, I will tell him some great news. And more... in five years, find two of your best horses and give them to me. I will take care of everything else myself. I believe that you will do everything as I have asked you.

Part 5

With these words, Tangsulu left. In some time, she gave birth to a boy. The *Kalmik bek* kept his promise and gave the servant's son to Tangsulu to raise. Soon, however, he died in battle. Tangsulu put together different stories about the *Kalmik bek* and *Zhoikyn*. She often told these stories to her sons.

Five years passed. The two boys grew up like brothers. They were very friendly and supportive of each other. One day an old man brought two wonderful horse to Tangsulu. Several more years passed. Tangsulu's sons were already good hunters. They both were fifteen and both called Tangsulu "*apa*". One morning *Zhoikyn's* son saw that Tangsulu was getting ready to leave:

- Where are you going, *apa*?
- You are an adult now, my son. I do not want to be a burden to you.
- But you are my mother, *apa*. Please do not leave.
- I must go now!
- But where will I find you? When will we meet again? I know where to look for my father, but how will I find you?
 - You will find me where you find your father.
 - Do not be so mysterious, *apa*. I do not understand what you mean.
 - This is not a mystery, son. Later, you will figure everything out.

After this, Tangsulu turned around and got ready to leave. Her son ran up to her and hugged her. Her shawl accidentally came untied and the boy saw her noseless face. Tangsulu turned around, picked up her shawl and left. The boy watched her for a long time as she left. He knew that his mother's terrible wound didn't damage the beauty of her face.

Part 6

Days, one passing another, passed. *Zhoikyn* got married again and had three children. His youngest son was almost eight. He started to forget Tangsulu, but one day a noseless beggar appeared in the village. Her face was always covered with a shawl so that only the

top of her face was visible.

Zhoikyn did not pay much attention to the beggar woman, but his youngest son grew close to her. Often Zhoikyn saw that they played or read together. Zhoikyn noticed that the voice of the beggar woman reminded him of someone's voice. Each time Zhoikyn and the beggar woman met, she would rush away.

One morning Zhoikyn's wife noticed that he was silent and irritated.

- What is wrong *otagasy*¹ Are you not well?
- No... I had a bad dream last night. I cannot stop thinking about it...
- Old men say that dreams mean nothing! However, should I call a fortune-teller? She might be able to tell you what your dream meant.
- No! No need... I have been very tired lately; I am sure this is the reason that I had a bad dream!

However, the next day Zhoikyn was even more irritated and upset. His wife asked:

- *Otagasy*, you must not be well! What is the matter with you?
- Listen, my wife, I need to tell you the truth now... Two nights in a row I have been dreaming of Tangsulu. I thought that I already forgot all about her, but she came back to me again!
- Let us call the village *mulla*, and he will say a prayer!

The *mulla* came immediately. He asked why Zhoikyn and his wife had called him. Zhoikyn explained that he had seen Tangsulu in his dreams repeatedly and that he wanted the *mulla* to say a prayer. The *mulla* said a prayer. And after they had dinner together, the *mulla* left.

In the morning Zhoikyn's wife woke up before the sunrise. She turned in bed and realized that Zhoikyn was not there. She got scared

¹ A traditional way for a wife to call her husband.

and jealous. She ran out of the *yurt* immediately. She saw her husband standing outside near the *sore*.¹ She wanted to come up and talk to him, but he noticed her and asked her to go back to the *yurt*. She returned to bed and soon fell asleep.

Every person at some point of his or her life starts analyzing everything that has happened in the past. This was the time for Zhoikyn to carefully analyze his life. He was thinking about past years, about his family and about his future. He was also trying to figure out why he had the exact same dream for several nights.

However, we will leave Zhoikyn with his thoughts and go back to our Tangsulu.

As you probably figured, the beggar woman who appeared in Zhoikyn's village was Tangsulu. She told her son when to start looking for his father and left to go to her husband's village. As soon as she got there, she started to bring her old plan to life. Every evening she would put sleeping pills in Zhoikyn's and his wife's tea. She would wait until they fell asleep, and then she would sit on the side of Zhoikyn's bed and she would tell the story of her life. She would look at her former husband and she would cry, because he did not belong to her any more.

Tangsulu had been doing this for three days. After the whole story was told, Tangsulu felt better. Now she was happy again. She was just as happy then, as she was when she was young. She spent a lot of time with Zhoikyn's youngest son Dauren. She sang for him, played with him, and read for him. She knew that Zhoikyn heard her song, but she also heard once that Zhoikyn called her a spirit. It broke her heart and she realized that there is no room for her among alive people. She saw that one morning he was along outside of his *yurt*. She saw him standing there, and she knew exactly what he was thinking about. She knew exactly what bothered him that morning. She was the only one who could understand and share his sufferings. Unfortunately, there was nothing she could have done.

Next day she heard that Zhoikyn called Sagila. Tangsulu was scared and happy. She ran away to the field and hid there. If someone saw her run, he or she would have seen a miraculous beauty, but, unfortunately, nobody saw her. While Tangsulu was hiding in the

¹ Kazak term for a special piece of equipment to dry milk products.

field, Zhoikyn was talking to Sagila:

- Sagila, this happened a long time ago, and it, probably, hurts to talk about it. However, I need to ask you some questions. Did you bury Tangsulu yourself? Do not lie to me, please!
- I told you this story many times, dear brother. I cannot remember clearly now, so please let us not talk about it!
- I would not have asked you to come, believe me! I would not have asked you this question, if it was not important! I have been dreaming of Tangsulu for three day in a row. So please, tell me!
- Well... If you have been dreaming of her, let us call the village *mulla* and he would say a prayer.
- I already did, Sagila... Are you hiding something from me? Why would you not just answer my question?
- I cannot... I could not have done it differently! They said... I did...
- Who said? What did you do? Tell me, Sagila?
- Sometimes we cannot decide for ourselves...
- Stop confusing me! Just say it straight! Did you bury Tangsulu yourself? Who gave you Tangsulu's knife?
- Knife... What knife?
- This knife! - Zhoikyn took Tangsulu's knife out of his pocket and showed it to Sagila.
- Oh, no! I cannot tell you anything! I promised! I swore that I would not tell anyone!
- It would be a great sin if you hide the truth from me! Tell me! Tell me! I need to know the truth, Sagila!
- I swore that I would not tell!
- Whom did you promise not to tell the truth?
- The *Kalmik bek*... He died. I should not have told you...
- I saw him die... Too bad it was not me who killed him!
- Let me tell you now... I will tell you everything that I have been hiding for so many years. I was not the one who buried Tangsulu. I did not even see her die. The *Kalmik bek* gave me her knife. He said she killed herself. I was supposed to go back to the village and tell everyone including you that I

buried Tangsulu myself. I promised that I would and he let me go.

Zhoikyn went silent. He was shocked. Sagila, however, continued:

- Remember fifteen years ago when I told you that one day you would have a dream about Tangsulu?
- I forgot, but now I remember! You are right: this was exactly fifteen years ago!
- I think that Tangsulu is still alive!
- Why?
- Well... I did not see her die; I did not bury her.
- According to my dream, my son will come to me soon. Tangsulu told me about it in my dream.
- I knew something important was going to happen!
- Whatever happens I will wait for my son to come. Tangsulu was pregnant when we were separated. Did you know that?
- Yes, I did!
- In my dream, Tangsulu asked me not to move anywhere before my son came. She was afraid that if I moved, my son would not find me. That is why I will stay where I am, and I will wait for him.

Part 7

Zhoikyn was looking at his son closely. Zhoikyn was trying to find Tangsulu's features in his son's face. Unfortunately, he could not find anything that reminded him of Tangsulu. Suddenly Zhoikyn's youngest son Dauren ran into the *yurt* and started to scream: «*Ake*¹, *ake, apa* fell into the river!" Zhoikin looked at his newly arrived son and he reminded him of Tangsulu so much that his heart fluttered. There were no more doubts: this was his son!

Dauren, however, was calling them to follow him to the river.

Zhoikyn's son started to worry. "Who was that woman? Where did she come from?" - he asked. Zhoikyn answered that she came

¹ Kazak term for «father».

recently and that she was a good friend of Dauren's. The one question that he did not know the answer to was why the beggar woman jumped into the water.

When they reached the shore, the young man was pale. He fell on the beggar woman's clothes and started to cry. Tears were all over his face. This was the very first time in his life when he cried.

He was still crying when he came up to the edge of the hill and looked in the water. The current was very strong and loud.

The son and the father were standing near each other and each of them was crying. But everyone understood their grief, and nobody could call them weak.

Many years passed, and the son of Zhoikyn and Tangsulu grew up and became a brave hero. Many songs and legends were written about him.

I did not tell you his name on purpose. Because this story is not about him, but about the power of love, which Tangsulu carried in her heart throughout many years.