

Prologue



The spotlights were shining across the Sea, back and forth, and then they went out. Maybe we were lucky and they did not spot us. We tried to crouch down as best we could in the little boat, which was filling more and more with water. It looked a little like a submarine gliding on the surface of the water. Only our heads and the motor were visible above the water level. From the viewpoint of the sharp shooters at shore we would not be an easy target due to the waves.

We watched the shore carefully. It was almost dark and we could recognize only a few details of the wooded shoreline. It would have been wiser to stay further out at Sea, away from the sharp shooters on shore; but the waves got higher and we had too much water already in the boat, to take the risk of adding more. Around midnight we reached the bay which we had seen hours before. After the strains of the last hours we were totally exhausted. We recognized a few lights on the horizon, which suggested these must be coming from a village. Having worked our way against the waves for another half hour, we felt we must be close to the shoreline. A sudden noise behind me made me look back, but it was too late. A wall of water came crushing down on us and buried. Because of the darkness, we had not noticed that we were already so close to the beach. The breaker caught us and the boat capsized, throwing us onto the beach.

Extremely exhausted we crawled further onto the shore. After sitting in the boat for such a long time we had to get used to using our limbs again. Our boat was also washed ashore. We pulled it onto the beach with our last remaining strength. Our trip across the Sea had come to an end after about thirty-three hours.

We changed our clothes. Luckily, some of the clothes we had packed inside plastic bags were still dry. Finally, I tried to explore our surroundings. I didn't get far. I heard a voice and I turned around only to look into the light cone of a flashlight. There was a soldier who pointed his gun barrel towards me.

I asked if he spoke Russian: "Goworite pa russki?" An unintelligible sentence followed. The soldier pulled the rifle up making me raise both my hands instinctively.