

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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WEAKS (WOMEN) (1966)
BATIYNA (1962) - *THE PASS / ASHUU* (1965)
Tügölbay Sıdıkbekov (1912–1997)

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OVERVIEW

Author

Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997) was a Kyrgyz writer born in Keng-Suu, in present-day Issyk-Kul Region. Because his official birth date was unknown, he later chose May 14 as his birthday through a family tradition involving his daughter selecting a date at random.

He studied at the Agricultural Technical School in Frunze (1928–1931) and later at the Central Asian Veterinary Institute in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. He worked at the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* (1931–1936), served as a consultant for the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1937–1947), and worked as an editor at *Kyrgyz mambas* publishing house (1949–1951).

In the Soviet period, he was labeled a “nationalist writer,” but his earlier Stalin Prize recognition limited political repression against him. He supported objective study of Kyrgyz history, promoted the development of the Kyrgyz language, and openly criticized official shortcomings, leading some scholars to describe him as a Soviet-era Kyrgyz dissident.

Sydykbekov remained a major figure in Kyrgyz literature for nearly seventy years and died in Bishkek on July 19, 1997.

Literary career

He began his literary career as a poet. His first poem, *Who Are These People? (Bular Kimder?)*, was published in the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* on May 1, 1930. Soon afterward, he wrote *The Old Komuz Player (Chal Komuzchu)*, which appeared in the magazine *Chabuul*. His first poetry collection, *Struggle (Kurosh)*, was published in 1933, followed by *Heroes (Baatyrlar)*, 1936) and *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938). During this period, he also began working actively in prose.

Like many writers of his generation, Sydykbekov's early works reflected social changes in Kyrgyz society, including the new socialist system, labor, and changing social relations.

In 1937–1938, his novel *Keng-Suu (Keng-Suu)* was published in two volumes, becoming one of the first novels in Kyrgyz literature. In the 1950s, he revised it and republished it as *In the Mountains (Too Arasynda)*, with volumes appearing in 1955 and 1958.

During this period, he also wrote *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938), the essay *Ala-Toodon Jetoo* (1939), the poem *News from the Night Watchman (Tun Jarchysynan Kabar)*, 1939), and the verse tale *The Greedy Father (Ach Koz Ata)*, 1940).

His collection of stories *During the War Days (Sogush Kundorundo)*, 1943) reflects wartime unity and patriotism during World War II.

Between 1938 and 1940, he wrote the novel *Temir (Temir)*, published in 1946, depicting the establishment of Soviet power in southern Kyrgyzstan.

His novel *The People of Our Time (Bizdin Zamandyn Kishileri)*, 1948) marked a major stage in his career. It was first published in *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan (Ala-Too)* and later in Moscow in Russian. In 1949, it received the Stalin Prize, making him one of the leading Kyrgyz writers.

After the war, he contributed to children's literature with *Mountain Children (Too Baldary)*, 1953). Later, after *In the Mountains*, he wrote the major novel *Women (Zaiyptar)*. Its first part, *Batiyna*, was published in 1962, and the complete version, including *Mountain Pass (Ashuu)*, appeared in 1966.

His later works include *Friends (Kurbular)* and *Confession (Syr Achuu)*, 1977), focusing on youth, and *Yimanbay's Character (Yimanbay Peyili)*, 1980), which continues a character from *Among the Mountains (Too Arasynda)*.

In his autobiographical works *The Road (Jol)*, 1982) and *Over the Mountain Passes (Bel-Beleste)*, 1996), he reflects on his life and experiences.

Novel

The author wrote *Women (Zaiyptar)*, a novel rooted in the pre-revolutionary life of the Kyrgyz people. He published the first book, *Batiyna*, in 1962, and released the complete version together with its second part, *The Pass (Ashuu)*, in 1966. The first part of the novel traces the fates of women, revealing the powerless and unequal condition of Kyrgyz women under the oppressive patriarchal and feudal social order. This essay is based on the Russian translation of the novel by M. Chechakovsky, published in 1972.

Background

The novel is set in a period where a woman's fate was held entirely in the hands of clans and wealthy landlords. In pre-revolutionary Kyrgyz society, powerful landlords dictated social order through a patriarchal system that treated marriage as a financial or political tool.

Women were essentially commodities used to settle debts, bridge clan rivalries, or consolidate wealth. This is exemplified by "snuff-bride" pacts and the *kalym* (bride price), which allowed the rich to exploit the poor, turning young girls like Batiyna into assets of a landlord's estate.

Justice was dictated by customary law (*adat*), which favored lineage and livestock over individual rights. A poor hunter had no standing against a wealthy landlord in tribal courts; thus, women had no protection from abuse or forced marriage.

This feudal structure was only shattered by the 1916 Uprising and the catastrophic "Exodus" to China, which decimated the clans' traditional power.

The subsequent Bolshevik Revolution introduced a radical shift, offering women legal personhood for the first time. By banning forced marriages and promoting literacy, the new Soviet power gave women the right to choose their own fate for the first time.

Batiyna's choice to wear the red headscarf became a powerful symbol of this new era, representing her courage to reclaim her identity and speak with her own voice.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Batiyna - resilient protagonist and revolutionary advocate for women's freedom
Zuurakan – One of the two central heroines of the novel, based on Zuurakan Kainazarova
Kazak - honest hunter father forced to trade his daughter to settle debts
Abdyrahman (Elder) - grandfather whose "snuff-bride" pact caused the family's suffering
Abdyrahman (Younger) - abusive first husband and son of the landlord Adyke
Adyke - wealthy antagonist who uses corrupt courts to exploit the poor
Alymbay - clumsy second husband and son of Asantay who eventually stabs Batiyna
Asantay - elderly clan leader who takes a teenage girl as his bride
Gulsun - young child bride who dies tragically in childbirth
Abyl - Batiyna's first love representing a life lost to rigid tradition
Yakimenko - Soviet soldier who protects Batiyna and encourages her rebellion
Kachyke - village head who aids Batiyna's literacy and political activism
Kanymbubu - young girl sold for a lambskin debt and saved by Batiyna
Serkebay - powerful elder who masterminds the violent opposition to Batiyna
Salkynay - Adyke's cruel second wife who torments Batiyna in her first home
Tekebay – Zuurakan's first husband
Oroz – A trader and Zuurakan's second husband
Buken – The wife of Serkebay, landlady of the wealthy household
Oshur – A trader and gambler connected to Oroz
Valentina Kopylova – A Russian activist an government official
Temirbolotov – A Soviet official
Cholpon – A young girl kidnapped for forced marriage
Jusup – A young man, later Batiyna's husband

SYNOPSIS

THE 1ST SECTION

The story begins with Abdyrahman, an old hunter who once lived among wealthy Kazakh families and later becomes dependent on the landlord Satylgan. They establish a marriage agreement concerning their future grandchildren. After both Abdyrahman and Satylgan die, their sons Kazak and Adyke inherit the consequences of this agreement.

Kazak raises his daughter Batiyna in poverty. Adyke refuses to honor the old agreement, and Kazak is humiliated when he tries to claim it.

Batiyna grows up and is forced into her first marriage through custom and family pressure to Abdyrahman, the son of Adyke. In his household she is humiliated, her dowry is insulted, and she is treated as a servant under control of in-laws. Batiyna escapes from her first marriage and leaves the oppressive household. Kazak is later ordered to pay heavy compensation to Adyke after legal disputes.

Because of this compensation burden, Batiyna agrees to marry Alymbay, a cold, indifferent, and uneducated man. This becomes her second marriage. In Alymbay's household she again lives under restriction and emotional neglect.

Batiyna shares experiences of oppression with other women, including Gulsun, Gulbubu, and Kanymbubu, who suffer forced marriages, abduction, and violence. The women support each other.

Violence escalates, leading to an uprising against tsarist oppression and massacres. A mass flight begins toward China. Batiyna travels with refugees, helping them survive hunger, cold, and death. Refugees reach Central Asian cities and face hardship.

Batiyna meets Abyl again during displacement.

After years of exile, refugees return. With new political power, Batiyna rejects the old order and turns toward education and women's emancipation. She leaves for Moscow to attend a Congress of Women of the East.

THE 2ND SECTION

The story follows Zuurakan and Batiyna as their lives unfold during the collapse of traditional bay rule and the rise of Soviet power. Zuurakan lives as a servant in a wealthy household, suffering abuse and humiliation. After a violent beating, she steals horses and flees into the mountains. She confronts her husband, survives hunger and a wolf attack, and later falls into the hands of traders who treat her as property. She lives with Oroz, but gambling, betrayal, and distrust destroy their marriage. When Oroz stakes her in a game, Zuurakan finally leaves him, determined to protect her dignity.

At the same time, Batiyna leaves her village and enters Soviet public life. In the city she meets Valentina Kopylova and becomes active in women's political work. She travels as a delegate, speaks at a congress about women's suffering, and later returns to the villages as an official. Batiyna challenges powerful elders, investigates crimes, rescues the kidnapped girl Cholpon, and demands justice for abused women. After surviving an attack and continuing her education, she marries Jusup by choice. Through both women's journeys, the story shows a society in transition and women fighting for freedom.

SCENES

1ST SECTION:

Abdyrahman's Life

The Hunter's Fate and the Illusion of Protection Abdyrahman, once a skillful hunter, spent his youth among Kazakh rich people, where he was respected for his precision and strength. However, he was exploited and eventually returned to his own people. In old age, he settled near the rich landlord Satylgan, hoping for protection. His son Kazak became a strong hunter like him. When Kazak offered game to the landlord, Satylgan responded with flattering blessings, while quietly benefiting from their dependence, revealing the hidden inequality behind his apparent generosity.

A Marriage Pact between Unequal People Abdyrahman entertained the wealthy man Satylgan with stories while his son Kazak prepared a hunted argali. Impressed by Kazak's skill but motivated by self-interest, Satylgan proposed a marriage agreement between their unborn grandchildren. If Abdyrahman son Kazak's future child were a girl, the bride price would be paid with the hunter's game; if Satylgan's grandchild were a girl, his contribution would be nothing more than a pinch of *nasvai*. Believing the proposal to be an honor, Abdyrahman accepted the oath with gratitude. Convinced that fate had elevated his family's status, he returned home filled with hope, unaware that the unequal agreement already favored the powerful landlord.

A Broken Promise of Kinship Proud of his new relationship with the wealthy man Satylgan, Abdyrahman constantly reminded his family to honor their future in-laws. After both elders died, Kazak trusted that the marriage agreement between their children would still be respected. Years later, he visited Adyke, Satylgan's son, expecting to be welcomed as a relative. Instead, he found a wealthy household where he was treated with cold indifference. Adyke, now the head of the family, barely acknowledged him, despite the oath sworn by their fathers. The contrast between Kazak's humble life and Adyke's growing wealth revealed that social status had outweighed kinship and honor.

Kazak's Humiliation at His In-Laws' Camp Kazak visited Adyke to remind him of the marriage agreement their fathers had sworn years earlier. Although Seyilkan welcomed him politely, Adyke treated him with cold arrogance and showed little respect for their kinship. Kazak introduced his seven-year-old daughter, Batiyna, as the promised bride and asked to meet his future son-in-law. Adyke mockingly replied that Kazak had already received the bride price and would have to bring his daughter to the groom himself. Humiliated but determined to uphold his father's oath, Kazak left gifts behind and returned home convinced that wealth had replaced honor and justice.

Batiyna's Childhood and Family Life

Batiyna's Poverty and Quiet Dignity Batiyna grew up in a poor hunter's family where hard work, kindness, and honesty mattered more than wealth. Her parents struggled to provide for their children, while her mother worked tirelessly to earn enough for Batiyna's future. Although Batiyna excelled in sewing, singing, and traditional games, her worn clothing made her the target of ridicule from wealthy girls, eventually forcing her to withdraw from social gatherings. Despite the humiliation, she never complained or blamed her parents.

Waiting for a Promise to Be Fulfilled Batiyna grew up learning that dignity, hard work, and kindness mattered more than wealth. Her mother, Tattygul, taught her the skills and virtues expected of a good wife while quietly fearing the hardships awaiting married women. Although Batiyna had long been promised to Adyke's son, no messengers or bride price ever arrived after the deaths of the elders who arranged the match. Meanwhile, Adyke remarried and ignored his obligations. As Batiyna reached marriageable age, her parents became increasingly anxious, knowing they could neither break the engagement nor secure another husband without violating tradition. Eventually, Kazak decided to visit Adyke himself again for the second time.

The Humiliation of Kazak Salkynay, the proud daughter of the powerful manap Karaberk, became Adyke's second wife after Seyilkan's death. Raised like a son, she despised domestic work and looked down on poor families. She regarded Kazak's daughter as unworthy of marrying her stepson and encouraged Adyke to ignore the old betrothal. When Kazak visited to request either the promised bride-price or his daughter's release, Adyke mocked him, claiming that a pinch of snuff given years earlier was sufficient payment. Enraged, he ordered his men to tie Kazak to the yurt frame and brutally whip him while everyone watched in silence.

Marriage Agreement and Family Expectations

The Lion's Tail Adyke inherited the arrogance of his noble ancestors, who believed wealth and power placed them above justice. Like his forefathers, he used violence to dominate the poor while hiding behind tradition and ancestral honor. Kazak, although deeply humiliated, remained an honest hunter who valued dignity over wealth. He and his wife worked tirelessly to support their family, hoping Adyke would eventually honor the marriage agreement. Yet no elder dared challenge the powerful landlord. Only one respected elder persuaded Adyke to untie Kazak. The hunter returned home wounded, realizing that, in their society, justice rarely protected the poor against the rich.

The Clan's Response to Adyke's Abuse After Kazak's humiliation, he questioned God's justice, wondering why the innocent suffered while the powerful remained unpunished. His relatives gathered to discuss Adyke's cruelty. Many argued that the marriage agreement should be canceled because Adyke had violated both custom and honor by refusing the bride-price and beating his future in-law. However, the wise elder Sarala urged caution. He warned that wealthy leaders and judges would always side with Adyke, whose influence and riches outweighed justice. Rather than risking the entire clan's safety, Sarala proposed negotiation, believing careful words offered more hope than open confrontation.

Batiyna Questions Her Engagement From childhood, Batiyna faithfully helped her parents with every household task and earned her father's praise for her diligence. Yet after Kazak returned home beaten by Adyke, she began questioning the marriage arranged without her consent. She wondered why her future had been discussed in terms of bride-price and livestock rather than her own wishes. Although she never blamed her struggling parents openly, the uncertainty left her withdrawn and sorrowful. When her cousin's joyful engagement filled the village with songs and celebrations, Batiyna stayed away, ashamed of her worn clothes. Even Sayra's cheerful encouragement could not ease her tears or quiet her doubts.

Bridewealth Problem and Forced Engagement

The Groom Arrives without Bridewealth As Batiyna reached marriageable age, her parents struggled to prepare a modest bridal outfit from years of savings and hunted furs. Bound by custom, Kazak

reluctantly summoned Adyke to claim the bride, although no bridewealth had ever been paid. When the groom finally arrived, he came without ceremony, gifts, or respect for tradition, reflecting Adyke's contempt for the poor family. Batiyna, watching from inside the yurt, was devastated by her future husband's appearance and the humiliating reception. Kazak's anger and Tattygul's quiet consolation revealed a family forced to submit to unequal customs they deeply resented.

Batiyna Accepts an Unwanted Marriage Hidden outside the yurt, Batiyna secretly observed her groom, Abdyrahman, and realized he was nothing like the husband she had imagined. Overwhelmed by despair, she fled into the mountains, where Sayra comforted her and persuaded her to abandon thoughts of suicide for the sake of her parents. Realizing that her family were also victims of custom rather than its architects, Batiyna resolved to endure her fate while preserving her inner freedom. She accepted the marriage to spare her parents disgrace, refused a public wedding celebration, and prepared to leave despite knowing she would enter an unhappy household.

Batiyna and Abyl's Secret Promise At autumn gatherings, Batiyna briefly escaped her sorrow by singing on the village swings, while Sayra carefully protected her from unwanted attention. Beneath this appearance of ordinary celebration, Batiyna secretly met Abyl, the young man she truly loved. Hidden beside their favorite spring, they pledged never to abandon each other despite her arranged marriage to Abdyrahman. Abyl promised to find a way to free her without bringing disaster upon her family, while Batiyna resolved to endure the marriage only temporarily before escaping. Their farewell transformed despair into determination, binding them together through hope rather than surrender.

The Hunter's Tale and Batiyna's Dream of Freedom Before Batiyna left her parents' home, Kazak told his children a long folktale about the brave hunter Emil, who defeated a family of monstrous demons after one of them threatened his daughter and innocent people. Emil's courage, wisdom, and sacrifice symbolized the struggle against overwhelming evil. After finishing the tale, Kazak compared himself to the legendary hunter, lamenting that he could not free his daughter from the cruel power of Adyke. The story gave Batiyna a spark of hope. That night she dreamed an eagle cast Adyke from the sky, and Abyl joyfully declared that she was finally free and they could marry without fear.

Batiyna's Farewell to Her Family and Abyl On the morning of her departure, Batiyna struggled to accept her forced separation from Abyl. Comforted by Sayra, she visited the spring where they had shared their happiest moments and tearfully sang a farewell song, asking Sayra to tell Abyl she had mourned their parting there. Her family bid her an emotional farewell through traditional *koshok* lament songs, expressing love, grief, and blessings. As Batiyna journeyed toward her husband's home, she unexpectedly met Abyl. Concealing their love, they exchanged only brief words, silently promising faithfulness and hoping they would one day be reunited despite overwhelming obstacles.

Life in Salkynay's Household

Life under Salkynay's Tyranny After Batiyna arrived at Adyke's household, she was welcomed with humiliation instead of honor. Salkynay, the domineering mistress of the family, ignored Kyrgyz wedding traditions, insulted Batiyna's dowry, and publicly degraded her. During the marriage ceremony, Batiyna openly refused to consent, yet the witnesses treated her silence as approval. Her married life soon became one of relentless suffering. Salkynay subjected her to beatings, exhausting labor, hunger, and constant humiliation, while forcing Abdyrahman to discipline his wife. Enduring every hardship in silence, Batiyna realized that, as a poor woman, she seemed trapped with no escape from oppression.

The Call of the Beloved Despite relentless abuse, Batiyna refused to surrender her spirit. Hard labor, beatings, and humiliation only strengthened her determination, while songs of longing for Abyl sustained her through despair. Haunted by dreams and visions of her beloved, she finally resolved to escape, disguising herself as a herdsman and riding into the mountains at night. Guided by hope but slowed by her exhausted horse, she was soon overtaken by Adyke and his men, who intended to punish her brutally for fleeing. At the last moment, Jusup, her father's loyal friend, arrived and intervened, saving Batiyna from certain death.

Batiyna's Escape Attempt

The Failure of Justice Jusup courageously refused to hand Batiyna over to Adyke, declaring that the daughter of his late friend was like his own child and deserved protection. Although he briefly rescued her, Adyke appealed to the influential elder Kobogon Ajy, whose authority outweighed Jusup's. Forced to submit to tribal power, Jusup sorrowfully returned Batiyna, admitting that he could not overcome the injustice of the social order. Back in Adyke's camp, Batiyna was humiliated, cursed, and condemned to a cruel public punishment. Bound to the yurt frame and mercilessly flogged, she endured the violence in silence, becoming a victim of patriarchal authority upheld by custom, power, and social hierarchy.

A Father's Plea After learning that Batiyna had attempted to escape but had been captured, Kazak feared for his daughter's life and asked the respected elder Sarala to intervene on her behalf. Knowing that Adyke would not listen to him, Kazak relied on Sarala's authority and kinship with the powerful Akimkan. Sarala persuaded Akimkan to investigate Adyke's actions and remind him of the customs his family had violated. While the elders discussed justice and family honor, Batiyna continued to suffer. She was brutally beaten, tied to the yurt frame and later to a post in the snow, where she repeatedly lost consciousness under relentless punishment.

Batiyna's Song of Suffering Batiyna lay weak in Kenjekan's yurt, slowly recovering after severe beatings. The old woman cared for her, washed her wounds, and tried to comfort her. Soon, it was learned that Sarala, Jusup, and Akimkan's envoy had arrived at Adyke's village, leading to new tensions. Some of the guests were beaten, and only Akimkan's threat forced Adyke to restrain himself. Hearing that Jusup had been punished because of her, Batiyna broke into tears. Sarala visited her briefly and brought news from her parents, but could not take her away. Still trapped in suffering, she sang a sorrowful song about a woman deprived of love, freedom, and hope.

The Embroidered Clue and Escape After a harsh winter, Batiyna continued exhausting labor under Salkynay's control, hauling heavy felt and wool across the thawing ground. One day, while driving a loaded bull, she met a rider who asked about her origins. Batiyna said she belonged to the Sayak clan from Jumgal. The rider then showed her an embroidered amulet and pillow cover. She immediately recognized them as her own childhood work, confirming her identity. He told her to come in the evening to his grey yurt, where Mukambet, her father's younger brother, would be waiting for her. That night, she secretly went there, escaped with him through the mountains, and reached her father Kazak's highland camp. They reunited in tears.

Asantay, Barman and Aynagul

The Conflict of Asantay and Barman Asantay and Barman were powerful clan leaders whose pastoral communities controlled thousands of yurts and vast herds. They repeatedly clashed over pasturelands, livestock, and honor. A raid in which Barman's son was injured turned earlier tensions into open hostility, followed by threats of revenge. Elders tried to restore peace, but neither leader yielded, and fear spread among poorer herders who suffered most from the instability. Eventually, the wise wife Gulgaaky intervened, appealing to shared kinship and condemning bloodshed, which gradually softened both sides. After the conflict cooled, Myrzakan, a clever friend of Asantay proposed a political solution: a marriage alliance between Asantay's family and Barman's house. He suggested Barman's daughter Aynagul as a bride to unite the rival clans. Asantay, driven by pride and ambition, seriously considered the proposal, opening a path toward fragile reconciliation.

Aynagul and Bolot: The Disputed Abduction During the migration, Aynagul met Bolot, a young man from the Kulbarak clan. He was confident, strong, and different from Ramazan, the man she had been promised to. Aynagul, who had already rejected the arranged marriage, agreed to leave with Bolot, so her departure was by her own will, though others later called it an abduction. While traveling with his companion Sulayman. Aynagul was already betrothed to Ramazan, son of Asantay. Instead of direct force, Bolot and Sulayman planned a secret approach through Kaldan, who was trusted in Barman's camp. They believed Aynagul, unhappy with Ramazan, might agree to leave voluntarily. Kaldan promised to persuade her. Soon, Aynagul was secretly taken away with his help. Although persuasion was

involved, the act was publicly regarded as abduction, provoking Asantay's anger and renewed demands for retaliation.

The Threat of War between the Clans From this, a full-scale conflict emerged between the clans of Asantay and Barman, as both sides treated Aynagul's departure as an insult to their collective honor. Armed riders were rapidly gathered from across the pastoral settlements, and what began as a family dispute escalated into a large mobilization of warriors. The plains filled with armed men, horses, and preparations for battle, as each side advanced to defend its reputation and demand retribution. At the same time, elders and mediators attempted to prevent violence, insisting on dialogue and reconciliation. Despite their efforts, tension remained high, and the possibility of bloodshed was imminent.

Return without Battle and Aynagul's Fate Before the two sides could clash, Sulayman brought Aynagul to the elders gathered on the hill. Under pressure, she could not clearly state her own will, and confusion spread among the assembled clans. The situation nearly escalated into armed conflict, but negotiations between Nazarbay, Asantay, and Barman ultimately prevented bloodshed. Asantay claimed his bride, while Bolot's side avoided war. Meanwhile, Gulgaaky organized Aynagul's return with full ritual dignity, preparing her dowry and escorting her in a ceremonial procession. Despite her tears and inner resistance, Aynagul was formally taken back into the marriage arrangement with Asantay's son, as clan honor and custom prevailed over personal choice.

The Wound of Love and Fear Abyl fell into deep emotional and physical illness after learning that Batiyna suffered a lot. His mother, Tatyna, who had already lost six sons, feared for her only surviving child and sought healers and rituals, but nothing helped. Abyl admitted that his sickness was not of the body but of the heart—he loved Batiyna, who had been returned to an unwanted marriage. Although relatives debated custom, bride-price, and possible clan conflict, Abyl remained focused only on saving her. The elders warned that tradition and wealth made her situation dangerous, yet he insisted on acting despite all risks.

Heavy Compensation for Kazak

The Unjust Judgment Kazak had returned home after many days of absence, exhausted and broken by the journey. He had been forced to stand before a large gathering of judges and powerful elders, where his enemy Adyke had accused him of dishonoring the marriage agreement. During the trial, Adyke had spoken confidently, claiming that he had paid a full bride price and that Kazak's daughter had fled unlawfully. The judges had listened more to wealth and status than to truth. Despite Kazak's protests and his memories of tradition and fairness, the ruling had gone against him. He had been ordered to pay a heavy compensation of livestock, an impossible burden for a poor man.

The Family's Sorrow When Kazak had finally returned to his village, he had arrived like a shadow of himself—older, weaker, and deeply humiliated. He had told his family what had happened, how he had lost the case and nearly all hope of justice. The household had fallen into silence as his words settled like a heavy stone. Batiyna had listened from the darkness, realizing that her fate had already been decided by others. The relatives had whispered in fear and pity, understanding that power had once again defeated truth. That night, Batiyna had wept quietly, feeling that her "bird of happiness" had flown far beyond her reach.

Batiyna's Broken Hope Batiyna watched silently as Abyl's envoys arrived at her father's village with gifts of three horses and a camel. She understood immediately that Abyl had come for her, but the offering was too small to satisfy the heavy court demand of forty horses imposed on her family. Her father Kazak, exhausted and fearful of punishment from Adyke and the judges, refused the proposal. At the same time, the wealthy relative Kydyrbay expressed his wish to marry Batiyna into his own family, offering security and status. Torn between love and obligation, Kazak chose safety over affection. As Abyl's envoys left empty-handed, Batiyna realized her chance at happiness had been taken from her again, and she wept in silence.

Batiyna's Second Marriage

Kydyrbay and Batiyna's Fate By autumn, Kazak agreed to the marriage proposal from his distant relative Kydyrbay, hoping to secure his daughter's future and repay the debt to Adyke. Batiyna slowly began to accept her father's decision: her love for Abyl faded, replaced by a sense of duty toward her family. Her mother comforted her, urging her to accept the marriage as fate. When Kydyrbay arrived at the village with his men and fine horses, negotiations were about to begin. For Batiyna, it was a moment of anxiety, as she realized her life was being decided by elders. The riders entered the river, and she saw that her destiny was now drawing near.

"The Bear" Kydyrbay observed Batiyna during the wedding preparations and introduced his younger brother, Alymbay, as the groom. Confident and informal, Kydyrbay treated the visit like family business rather than formal matchmaking. Batiyna immediately felt disappointment: Alymbay appeared slow, clumsy, and indifferent, and she compared him to a "bear." Her heart rejected him at once. During the evening gatherings, Alymbay remained silent and awkward, confirming her fears. Batiyna grew increasingly distressed and begged her mother not to force this marriage. Her mother sympathized, but her father insisted the match could still secure stability. Meanwhile, Kydyrbay calmly argued that Batiyna's wisdom might reform his brother, urging her to accept fate and remain within the family alliance.

Batiyna's Conditional Consent Batiyna, moved by pity for her father, softened her refusal and agreed to Kydyrbay's proposal. She still felt deep doubt about Alymbay, whom she saw as dull and lifeless, but she could no longer speak harshly in front of elders. Kydyrbay responded calmly, admitting his brother's weaknesses yet insisting that a wise woman could transform him. He told a long parable about a woman who healed her husband's illness through patience, guidance, and moral teaching, turning him into a respected leader. Encouraged by this story, Batiyna accepted the marriage conditionally: she would stay for three years and try to "shape" Alymbay. If he did not change, she reserved the right to leave freely. The agreement was sealed, and she was sent to her new home.

Aynagul's Story

Aynagul and the Arrival of Manapbay Aynagul was taken into a wealthy marriage with Ramazan, but her heart remained cold and resentful. Rumors spread through the village, where women harshly judged her for rejecting tradition. Despite her status, she felt trapped and emotionally distant from her husband, whose dullness deepened her despair. She longed for freedom and love, refusing to accept an unwanted fate. Meanwhile, the village of Asantay became lively with spring gatherings and guests. One day, Manapbay, the proud son of Arstanaly, arrived with his companions. His arrival brought prestige and excitement, and Asantay ordered a grand reception, eager to display wealth and honor to strengthen his family's reputation.

Manapbay's Scheme against Aynagul Manapbay, a wealthy and influential young man, visits Barman's village as a respected guest while secretly planning to abduct Aynagul. Impressed by her beauty and dignity, he ignores that she is already married and decides to possess her. Under the appearance of polite hospitality, he carefully studies the situation and prepares a deceptive plan. He instructs his companion Sanjar to pretend a severe toothache and remain behind as an excuse to delay travel. Using custom and trust as cover, Manapbay intends to create an opportunity for Aynagul's secret removal at night. His actions reveal the tension between social order and personal desire.

The Taking of Aynagul Manapbay had visited Baraman's village and had been received with hospitality and honor. During his stay, he had become interested in Aynagul and had decided to take her despite her marriage. With Sanjar's help, he had planned a deception, and Aynagul had been led away from her home. Her disappearance had caused shock among people, and news had spread quickly across surrounding communities. Elders had argued about broken custom and social order. Manapbay had left with confidence, but tension had already begun to rise around his actions and the consequences that would follow him afterward.

Aynagul's Confrontation After she had been taken, Aynagul had been brought into Manapbay's household, where she had felt humiliated and trapped. She had refused to accept her new position and

had openly spoken against Manapbay's actions. His mother had demanded that he return her to protect family honor, and Manapbay had begun avoiding her under pressure. Aynagul had later confronted him directly, accusing him of betrayal and broken promises. Her resistance had deepened the conflict inside the household. Manapbay had been left torn between desire, reputation, and family expectations, unable to resolve the situation peacefully.

Gulsun and Batiyna

Vulnerability in Forced Marriages After Atantay's wife had died, he had remarried at the age of eighty, taking Gulsun, the teenage daughter of a shoemaker, into his household. She had still behaved like a child, playing with dolls and spending time with her peers, while no one had dared to question the marriage. Gulsun had lived as a child bride and had felt neither womanhood nor acceptance. Batiyna had treated her with care, and Gulsun had spoken openly about her fear and confusion regarding the old husband. She had also said Batiyna's husband seemed mentally dull and rarely spoke. Both women had shared their pain and vulnerability within unequal marriages.

Batiyna and Alymbay: A Silent Marriage Batiyna dressed Alymbay in a white wool coat and made him a kalpak with a silk tassel, hoping he would look dignified like Abyl. But Alymbay showed no gratitude, only snorted, wore the clothes clumsily, and dragged them as he walked out. The kalpak slipped over his ear, and he almost fell. Batiyna felt disappointed and remembered Abyl, who had been cheerful, gentle, and affectionate like a soft morning wind. At night she could not sleep, thinking about her unhappy life. Alymbay remained silent, answered rudely, and often told her to be quiet.

The Lambskin Debt A poor group of families lived near wealthy clans. Young Asanbay borrowed a lambskin from the moneylender Tilep to make a traditional hat, promising to cut hay in return. After illness prevented him from fulfilling his promise, Tilep demanded an impossible debt of forty sheep. Unable to pay, Asanbay's relatives agreed to settle the debt by giving twelve-year-old Kanymbubu, the daughter of a poor widow, in marriage to Tilep. Her mother pleaded desperately, but the decision stood. Kanymbubu tried to escape, yet she was captured and forced to marry the fifty-year-old moneylender, becoming the price of a single lambskin.

Gulbubu's Story

Serkebay Fell in Love with Gulbubu The wealthy Serkebay set out for Andijan with five hundred fattened wethers to sell at the market. During the journey, he stopped at the camp of Temirkan, a respected tribal leader, where he and his companions exchanged witty remarks with the hosts before receiving generous hospitality. Inside the yurt, Serkebay noticed Temirkan's eldest daughter, Gulbubu, quietly embroidering. Unlike most young women, she remained confidently among the guests. Her beauty, grace, and self-assurance captivated Serkebay immediately. Although he had planned only to trade livestock in Andijan, he secretly asked his companion to discover whether Gulbubu was already promised in marriage.

Gulbubu Became Serkebay's Second Wife Abyke discovered that Gulbubu had long been betrothed, but her fiancé had fallen ill and had not claimed her. Encouraged by Abyke, Serkebay offered five hundred wethers and promised forty horses to persuade her father, Temirkan, to break the earlier engagement. Temirkan accepted the extraordinary bride price and sent Gulbubu with a rich dowry. Although she accepted the marriage, she entered Serkebay's household as his second wife. His first wife, Buken, and their grown children openly mocked his decision, believing he should have married off his sons before taking a young bride. Serkebay ignored their resentment and remained devoted to Gulbubu.

Serkebay Displayed His Wealth through Gulbubu After marrying Gulbubu, Serkebay rarely left her yurt and devoted himself entirely to his young wife. Her beauty attracted admiration throughout the region, while his first wife, Buken, bitterly opposed the marriage and demanded that he choose between them. Ignoring her protests, Serkebay ordered Gulbubu to replace the married woman's headdress with five maiden braids and a sable-trimmed cap. He celebrated the change with a lavish feast. The unusual

gesture reflected not equality but Serkebay's vanity, wealth, and determination to display his privilege and prestige before the entire community.

Arstanaly Defended Manapbay's Crime After Manapbay abducted the promised for marriage Aynagul, her father-in-law Asantay prepared to seek justice. However, the aged Khan Arstanaly, though over one hundred years old, dismissed the complaint with contempt. He declared that Asantay and his entire clan were beneath him, insisting that a ruler's son had every right to take any woman he desired. Although Arstanaly privately admitted that Manapbay had acted rashly, he publicly defended him to protect the prestige of his lineage. He presented his ancestral sword and rifle to Manapbay, ordered the elders to reject Asantay's appeal, and sent armed horsemen to intercept him. Asantay was captured on the road, humiliated, beaten, and forced into the freezing river, demonstrating that political power had replaced justice and tribal law.

Buken's Jealous Plot Buken, Serkebay's first wife, resented the attention and privileges given to the young second wife, Gulbubu. She secretly arranged a trap by placing the herdsman Dubana's clothes inside Serkebay's yurt and then publicly claimed that she had seen him fleeing after spending the night with Gulbubu. The accusation quickly spread throughout the village, and Gulbubu was condemned as an adulteress without being given a chance to defend herself. Dubana, frightened by the accusation, escaped before he could be questioned. Pressured by his relatives and village elders, Serkebay allowed them to punish Gulbubu for the alleged betrayal of his honor.

Public Humiliation of Gulbubu: The children clung to the yurts while young men and women scattered in fear, and even the dogs fell silent as an uneasy atmosphere spread through the village. Under the command of Abyke, the villagers gathered for punishment, and he declared that Gulbubu had no protection and that her bride-price had already been "covered." He ordered that she be beaten, wrapped in a thorny bush, her hair shaved, and her body exposed as an example to others. Gulbubu cried out in confusion, asking what crime she had committed, but the beating continued until she was covered in blood and collapse. She was then humiliated, forced onto a camel, and paraded through the village while made to repeat that adulterous women would face such punishment.

Women's Pain and Shared Solidarity: Batiyna witnessed Gulbubu's humiliation and returned to her yurt in shock, overwhelmed by grief and helplessness. Gulsun comforted her, though her words revealed resignation to injustice. Soon the frightened young bride Kanymbubu arrived, tearful and terrified after seeing Gulbubu paraded and threatened by her husband, Tilep. The women tried to console her, advising her either to seek help from relatives or endure her fate quietly to avoid further violence. Kanymbubu's innocence and fear exposed the vulnerability of women in forced marriages. Batiyna and Gulsun, though bitter, expressed deep awareness of systemic oppression and the absence of justice.

The Marriage of Erkegan Batiyna had seemed to accept her fate and lived with her husband Alymbay, though he remained rough and emotionally distant. She often remembered Abyl, who appeared to her in visions as a symbol of lost happiness. Over time, she grew more patient and less rebellious. She devoted herself to her role as mentor to Erkegan, teaching her domestic skills, etiquette, and marital duties according to tradition. When Erkegan's marriage was arranged, Batiyna guided her through preparations and ceremonies. The farewell was emotional, filled with songs, blessings, and sorrow, as Batiyna quietly accepted the passing of another girl into married life.

Public Humiliation of Batiyna

Batiyna's Encounter with the Bolush Batiyna travelled with confidence to fetch the promised horse for Kydyrbay and arrived at the hospitable yurt of Esen and his wife Jyde. There she was admired for her strength, intelligence, and graceful behavior as a rider. Soon, Bolush Maralbay and his entourage entered, expecting hospitality and obedience. The guests treated Batiyna with flirtatious and disrespectful attention, while Esen tried to maintain harmony. At night, the bolush attempted to enter Batiyna's sleeping space, but she resisted firmly and rejected him with anger and dignity. Embarrassed by her response, he left early the next morning without confronting her again.

The Trial of Honor Batiyna recalled the humiliating night at Esen's yurt when the Bolush tried to dishonor her, and she struck him in self-defense. Soon Maralbay and his men spread false rumors to avenge their shame. The gossip reached her family and threatened the clan's reputation. Determined, Batiyna demanded a public confrontation with the Bolush to prove her innocence. Yet fear and custom silenced Kydyrbay and others. When the Bolush arrived, Batiyna boldly exposed him before the gathered guests, but her voice was restrained by tradition. The visitors left offended. Later, her husband beat her, leaving her alone with unresolved pain afterwards quietly.

The Clan's Judgment Those who had witnessed Batiyna's bold confrontation with the volost governor spoke of her courage with hidden regret. Some said she could have become a leader of their people, while men like Maralbay brought no honor. Yet no one openly defended her. Fearing the governor and tradition, Kydyrbay accepted the "nine penalties," and his respect for Batiyna faded. He blamed her for his losses and cursed himself for allowing her freedom. Furious, he ordered his wife to tell Alymbay to discipline her more strictly. Consumed by anger and shame, he began planning severe punishment for Batiyna.

The Oppression of Batiyna After punishment, Serkebay allowed Gulbubu to visit her parents, but she never returned, causing anger among the village elders. Her absence was seen as a disgrace to the Kara-Saz clan. Rumors spread, and Tazabek and others argued about honor and revenge, blaming Serkebay's weakness and criticizing women's behavior. Kydyrbay became increasingly anxious, fearing his own family's shame. Influenced by elders, he began to believe Batiyna must be controlled strictly. Turumtay also pressured him, claiming Batiyna was disrespectful and dangerous to family honor. As a result, Batiyna lost her former respect. She was watched, restricted, and sometimes beaten. Gradually, she stopped resisting openly and became emotionally numb, realizing no one would defend her.

Batiyna Seeks a Way to Freedom Tilep could not accept that his young wife Kanymbubu often visited Batiyna. Believing Batiyna was a bad influence, he beat his wife and complained to Kydyrbay. After Tilep left, Alymbay again punished Batiyna severely, while Kydyrbay did nothing. Even elder Gulsun begged them to stop the violence, but her pleas were ignored. Batiyna became emotionally broken and isolated. She avoided people, wandered alone, and sang sorrowful songs. Hoping to find a way to escape her marriage, she went to the kind mullah Tagay. However, he told her that her marriage was valid under Sharia law and could not be dissolved without her husband's consent, leaving her in despair.

Unhappy Love of Abyl and Batiyna

Return of Abyl Batiyna had long been unable to see her parents, and life in Kydyrbay's household only deepened her loneliness. One day, unexpectedly, she met Abyl, her first love. Time had changed him: he looked older, worn by hardship, with darkened skin and tired eyes. Yet his gaze still carried the same quiet pain and unspoken feeling for her. Batiyna tried to hide her emotions and behaved formally, as if he were a distant relative. While serving him tea and kumis, she silently longed for freedom and wondered about his life. Their meeting reopened old wounds and unspoken love.

Abyl's Silent Love Abyl arrives as a guest but hides a deep emotional storm beneath his calm appearance. Though he sits quietly among others, his mind is fully occupied with Batiyna. He remembers their forced separation, the pain of losing her, and the long years of silence that followed. Life pushed him into another marriage, and while his wife is kind and caring, his heart never fully left Batiyna. Seeing Batiyna again awakens everything he had buried. He cannot speak openly, so he behaves respectfully like a distant relative, masking his feelings. At the same time, he silently wishes her peace, even if they can never reunite.

The Song of Abyl and the Silence of Power Guests gathered in Batiyna's yurt, curious about Abyl, the man she once loved. When he sang his sorrowful songs of separation, the women listened with hidden emotion, while men grew uneasy. His friend Sansyzbay openly performed "Abyl's Song," revealing the depth of his unforgetten love for Batiyna. The melody stirred admiration, jealousy, and suspicion among the listeners. Abyl, though outwardly calm, felt his past life exposed. Batiyna remained silent, composed, yet deeply moved. Even Guljan, Abyl's wife, accepted the truth without anger, recognizing the endurance

of first love. As Abyl departed, the village was left divided between admiration for his art and fear of the feelings it awakened.

Kanymbubu's Story

The Song of Altynay and Batiyna's Request The fame of Altynay, a master of the *temir-komuz*, jaw harp spread across Kyrgyz lands. Wherever she traveled, people gathered to hear her music, which filled yurts with joy and emotion. Even weary elders were moved by her melodies, and her songs became known throughout the valleys. During her stay in Kydyrbay's village, Batiyna met her and was deeply impressed. Yet beneath her admiration lay sorrow. She secretly asked Altynay for help, telling her about the young girl Kanymbubu, trapped in an unhappy marriage with cruel Tilep. Batiyna begged Altynay to inform the respected relative Naimanbay and seek a way to free the girl according to Sharia law. Altynay listened carefully and agreed to carry the message before continuing her journey.

The Struggle for Kanymbubu's Freedom Throughout the winter, Batiyna and Kanymbubu kept watching the distant mountain path, hoping for rescue. Batiyna tried to comfort the young girl, assuring her that her uncle Naimanbay would surely come. Yet uncertainty and fear slowly weakened their hope as harsh winter conditions made travel nearly impossible. As spring approached, migrating herders filled the valleys, and life slowly revived. Still, Kanymbubu remained trapped in anxiety, waiting for justice, while Batiyna silently feared that help might never arrive.

The Failed Appeal The elders' council, influenced by Tazabek and Kydyrbay, rejects Naymanbay's plea to free Kanymbubu. Despite her clear protest and forced marriage, the "witnesses" distort her words, and the mullah justifies the decision through a selective interpretation of sharia. Naymanbay offers compensation and appeals for mercy, but the assembly prioritizes honor and social reputation over justice. Fear of shame and gossip outweighs compassion. As a result, the decision is final: Kanymbubu must remain with Tilep. Devastated, Naymanbay leaves in anger, while the girl's last hope collapses into silence, sorrow, and irreversible despair under the weight of communal authority.

Lives Broken, Hope Lost Batiyna worked tirelessly and endured hardship, while Kanymbubu remained trapped in a forced marriage. Gulbubu left her husband's house in shame and never returned, disappearing from communal life. Her mother Ziyada died after a long illness and helpless grief when she failed to save her daughter. Later, old Atantay died quietly in the household, marking another loss for the family. Gulsun, already pregnant and emotionally distant, was left widowed and overwhelmed by ritual obligations. Despite repeated appeals, the community refused to free Kanymbubu, and hope collapsed. Batiyna continued supporting others, but each death deepened suffering, injustice, and silence.

Gulsun and Atantay Died Gulsun had been given in marriage to the old Atantay when she was still a girl. She grew up within a world of custom, silence, and submission, yet learned to hide her sorrow behind a gentle smile. When Atantay died of old age, she performed the ritual lament and was mourned as his respected wife. Later, during childbirth, Gulsun suffered long and painfully, and no healer could save her. She died young, after asking forgiveness and blessing her family. Gulsun was buried beside Atantay, and her death marked the third tragedy, completing the quiet chain of three lives lost in one household.

Batiyna's Awakening and Final Struggle

Batiyna's Resistance After Gulsun's death, Batiyna was haunted by dreams in which she chased her across hills, but Gulsun kept disappearing and saying she was dead. In reality, Batiyna grew bolder, giving food and livestock to the poor and openly resisting household authority. At a gathering with guests and a mullah, she challenged Sharia for ignoring women's suffering and declared her rejection of it. She then rode out to meet a fortune teller from Andijan, hoping to learn the truth about women's fate. However, she did not meet him, as he had already left. Returning home, she also resisted her husband's violent attempt to control her.

Batiyna and the Search for Truth Batiyna decided to seek justice and go to the city to meet the great mullahs, hoping they might know the true answer about women's fate. In her village there were no

educated people except old pilgrims and a boy, Kachyke, studying in a Russian school. From him she learned about city life, different peoples, and their customs. She did not go to the city and did not meet the fortune-teller from Andijan, although she had hoped to find him. Instead, she reflected deeply on women's suffering and dreamed of a future when Kyrgyz girls would be educated and free.

Encounter between Batiyna and Zuurakan Batiyna met Zuurakan, a young servant who was carrying a heavy load of firewood. Zuurakan explained that she had been gathering fuel on the rocky slopes and that she worked for Buken under harsh conditions. Batiyna spoke kindly to her and encouraged her to value her strength and not let others exploit her. Zuurakan told her about her family and how she had been married into debt and forced into labor. Batiyna warned her about the cruelty of the bay household. The two women parted, but Zuurakan remembered Batiyna's words. Later she was scolded for mentioning her name.

Batiyna's Plan and the Clash with the Authorities Batiyna met Zuurakan and persuaded her to join a plan of escape to the Chuy Valley, where they hoped to find freedom. She promised to prepare horses, food, and disguises, including male clothing for herself and a noble outfit for Zuurakan. Zuurakan agreed but feared pursuit. They worked together briefly and parted with hope and anxiety. On her way back, Batiyna witnessed a government official, Jarban, illegally seizing horses for the authorities. Furious, she confronted him and attacked him on horseback, striking him after a violent struggle. Her rebellion against injustice became more direct and fearless.

Batiyna's Defiance and the Punishment of Jarban Jarban attacked Batiyna, but she refused to retreat and demanded that he release the stolen horse. As other herders arrived, they surrounded him and supported her. Batiyna urged them to defend their honor and stop the official's abuses. Overpowered, Jarban jumped from his horse and begged for mercy, blaming the volost leader for the orders. The herders beat him in anger, while Batiyna mocked his cowardice. She ordered him to leave and warned him against oppressing the people. Humiliated, Jarban fled, and the villagers reaffirmed their resistance to officials who exploited and mistreated them.

Resistance, and the Collapse of Escape Batiyna encouraged Zuurakan to resist and planned an escape to the Chuy Valley with Zuraakan and her husband Tekebay. Before they could leave, a mass uprising against the tsarist (Russian imperial) authorities broke out, and the ails fell into panic. Poorly armed fighters gathered, while families fled through dangerous mountain passes with livestock and belongings. Batiyna took action during the chaos. She rode her grey mare at first, and later a bay stallion seized from the volost agents' horse herd. As the situation worsened, her husband Alymbay disappeared in the confusion. Soon, the escape plan collapsed entirely. Batiyna was swept into the large refugee movement crossing the mountains toward the southern passes, struggling to survive but still determined to find freedom.

The Great Flight During the mass flight after the uprising, Batiyna helped refugees cross dangerous mountain passes toward Chinese Turkestan. She rode through fog and snow, rescuing the lost, including the frozen girl Kanymbubu. The refugees suffered extreme cold, hunger, and death; children, women, and livestock perished along the way. Entire groups scattered and eventually reached Kashgar, Aksu, Turfan, Kulja, and Urumqi, where they were coldly received and often rejected by local elites. Batiyna continued serving others despite exhaustion. Haunting images of frozen children and dead mothers tormented her. In the end, she collapsed, weakened by grief, illness, and endless hardship.

Batiyna among the Refugees and the Rescued Child Batiyna traveled with Kachyke and other refugees in the Kashgar region, where thousands fled from hunger, cold, and violence. To survive, they sold their remaining belongings to buy food and witnessed families breaking apart as children were given away. Batiyna reflected on the destruction of her people and the loss of her homeland. One day, she met Jusup, an old friend of her father, who had lost his family and was exhausted by disease and starvation. He carried a three-month-old baby found beside a dead mother. Deeply moved, Batiyna shared food and offered shelter, continuing to care for the suffering.

Meeting on the Road Home On the green spring road, Batiyna met Abyl, her former youth love, among returning refugees. He was now a widower, exhausted and changed by hardship, leading his two children, Baktygul and Baktyjan, after losing their mother to illness. Their meeting reopened memories of their distant past love, now buried under years of suffering. Abyl spoke with sorrow, while Batiyna listened quietly, moved by his condition. She comforted the children, giving them food and care, but could not stop their journey. Abyl continued with the refugee caravan for safety. They parted again, united briefly by memory and shared loss.

Crossing into Hope At the bridge over the Naryn, the exhausted caravan of Kydyrbay's people, returning from Chinese Turkestan after years of exile and suffering, hesitated in fear, believing armed soldiers might block their passage. Panic spread through the crowd until a Russian-speaking soldier stepped forward and announced a "new power" that had overthrown the old tsar, promising freedom for the oppressed poor. Confused yet attentive, Batiyna questioned him about this freedom and who had granted it. The name "Lenin" passed through the frightened crowd with uncertainty. Though not fully understood, it softened their fear. For the first time, hope emerged as they crossed.

Batiyna's First Step toward Freedom After returning from Chinese Turkestan, Batiyna was unexpectedly reunited with her long-lost husband, Alymbay, who had survived the chaotic flight but returned as a broken man. Although they lived together again, her feelings for him had long since faded, and she quietly longed for a life of freedom. When the new Soviet authorities invited both men and women to a public meeting, Alymbay remained silent, while others insisted that respectable women should stay home. Encouraged only by the Russian soldier Yakimenko, Batiyna ignored public criticism and rode to the gathering, taking her first courageous step toward personal freedom and women's equality.

Defying Social Norms After attending the public meeting, Batiyna became the target of harsh criticism from conservative men, who feared that women's equality would destroy traditional family authority. While many villagers questioned the new Soviet reforms, Batiyna reflected on her own unhappy marriage and the customs that had deprived her of freedom, including her forced separation from her beloved Abyl. She realized that the old marriage traditions had chained women to lives they had never chosen. Strengthened by the meeting, she resolved to embrace the new path offered by Soviet law and devote herself to defending women trapped in forced marriages, polygamy, and lifelong dependence on men.

The Burden of Old Life After Kachyke was elected head of the village committee because of his education and honesty, the village elders quickly sought to influence him. While outwardly accepting Soviet reforms, they urged him to preserve traditional customs, especially male authority over women. They praised limited kindness toward wives but rejected true equality, fearing women's independence would destroy social order. During the gathering in Kydyrbay's yurt, Batiyna silently listened as Serkebay's warnings clearly targeted her growing independence. Even her own household, led by Turumtay, urged her to abandon new ideas. Yet Batiyna remained inwardly committed to the path of freedom and justice for women.

Batiyna's Break with Tradition After another brutal beating by her husband Alymbay, Batiyna realized that neither her marriage nor her family would protect her. She appealed to Kachyke, now head of the village committee, but he remained loyal to patriarchal customs despite his new position. Determined to claim the rights promised by the Soviet government, Batiyna rejected the old order. She removed her traditional turban *elechek* and boldly tied a red headscarf—the symbol of the new era. She enrolled in literacy campaigns, rode fearlessly from village to village, and encouraged women and girls to attend school, becoming a passionate advocate for education, equality, and women's emancipation.

Confronting Patriarchal Resistance While Batiyna and the teacher Sapar traveled through the villages inviting women to literacy classes, they faced fierce resistance from wealthy families. Serkebay and his first wife Buken refused to let Kaliykan, Serkebay's young second wife, and the servant Zuurakan attend school, insisting that women belonged in the household. Batiyna reminded them that the new government required everyone to learn reading and writing and warned that those who prevented women from studying could be punished. Despite opposition from husbands and parents, many young wives, second

wives, servants, and daughters secretly embraced the opportunity, seeing education as their first path toward dignity, independence, and a different future.

Escalating Violence against Batiyna As more women joined literacy classes, conservative elders and wealthy men intensified their opposition. They mocked educated women, spread rumors about the young Soviet teacher, and blamed Batiyna for destroying traditional family values. Many husbands beat or threatened wives who attempted to attend school, while Soviet officials punished those who obstructed women's education, even imprisoning Serkebay for refusing to let his second wife study. Humiliated, Serkebay and Tazabek secretly discussed killing Batiyna to stop her campaign. Soon afterward, Batiyna was ambushed by Mekebay and Tekebay while riding alone, but she fiercely fought back with her whip, refusing to surrender or abandon her cause.

Batiyna's Survival and Departure for Moscow After Tazabek incited Mekebay and Tekebay to attack her, Batiyna fought back until Yakimenko intervened and arrested the assailants. Although she identified the village elites as the true instigators, she refused to seek revenge against the attackers. Serkebay then persuaded Alymbay to restore his "honor" by killing his wife. Alymbay stabbed Batiyna with a dagger, seriously wounding her in the chest. She spent about ten days recovering at the healer Maty-Ene's home before the violence resumed. Soon afterward, Kachyke informed her that she had been selected to attend a congress of Eastern women in Moscow convened by Lenin. Seeing this as her chance to escape oppression, Batiyna left the village and set out for a new life.

2ND SECTION

Zuurakan in the Wealthy Nomad Household

Zuurakan's Escape from the Rich Household Zuurakan left the bay household after a violent insult and beating from the landlady. Angry and exhausted from years of forced labor, she refused to stay in servitude. She gathered her few belongings, but then threw them away, feeling they meant nothing. Her husband Tekebay did not protect her. In the night, she quietly untied the guest horses at the village. She mounted the best horse belonging to Nurbay and led two others. She justified taking them as payment for her years of hard work. Once away from the village, she urged the horses forward and fled into the darkness night.

Confrontation in the Mountains Zuurakan fled through the mountains and was pursued by her husband Tekebay and his companion Mekebay after she had stolen horses to escape abuse. Disguised as a man, she tried to mislead them on the road to Chu Valley. Exhausted but defiant, she argued that she deserved justice after years of servitude. When she was caught, she confronted both men, questioning their cowardice in letting her be beaten. Her boldness and fearlessness unsettled them, and they momentarily relented. The confrontation revealed the collapse of her marriage and the brutality of bay society. Later, she met Batiyna, to whom she recounted her suffering and escape. Freedom began for her.

Batiyna's First Experience of Soviet Life

In the City Batiyna arrived in the city for the first time after she had left her mountain village. She was amazed by tall buildings, crowded markets, and unfamiliar urban life. Guided by a companion, she reached the local administration of the communist party, believing it protected the poor and brought justice. She reflected on past oppression by the wealthy nomads and hoped for equality under the new power. At the office, she was welcomed by a Russian woman, Valentina Kopylova.

Batiyna at Valentina Kopylova's Home She stayed with Valentina Kopylova, a Russian woman working in the women's department of the local administration of the communist party, who welcomed her kindly and introduced her to a new way of life. Batiyna was amazed by lamps, pictures, and household objects, but felt uneasy in the unfamiliar environment. After a sleepless night, she reflected on her harsh past and compared it with the city's crowded, unequal life. At the bazaar she sold her horse under pressure and

witnessed deception and greed among traders. Gradually, she became more aware of urban realities. Later, she was chosen as a delegate and prepared to travel to Moscow with other women.

Farewell Procession and Public Reaction A large crowd filled the street as people gathered to watch the departure of the women delegates. Villagers and townspeople discussed the event with curiosity and excitement. Some men speculated that the women were going to Moscow to receive freedom from Lenin and that new laws would change marriage customs and punish old practices like bride price and polygamy. Street vendors moved through the crowd selling food, including the husband of Anarhon, one of the delegates, who offered baked meat-filled bread to Batiyna. She hesitated but accepted it. As the procession moved on, music played and people slowly dispersed.

Journey to Moscow and the Museum

Conflict and Solidarity among the Delegates Batiyna traveled by covered cart with Anarhon, an Uzbek woman, Rabiyya, a Tatar woman, and Rahima, a Sart-Kalmyk woman of Mongolic background. During the journey, tensions rose when Anarhon called Batiyna “uncultured,” leading to an argument over rural and urban identity. Batiyna defended her mountain people and rejected social and cultural superiority. Though differences in language and background surfaced, the women remained united by their shared journey toward Moscow. Gradually, anger softened as reflection replaced insult. Batiyna’s song, filled with memory and longing, helped ease the conflict and created a fragile sense of solidarity among the diverse delegates.

Women on the Road of Change Batiyna and her companions traveled for weeks by covered cart along a long and difficult road through mountains, valleys, and open steppe. Exhausted by dust, heat, and constant shaking, each woman reflected on her life and fears. Batiyna felt pride and frustration, wishing they had ridden horses instead of enduring hardship. Anarhon worried about her past, her husband, and whether her new freedom would last. Rabiyya thought of her children and home, while Rahima longed for her village and cattle. Batiyna argued with her companions over insults, defending her people’s dignity. Despite tension, they gradually understood one another. Anarhon suffered a disturbing dream of violence and loss, revealing her deep anxiety about returning home and the fragile nature of her emancipation.

Anarhon’s Fear, Journey, and Changing World Anarhon, once confined to the strict world of home life and seclusion, traveled with the other women through long and difficult roads toward Moscow. During the journey she suffered deeply from anxiety after a disturbing dream in which her husband Turgunbay threatened her under religious pressure. The dream seemed like a warning, and she feared returning home. Her illness, however, was only emotional exhaustion, and her companions tried to comfort her. Over time, she slowly recovered and became more engaged in conversations during the journey. Yet memories of oppression and fear continued to haunt her.

Arrival in Moscow A cleanly dressed Russian woman asked Rabiyya what Batiyna was saying so loudly and boldly. Rabiyya explained how Batiyna had taken offense at Anarhon. The Russian woman thought for a moment. Her reddish eyebrows drew together, as if she were irritated. Her bright blue eyes became serious and even somewhat sad. “Yes... this is all, of course, from ignorance. Look, Anarhon said one careless word, but Batiyna was deeply offended and still remembers it. And yet Uzbeks and Kyrgyz share the same faith and have related languages. When will the time come when peoples of different religions, customs, and languages stop insulting and humiliating each other? Only the Soviet era will strengthen friendship among peoples.”

Museum Encounter in Moscow Batiyna met a Russian scientist and his wife in the museum. He explained that she was Kyrgyz from the mountain region and introduced her to visitors. The scientist said Kyrgyz people had a long history and should not be called “wild.” His wife admired Batiyna’s face and clothing. Another woman criticized the group, calling them idle. Inside the museum, the women walked through halls filled with ancient objects. Rahima was tired and uninterested, wanting to rest. Rabiyya read museum labels. People in the museum stared, whispered, and asked questions about their nationality and clothing.

Voices in the Museum In the museum, Anna Nikolaevna praised Batiyna's beauty and compared her eyes to berries washed by dew. The scientist warmly shook her hand and said the Kyrgyz people had a rich history and would grow quickly under Soviet power. He said they should not be called "wild." Some visitors looked at the women with kindness, but one upper-class woman insulted them and called them "savages," causing a conflict with another woman. At the hotel, Rahima rested from exhaustion. Batiyna reflected on her people's past, feeling both pain and curiosity about the world, while remaining calm about the insults she heard.

Zuurakan Returns and Faces Judgment

Tense Situation Zuurakan returned to the village on horseback and stood before the mistress of the household, declaring that she was ready to accept any punishment. The household erupted in anger and confusion over the stolen horse and her escape. Tekebay wavered between fear of the mistress and concern for his wife. The elders gathered, observing the tense confrontation. Nurbay spoke slowly, coughing slightly, as if about to say something important, urging restraint and reminding them of the hardships of travel and changing times. He advised settling the matter without cruelty, allowing the couple to decide their path. He concluded: "If you want to leave, go in peace, my child."

Do whatever you want At dawn the elders gathered near the white kid tied in front of the yurt. Buken, the landlady spoke calmly about a dream and ordered the sacrifice to the spirits. The villagers listened in silence, afraid to oppose her. Tekebay stood pale, holding the trembling animal. Suddenly the sound of hoof beats rolled through the valley. Zuurakan arrived, covered in dust, her eyes burning with anger. She stopped her horse sharply and threw down the reins. "Here I am," she said. "Do whatever you want." The crowd froze. Buken hesitated for a moment. For the first time, her authority, built on fear and curses, showed a crack as morning light spread across the silent settlement.

Buken's Plan against Zuurakan After Zuurakan returned, she continued working in the Serkebay's household, but his wife Buken's hatred did not disappear. Outwardly she acted calm and even kind, while secretly preparing revenge. She told Tekebay that Zuurakan remained dangerous and needed to be "treated." She praised Zuraakan's strength to gain trust, while planning to control her. Buken suggested carrying out her plan during a future gathering across the river, when most villagers would be away. Confused and frightened, Tekebay could not resist or fully understand her intentions and finally broke down in tears, trapped between fear and obedience.

Zuurakan Resists the Attack Zuurakan was alone in the yurt when three men entered and tried to seize her, claiming they would cure her. She struggled fiercely, breaking their grip and striking back with great strength. One man fell against the lattice wall, injured, while another was pushed to the ground. She fought her way outside, still holding a wooden tool, and continued to resist despite torn clothing. Tekebay stood nearby, crying and failing to protect her. The attackers hesitated and retreated, alarmed by her strength. Zuurakan, shaken and furious, left the camp, refusing to submit or stay under their control anymore that day.

Women's Congress in Tashkent

Arrival in Tashkent On the train, the women learned that the women's congress would be held in Tashkent instead of Moscow. Batiyna felt disappointed, while Anarhon was excited about the city. They traveled together, joking and talking to ease the long journey. Batiyna thought about Zuurakan and Kanymbubu and wished such struggling women could attend the congress. She fell asleep, and Anarhon gently helped her. In her dream, Batiyna called out to women suffering in different places. The next morning the train approached Tashkent. The passengers prepared their belongings, and Batiyna and her companions got ready to step out.

Tashkent Streets and Women's Awakening While walking through Tashkent, Batiyna, Anarhon, Rahima, and Rabiyya faced hostility from men in the crowded bazaar. A man insulted them, followed by another in a carriage who mocked women and called them immoral. Batiyna answered him boldly, laughing at his words, and the women moved away together. The experience filled Batiyna with anger

and reflection on women's lack of rights. She questioned why men treated women as objects and dreamed of equality. Turning to Anarhon, she softened and suggested friendship, asking her to become her closest companion as they continued walking through the city.

Batiyna Speaks at the Congress Batiyna stepped onto the stage of the women's congress, her heart trembling as she represented the women of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region. Earlier she had hesitated, fearing her Kyrgyz speech would not be understood, but Sharapat Nurpaissova encouraged her to speak from her own life. Looking at the hall filled with women, Batiyna saw Kanymbubu, Gulbubu, and Zuurakan in her mind and began to speak about their suffering and longing for freedom. Her voice grew stronger as she continued. She declared that women must no longer live in fear and oppression. In the end, she cried out for the freedom of Eastern women and support for Soviet power. The hall fell silent, and many women quietly wiped away their tears.

Zuurakan's Journey

Zuurakan in the Mountains Zuurakan climbed far from the inhabited valley toward a lonely mountain pass. Angry and wounded, she walked without fear, her torn clothes tied at her waist. She drank once from a cold spring, then continued upward, leaning on a rowan stick she had cut herself. Hunger and thirst grew, but she endured, thinking of freedom and her life with Tekebay and Buken.

Night fell over the mountains. Shadows moved, and she tightened her grip on the stick. She climbed higher and found a narrow rocky ledge. Exhausted, she lay down on cold stone, staring at the stars, and finally drifted into sleep.

Zuurakan on the Pass Zuurakan walked forward on the rocky slope, bleeding but still upright. The dead wolf lay behind her, and the surviving one had withdrawn into the shadows of the stones. Her hand throbbed, yet she gripped the wooden stick tightly and did not stop. The cold wind cut across the pass, but she kept moving step by step. Hunger and pain followed her, yet inside her rose stubborn strength. When she reached higher ground, she lifted her head toward the brightening sky and kept walking, refusing to fall, refusing to surrender to fear or exhaustion.

Village Assemblies and Struggle for Justice

Batiyna at the Village Assembly Batiyna arrived in a noble clan village as an official instructor representing Soviet authority. She ordered the men to dismount from their horses and allowed the women to move forward, breaking traditional hierarchy. The villagers gathered in confusion, divided between custom and curiosity. Batiyna spoke firmly about women's rights, equality, and protection under the law, invoking Lenin's support. Gradually, resistance weakened as people listened. Women felt hope, and men, though uneasy, obeyed the order. The assembly became a shared public space where women were finally seen and heard, marking a turning point in the mountain community's social life forever changed.

Batiyna and Adyke At the village assembly, Batiyna confronted Adyke, her former father-in-law and once a powerful local nomadic ruler, demanding that he recognize women as equal under the new Soviet law. The gathering fell into tense silence as her words challenged long-standing customs and authority. Some men reacted with unease and resentment, while others were forced to reconsider their views. Adyke, who had once supported the system that oppressed Batiyna, struggled under her direct and unwavering gaze, confronted with his past. Salkynay, her stepmother-in-law who had once been part of that oppression, unexpectedly stepped forward and sided with Batiyna, urging acceptance of the new order. Under collective pressure and shifting public sentiment, the assembly began to acknowledge the demand for equality, marking a decisive change in the village's social hierarchy.

Batiyna on the Galloping Aksur Riding the swift horse Aksur, Batiyna sped through the mountain road after leaving the village assembly. Though she sensed the silent contempt of men who saw a woman in power as an insult to tradition, she refused to yield. When a group of riders tried to stop her, Aksur burst through them like a storm and carried her forward with uncontrollable force. The men recognized her as the "woman-chief," both amazed and uneasy. As the wind rushed past, Batiyna felt a mix of fear and

determination but kept her posture firm. The journey became a symbolic passage: old authority was being left behind, while a new, uncertain order was accelerating forward.

Farewell under a Shifting Order In the crowded courtyard, Manapbay's relatives gathered to bid him farewell, filling the space with blessings and ritual words. Elders invoked ancestral honor, though fear of the new order unsettled their speech. Manapbay was under detention, neither fully free nor formally in prison, awaiting removal under state orders. Aynagul spoke with Batiyna about the new laws that now constrained the old elite and their privileges. After their meeting, she calmly departed with her escort, Sanjar. Her exit was steady but final, reflecting acceptance of unavoidable separation. Around her, prayers continued, while uncertainty and the collapse of old authority hung over the gathering.

Zuurakan Meets Oshur and Oroz

At the Mountain Ford At the mountain ford, a caravan of mule traders halted where the roaring stream met the river below the ravine. The merchants Oshur and Oroz were startled when they saw a half-naked, wounded woman emerge from the wilderness. It was Zuurakan, who had escaped a wolf attack, her arm bleeding and her body torn from the struggle. Exhausted and starving, she demanded cloth and food, insisting she was not a spirit but a living woman who had suffered violence and flight. One trader covered her with a cloak while the other watched cautiously. Yet greed soon surfaced, and her safety became uncertain.

The Disappearance of Zuurakan At the large village assembly, Batiyna confronted Serkebay and Buken over the sudden disappearance of Zuurakan, a strong young woman who had worked in their household. Rumors spread that she had been driven away or harmed, yet the couple claimed she had simply run off. Batiyna rejected their explanations, insisting that Zuurakan would not abandon her dignity without cause. Batiyna reminded everyone that under the new order, even powerful village elites could not hide injustice behind custom or superstition. Buken attempted to deflect blame, but her words only deepened suspicion. Batiyna declared that Zuurakan must be found and that any harm done to her would be punished by law.

Rising Suspicion Months passed, but Zuurakan had not returned. Serkebay came back from the Chu Valley more bitter than afraid. He claimed she had simply run away and remarried, even producing a paper from the authorities confirming her new marriage. To him, this was proof that women were now "free to leave" under new laws. His words were sharp with anger and humiliation, as if the world itself had changed against him. He mocked the idea of order, blaming women's freedom for chaos. Yet in the village, doubt grew. People whispered that Zuurakan's disappearance was not simple escape but something darker, possibly tied to violence and hidden crimes.

Batiyna Demands Truth Batiyna refused to accept Serkebay's version. She gathered the people and openly challenged him and Buken, insisting they explain what truly happened to Zuurakan. Her voice was steady, firm, and fearless in front of elders and men. She reminded everyone of past injustices and accused the powerful of hiding the truth behind lies and excuses. Fear spread among the guilty, while ordinary people began to listen more carefully. For the first time, the balance of power shifted in the gathering. Batiyna also revealed how Buken disgraced Gulbubu by falsely accusing her of adultery, showing it was Buken's own scheme to destroy Gulbubu's honor.

Violence and Loss

Batiyna's Ordeal Batiyna rode alone through the valley lost in heavy thoughts about her past and the struggle for justice. Two armed men suddenly appeared on the road pretending to know her and blocking her way. They seized her horse and dragged her toward a rocky ravine despite her desperate resistance. Batiyna tried to fight back but was struck down and fell into darkness. She drifted between life and death hearing distant sounds and feeling unbearable pain. After days of unconsciousness she slowly regained awareness under a doctor's care wrapped in white cloth. She whispered weakly asking where she was now safe

Zuurakan on the Caravan Road Zuurakan rode a low mule with traders Oshur and Oroz across the mountain road. Though wounded and exhausted, she tried to stay cheerful, speaking boldly and even singing. The traders argued over her as if she were a prize in their gambling game, each hiding greed and tension behind rough jokes and threats. Zuurakan, unaware of the full truth, believed she was simply traveling toward safety and her family. When insults escalated and Oshur threatened her, she challenged him fearlessly and even dismounted in anger. The journey grew dangerous as hidden violence and betrayal surfaced on the road ahead.

Oroz's Intentions

Zuurakan between Resistance and Surrender That night in the forest, Oroz revealed his true desire, abandoning all pretense of kinship. Zuurakan first resisted him with anger and irony, reminding him she was a married woman. Yet his persistent words, touch, and manipulation slowly unsettled her thoughts. Torn between loyalty to Tekebay and fear, she hesitated, her strength wavering under emotional confusion and exhaustion from her journey. In that vulnerable moment, Oroz pressed closer, and her resistance collapsed into conflicted surrender. For an instant, she felt both guilt and longing, as memory and desire clashed within her. The night deepened, and her inner world broke apart.

Zuurakan Learned the Truth At dawn, Zuurakan woke to chaos as Oshur and Oroz fought over her, each claiming ownership through a gambling agreement she had never understood. Shocked, she realized she had been treated as a wager between men. Oroz had once sworn friendship and protection, but now spoke of her as a lost prize, while Oshur insisted she was his “won wife.” Confused and humiliated, Zuurakan demanded the truth and rejected both men’s claims. Her anger rose as she understood how deeply she had been deceived. Refusing to be property, she declared her freedom and prepared to leave, wounded but determined to reclaim her dignity.

Batiyna Attacked, Anarhon Murdered

Batiyna in the Hospital: Awakening to Loss and Resolve Batiyna lay in a clean, quiet hospital room, recovering under the care of attentive doctors. Her strength slowly returned as she remembered past sufferings and survival. Visitors brought her food and flowers, and she felt gratitude for human kindness. Yet beneath this peace, unease lingered. One day, she was ordered back to her room. Soon after, Kopylova entered in distress and announced that Anorhon had been murdered. Shocked and grieving, Batiyna prepared for the funeral. At the memorial, she spoke passionately against violence and oppression, pledging justice and freedom for women.

Batiyna's Path to Knowledge After leaving the hospital, Batiyna followed the doctors’ advice to rest, though she still suffered from headaches. Temirbolotov, the government official suggested she recover in a quiet village, but she refused and asked instead to be sent to courses in Alma-Ata, determined to continue her education. She felt she had survived many trials and now owed it to Anorhon’s memory to study and understand the world. At the courses, despite her illness, she studied eagerly and observed city life with intense curiosity. She visited markets and workshops, learning not only from books but also from people around her. Gradually, she realized that both freedom and injustice existed in the city as well as in the mountains, and she began to question the true meaning of women’s liberation.

Batiyna's Recovery and Awakening Batiyna returned from her studies in Alma-Ata ill and stayed with Kopylova’s family. Valentina and her mother cared for her, keeping her warm, giving her medicine, and urging her to rest. They warned her against overexertion, fearing her fragile health. While recovering, Batiyna listened to their conversations about injustice, class struggle, and the violent history of exploitation. These discussions deepened her awareness of social inequality and strengthened her determination.

As she regained strength, Batiyna reflected on her journey from a simple mountain girl to a conscious learner. She understood that people of different nations share similar hopes and suffering.

Fear, Ideology, and the Burden of Justice After her examination, Batiyna’s illness continued to affect her daily life. She felt dizzy and weak, yet still walked with Valentina Kopylova, who insisted that the

doctor was politically unreliable and linked to past violence. Batiyna, however, sensed only confusion and unease, especially after hearing again about Anarhon's murder and the forces that had incited it. Valentina explained that enemies of the new order still manipulated people, hiding behind old beliefs. Batiyna listened, disturbed but thoughtful, trying to understand how justice could be achieved in such a world. Despite her weakness, she agreed to travel back to the village if necessary and continue her work after recovery, believing action might restore her strength.

The Rescue of Cholpon

The Search for Cholpon Temirbolotov ordered Batiyna and Valentina to join a mission to find the missing girl Cholpon, whose grandfather Bayterek had come in despair. The old man had lost his sons, his wife, and now feared for his only granddaughter. He begged the Soviet authorities to rescue her from unknown abductors. Moved by his grief, Batiyna agreed to help. They rode urgently into the countryside with soldiers and the grandfather as guide. Batiyna felt renewed strength on horseback, while Valentina remained firm and decisive. On the way, Batiyna spoke with village women, sensing fear and hidden truths. She learned that girls were sometimes taken by force and forced to claim they had married willingly, exposing the fragile justice behind appearances.

Hidden in the Smoke The police searched Shaymerden's village but did not find Cholpon at first. His wife, Jypar, had hidden the girl in a smoky storage pit where she nearly suffocated. When they finally discovered her, Bayterek collapsed in despair, believing his granddaughter was dead. Cholpon had been taken by Shaymerden's son Myrza with a group of men. Shaymerden denied guilt and tried to justify his power, but no one listened. Batiyna ordered that both Shaymerden and his wife be taken in accordance with the law. Valentina cried when she saw Cholpon's condition. The girl was rescued alive. Bayterek thanked the officials, and they left the village to bring the guilty to justice.

Zuurakan and Oroz

Zuurakan's Anger and Softening Zuurakan walked away without looking back, filled with anger and hurt. On a narrow path she killed a snake that crossed her way, symbolically rejecting all obstacles before her. She crossed a river and moved quickly through a wide valley, still feeling that someone was following her. Hearing hoof beats behind her, she grew tense and prepared to defend herself, thinking it might be an enemy. It was Oroz on a mule. He stopped, came toward her, and confessed his guilt, begging forgiveness and swearing his love. Zuurakan, though deeply wounded, slowly softened as she listened to his sincere words.

Zuurakan and Oroz Years passed, and Zuurakan and Oroz lived a relatively comfortable life. The old wound in Zuurakan's heart had faded. Every Friday they went to the bazaar, neatly dressed, joking with others and eating in teahouses. They lived in a crowded courtyard filled with people and livestock, surrounded by high mud walls and small rooms. Zuurakan spent her days in their small room while Oroz met his friends outside. Their life became routine and familiar. Oroz often laughed at her jokes, and they passed time with humor, teasing, and quiet suspicions about each other's loyalty and behavior.

Marriage, Suspicion, and the Desire for the Mountain Village Zuurakan grew increasingly restless within the enclosed courtyard life. She told Oroz she was tired of the city and its hidden trades, urging him to leave for the village where they could farm and live honestly. Oroz, suspicious and defensive, grew uneasy at her words and questioned her loyalty. To push him toward leaving the city, Zuurakan began inventing stories about men threatening her, hoping to awaken his jealousy and change his behavior. Oroz believed her and became more possessive and violent in thought, convinced that rivals wanted his wife. Their relationship slowly shifted from affection to distrust and emotional manipulation on both sides.

Gambling, Wealth, and the Breakdown of Trust Oroz's behavior changed as he brought strangers into their home and engaged in gambling and drinking. He grew unpredictable, sometimes arriving with money, sometimes drunk and hostile toward Zuurakan. One day he hosted a gambling gathering with dangerous men, including his rival Oshur. They played games for large sums of money while Zuurakan silently observed, disturbed by the illegal and reckless nature of their actions. Oroz proudly claimed his

money was honestly earned, though his actions suggested otherwise. As the night continued, he lost heavily, demanded more money from Zuurakan, and deepened the tension and moral distance between them.

Zuurakan Breaks Free Zuurakan watched in horror as Oroz lost everything in the gambling game. Drunk with rage and desperation, he even staked his wife against Oshur's winnings. The men laughed and urged him on, while the room filled with chaos and spilled wealth. Suddenly, Oroz collapsed, unable to continue, and Zuurakan, furious at his betrayal, pulled the rug and sent the gamblers crashing to the floor. Without hesitation, she stepped over her husband and walked out, declaring she would not be treated as property or wager. She left the house, burning with anger, determined to reclaim her dignity and freedom forever free.

Barskan's Threat Shaymerden, his tokol Jypar, and his son Myrza were arrested for kidnapping Cholpon, shocking their younger son Barskan deeply. Half drunk and wearing his Mauser, Barskan rushed to Temirbolotov demanding their release. He insisted he was a loyal Soviet security police worker and threatened to report the case to Moscow. Temirbolotov calmly refused and forced him to confront the truth about his family's feudal violence. He also warned Barskan that his own position would not protect him if he continued to hide their crimes. When news arrived that Shaymerden's relatives had beaten villagers, Temirbolotov's position hardened further. Barskan was left trapped between family loyalty and Soviet law.

Batiyna's Education and Marriage

Unexpected Feelings Months passed while Jusup recovered from his head wound in the hospital. Batiyna and Valentina visited him often, noticing how he had grown weaker in body but remained bright in spirit. Jusup had long admired Batiyna, though he had never dared to approach her because of her strength and authority. After winter, Valentina revealed her own tragic past love, showing how war and loss reshaped lives. Meanwhile, Batiyna received a heartfelt letter from Jusup confessing his love and desire to marry her. His words unsettled her, reviving memories of Abyl and awakening doubts about her own life. Though she felt drawn to him, she also feared she was no longer a woman capable of love or family.

A Wedding of Freedom and Friendship The women's courses organized by Batiyna and Valentina brought together young women, former tokol, and girls like Cholpon who had once suffered under forced marriages. Living in the confiscated house, they studied literacy and prepared for new lives. Batiyna, who served as the director, firmly defended her students' health and dignity, insisting that they received medical care first. One day, Jusup visited her and openly confessed his love. After an honest conversation about age, past pain, and personal freedom, Batiyna accepted his proposal while keeping the memory of Abyl in her heart. Their wedding became a joyful celebration of women's emancipation, friendship, and chosen love.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Batiyna

Batiyna is not merely a character; she is the heartbeat of the Kyrgyz struggle for dignity. Born into the wild, free air of a hunter's camp, her light is nearly extinguished by the heavy shadows of old-world pacts. Traded like livestock to settle the debts of men, she endures forced marriages that attempt to break her spirit. Yet, Batiyna refuses to be a silent ghost in her own life. Her journey from the cruelty of Adyke's yurt to the revolutionary streets of Moscow is a human testament to the power of a single soul rising against the weight of an entire history.

Resilient Batiyna is forged in the biting winds of the steppe and the stinging lash of the whip. Her body bears the scars of a first husband's hate and the near-fatal blade of a second, yet she never breaks. During the 1916 Great Flight, she walks through the jagged, frozen mountains, her feet bleeding and her stomach empty, while death claims thousands around her. She carries the weight of her family's shame

and the physical toll of relentless labor, yet she emerges from the snow and the blood with her head held high, proving that her spirit is an unbreakable stone.

Defiant Even when the law, the mullahs, and her own father demand her silence, Batiyna carries a fire of defiance in her chest. She is not a woman who waits for permission to be free; she dares to ride into the night to escape her cage and strikes back at the powerful Bolush when he tries to dishonor her. Her subversion is seen in her eyes when she rejects the "divine fate" preached by those who profit from her pain. When she finally discards her traditional turban for a red headscarf, she isn't just following a new law—she is finally saying "no" to centuries of chains.

Tender Despite the hardness of her life, Batiyna never lets her heart turn to ice. Her compassion is a quiet sanctuary for others who are drowning in the same sea of injustice. She is the one who cradles the dying child-bride Gulsun and the one who risks everything to save little Kanymbubu from the cold. In the starving refugee camps of China, she becomes a mother to the motherless, sharing her last morsel of food with orphans. Her empathy is her greatest strength; she knows that her freedom means nothing if she leaves the weak behind in the shadows.

Unwavering Batiyna possesses a grit that makes her impossible to tame. Once she glimpses the possibility of a world where a woman can read, write, and choose her own path, she moves toward it with the singular focus of a hunter. She ignores the mocking laughter of the village men and the violent threats of the elders, riding through mountain storms to bring books to girls hidden in yurts. Her determination is not fueled by hate, but by a deep, quiet hunger for light. Even as she bleeds from an assassin's wound, her only thought is of the road that leads to Moscow and a future she built with her own hands.

Aynagul

Aynagul represents the woman as a political pawn in the volatile world of Kyrgyz clan rivalries. Unlike Batiyna, who suffers from the hardships of poverty, Aynagul is caught in the crossfire between powerful men like Asantay and Barman. Her story highlights the practice of abduction and the exploitation of women to settle tribal warfare. Aynagul reflects the internal conflict of a woman who possesses high social status but lacks basic personal agency. Her journey is defined by her attempts to navigate a landscape where her beauty and lineage are treated as weapons by the men around her.

Independent Aynagul exhibits a fierce sense of independence that puts her at odds with her family's political ambitions. She rejects the marriage arranged by her father, Barman, refusing to be a silent participant in his alliance with Asantay. When she meets Bolot, she chooses him over the man she was promised to, effectively attempting to rewrite her own destiny. Her decision to leave with Bolot is an act of self-will, even if the society around her labels it an abduction to suit their own honor-bound narratives. She constantly tries to separate her identity from the political agendas of the men who claim her.

Courageous Aynagul possesses a deep-seated courage that allows her to survive abduction, forced returns, and social shaming. When Manapbay deceives her and takes her by force, she does not retreat into submissive silence. She directly confronts him within his own household, accusing him of cowardice and betrayal. Her bravery is most evident when she stands before the gathered clan elders, refusing to play the part of the fragile victim. Even as armed horsemen mobilize for war over her, Aynagul remains steadfast in her own truth, speaking out against the men who treat her presence as a reason for bloodshed.

Dignified Aynagul maintains a profound sense of dignity even when she is being traded between households like a piece of livestock. Despite the humiliation of being returned to an unwanted marriage with Ramazan to prevent a clan war, she carries herself with the grace of her noble upbringing. She refuses to let the harsh judgments of village women or the coldness of her husband break her spirit. Her dignity is her armor; it prevents her from becoming a mere casualty of the patriarchy. She commands respect through her composure, reminding everyone that she is a human being with inherent worth beyond her dowry.

Resentful Aynagul harbors a deep, justified resentment toward the social order that repeatedly sacrifices her happiness for the sake of clan honor. This resentment fuels her emotional distance from her husband, Ramazan, and her coldness toward the traditions that keep her trapped. She is acutely aware that the reconciliation between clans was built upon her suffering. Her internal life is a landscape of frustration, as she watches powerful men like Arstanaly dismiss her rights with contempt. This resentment is not a weakness but a clear-eyed recognition of the injustice she endures, keeping her spirit separate from the world that imprisons her.

Gulsun

Gulsun serves as the tragic shadow of the narrative, representing the stolen childhood of countless Kyrgyz girls under the feudal-patriarchal system. Married to the eighty-year-old patriarch Asantay while she is still a child playing with dolls, she is the ultimate victim of "marriage as transaction." Her presence in the story highlights the predatory nature of old customs where wealth allowed men to buy youth. Gulsun's journey is not one of rebellion like Batiyna's, but one of quiet, heartbreaking endurance. She is the innocent soul whose death in childbirth eventually acts as a catalyst for Batiyna's radical awakening and rejection of the old ways.

Innocent Gulsun is a portrait of pure innocence caught in a web of adult cruelty. Even after being taken into Asantay's household, she continues to play with dolls, seeking the comfort of childhood in a world that demands she be a woman. She does not understand the complexities of clan politics or the dark implications of her marriage; she only knows the fear of the old man she must serve. This innocence makes her suffering even more poignant, as she lacks the tools or the hardness to fight back. She is a lamb among wolves, navigating a terrifying reality with the wide-eyed confusion of a child.

Vulnerable Gulsun embodies the utter vulnerability of women who have no protectors. As the daughter of a poor shoemaker, she was sold into a life of servitude to a man who could be her great-grandfather. In the household of Asantay, she has no voice and no rights; she is a ghost in a rich man's tent. Her vulnerability is most visible in her physical fragility as she faces the demands of womanhood before her body is ready. Without the physical strength of Batiyna or the high social status of Aynagul, Gulsun is completely at the mercy of a tradition that views her life as expendable.

Enduring Despite the nightmare of her marriage, Gulsun shows a quiet, tragic capacity for endurance. She masks her sorrow behind a gentle smile, trying to fulfill the role of a "respected wife" in a house where she is essentially a captive. She does not scream or rail against the sky; instead, she folds her pain into herself, performing ritual laments and domestic tasks with a soft, haunting grace. Her endurance is not a sign of acceptance, but of a spirit trying to survive a situation it cannot change. She remains gentle and kind to those around her, even as her own life is slowly drained away.

Symbolic Gulsun's character is deeply symbolic, representing the "quiet tragedies" that the clan system buried in the earth. Her death during childbirth is the final evidence of the lethal nature of child marriage and the price paid by the weak. She represents the thousands of girls whose names were never recorded but whose lives were sacrificed for the sake of patriarchal vanity. For Batiyna, Gulsun's death is the moment the veil is lifted, proving that the old order is not a source of protection but a source of death. She remains a haunting memory, reminding the survivors that the cost of tradition was often innocent blood.

Kazak

Kazak is the tragic embodiment of the "honest hunter", representing the honorable poor who are systematically crushed by the feudal elite. As the father of Batiyna, he embodies the agonizing conflict between traditional patriarchal duty and genuine paternal love. Though he is a man of physical strength and survival skill, he remains socially invisible in a world where livestock and lineage are the only recognized currencies of justice. His character arc reveals how traditional honor can be weaponized

against the vulnerable, turning a proud provider into a broken man forced to sacrifice his daughter to satisfy the debts of the powerful.

Honorable Kazak lives by a strict code of integrity that defines his identity as a hunter and a member of his clan. He believes in the sanctity of a man's word and the weight of ancestral oaths, which is why he initially feels compelled to honor the unequal snuff-bride pact. He tries to instill a sense of dignity in Batiyna, teaching her that hard work and honesty are more valuable than wealth. However, this sense of honor becomes a cage; in a society where the rich manipulate customs for profit, his commitment to his word allows landlords like Adyke to exploit him.

Disenfranchised Despite being a master of the mountains, Kazak is entirely powerless within the social and legal hierarchy of the clans. He possesses no vast herds or political influence, making him easy prey for the predatory manaps. When he is brutally whipped by Adyke's men, his lack of status means no elder will stand in his defense. In the tribal courts, his testimony is silenced by the bribes and connections of his enemies. He can track a wolf through a blizzard but cannot navigate the corrupt corridors of feudal law, highlighting the total vulnerability of the landless poor in his society.

Despairing The final stages of Kazak's journey are marked by a deep, hollow despair as he watches his daughter's life sacrificed to settle his debts. The psychological toll of being forced to trade Batiyna—first to settle an ancestral oath and later to pay an impossible livestock fine—leaves him a shadow of his former self. He is haunted by his inability to protect his children and the realization that his integrity cannot shield them from the cruelty of the wealthy. This despair is a direct result of a soul-crushing system that forces a loving father to become the architect of his daughter's misery.

Adyke

Adyke stands as the quintessential antagonist of the novel, embodying the callous arrogance of the feudal elite. As the son of Satylgan, he inherits not just wealth but an entrenched belief that his social status places him above the laws of morality and common decency. He serves as the primary architect of the hunter's misery, transforming the ancestral "snuff-bride" oath from a bond of kinship into a weapon of exploitation. Unlike the hunters who rely on skill and labor, Adyke relies on the weight of tradition and the force of his men. His existence highlights the fundamental rot of a society where honor is a commodity and human beings—particularly the poor—are treated as disposable assets to be managed or discarded.

Arrogant Adyke is defined by a deep-seated arrogance that blinds him to the humanity of those beneath him. He treats Kazak—a man who once served his family—with cold indifference, viewing his presence as a nuisance rather than a binding obligation of kinship. He believes his wealth grants him immunity from the social contracts of his ancestors. When he mocks Kazak for bringing his daughter to be married, he does so with the sneering superiority of someone who views the hunter not as an equal but as a servant. This arrogance is his worldview; he assumes his status makes his whims the law, and he expresses this by using violence—like whipping Kazak—as a form of correction rather than negotiation.

Predatory Adyke is a predatory figure who weaponizes tradition to satisfy his greed. He hides behind "ancestral honor" to justify his cruelty, yet he ignores those same traditions whenever they conflict with his interests. He is most dangerous when he turns the legal apparatus of the clan against the poor. When Batiyna escapes his abuse, he doesn't simply accept the loss; he takes Kazak to the tribal court, utilizing his influence with the judges to demand a crushing fine of cattle. He treats marriage not as a union but as a transaction, and when he feels "defrauded," he demands compensation. He understands the rules of the game perfectly and manipulates them to ensure the poor remain in perpetual debt.

Cruel Beneath his veneer of noble status lies a profound and systemic cruelty. Adyke finds satisfaction in the humiliation of others, viewing their suffering as a demonstration of his power. When he orders his men to tie Kazak to the yurt frame and whip him in public, it is not merely a punishment; it is a spectacle intended to terrify the entire community into submission. He feels no remorse for the agony he inflicts, viewing the pain of the hunter's family as a trivial price for maintaining the social hierarchy. His

cruelty is the glue that holds his power together—he maintains his "honor" by stripping it from others, remaining completely indifferent to the broken lives he leaves in his wake.

Abyl

Abyl stands as the emotional core of the novel, representing the tragic "lost happiness" of a generation. He is the young man Batiyna truly loves, yet their relationship is severed by the cold machinery of tribal law and the kalym system. Unlike the aggressive and entitled landlords, Abyl embodies a gentler form of Kyrgyz masculinity, one defined by artistic expression and deep feeling. His character serves as a constant, haunting reminder of the human cost of forced marriages. Even as he builds a separate life, his spirit remains tethered to Batiyna, proving that while the clans could trade bodies, they could not govern hearts.

Constant Abyl possesses a heart that refuses to forget. Long after Batiyna is forced into marriages with other men, his devotion remains steady and unwavering. He does not seek to replace her with hollow substitutes; instead, he carries his love like a silent, holy wound. When he eventually meets her again after the Great Flight, his eyes still carry the same quiet pain and unspoken affection from their youth. This constancy makes him a rare figure in a world where relationships are usually fleeting transactions. His faithfulness is his greatest strength, allowing his love to survive even the total collapse of their old world.

Expressive Abyl finds his voice through music and poetry rather than violence or wealth. He is a master of the soul's lament, and his sorrow eventually gives birth to "The Song of Abyl." This mournful melody spreads through the valleys, transforming his private grief into a shared cultural anthem for all those separated by fate. Through his art, he communicates the depth of his loss to the community, making it impossible for the elders to fully ignore the human suffering caused by their traditions. His expressiveness allows the voiceless—both men and women—to feel the weight of a heart broken by the cold demands of the kalym.

Disadvantaged Despite the depth of his character, Abyl remains a victim of his limited economic status. He lacks the vast herds and political influence required to challenge men like Adyke or Kydyrbay. When he tries to rescue Batiyna from her father's debt, his offering of horses is dismissed as insufficient by the corrupt tribal court. He represents the many young men who were "priced out" of their own happiness by a system that favored the elderly rich over the youthful poor. His inability to save Batiyna is not a failure of will, but a symptom of a society where gold carries more weight than love.

Zuurakan

Zuurakan is one of the central figures of the novel and is based on the historical personality Zuurakan Kainazarova. Her character represents the suffering and transformation of rural Kyrgyz women during a time of social change. Born into poverty and later trapped in a wealthy bay household, she experiences humiliation, physical violence, and emotional betrayal. However, Zuurakan is not portrayed as a passive victim. Her journey through escape, survival in the mountains, betrayal by men, and final rejection of humiliation shows a woman in constant struggle for dignity. Through her experiences, the novel presents both personal endurance and the awakening of self-worth.

Resilient Zuurakan is deeply resilient. Despite years of abuse in the wealthy household, she does not completely lose her inner strength. After being beaten and humiliated, she makes the bold decision to flee, even though she faces danger and uncertainty. In the mountains she survives hunger, cold, and even a wolf attack. Later, when deceived and treated as property by traders and gamblers, she continues to endure emotional pain without surrendering her sense of self. Her resilience is not loud or dramatic; it is steady and stubborn. No matter how often she is betrayed, she finds the strength to stand up again.

Courageous Zuurakan shows remarkable courage throughout the novel. Stealing horses and escaping at night requires both physical and moral bravery, especially in a society where women are controlled by men and tradition. She confronts her husband Tekebay without fear, openly questioning his

weakness. When attacked in the yurt, she fights back fiercely against several men. Even later, when Oroz gambles her away, she does not collapse in silence but openly rebels and walks out. Her courage is not only physical but emotional — she dares to reject humiliation and refuses to accept the role of obedient victim.

Independent Independence defines Zuurakan's character. From the moment she steals the horses, she begins choosing her own path. She refuses to remain in a household where she is treated as a servant without dignity. Even when she lives with Oroz, she questions their life in the city and suggests moving to the village for honest work. When she discovers she has been gambled like property, she immediately rejects both men's claims over her. Her final act of walking away alone shows that she values self-respect more than security. Zuurakan's independence grows from painful experience and personal awakening.

Passionate Zuurakan is passionate in both anger and affection. Her emotions are strong and direct, whether she is defending herself, arguing with Oroz, or expressing hurt. She does not hide her feelings behind silence. When betrayed, her anger burns intensely, giving her the strength to act decisively. At the same time, she is capable of warmth and longing, which makes her vulnerable to manipulation. This emotional depth makes her human and complex rather than idealized. Her passion drives her actions and decisions, pushing her toward freedom even when the path is uncertain and painful.

Tekebay

Tekebay is Zuurakan's first husband and an important secondary character in the novel. He represents the weakness and moral uncertainty of men shaped by traditional patriarchal society. Although he is not openly cruel like the bay household, he fails in his responsibility to protect and support his wife. His silence and hesitation allow injustice to continue. Tekebay stands between fear of authority and personal loyalty, but he never finds the courage to choose firmly. Through his character, the novel shows how passivity and cowardice can contribute to oppression just as much as direct violence.

Weak Tekebay's most defining trait is his weakness. When Zuurakan is beaten and humiliated by the landlady, he does not defend her. He fears the authority of the wealthy household more than he values his wife's dignity. Even during confrontations in the mountains, he hesitates and avoids taking responsibility. His weakness is not physical but moral. He cannot stand up against injustice or make firm decisions. This inability to act makes him partly responsible for Zuurakan's suffering. His character shows how weakness in times of injustice can harm others as deeply as cruelty.

Fearful Tekebay is driven by fear—fear of the bay, fear of punishment, fear of social consequences. His behavior often reflects anxiety rather than conviction. When conflicts arise, he tries to avoid confrontation instead of facing it directly. Even when elders gather to judge Zuurakan, he appears nervous and uncertain. Fear controls his actions and prevents him from defending what is right. This constant anxiety weakens his authority as a husband and undermines his relationship with Zuurakan. His fear contrasts sharply with Zuurakan's courage, highlighting the difference between submission and resistance.

Passive Passivity defines Tekebay's role in the story. He rarely initiates action and mostly reacts to others. Instead of shaping events, he is carried by them. When Zuurakan decides to escape, he follows rather than leads. When she is attacked in the yurt, he stands nearby crying instead of intervening. His passivity creates emotional distance between him and his wife. It also symbolizes a generation of men unable to adapt to social change or challenge unjust traditions. Through Tekebay, the novel suggests that silence and inaction can maintain oppressive systems.

Conflicted Although weak, Tekebay is not entirely heartless. He shows moments of inner conflict, especially when torn between obedience to authority and concern for Zuurakan. He appears troubled and ashamed, aware that he is failing as a husband. This internal struggle makes him more human and tragic rather than simply villainous. However, his conflict never turns into decisive action. He

remains trapped between fear and responsibility. His inability to resolve this conflict ultimately leads to the collapse of his marriage. Tekebay represents a man caught between old traditions and the need for moral courage.

Oroz

Oroz is Zuurakan's second husband and one of the most complex male characters in the novel. Unlike Tekebay, he first appears confident, bold, and protective. He rescues Zuurakan from danger and speaks passionately about love and loyalty. However, as the story develops, his true nature becomes clearer. Oroz is shaped by pride, jealousy, and greed. His involvement in gambling and risky behavior gradually destroys trust in their marriage. Through Oroz, the novel shows how charm and strength can hide moral weakness. His relationship with Zuurakan moves from attraction and security to betrayal and collapse.

Charismatic Oroz is charismatic and persuasive. When he approaches Zuurakan, he speaks with confidence and emotional intensity. He knows how to use words to gain her trust and forgiveness. His bold personality and physical presence make him seem strong and dependable, especially after her painful experiences with Tekebay. He presents himself as a man who can protect and provide stability. This charm allows him to win Zuurakan's heart despite her doubts. However, his charisma is double-edged: it attracts and reassures her at first, but later it becomes a tool of manipulation and control.

Jealous Jealousy strongly influences Oroz's behavior. He becomes suspicious when Zuurakan speaks about other men or suggests changes in their life. Even small comments awaken his possessiveness. He imagines rivals and reacts emotionally rather than rationally. This jealousy does not come from love alone but from a desire to control. He wants to be the only authority in her life. As his insecurity grows, his trust weakens, and tension increases in their relationship. His jealousy eventually contributes to aggression, gambling, and reckless decisions, revealing the fragility beneath his confident exterior.

Reckless Oroz's recklessness becomes clear through his gambling and drinking. He brings dangerous men into his home and risks large amounts of money without thinking about consequences. His desire to prove himself bold and successful pushes him toward irresponsible actions. He ignores Zuurakan's concerns and chooses excitement over stability. This impulsive behavior shows his lack of discipline and foresight. The climax of his recklessness occurs when he stakes Zuurakan in a gambling game, treating her as property. At that moment, his carelessness turns into moral failure, destroying the foundation of their marriage.

Self-Centered Oroz often prioritizes his pride and reputation over Zuurakan's dignity. He wants admiration from other men and fears humiliation more than he fears losing his wife's trust. His decisions are guided by ego rather than partnership. Even when he claims to love Zuurakan, his actions reveal that his own image matters most. By staking her in a game, he reduces her to an object for his personal gamble. This selfishness ultimately leads to their separation. Through Oroz, the novel demonstrates how self-centered behavior can transform affection into betrayal and destroy relationships.

Buken

Buken is the cruel landlady of the wealthy bay household where Zuurakan serves. She represents the harsh and oppressive face of traditional elite authority. As the wife of Serkebay, she holds power over the servants and uses it without mercy. Her treatment of Zuurakan reflects the deep inequality and brutality of feudal society. Buken is not only physically violent but also manipulative, using superstition, false kindness, and social influence to maintain control. Through her character, the novel exposes how women of privileged classes could become instruments of oppression against other women, reinforcing rather than challenging injustice.

Cruel Buken is openly cruel toward Zuurakan and other servants. She insults, humiliates, and beats them, treating them as inferior beings rather than human workers. Her cruelty is not occasional but

constant, shaping the daily atmosphere of the household. She uses physical violence as a tool of discipline and emotional abuse as a form of control. Even after Zuurakan returns and accepts punishment, Buken does not show forgiveness. Her cruelty has no clear limit, and it grows whenever her authority is challenged. Through her, the novel illustrates how unchecked power often turns into brutality.

Manipulative Buken is highly manipulative. She knows how to hide her true intentions behind calm words and false kindness. After Zuurakan's return, she pretends to forgive her while secretly preparing revenge. She influences Tekebay through fear and persuasion, pushing him into actions he does not fully understand. She uses superstition, dreams, and rituals to justify her plans, giving them the appearance of tradition. Her manipulation allows her to maintain power without openly showing aggression. This calculated behavior makes her more dangerous than a directly violent person, because her cruelty is planned and disguised.

Authoritarian Buken rules the household with absolute authority. She expects complete obedience from servants, her husband, and even other relatives. No one dares to oppose her openly, and her decisions shape daily life in the yurt. Her authority is built on fear, social status, and tradition rather than respect. She uses her position to enforce hierarchy and punish anyone who challenges her. When Zuurakan resists, Buken perceives it as a threat to her power and reacts harshly. Her authoritarian nature reflects the rigid structure of the old feudal order, where dominance was maintained through intimidation.

Vengeful Buken's vengeful character is one of her most destructive traits. She does not forget insults or resistance, and she carefully plans revenge against those who oppose her. After Zuurakan escapes and later returns, Buken cannot accept that a servant defied her authority. She waits patiently for the right moment to strike, even arranging an attack disguised as a "cure." Her desire for revenge is stronger than reason or compassion. This vengefulness reveals her wounded pride and fear of losing control. Through Buken, the novel shows how personal hatred can become a tool of social oppression.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Patriarchy: Men

1) Honor and Violence

Male honor is not a private virtue but a social currency maintained through the visible control and punishment of women. When this "honor" is threatened, men use violence to restore their reputation, regardless of the truth. This is most brutally seen in the tragedy of Gulbubu, the second wife of Serkebay. The first wife of Serkebay, Buken, fueled by jealousy, orchestrates a cold-blooded scheme by planting a herdsman's clothes inside Gulbubu's yurt. She then publicly accuses the young second wife of adultery. Without a trial or a chance for Gulbubu to defend herself, the men immediately reclaim their collective honor through blood. Abyke and the village men gather to witness her destruction; she is beaten, wrapped in a thorny bush, and her head is shaved. In a final act of public humiliation, she is paraded through the village on a camel, forced to admit to a crime she did not commit as a warning to all other women.

A similar weaponization of honor occurs when Batiyna defies the powerful Bolush Maralbay. After she strikes him in self-defense to protect her dignity, the Bolush and his entourage do not admit to their own misconduct. Instead, they spread malicious rumors to turn the community against her. Because a woman's word carries no weight against a government official, the gossip is treated as fact. Kydyrbay, fearing the loss of his own social standing and the "nine penalties" (fines) imposed by the governor, turns his anger toward Batiyna. He views her defiance not as courage, but as a stain on his family's name.

Illustrative moment: When Abyke and the village men gather, they do not search for the truth. Instead, they seek to restore Serkebay's reputation. Gulbubu is dragged before the community, while her confusion and protests are ignored. She is beaten and wrapped in a thorny bush that tears her flesh. Her

hair, a traditional symbol of beauty and maidenhood, is shaved off, and she is paraded through the village on a camel as a public object of shame.

This scene is a terrifying display of patriarchal power. Children hide, and even the dogs fall silent, showing that the violence is intended to frighten the entire community. By forcing Gulbubu to publicly repeat that she is an adulteress, the men turn her into a warning for other women. It does not matter that the evidence was planted by the jealous Buken. What matters is that the men demonstrate their absolute authority. The violence itself becomes a way of protecting male honor, while the village punishes a woman to prove that its men remain in control.

2) Violence: Response to Women's Emancipation

Violence as a response to women's emancipation forms one of the most disturbing and recurring themes in the novel. As women begin to reject traditional roles and seek freedom, education, and public voice, they are met not with acceptance but with brutal physical retaliation. The story clearly shows that the patriarchal system does not give up power willingly; instead, it uses violence to punish, intimidate, and push women back into submission.

Zuurakan is repeatedly attacked because she refuses to remain silent and obedient. After escaping the bay household, she is assaulted in the yurt by men sent by Buken. The violence is carefully planned and disguised as a "cure," showing how tradition can be used to justify brutality against a woman who dares to claim her independence.

Batiyna faces even more direct political violence. After she becomes an active Soviet representative, speaks at public assemblies, confronts powerful men, and demands justice for abused women, she is ambushed on a mountain road, beaten unconscious, and left to die. The attack is clearly meant to stop her work and silence her growing influence.

The murder of Anarhon represents the most tragic expression of this theme. Having broken away from seclusion and traveled as a delegate to fight for women's rights, she is killed by forces connected to the old order. Her death serves as a terrifying warning to any woman who chooses emancipation over traditional obedience.

Through these events, the novel reveals a harsh reality: every step toward freedom carries the risk of violence. Whether resisting domestic abuse, speaking in public, or working for legal change, women who challenge the old system become targets. The author powerfully suggests that true emancipation is not only a political struggle but a dangerous personal battle that demands immense courage.

Illustrative moment: A striking illustrative moment is the murder of Anarhon. After traveling with the other women delegates, participating in public life, and embracing new freedoms, she becomes a symbol of the changing role of women. Yet her transformation provokes deadly resistance. When Kopylova enters the hospital in distress and announces that Anarhon has been murdered, the news reveals how violently the old order reacts against women who step beyond tradition. Her death is not an isolated tragedy but a sign of the larger conflict between the past and the emerging social order. Those who fear losing power respond with force, trying to halt change through fear and bloodshed.

At Anarhon's memorial, Batiyna speaks passionately against violence and oppression, transforming grief into determination. This moment captures the painful cost of social transformation: progress is real, but it is achieved through suffering, sacrifice, and the courage to continue despite danger.

Gender / Women

1) Women's Discrimination and oppression

Women's oppression is shown through the scenes in which girls are handed from one household to another without being asked. Batiyna's fate begins with an old agreement made before she is born. When she grows up, her father must send her to Adyke's son Abdyrahman, although no real bridewealth has been paid and she loves Abyl. At the wedding, she refuses in her heart, but the witnesses treat her silence as consent. In her husband's house, Salkynay insults her dowry, overworks her, starves her, and

has her beaten. When Batiyna escapes, men ride after her, bring her back, tie her to the yurt frame, and whip her before others. Later, the court punishes not her abusers but her father, forcing him to pay livestock compensation.

Other women suffer in different but equally painful ways. Aynagul is promised to one man, leaves with Bolot, and is then returned after clan elders negotiate to prevent war. Her feelings disappear beneath arguments about honor, bride claims, and clan reputation. Later, Manapbay takes her again through deception, and even then men discuss family shame more than her own will.

Gulsun shows another cruel scene: an eighty-year-old Asantay marries her while she is still almost a child. She plays with dolls, fears her old husband, and speaks to Batiyna with confusion rather than maturity. Her death in childbirth exposes the cost of forcing a child into a wife's role.

Kanymbubu's story is perhaps the starkest. A poor family cannot repay a lambskin debt, so the twelve-year-old girl is given to the old moneylender Tilep. Her mother begs, the girl tries to run away, but she is caught and married off. Through these scenes, women's lives are treated as payment, proof of honor, or clan property.

Illustrative moment: One of the clearest moments of women's oppression occurs when Batiyna tries to escape her first marriage. After being insulted, overworked, beaten, and humiliated in Adyke's camp, she disguises herself and rides into the mountains at night, hoping to return to freedom and to the people who love her. Her escape is not treated as a desperate act of survival. Instead, Adyke and his men pursue her as if she were stolen property. When she is caught, the question is not why she fled or what she suffered, but who has the right to control her.

Even Jusup, who tries to protect her, cannot stand against Adyke's influence and the authority of powerful elders. Batiyna is returned to the abusive household, publicly humiliated, tied to the yurt frame, and beaten. This scene shows that her body, movement, and future are controlled by men: her husband's family, clan elders, and customary law. Her suffering matters less than preserving male honor and household authority.

2) The Vulnerability of Women

The novel portrays the deep vulnerability of women living in a society shaped by poverty, patriarchal authority, and shifting power structures. Women are often left without protection, dependent on men who may fail or betray them, and exposed to violence, deception, and exploitation. Their vulnerability is not a sign of weakness but a result of the unequal social conditions that surround them.

Zuurakan's life clearly reflects this vulnerability. As a servant, she has no legal rights and no protection from abuse. Her husband Tekebay is too weak to defend her, leaving her exposed to the cruelty of the household. After she escapes, she becomes even more vulnerable in the outside world. Traders treat her as property, gamble over her, and attempt to control her future. Despite her courage, her position as a lone woman makes her a constant target for exploitation.

Batiyna, although stronger in social status, is also vulnerable. Her work for women's rights places her in danger, and she is violently attacked on the road. The murder of Anarhon further shows how exposed women remain, even when supported by new laws. Cholpon, kidnapped and hidden in a smoky pit, represents the extreme vulnerability of young girls who have no power to resist forced marriage.

Yet the novel does not present vulnerability as permanent helplessness. The women respond to their exposed conditions with resilience, resistance, and solidarity. Zuurakan refuses to remain a victim, Batiyna fights publicly for protection, and other women begin to support one another. Through these contrasts, the novel highlights both the dangers women face and their capacity to struggle against them. Vulnerability becomes the starting point for transformation, showing why social and legal change is urgently needed.

Illustrative moment: After being kidnapped for forced marriage, Cholpon is hidden by Shaymerden's wife inside a smoky storage pit, where she nearly suffocates. When the police finally discover her, she is barely alive, and her grandfather Bayterek collapses in despair, believing she is dead.

This moment captures the extreme powerlessness of women and girls within an unjust social order. Cholpon has no ability to resist or protect herself; she is taken by force and treated as property. The scene also shows the beginning of change, as Soviet authority intervenes and arrests those

responsible. Through Cholpon's suffering and rescue, the novel exposes the injustice women face and the urgent need for legal protection and social transformation.

Marriage:

1) Forced marriage

Forced marriage is one of the central realities shown through Batiyna's life. Her first marriage is not based on affection or consent but on an old pact made by men before she was born. Her grandfather's unequal agreement with Satylgan becomes a burden passed down to Kazak and then to Batiyna. When Adyke's family finally demands the bride, Batiyna must marry Abdyrahman, Adyke's son, although her heart belongs to Abyl. Her parents know the marriage will bring pain, but they are trapped by the oath, custom, and fear of disgrace. The wedding therefore becomes not a celebration of love, but the fulfillment of a debt.

Batiyna's life in her first husband's household proves how little value her consent has. She is mistreated by Salkynay, beaten, starved, and forced into exhausting labor. When she tries to escape, her attempt is judged not as a cry for help but as an offense against her husband's family. The tribal court listens to Adyke's claims and orders Kazak to pay a heavy livestock fine. Batiyna's suffering disappears behind calculations of bride-price, honor, and compensation.

Her second marriage also grows out of debt. Because Kazak cannot pay the fine imposed after Batiyna's escape, he accepts Kydyrbay's proposal and gives her to Alymbay, the son of Asantay. Again, Batiyna's future is negotiated by men. She is asked to accept the marriage for her father's sake, not because she desires it. Although she tries to set conditions, her choice remains limited by poverty and family obligation.

Other women's stories repeat this pattern. Gulsun is married as a teenager to the elderly Asantay, while Kanymbubu is given to Tilep to settle a lambskin debt. Through these scenes, the novel presents marriage as a social transaction in which women's lives are exchanged for honor, livestock, and survival.

Illustrative moment: After Batiyna escapes from her abusive first husband, Abdyrahman, Adyke takes Kazak to a tribal court. The judges side with the wealthy landlord and order Kazak to pay a heavy compensation in livestock. For a poor hunter, this debt is impossible to meet. Batiyna's future is then discussed not as a matter of love or personal choice, but as a way to save her father from ruin.

When Kydyrbay proposes marriage between Batiyna and Alymbay, the arrangement is presented as a practical solution. Batiyna sees Alymbay and immediately feels disappointment and fear; he appears dull, clumsy, and emotionally distant. She begs her mother not to force her into the match, but Kazak sees no other way to escape the debt. Batiyna eventually agrees out of pity for her father, not desire for the groom.

2) Child Marriage

Child marriage is one of the most painful injustices shown in the novel, especially through the fate of Gulsun and Kanymbubu. These girls are not prepared for marriage emotionally, physically, or socially, yet their lives are handed over to older men because poverty and custom leave them no protection. Their stories reveal how childhood can be erased by decisions made in the name of family survival, debt, or male privilege.

Gulsun's marriage to Asantay is the clearest example. Asantay is already eighty years old when he takes her as his wife. Gulsun is still a teenager, closer to childhood than adulthood. She still plays with dolls and spends time with girls her own age, but society suddenly expects her to behave as a married woman. No one openly challenges Asantay because he is wealthy and powerful. His age and status silence criticism, while Gulsun's fear and confusion remain hidden inside the household. When Batiyna meets her, she sees not a mature wife but a frightened child forced into an adult role.

Kanymbubu's story shows another path into child marriage: debt. She is only twelve when she is given to Tilep, a fifty-year-old moneylender, because of a lambskin debt. Her mother pleads desperately, but the poor widow has little power against men who treat the girl as repayment. Kanymbubu tries to

escape, proving that she does not accept the marriage, yet she is captured and returned. Her tears and fear do not change the decision.

Through these girls, the novel shows that child marriage is not simply a private family matter. It is tied to wealth, debt, and social authority. Gulsun and Kanymbubu lose childhood, safety, and freedom before they can understand the world around them. Their suffering makes visible the cruelty of a system that allows powerful men to take young girls and call it marriage.

Illustrative moment: Gulsun is the teenage wife of Asantay, who is already eighty years old. Although she is recognized as a married woman and wears the *elechek*, the traditional headdress of married women, she remains emotionally a child. Instead of performing household duties, she spends her days and evenings playing with dolls and other children, returning to the house only at night. She confides to Batiyna that she is frightened of Asantay and dreads sharing the night with him. Her behavior reveals the sharp contrast between the social identity imposed upon her and her psychological immaturity.

Gulsun's later death during childbirth exposes the devastating consequences of child marriage. Her childhood is taken from her before she is physically and emotionally prepared for adulthood, marriage, or motherhood. Through Gulsun's story, the novel presents child marriage as a hidden domestic tragedy, exposing the emotional trauma and physical dangers faced by girls whose lives are determined by patriarchal custom rather than their own readiness or choice.

POLITICS

Conflict: Tradition versus Soviet Reform

The conflict between traditional authority and Soviet reform is one of the central tensions in the novel. The old order is represented by wealthy landowning households, patriarchal customs, arranged and forced marriages, bride price, and the unquestioned power of male elders. In this system, women are expected to obey their husbands, serve rich families, and remain silent in public life. Zuurakan's suffering in the household where she works shows how tradition can become a tool of control. Physical punishment, superstition, and strict hierarchy maintain the dominance of elites like Serkebay and Buken. Custom functions as an unwritten law, leaving little space for personal freedom.

In contrast, Soviet reform introduces new legal principles that promote equality and women's rights. Through Batiyna's work as a representative, the novel presents public assemblies where men are ordered to step down from their horses and women are invited to move forward and speak. New laws challenge bride kidnapping, polygamy, and forced marriage. The rescue of Cholpon illustrates how state authority begins to interfere in private family matters that were once protected by tradition and silence.

Yet the transformation is difficult and contested. Many men react with hostility, mocking female delegates and seeing women in leadership as a threat to established norms. Even when legal structures change, social attitudes remain resistant. Influential figures attempt to manipulate the law to defend their reputation and conceal wrongdoing.

Through these opposing forces, the novel portrays a society in transition, where long-standing customs collide with revolutionary reforms, shaping new possibilities and deep conflicts in everyday life.

Illustrative Moment: When Batiyna arrives as a Soviet representative, the men are seated on horseback, maintaining their traditional display of authority, while the women stand behind them in silence. Batiyna orders the men to dismount and invites the women to step forward. This simple action disrupts the established hierarchy. The men react with confusion and quiet resentment, but they obey.

In that moment, two systems directly confront each other: the old custom that places men above women, and the new law that demands equality. The physical act of changing positions symbolizes the broader social transformation taking place in the village.

Power: Abuse of Authority

The novel shows that authority, whether traditional or Soviet, can become cruel and unjust when used for personal interest rather than justice. Characters like Buken and Serkebay represent the older form of power rooted in wealth, status, and fear. In their household, authority is maintained through intimidation, humiliation, and violence. Buken uses superstition and manipulation to justify her actions,

while Serkebay relies on influence and reputation to silence criticism. Their power is not based on fairness but on control, and those beneath them suffer without protection.

However, the novel also suggests that abuse of authority is not limited to the old order. Barskan, a Soviet security officer, represents a new kind of power that can also be misused. When his parents and brother are arrested for kidnapping and hiding Cholpon, he does not seek truth or justice. Instead, he uses his position to demand their release. He threatens Temirbolotov, claiming he will complain to Moscow and use higher political connections to protect his family. Barskan's reaction shows how loyalty to family and personal pride can corrupt official responsibility.

Temirbolotov's refusal to give in highlights the tension within the new system. The law is meant to protect the weak, yet individuals within it may still attempt to manipulate power for private benefit. Through these contrasting figures, the novel demonstrates that injustice can exist under any system if authority is not guided by integrity. True justice depends not only on laws but on the moral strength of those who enforce them.

Illustrative moment: In the wealthy household Buken organizes a so-called "treatment" for Zuurakan. Pretending concern, she secretly arranges for several men to seize Zuurakan inside the yurt. The act is presented as a ritual cure, but in reality it is punishment and revenge disguised as tradition. Tekebay stands nearby, powerless and afraid, while Buken controls the situation without openly showing violence herself.

This scene illustrates how authority can hide cruelty behind custom and social status. Buken does not need to strike Zuurakan directly; her power lies in commanding others and shaping the narrative. The abuse is justified as tradition, making resistance even more difficult. The moment reveals how unchecked authority becomes dangerous when it is protected by fear and silence.

Freedom:

1) Resistance and Awakening

Batiyna's resistance does not appear suddenly; it grows slowly out of years of humiliation, violence, and helpless observation. At first, she endures because she believes obedience may protect her parents from shame. She accepts her first marriage to Abdyrahman, though she loves Abyl, and later agrees to marry Alymbay to save her father from the crushing fine imposed by Adyke's court. In these early moments, her silence is not weakness but survival. She sees that every act of refusal can bring punishment not only to herself, but also to her family.

Her awakening begins when she realizes that her suffering is not individual misfortune, but part of a larger pattern. She watches Gulsun, still almost a child, fear her elderly husband Asantay and later die in childbirth. She sees Kanymbubu given to Tilep to settle a lambskin debt and hears the girl's despair after every failed appeal for freedom. She witnesses Gulbubu's public humiliation after Buken's false accusation. These scenes teach Batiyna that women are not protected by custom; they are sacrificed to it.

Gradually, her compassion turns into defiance. She resists the Bolush when he tries to dishonor her, publicly exposes his wrongdoing, and later confronts Jarban when he seizes horses from poor herders. She encourages Zuurakan to escape and imagines a life beyond clan control. Her questions about religion, law, and justice become sharper as she searches for an answer to women's fate.

After the Exodus and the return from China, the arrival of Soviet power gives Batiyna a language for what she has long felt. She attends the public meeting despite criticism, joins literacy work, and urges women to study. Her private pain becomes a public mission. By challenging forced marriage and female illiteracy, Batiyna transforms from a woman trying to survive oppression into one determined to end it.

Illustrative moment: Batiyna decides to remove her traditional elechek and replace it with a red headscarf. Written from a clear Soviet ideological perspective, the author frames this transition as a radical break from the "darkness" of the past. To the village elders, the elechek is a sacred symbol of a woman's place within the clan and her submission to patriarchal tradition. However, through the lens of the novel's revolutionary message, the heavy, white layers of the elechek are depicted as a physical weight—a symbol of the feudal "chains" that have kept women like Batiyna silent and illiterate.

By donning the red headscarf, Batiyna is not just changing her clothes; she is performing a political act of defiance. The red scarf represents the "New Power," literacy, and the promise of legal equality. When she rides into the village gatherings with her head uncovered by the traditional turban, she causes a scandal. The author uses this moment to show that Batiyna has moved beyond seeking personal safety and has now embraced the role of an activist. To her, the red scarf is a banner of the future, even as the author uses this symbol to emphasize the Soviet rejection of the old, patriarchal social order. This act of "unveiling" her old identity allows her to step into the public sphere as a leader, signaling that her awakening is now complete and irreversible.

2) Female solidarity

Female solidarity is presented as a quiet but essential form of survival for women who have no legal protection in a patriarchal society. Because their lives are controlled by husbands, fathers, and clan elders, women find comfort and safety in one another. This bond is shown most clearly through Batiyna, who cares for younger and more vulnerable women such as Gulsun, Kanymbubu, and Zuurakan.

With Gulsun, Batiyna acts as a protective older sister. She listens to the young bride's fears about the eighty-year-old Asantay and offers tenderness that Gulsun cannot find anywhere else. Their relationship is not based on wealth or family status, but on shared suffering. When Gulsun eventually dies in childbirth, her loss is felt most deeply by Batiyna, who recognizes the injustice that killed her.

Another example is Batiyna's constant effort to help Kanymbubu, the twelve-year-old girl married to the old moneylender Tilep because of a lambskin debt. Batiyna and Kanymbubu spend the winter watching for the mountain path, hoping for rescue. Batiyna encourages the girl, telling her that justice may still arrive. Even after her appeals to the elders fail, she remains Kanymbubu's only source of hope. During the "Great Flight" to China, Batiyna saves her from freezing, demonstrating that their solidarity is also a literal struggle for life.

Finally, Batiyna's encounter with the servant Zuurakan shows how empathy can lead to resistance. Batiyna speaks kindly to the overworked girl, warning her about the cruelty of the landlord's household and encouraging her to value her own strength. This connection later leads to their plan for escape. Through these bonds, the novel shows that although women are legally powerless, their emotional and practical support for one another keeps their humanity alive. Their solidarity is a quiet protest against a world that treats them as property.

Illustrative moment: Kanymbubu arrives at Batiyna's yurt, trembling and in tears after witnessing the brutal public punishment of Gulbubu. In this scene, Batiyna and Gulsun do not turn her away; they bring her inside and offer a quiet sanctuary. Kanymbubu is terrified of her husband, Tilep, and the older women use their words to steady her, advising her on how to survive or seek help from her relatives.

This moment shows that the yurt becomes a space where women can drop the mask of obedience and share their true fears. While the men are outside commanding punishments and discussing "honor," the women are inside performing the emotional labor of healing.

Their solidarity is not about public power, but about the private strength needed to keep a frightened girl like Kanymbubu from collapsing under the weight of her fate. Through this shared comfort, they acknowledge that while they cannot change the law, they will not let one another face the cruelty of the village alone.

3) Women's Struggle for Dignity

The novel presents women's struggle for dignity as a central and continuous theme, expressed through both personal suffering and social resistance. Zuurakan's life reflects the harsh reality faced by many rural women under traditional authority. In the bay household, she is treated not as a human being but as unpaid labor, exposed to insults and physical violence. Her dignity is constantly attacked, yet she does not fully surrender. When she steals horses and escapes into the mountains, this act becomes more than flight—it is a declaration that she will no longer accept humiliation. Even later, when she is deceived by traders and betrayed by Oroz, she ultimately refuses to be treated as property. Her decision to walk away after being gambled away shows that dignity, for her, is more important than security or dependence.

Batiyna's struggle follows a different but related path. She begins as a young woman trapped in forced marriage and poverty, silenced by patriarchal expectations. However, through exposure to Soviet political life, she gains confidence and education. Speaking at congresses and confronting village elites, she demands recognition not only for herself but for all women. Her fight is not limited to personal survival; it becomes a public defense of women's rights and legal protection.

Through both characters, the novel suggests that dignity is not automatically granted—it must be claimed and defended. Whether through physical resistance, public speech, or moral courage, women assert their humanity in a society that often denies it. Their struggle symbolizes a broader transformation in which women move from silence and submission toward voice, independence, and respect.

Illustrative moment: Oroz, drunk and desperate during a gambling game, stakes Zuurakan as if she were property. The men laugh and treat her as part of the wager. In that humiliating instant, Zuurakan realizes that despite everything she has endured, she is still being reduced to an object. Instead of collapsing in silence, she reacts fiercely. She pulls the rug from under the gamblers, disrupts the game, and walks out, stepping over Oroz without looking back.

This moment clearly shows her struggle for dignity. She refuses to accept ownership, rejects humiliation publicly, and chooses uncertainty over degradation. Her action transforms her from victim to decision-maker, proving that dignity is defended through courage and self-respect.