

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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THE STORY OF KOJOMKUL / BAATYR BAYANY (1980)

Kasymaly Bektenov (1910-1975)

Source: Bektenov, K. (1980). *The tale of a hero: Novellas and short stories* (Including the novella *Bone-Deep Revenge*). Frunze: Kyrgyzstan Publishing House.

OVERVIEW

Author **Kasymaly Bektenov** (1910, Kara-Oy village, Issyk-Kul District, Issyk-Kul Region – June 20, 1975, Bishkek) was a Kyrgyz writer, playwright, and actor.

From 1929 to 1934, he worked in the Komsomol committee in the Naryn district and at the state radio committee. He graduated from the A. V. Lunacharsky State Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow in 1941. During World War II, he served in the Soviet Army. From 1945 to 1947, he worked as an actor at the Kyrgyz State Drama Theatre and later as chief director of the regional drama theatre in Przhevalsk city. From 1952 to 1957, he served as director of the Kyrgyz State Drama Theatre. He also worked as deputy chairman of the Union of Cinematographers of Kyrgyzstan and, from 1964, at the Kyrgyz State Philharmonic. In addition, he appeared in several films.

He began his literary career in the 1950s. Between 1953 and 1955, he wrote the short stories *Among the Mountains* (*Too arasynda*), *On the Shore of the Blue Whirlpool Lake* (*Kok irim koldun jeeginde*), *At the Mountain Pass* (*Ashuuda*), and *People of One Workshop* (*Bir tsekhtin adamdary*). In 1955, his plays *Fertile Valley* (*Berekeluu oroon*) and *The Foot Resents the Head* (*But bashka taaranat*) were staged.

Bektenov is also the author of the works *Kuyruchuk* (*Kuyruchuk*, 1960); *Taabaldy Pudovkin* (*Taabaldy Pudovkin*, 1959); *Raikan's Laughter* (*Raikandyn kulkusu*, 1963); *Do Not Forget Me* (*Meni unutpa*, 1971); and the play *Bright Path* (*Aikyn jol*). He also wrote several books for children and other works.

Some of his works have been translated into Russian. He was awarded the Order of the Badge of Honor.

Novella The novella is one of the early autobiographical works that depicts the life of Kojomkul Kaaba uulu during the period of Soviet land reforms and literacy campaigns. It shows the growing tensions between the old wealthy elite and the poor in the remote Suusamyr Valley. Written in the style of early Soviet literature, the story focuses on the establishment of Soviet rule and reflects key themes such as class struggle, the decline of the feudal class, the rise of the poor, and the spread of literacy and social equality.

Background The novella is set in the Suusamyr Valley, a high and isolated mountainous region in central Kyrgyzstan during the early twentieth century. It tells the story of Kojomkul Kaaba uulu, a man of extraordinary physical strength who becomes a legendary figure among his people.

Kojomkul Kaaba uulu (1888–1955) was a famous Kyrgyz wrestler and legendary strongman born in the Suusamyr Valley, in the village of Keng-Suu. Some sources give his birth year as 1889. His father was also known as a brave and strong man.

From a young age, Kojomkul worked as a livestock herder and became known for his extraordinary physical strength. He later became a well-known wrestler and local leader, serving for about twenty years in the Suusamyr region and contributing to community development, including the construction of a school.



He became especially famous for his enormous physical size and strength. At his peak, he stood about 2.36 meters tall (approximately 7 feet 9 inches) and weighed around 165 kilograms (about 364 pounds). His hands, fingers, and overall build were unusually large, making him stand out even among strong men. Stories also describe him lifting a 400-kilogram bull from a ravine and moving the famous “Kojomkul stone,” weighing about 635 kilograms.

Kojomkul held several administrative positions, including leadership in local committees and land management. In 1937, he was briefly arrested during political repression but was later released. He retired in 1948 and worked in horse farming until his death in 1955. He is remembered as a symbol of strength and endurance.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Kojomkul Kaaba uulu – Protagonist of the novella; poor shepherd from Suusamyр Valley; extraordinary physical strength; humble and just; symbol of traditional Kyrgyz heroism and social transformation

Biyaly – Wealthy landlord; employer of Kojomkul; seeks prestige through him; representative of the old elite resisting reform

Barakan Bay – Rich livestock owner; owner of the black camel; values wealth and status; figure of the feudal order

Iskak – Biyaly’s educated son; opportunistic Party member; manipulative; resistant to genuine social change

Japar – Supporter of Soviet reforms; involved in literacy campaign; victim of political revenge

Esenaly and Kasymbek – Soviet representatives; promoters of literacy and new alphabet; agents of social and political change

SYNOPSIS

Kojomkul is a humble shepherd in the remote Suusamyр Valley, renowned for his extraordinary physical strength. The story opens when he rescues a wealthy man’s black camel stuck in the mud, an act that quickly spreads his reputation across the mountains. Though the son of the legendary warrior Kaaba Baatyr, Kojomkul lives in poverty and works for rich landowners who seek to exploit his power for their own prestige at feasts and traditional games.

Throughout the novella, Kojomkul demonstrates both great strength and deep moral integrity. He clears dangerous mountain roads, wins horseback wrestling contests, and lifts heavy animals with ease. Yet he remains modest, even deliberately losing a match to honor his mother’s clan. As Soviet power arrives in the valley, Kojomkul supports the new changes by attending literacy classes and encouraging others, especially women, to study despite resistance from the wealthy elite.

When political tensions lead to violence and the murder of a local official, Kojomkul helps restore order. He stands as a bridge between the old and new worlds—protecting the poor, calming conflicts, and quietly approving the shift toward greater equality. The novella portrays Kojomkul as a national hero whose strength is matched by his dignity and sense of justice during a time of social upheaval.

SCENES

The Black Camel Stuck in the Mud The story takes place in the Suusamyр Valley, one of the high mountainous valleys. It is early spring, and the grass has not yet grown. Camels and cattle feed on the sparse grass in the marsh. The sheep of the wealthy have already consumed the grass in the mountains. There is no good pasture left for the camels; they eat thorns, dry leaves, and wild plants. Near the edge of the marsh walks Barakan Bay’s black camel, weakened after the harsh winter, its two humps nearly collapsed together. The camel is loaded with goods, and a young girl is leading it forward. As it tries to

graze, it becomes stuck in the mud. Despite its loud cries, it cannot free itself and struggles helplessly. Soon, Barakan Bay's servants and young men arrive and see the camel trapped in the marsh.

Attempt to Rescue the Camel Barakan Bay arrives with several people and sees the camel stuck in the mud. He orders them to pull it out from the head and from the tail, but it is impossible. Barakan Bay scolds the young girl for leading the camel into the marsh and also blames his servants for failing to rescue it. He is deeply upset about his camel. When some suggest slaughtering it, he becomes angry. The camel cries in pain. Barakan Bay then asks about Kojomkul, known for his great physical strength. His men reply that Kojomkul is herding sheep. Barakan Bay orders that Kojomkul be invited.

Kojomkul Arrives Barakan Bay becomes very anxious and impatient as he waits for the shepherd Kojomkul, who is late. Someone remarks that the camel is not very important, which makes Barakan Bay angry; he says poor people do not understand the value of livestock. Meanwhile, Kojomkul arrives riding a bull. A man who went to invite him returns on horseback. Barakan Bay scolds him for not giving Kojomkul a horse. The man replies that Kojomkul refused, saying the horse cannot carry his weight.

Kojomkul Saves the Camel Kojomkul sees the camel stuck in the mud but respectfully greets Barakan Bay. He then wraps a rope around the camel's neck and pulls it, and the camel's head slowly comes out of the mud. After that, he pulls the rest of the camel out completely. The camel lies on the ground, covered in thick black mud, and everyone laughs at its miserable appearance. The camel is weak and exhausted. Barakan Bay praises Kojomkul, calling him a true hero. Then he asks Kojomkul to lift the camel and make it stand. Kojomkul holds it with one hand and lifts the camel up with ease. Everyone is amazed by his strength. Barakan Bay orders the camel to be cleaned and covered warmly. He also tells Kojomkul to go back to his sheep so that wolves do not attack them. Kojomkul leaves riding his bull. The weak camel stretches its neck as if thanking him.

Kojomkul Returns Home: Barakan Bay's Yurt Kojomkul returns home from the pasture with his sheep. While he was rescuing the camel, four sheep in his flock gave birth to lambs. He is hungry and tired, and some women offer him *talkan jarma*, a traditional wheat drink. There is no bread in Suusamyr because it is a high-altitude region where wheat does not grow; grain is brought from the Chüy Valley. Kojomkul takes off his handmade leather boots and begins sewing his torn trousers. Soon, he is told that he has been invited to Barakan Bay's house. When he enters the yurt, Barakan Bay sits in the honored place at the back. An older man is also present, Otunchu, a carpenter and blacksmith. He asks Kojomkul which tribe he belongs to. Following Kyrgyz custom, Kojomkul recites his genealogy through several generations. In Kyrgyz tradition, a person who does not know his seven ancestors is considered a slave.

The Son of Kaaba Baatyr Otunchu asks Kojomkul his father's name. "I am the son of Kaaba," Kojomkul replies. Otunchu's eyes widen. "Kaaba Baatyr, the giant warrior?" He says Biyaly biy, the ruler of Kojomkul's village, should not let the son of such a hero wander freely. Then Otunchu tells Kaaba's story. During a feud between wealthy manaps, thieves come at night to steal horses. Kaaba stands alone against them, strong as a mountain. He beats them, captures two, and drags them back in shame. The horses remain safe, the village protected, and Kaaba's name lives among the Kyrgyz people.

Kojomkul and the Landlord's Offer After word spreads that Kojomkul can lift a camel, Biyaly, a wealthy landlord from his home village, learns he is herding for Barakan Bay. Biyaly invites him, saying it is a shame to work elsewhere since other elites might mock him. He offers Kojomkul his own sheep, cattle, and goats to herd, along with a horse and milk. Biyaly argues that as a strong warrior, Kojomkul will make other wealthy people afraid of them. He insists that Kojomkul should serve his own village's landlord rather than a rich person from a different and distant village.

The Luxury of the Yurt and the Coming Soviets Kojomkul is surprised by the richness inside the yurt, looking at the different silk blankets and carpets he does not have. Biyaly asks why he is staring, and Kojomkul replies he is just admiring the interior. Biyaly tells him that by joining him, he will earn fame and participate in the feasts hosted by wealthy people. Kojomkul mentions that people are saying the Soviet government will come soon. Biyaly dismissively replies that he does not care. He focuses on the prestige Kojomkul can bring to his household, ignoring the news of the approaching political changes.

The Legend of the Mountain Road As summer approaches, the people of the Suusamyр Valley begin moving their cattle to the highland pastures. Although the pastures provide excellent grazing, the journey is dangerous because there are no good roads. The path is rocky, tricky, and life-threatening for those traveling with livestock. To help his community, Kojomkul cleans the road by lifting and taking away the massive stones that block the way. By removing these heavy obstacles, he makes the mountain passage safe for everyone. His feat of strength in clearing the road is so remarkable that people still tell legends about it today.

The Feast and the Wrestling Match That summer, a feast is organized, and people gather in the plains as the horse games begin. Everyone starts talking about Kojomkul and his parents, Kaaba and Kyrgool, who worked honestly but lived in poverty. Kojomkul is set to wrestle a Duncan warrior. During the match, the Duncan tells Kojomkul that his mother is from their clan and asks him to lose deliberately for the honor of her people. He claims that if Kojomkul wins, his mother's spirit will be unhappy. To honor his mother's dignity, Kojomkul agrees to lose, and the Duncan wins the match.

Biyaly's Anger and Disappointment The people of the Suusamyр Valley are deeply disappointed by Kojomkul. Biyaly gets very mad and tells Kojomkul that if he had known this would happen, he would not have brought him there. He yells at Kojomkul, saying he is a big shame. While Kojomkul chooses to respect his mother's lineage and the Duncan warrior's request, Biyaly only cares about the loss of prestige. The landlord feels humiliated in front of the other wealthy elites, believing his champion has embarrassed him despite all the talk of his great strength.

The Struggle for Power in Suusamyр As autumn comes, Soviet power is established in Suusamyр, but the local wealthy elite remain strong and refuse to recognize Bolshevik authority. They constantly fight for influence and power, sending their children to Pishpek and Almaty for education by registering them as children of the poor. Most of these children eventually return home. To protect their status, the old wealthy class tries to become part of the Bolshevik power structure, with some even joining the Communist Party. They also attempt to maintain their influence by bribing Bolshevik officials as they navigate the changing political landscape.

Kojomkul and the Challenge Usup, one of the wealthy men, hosts a grand feast where various contests and traditional games are held. As part of the celebration, it is expected that Duncan and Kojomkul will fight each other. However, to everyone's surprise, Duncan refuses to compete despite repeated efforts to persuade him. He understands that Kojomkul is far stronger than he is, and in an earlier contest he had even asked Kojomkul to lose deliberately in his favor. As Duncan belongs to Kojomkul's maternal clan, a sense of family respect also influences his decision. The crowd is left confused, unable to understand his refusal. In the end, the prize is awarded to Kojomkul, further strengthening his reputation among the people.

Er Oodarysh, a Horseback Wrestling Game Another contest follows — er oodarysh, a traditional horseback wrestling game in which riders try to pull each other off their horses. A famous warrior, Abdrakhman, steps forward and challenges Kojomkul. The crowd immediately grows tense, knowing both men are strong and skilled riders. As the match begins, they grip each other tightly while controlling their horses at full strength, each trying to unbalance the other. The struggle becomes increasingly fierce. Abdrakhman attempts bold moves to break Kojomkul's hold, but Kojomkul remains steady and unshaken, using both strength and precise control of his horse. At one point, the clash becomes so intense that it seems Kojomkul might seriously injure or even kill his opponent, and the spectators begin shouting for them to stop. Despite the pleas from the crowd, Kojomkul does not lose control of the situation. He overpowers Abdrakhman, bringing the contest to an end and securing victory, further reinforcing his reputation as an exceptionally strong and dominant warrior.

Voices of the Poor, Pride of the Powerful Usup's feast does not unfold as he had intended. Instead of reinforcing the authority of the wealthy, the gathering is overtaken by the voices of the poor. The atmosphere shifts as people begin to speak openly about politics, declaring that the land belongs to those who work it. This angers the wealthy guests, who insist that the land is their ancestral inheritance. Amid this tension, the crowd calls for a test of strength between Kojomkul and Abdrakhman. A young horse is brought forward,

and each man is challenged to lift it. Kojomkul raises the animal with ease, demonstrating his extraordinary power. Abdrakhman also manages to lift the horse, but it slips from his grasp, revealing the difference in their strength and control.

The Literacy Winter Winter arrives in the high mountain valley of Suusamyr, and the school opens its doors to the children. The contrast is striking: the children of poor families come poorly dressed, shivering in thin clothes, while the children of the wealthy arrive in warm coats, riding strong horses. That autumn, people speak of a new literacy campaign spreading across the region. Yet the reality is harsh, the school building is poorly heated, and there are barely any books to teach with. Esenaly is sent as a representative from the regional authorities, and a young man named Kasymbek arrives as the new teacher assigned to the village.

A First Meeting in the Cold Valley After a long and exhausting journey through the harsh mountain roads, they arrive in Suusamyr cold, tired, and nearly frozen. With no proper lodging available, they are taken in by a local resident's house, where the warmth is barely enough to ease their discomfort. Inside the house, they try to recover from the journey, sharing brief conversations about the difficult conditions of the valley and the lack of proper facilities for education. It is in this moment that Kojomkul arrives to greet them. His presence immediately fills the space—silent but strong, calm yet commanding respect. He welcomes the newcomers without many words, but with a sense of dignity and quiet authority.

Mockery at the Threshold The son of the wealthy man Biyaly, Iskak, joins the group and immediately questions Kasymbek's presence. Esenaly explains that the young man has been sent to teach literacy to the local people, especially the poor, including men like Kojomkul. Iskak responds with a sarcastic grin, mocking the effort: he remarks that only now will the poor become educated, implying they would never have seen a school otherwise. His words reveal his arrogance and deep social divide. It is also suggested that Iskak has not joined the Communist Party out of genuine belief, but rather deliberately entered it in order to create internal conflicts and disrupt the building of the new Soviet system. Through his behavior and comments, he appears to be trying to weaken trust and create tension among the people involved in the reform efforts.

A New Alphabet, A New Order As Iskak continues his mockery, another man, Japar, enters and exposes him, saying that Iskak has concealed his wealthy background to join the Communist Party. Iskak denies this, claiming he was invited instead. At that moment, Kasymbek speaks with authority, declaring that all adults over eighteen must learn the new Latin alphabet as part of the literacy campaign. Iskak responds that he already knows the Arabic alphabet, subtly resisting the change and highlighting the tension between old traditions and the new system.

Learning and Resistance People ask Kojomkul if he wants to study, and he calmly says yes, showing his openness to education. Iskak continues speaking, claiming that attempts to educate women in southern Kyrgyzstan once caused serious conflict, referring to the Basmachi movements as evidence of unrest. He looks down on the people, emphasizing that he was educated in a madrasa and is literate in Arabic script, presenting this as proof of his superiority. His comments create tension in the room and reflect a fear of social change. While some listen quietly, others begin to question his motives and the truth of his claims, revealing growing divisions among those gathered.

Conflict and Isolation Japar interrupts Iskak, stating that his father Biyaly went to the Andijan bazaar to sell cattle and is responsible for spreading these rumors. Iskak defends his father, insisting he is not guilty. Later, he invites Esenaly and Kasymbek to his home for a lavish dinner, but they refuse. Japar argues they should not stay with a wealthy man and reminds everyone that Iskak once humiliated Kojomkul when he worked as his shepherd. Iskak, increasingly isolated, eventually leaves.

Education and Hardship in the Village All the people in the village begin attending school, where Kasymbek teaches them how to read and write. The community makes a strong effort not to miss the lessons. However, the school building is very cold and only heated with firewood; when the fire is turned off, children and adults breathe into their hands to keep warm. Kojomkul slowly learns to write, carefully forming his name, "Kaaba uulu Kojomkul," with his large, rough hands. Despite these efforts, life remains

extremely difficult. The poor people are still hungry, with no cattle, meat, or milk to sustain them. As the literacy campaign continues, they begin to wonder whether the Soviets can truly improve their lives, since hunger and hardship still dominate their daily existence.

Rumors, Fear, and the Call for Education Young students from Pishpek and Almaty arrive during summer holidays to support the literacy campaign and help teach the villagers. However, attendance among women suddenly drops. Monoldorov, a government official, gathers a meeting and asks why women have stopped coming to school. Jeentay, a local man, explains that wealthy people and religious leaders spread rumors that women's hair will be cut, bringing shame in Kyrgyz culture, and that they will be forced to marry Russians or others. The official dismisses these claims as rumors. Kojomkul then urges the villagers to send their daughters and wives back to school.

Feast at Ketmen-Tobo and the End of Disputes Kerimbai, a wealthy man from Ketmen-Tobo, hosts another grand feast where horse games are held once again. During the gathering, Biyaly, who was once Kojomkul's employer, asks for help in settling disputes that arise in the competition. However, the situation turns tense, and he ends up being publicly disgraced by the crowd. Kojomkul steps in and calls for the disputes to stop, and the people agree to his words. Because of his intervention, Biyaly is spared from further violence, as he is severely beaten and leaves the feast wounded and exhausted. The villagers listen to Kojomkul and stop the fighting, realizing that without his calm authority, Biyaly could have been killed.

Life on the Pasture and the Contest of Strength Kojomkul shares stories from his life that deeply interest his companions. His memories reflect his strength, struggles, and experiences that shaped him as a man. He recalls an event when people arranged a match between him and the famous Teke Baatyr in er oodarysh, the traditional horseback wrestling game where riders try to pull each other off their horses. During the intense struggle, Kojomkul fights with great force and control, and in the heat of the contest Teke Baatyr's leg is broken, leaving the spectators shocked by the severity of the match.

The Fall of Teke Baatyr Kojomkul continues sharing stories as they travel across the pasturelands. He recalls that, despite losing the er oodarysh contest, Teke Baatyr showed respect toward him afterward. Teke Baatyr himself was a well-known and honorable warrior, admired for his courage and fairness. Kojomkul explains that he was not only strong in battle but also a just protector of the poor, defending them from thieves and local oppressors. However, Kojomkul then tells a tragic part of his story. In a conflict between two oppressive groups from the Talas region, Teke Baatyr becomes involved in a violent clash and is ultimately killed. His death marks the end of a respected warrior whose life was defined by strength, justice, and loyalty to the weak.

Akbalban and Kojomkul: Clash at Kerimbai's Feast Ketmen-Tobo Valley is famous for Kerimbai Manap, who hosts a large feast and invites people from a wide region. Among his followers is Akbalban, a well-known warrior. The crowd begins to desire an exciting contest between Akbalban and Kojomkul, hoping to witness a powerful clash between two strong men. During the encounter, Akbalban tries to use tricks against Kojomkul. He runs away, climbs onto a horse, and attempts to hide behind Kerimbai Manap. The people from the Suusamyr Valley feel both sad and ashamed by the situation. However, Kojomkul remains calm, catches Akbalban by the wrist, and fights with great force. In a sudden and intense struggle, he knocks Akbalban down, and Akbalban loses consciousness. Kojomkul's people are overjoyed by his victory.

The Confiscation at Turukmen's House Turukmen Sarybek uulu, a wealthy man who grows alfalfa between Jumgal and Suusamyr, has long benefited from selling his harvest. One day, he receives an unexpected visit from Esenaly, Japar, Kojomkul, and other government officials. They arrive at his house carrying an official decree announcing that his land is to be confiscated. The news shocks Turukmen and his family. They react with anger and curses, unable to accept the decision. Turukmen strongly objects, insisting that the land is his rightful property. He becomes increasingly furious at the fact that the poor people, whom he once looked down on, are now taking control and ruling the village.

Begging for Revenge and the End of Old Privilege Turukmen, in a moment of desperation, turns to Kojomkul for help. As he speaks, he also recalls his past with his wife, describing how they once lived in great wealth. He says that food was always abundant in their home, and when there was excess, they

would throw it into water, as his wife believed it was better to waste food than to give it to the poor. In anger and frustration, Turukmen asks Shakkulu, Bekkulu, and Iskak to take revenge for him against Japar, blaming him for everything that has happened. Although Kojomkul is physically powerful and imposing, he speaks very little. Having lived through oppression himself, he understands the suffering of ordinary people. Despite the tension and conflict, he feels a quiet approval that the poor are beginning to live under conditions of greater equality.

The Killing of Japar and the Shadow of Fear A group of brothers: Shakkulu, Bekkulu, Baimamat, and Jekshen operate as bandits in the region. One of them, Jekshen, kills Japar, a local government official, on his way to a meeting in the town of Naryn. The murder is linked to growing political tensions in the region. Japar had previously played a role in causing Iskak, the son of Biyaly, to lose his position and membership in the Communist Party. In addition, he was involved in the confiscation of Turukmen's land, which deeply angered Turukmen and his family. Feeling humiliated and powerless, Turukmen personally turns to those men and asks them to take revenge against Japar, holding him responsible for his losses and suffering. During the act, the bandit brothers taunt Japar, saying that he was once a beggar and that they had hesitated to kill him earlier because they feared Kojomkul. As the killing takes place, a man named Abdrakhman witnesses the scene but mistakenly believes they are only joking.

The Search for Japar and the Crying Camel Kojomkul and others learn that Japar has been killed, but his body has gone missing. Soon, poor people who had joined the Communist Party gather and express their condolences. They capture Jekshen, bind him, and order him to reveal where the body has been hidden. The entire village joins the search for Japar. During the search, something unusual happens—a camel begins to cry and refuses to stop. The people take this as a sign and believe that Japar's body must be nearby. Following this, they locate his body and bury him with honor, with Kojomkul and others leading the funeral rites. In the end, the perpetrators connected to the old oppressive order and the murder are caught, and justice is restored in the village.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kojomkul

Kojomkul Kaaba uulu is portrayed as both a legendary strongman and a morally grounded individual shaped by hardship. Although famous for his extraordinary physical power, lifting camels, clearing mountain roads, and defeating skilled opponents, his strength is not his only defining trait. More important is his humility. Despite public admiration, he remains modest, speaks little, and does not seek fame or wealth.

Born into poverty as the son of Kaaba Baatyr, Kojomkul inherits a legacy of bravery and justice, yet he must build his own reputation through action. He works as a shepherd for wealthy landlords who attempt to use his strength for their own prestige. However, he is never fully controlled by them. His decisions are guided by personal honor, as shown when he deliberately loses a wrestling match to respect his mother's lineage.

Kojomkul also represents moral stability during political upheaval. As Soviet reforms reach Suusamy, he supports literacy and social change, quietly aligning himself with the poor rather than the elite. He avoids unnecessary violence, calms disputes, and acts as a protector of the community.

Ultimately, Kojomkul embodies both the traditional Kyrgyz hero, physically powerful, honorable, and loyal, and a symbolic figure of transformation, bridging the old nomadic order and the emerging Soviet society.

Strong Kojomkul is exceptionally strong, and his physical power defines his public image. He rescues a camel from deep mud, lifts heavy animals, clears massive stones from mountain roads, and defeats skilled warriors in traditional contests. His strength reflects the harsh mountain environment, where endurance and resilience are essential for survival. In Kyrgyz culture, physical power symbolizes courage and capability, and Kojomkul embodies these ideals. However, his strength also exposes social inequality, as wealthy landowners attempt to use his abilities to increase their prestige. Despite this, he never misuses his power. Instead of intimidation, his strength serves protection and community welfare, reinforcing his heroic yet grounded character.

Humble Kojomkul remains humble despite his legendary reputation. He does not boast about victories or seek praise after performing remarkable feats. After saving animals or winning competitions, he quietly returns to his duties as a shepherd. Unlike wealthy landlords who crave recognition, Kojomkul avoids attention and lives simply among the poor. His modest behavior earns him genuine respect from ordinary villagers. He speaks little and lets actions define him. This humility strengthens his moral authority, as people trust him not because he demands admiration, but because he never places himself above others. His greatness lies in character rather than pride.

Honorable Kojomkul is deeply honorable, guided by tradition, loyalty, and fairness. He respects elders, values genealogy, and protects his family's dignity. When he deliberately loses a wrestling match to honor his mother's clan, he demonstrates that personal glory matters less than moral responsibility. He avoids unnecessary violence and often calms disputes, choosing peace over aggression. His honor connects him to his father's legacy as a just warrior. Even during political conflicts, he stands with the poor rather than seeking personal advantage. This strong moral code makes him not only physically powerful but ethically admirable.

Progressive Although rooted in tradition, Kojomkul is progressive in his openness to change. When Soviet reforms introduce literacy campaigns, he willingly learns to read and write despite difficulties. His participation symbolizes hope and social advancement for the poor. He encourages others, including women, to attend school, supporting equality and education. Unlike the old elite who resist reform, Kojomkul recognizes the value of knowledge and fairness. His readiness to adapt shows flexibility and wisdom. By embracing education while maintaining traditional values, he becomes a bridge between the old nomadic society and the emerging Soviet order.

Biyaly

Biyaly is a wealthy and influential landlord in the Suusamyr Valley. He owns large herds of livestock and holds significant power over the local community. As Kojomkul's employer, Biyaly tries to use the shepherd's extraordinary strength to increase his own prestige among other wealthy elites. Proud and status-conscious, he values traditional social hierarchy and resists any changes that might threaten his position. Biyaly represents the old feudal order, where wealth and authority were concentrated in the hands of a few landowners.

Proud Biyaly is deeply proud and concerned with his public image. He takes pride in his position as a landlord and wants to be respected by other wealthy men. When Kojomkul loses a wrestling match, Biyaly becomes extremely angry because he feels humiliated in front of his peers. His pride prevents him from accepting defeat or criticism. He believes his status gives him the right to control others, including Kojomkul. This excessive pride blinds him to the changing times and makes him resistant to new ideas. Biyaly represents the old elite whose self-importance prevents them from adapting to social transformation.

Manipulative Biyaly is manipulative and uses people for his own benefit. He offers Kojomkul better conditions and a horse, not out of kindness, but to keep the strong shepherd working for him instead of serving others. He tries to influence Kojomkul by appealing to his sense of loyalty and village pride. Biyaly also supports his son Iskak's opportunistic behavior in the Communist Party, showing his willingness to play both sides for personal gain. His actions are calculated, and he rarely acts without considering how it will affect his power and reputation.

Arrogant Biyaly is arrogant, believing his wealth makes him superior to others. He looks down on poor shepherds and treats them as servants beneath his dignity. At feasts, he demands respect and expects others to admire his possessions and status. When Kojomkul embarrasses him by losing intentionally, Biyaly shouts in anger, unable to accept any loss of face. He mocks the poor and dismisses Soviet reforms as threats to his privileged life. His arrogance blinds him to changing realities. He refuses to recognize that power is shifting away from the old elite. Eventually, his pride leads to public disgrace at Kerimbai's feast, where villagers reject him and he is beaten, showing the collapse of his once-feared authority.

Iskak

Iskak is the son of the wealthy landlord Biyaly and has been educated in a madrasa, learning to read and write in Arabic script. Unlike his father, Iskak appears modern and speaks with educated confidence. When Soviet representatives arrive in Suusamyr to promote literacy, Iskak mocks their efforts, claiming the poor were never meant to be educated. He sarcastically remarks that only now will the poor finally learn to read. Despite his wealthy background, Iskak secretly joins the Communist Party, not out of genuine belief, but to gain influence and create internal conflicts. He conceals his family's riches, presenting himself as a common villager. His presence at meetings creates tension, as he questions reforms and spreads doubt among the people. Iskak represents the deceptive face of the old elite, who infiltrate the new system to protect their fading power.

Opportunistic Iskak is highly opportunistic. He joins the Communist Party not out of conviction, but to protect his family's wealth and maintain influence in the changing political climate. By hiding his rich background, he attempts to gain power within the new system while secretly working against real reforms. His actions show that he is willing to betray his class origins when it benefits him, yet he has no true loyalty to the poor or to Soviet ideals. This makes him a calculating and self-serving character.

Arrogant Iskak displays clear arrogance toward the poor and uneducated villagers. He mocks the literacy campaign and looks down on people like Kojomkul, believing that education is unnecessary for them. He takes pride in his madrasa education and Arabic knowledge, using it to feel superior. His arrogance prevents him from respecting the efforts of ordinary people to improve their lives, revealing his deep class prejudice despite his involvement in the new political order.

Manipulative Iskak is manipulative in his interactions. He uses polite language and formal behavior to hide his true intentions. He spreads rumors against Soviet policies and tries to create confusion among villagers. At the same time, he pretends to support the Communist Party when it serves his interests. His ability to play both sides makes him dangerous, as he undermines the new system from within while appearing cooperative on the surface.

Resistant to Change Although he appears modern because of his education, Iskak is fundamentally resistant to real social change. He fears losing the privileges his family has always enjoyed. He spreads fear among women about education and supports his father's traditional views in private. Iskak wants to preserve the old hierarchy while only making superficial adjustments to survive under Soviet rule. His resistance shows that not all educated people welcomed progress during this period.

Japar

Japar is a leader of the local municipality who supports the new Soviet reforms and actively participates in building the new social order. He welcomes the literacy campaign and encourages poor families to send their children to school. When Soviet representatives Esenaly and Kasymbek arrive in Suusamyr, Japar helps them find shelter and explains local conditions. He openly criticizes the wealthy elite, exposing Iskak's hidden background as the son of Biyaly. Japar reminds villagers that Iskak once humiliated Kojomkul when he worked as his shepherd. His honesty and courage make him a target for the old elite. During land confiscations, Japar assists officials in taking property from wealthy landowners like Turukmen. His involvement in these reforms angers the powerful, who see him as a traitor to their class. Japar represents the brave ordinary people who risk everything to support justice and equality in the changing valley.

Progressive Japar strongly supports Soviet reforms, particularly the literacy campaign. He helps promote education among adults and encourages villagers, including women, to attend school. Unlike the wealthy elite, he believes that knowledge and equality can improve the lives of the poor. His progressive views make him an active participant in transforming traditional society. Through Japar, the novella shows the efforts of local people who welcomed the new political order and worked to spread its ideas in remote mountain regions.

Courageous Japar demonstrates courage by openly challenging the old wealthy class. He exposes Iskak's attempt to hide his rich background and criticizes those who spread rumors against Soviet policies. Despite knowing that the wealthy landowners are angry with him, he continues to support reforms. His bravery ultimately costs him his life, as he is murdered by bandits hired by the old elite. Japar's courage highlights the personal risks faced by those who supported change during this turbulent period.

Principled Japar is a principled man who acts according to his beliefs rather than personal gain. He refuses to stay silent when he sees injustice or manipulation by the wealthy. He stands with the poor and supports fair policies, even when it puts him in conflict with powerful figures like Biyaly and his family. His strong moral stance makes him respected by ordinary villagers. Japar represents those who genuinely believed in building a more equal society.

Dedicated Japar is deeply dedicated to his work as a local official. He actively participates in government efforts, including land redistribution and education campaigns. He travels long distances and works under difficult conditions to serve the new system. His dedication is shown in his commitment to helping the community, even at great personal risk. Unlike opportunistic characters, Japar works selflessly for the benefit of the people rather than for his own advantage.

THEMES

Character: *The Nature of True Strength* While Kojomkul's physical strength is remarkable, the novella emphasizes that real strength lies in moral integrity, humility, and justice. From the opening scene, when he pulls Barakan Bay's black camel from deep mud, his power is evident. Yet even then, he does not boast or demand reward. He greets the bay respectfully and quietly returns to his sheep. His strength serves life, not pride.

At feasts and competitions, Kojomkul repeatedly proves he can overpower any opponent. In er oodarysh, he defeats strong warriors such as Abdrakhman and others who challenge him publicly. However, when the struggle becomes too dangerous and the crowd fears for his opponent's life, he controls himself. He does not allow victory to turn into cruelty. His restraint reveals that true strength includes self-control.

When disputes erupt at Kerimbai's feast and Biyaly risks being killed by an angry crowd, Kojomkul intervenes and calls for calm. The people listen immediately. He prevents bloodshed not through force, but through moral authority. During the literacy campaign, he humbly sits in a cold classroom, learning to write his name with rough hands. His willingness to learn shows another form of strength, the courage to change.

Through these scenes, the novella presents strength as more than muscle. It is endurance in hardship, fairness in conflict, loyalty to family, and responsibility toward the community. Kojomkul carries not only stones and animals but the trust of his people. True strength is power guided by conscience.

Illustrative moment: At Biyaly's feast, Kojomkul faces Dunkan warrior. Dunkan begs him to lose, saying victory would shame his mother's clan. Kojomkul could easily defeat him, yet he chooses honor over pride. He allows himself to fall. The crowd is stunned, and Biyaly rages in anger. But Kojomkul remains calm. In that moment, his moral strength surpasses his physical power, proving that true greatness lies in dignity and self-control.

Class Struggle: The novella centers on the conflict between wealthy landlords and poor villagers, portraying a society divided by property, power, and privilege. From the beginning, this inequality is visible in the scene of Barakan Bay's black camel. The bay's deep distress over his animal contrasts with the quiet suffering of poor shepherds who endure hunger and harsh winters without complaint. When Kojomkul rescues the camel, the wealthy man praises him, yet the social hierarchy remains unchanged. Kojomkul returns to poverty while the bay retains his status.

Biyaly represents the old feudal authority even more clearly. He invites Kojomkul to serve him not out of generosity, but to increase his own prestige at public feasts. At competitions, Kojomkul's victories are treated as Biyaly's glory. When Kojomkul deliberately loses a wrestling match to honor his mother's clan, Biyaly reacts with anger, concerned only about his humiliation before other elites. This moment reveals the selfishness of the ruling class, who view people as tools for reputation.

The arrival of Soviet reforms intensifies the conflict. Literacy campaigns threaten the elite's control over knowledge and influence. Iskak mocks the education of the poor, showing fear of losing superiority. Land confiscations bring the struggle into the open. When Turukmen's property is seized, he cannot accept that poor villagers now hold authority. His bitterness leads to revenge, resulting in Japar's murder. This act of violence exposes how desperately the old elite cling to power.

Kojomkul's position is crucial. Though once employed by landlords, he sides with the poor, supports literacy, and participates in reforms. His moral authority strengthens the lower classes. Through these scenes, the novella presents class struggle as economic conflict, also a transformation of values, leadership, and social justice.

Illustrative moment: When officials arrive at Turukmen's house to confiscate his land, his reaction exposes the depth of class division. He curses the poor villagers and demands revenge, unable to accept that ordinary people now hold power. He recalls how his wife once threw excess food into water rather than feed the hungry. This memory reveals the cruelty of the old order, where the wealthy deliberately wasted resources while the poor starved. Turukmen then begs bandits to kill Japar, the reformer responsible for his loss. His desperation turns to violence, showing how deeply the elite resist equality and how costly change becomes for those who challenge them.

Change: Tradition versus Modernity The novella portrays a society caught between deeply rooted Kyrgyz customs and the sweeping changes brought by Soviet ideology. From the very first chapters, tradition defines every aspect of life. When Kojomkul enters Barakan Bay's yurt, Otunchu asks him to recite his genealogy through seven generations. In Kyrgyz culture, a person who cannot name seven ancestors is considered a slave. Kojomkul proudly declares himself the son of Kaaba Baatyr, connecting himself to a lineage of warriors. This scene shows how identity in the valley is built on blood and heritage, not individual achievement.

Traditional competitions further illustrate this bond with the past. Horse games, wrestling matches, and er oodarysh bring communities together and reinforce clan loyalty. At one feast, Kojomkul faces the Duncan warrior, who asks him to lose for the honor of his mother's people. Kojomkul agrees, choosing clan respect over personal victory. His decision reflects a moral code rooted in ancestry and communal obligation that predates any political system.

Yet modernity arrives relentlessly. The literacy campaign introduces the Latin alphabet to replace Arabic script. Kasymbek declares that all adults over eighteen must learn to read and write. Iskak resists, claiming he already knows Arabic and dismissing the new alphabet as unnecessary. His defense of the old script represents broader resistance to cultural change. Religious leaders and wealthy elites spread rumors that women who attend school will have their hair cut and be forced to marry outside their faith. These fears cause women to stop attending classes until officials and Kojomkul urge them to return.

Kojomkul himself bridges both worlds. He honors genealogy and clan tradition while sitting in a cold classroom, carefully forming the letters of his name with rough hands. His willingness to learn shows that tradition and progress need not conflict. Through these scenes, the novella suggests that communities can preserve their heritage while embracing change, finding balance between the old ways and the new order.

Illustrative moment: A revealing moment occurs when women suddenly stop attending the literacy classes. When officials ask about their absence, villagers explain that wealthy landowners and religious leaders have spread frightening rumors. They claim that women who attend school will have their hair cut, a deep humiliation in Kyrgyz culture, and will be forced to marry outsiders. Fear spreads quickly through families, and husbands forbid their wives and daughters from returning.

Justice: Injustice and Retribution The novella presents justice as gradual but inevitable, especially for those who abused power under the old feudal system. The wealthy elite, once untouchable in the Suusamyр Valley, begin to lose their authority as Soviet reforms take root. Land confiscations mark the first visible sign of retribution. When officials arrive at Turukmen's house with a decree declaring his property seized, the balance of power shifts dramatically. The man who once wasted food rather than give it to the poor now stands powerless before them. His anger and curses cannot restore what he has lost. This scene illustrates that privilege built on inequality is no longer secure.

Biyaly also experiences public humiliation. At Kerimbai's feast, tensions rise and disputes break out among powerful men. Once respected and feared, Biyaly becomes the target of anger and is beaten

by the crowd. Only Kojomkul's intervention prevents further violence. The moment symbolizes the collapse of the old elite's unquestioned dominance. Their authority, once reinforced by wealth and tradition, now crumbles before the collective will of the people.

The most dramatic act of retribution follows the murder of Japar. Hired bandits kill him in revenge for land reforms and political changes. His death initially spreads fear, suggesting that the old forces still have power. However, the community unites in response. The search for his body becomes symbolic, especially when a camel begins to cry and refuses to move. The villagers interpret this as a sign and soon discover Japar's hidden remains. The crying camel represents truth emerging despite attempts to conceal it.

The bandits are eventually captured, and Japar is buried with honor. Through these events, the novella affirms that injustice may cause suffering, but it cannot endure. Exploitation and violence meet consequences, and a new sense of collective justice replaces the old order's impunity.

Illustrative moment: After Japar's murder, the entire village gathers to search for his missing body. Fear and grief fill the valley, yet the people refuse to remain silent. During the search, a camel suddenly begins to cry loudly and refuses to move from one spot. Its strange behavior draws attention. The villagers interpret it as a sign and begin digging nearby. Soon, they uncover Japar's hidden body. The discovery shocks the community but also unites them. The killers can no longer hide their crime. This moment powerfully symbolizes that truth cannot be buried forever and that justice, though delayed, will ultimately prevail.

Role Model: *The Role and Fame of Kojomkul Kaaba Uulu in Modern Kyrgyzstan* Kojomkul Kaaba uulu holds an important place in modern Kyrgyzstan's historical memory. Beyond the legends of his extraordinary strength, he is remembered as a real contributor to the development of the country. One of his most significant achievements was his role in the establishment of the Suusamyр–Chuy road, which connected the southern and northern regions of Kyrgyzstan. According to popular accounts, he personally removed enormous stones “as large as houses” to help clear the mountain passage. Whether fully factual or partly legendary, these stories transformed him into a mythological hero in the national imagination.

Today, his name symbolizes both physical and moral strength. A major sports arena in Bishkek bears his name, honoring him as a national strongman and warrior. In nomadic Kyrgyz culture, physical endurance and courage have always been highly valued, and Kojomkul embodies these ideals. At the same time, he is respected not only as a warrior figure but also as a man who actively participated in establishing Soviet power in his region.

Kojomkul made a significant contribution to the economic development of the Suusamyр Valley and the Chüy region. For his dedicated labor, he was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labor and received multiple honorary certificates from the leadership of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. These awards recognized his efforts not just as a legendary strongman, but as a hardworking builder of the new society.

He had four sons and one daughter. Two of his sons, Alymbek and Turumbek, died in childhood due to illness. His lineage continued through his sons Mukhtar and Amantay. According to his grandson, Kojomkul once expressed regret that his sons did not become warriors, perhaps reflecting his deep connection to the traditional ideal of the batyr.

When Kojomkul passed away, the entire population of Suusamyр came to bid farewell to the beloved hero. His numerous students carried his body in turns. He was buried three kilometers from his native village in a special mausoleum. Even today, a wide path leads to his grave, and admirers from across Central Asia visit to pay their respects to the man whom people said had muscles made of iron.

Illustrative moment: A defining moment of Kojomkul's fame appears after he rescues Barakan Bay's black camel from the deep marsh. The wealthy men and servants struggle helplessly, unable to free the animal. When Kojomkul arrives, he calmly wraps a rope around the camel and pulls it out with his bare strength. Then, at Barakan Bay's request, he lifts the exhausted camel onto its feet with ease. The crowd stands in amazement. Word of this feat spreads quickly across the valley. From that moment, people begin speaking of him not just as a shepherd, but as a *batyr*, warrior. This scene marks the beginning of his transformation from an ordinary man into a legendary figure admired throughout the region.