

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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***KARGABAY THE ROBBER / KARGABAY KARAKCHY* (1992)**

Asanbek Stamov (1938-2010)

Reference: Stamov, A. (1992). *Jortuul* [The raid]. Uchkun.

OVERVIEW

Author

Asanbek Stamov, a People's Writer of the Kyrgyz Republic, was born on August 28, 1938, in the village of Murake in what is now Moscow District of Kyrgyzstan.

He graduated from the Department of Kyrgyz Language and Literature at Kyrgyz State University in 1962. That same year, he began his career as a teacher at the Toktogul Boarding School in the city of Tokmok.

From 1964 to 1966, Stamov worked as an editor and senior editor for the State Radio Committee. From 1967 to 1969, he served as a senior editor at the Kyrgyz State Publishing House. From 1969 to 1971, he worked as an instructor on the staff of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, the republic's principal political institution within the Soviet system. From 1971 to 1973, he served as director of the Kyrgyz State Publishing House.

In 1973, Stamov was appointed First Deputy Minister of Culture of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (Kyrgyz SSR). From 1985 to 1987, he served as chairman of the republic's State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting. From 1985 to 1990, he was also elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyzstan, the republic's legislative body under the Soviet system.

In 1987, Stamov became director of the Bureau for the Promotion of Fiction under the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan. In 1989, he was appointed editor-in-chief of *Chalkan* magazine. From 1990 until his retirement in 1992, he served as chairman of the *Uchkun* State Concern.

Stamov died on August 7, 2010. On September 17, 2013, the National Library of Kyrgyzstan opened a book and visual exhibition commemorating the 75th anniversary of his birth.

Writing and Literary Work

Asanbek Stamov began his literary career in 1959, when his novella *Ata (Father)* was published in the literary magazine *Ala-Too*. His first book, *Taanyshuu (Introduction)*, was published by Kyrgyzstan Publishing House in 1966. In 1975, he received the Lenin Komsomol Prize of Kyrgyzstan for his novella *Jany tuugan (A New Relative)*.

His collections of short stories and novellas, including *Taanyshuu (Introduction)*, *Kech kuzdo (Late Autumn)*, *Jany tuugan (A New Relative)*, *Noshordon kiyin (After the Downpour)*, *Ak kar (White Snow)*, *Jol boyunda jalgyz tam (The Lone House by the Road)*, *Egiz tal (The Twin Trees)*, and *Chuy dastandary (Tales of Chuy)*, were published in Moscow and included in the *Anthology of Kyrgyz Writers*.

He also translated works by Turkish writer Aziz Nesin and Tatar poet Musa Jalil. His own works were translated into several other languages.

After Kyrgyzstan gained independence, Stamov devoted nearly two decades to researching the history of the Kyrgyz people, focusing particularly on the period from the 16th century onward.

Drawing on this research, he wrote the historical novel *Khan Teyish*. After his death, his family published his complete works in a 12-volume edition.

Novella

The author wrote this novella *Kargabay the Robber* as the opening part of the novel *Jortuul (The Raid)*. It was published in 1992 in Bishkek by the *Uchkun* publishing house. According to the author, after

the collapse of the Soviet Union, book publishing was close to dying out because there was almost no paper. That the book still appeared at that moment, he says, shows the place his works hold in Kyrgyz literature.

Background

The novella is based on the life of Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu, an eighteenth-century Kyrgyz merchant and diplomat who later became the leader of the first official Kyrgyz embassy to the Russian Empire. In Russian historical records, his name is generally written as Abdrakhman Kuchakov. Other historical references also record forms such as Karganbay or Karyganbay, reflecting variations in the way his Kyrgyz name was rendered in Russian sources.

Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu was born into the Kyrgyz communities that had moved into Russian-controlled territories. He spent part of his early life among the Kyrgyz living near the Volga, in the area of present-day Kalmykia. During this period, he became familiar with Russian society and learned to speak Russian fluently and to write in Russian. This experience later became one of the reasons he was chosen for a diplomatic mission to Russia.

After returning to his homeland, Abdurahman became involved in long-distance trade and was known as a Tashkent merchant. His years of travel and commercial activity gave him broad knowledge of Central Asia and Russia. He eventually entered the service of Atake Baatyr Tynay uulu, a leading figure among the northern Kyrgyz. Atake Baatyr was the son of Tynay Biy. Historical sources describe Abdurahman as an experienced merchant, a trusted associate of Atake, and a man familiar with Russian language and customs.

In 1785, Atake Baatyr sent the first official Kyrgyz embassy to Russia. Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu led the delegation, accompanied by Shergazy, Atake Baatyr's trusted adopted son. The embassy left the Chuy Valley in 1785 and reached Omsk on August 23, 1785, before continuing to St. Petersburg. The mission sought closer relations with the Russian Empire and also aimed to improve the routes used by trade caravans between Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Turkestan.

The Kyrgyz envoys reached St. Petersburg in December 1785 and were received at the imperial court. Abdurahman represented the Kyrgyz leadership before the Russian authorities and was able to communicate in Russian, an ability he had acquired during his earlier years in the Volga region. His language skills and experience of Russian life were particularly valuable during the diplomatic mission.

Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu remains an important figure in Kyrgyz diplomatic history. His embassy marked one of the earliest formal attempts by the Kyrgyz leadership to establish direct political and diplomatic relations with the Russian Empire.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Kargabay / Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu — The main character

Shermat — A wealthy and famous merchant

Kuchuk — Kargabay's father

Esenbay — A strong mountain man

Kozuke — Kargabay's relative and companion

Keldibek — Kargabay's companion

Atake Baatyr — A major Kyrgyz leader and the son of Tynay

Tynay Biy — Abdurahman's maternal uncle and a leader among the northern Kyrgyz

SYNOPSIS

Kargabay is born to Kuchuk and grows up as his father's beloved son. Hoping that he will become an educated and respected man, Kuchuk sends him to a medrese in Samarkand. Kargabay learns to read, write, recite the Quran, and study Islamic history, but he cannot adapt to the strict life of the city. He leaves the medrese and returns to the steppe, dreaming of becoming wealthy. He eventually begins kidnapping and selling young girls.

Kargabay takes two girls from Andijan and travels toward Kashgar with Kozuke and Keldibek. During the journey, they are attacked by wolves, and Keldibek is killed. Later, Kozuke is also killed by wolves.

Kargabay continues alone and eventually meets a mysterious man who knows his past. This man is Sher-mat (Abdurahman), an experienced merchant who becomes his companion.

Shermat (Abdurahman) teaches Kargabay about life, wealth, faith, and the dangers of gambling. He also shows him how to recognize signs of buried gold. With Esenbay's help, they eventually discover a large hidden treasure. However, Shermat (Abdurahman) is bitten by a poisonous snake while returning to the cemetery and dies before reaching a healer.

After Shermat (Abdurahman)'s death, Kargabay is questioned about the missing treasure. Later, he returns to his old ways and begins kidnapping girls again. Ashamed of his actions, he finally confesses everything to his father. His father sends him north to his uncle Tynay. In 1756, Kargabay changes his name to Abdurahman and begins a new life among the northern Kyrgyz.

SCENES

Kargabay's Childhood and Education

Kargabay is in Samarkand Kargabay is Kuchuk's son, born when his father is nearly fifty. For many years, he is Kuchuk's only son. Later, Kuchuk has another son, but Kargabay remains his favorite. From an early age, Kargabay is restless and quick-tempered. He often gets into fights with other boys. Wanting him to become a good and educated man, Kuchuk sends him to a medrese in Samarkand. One day, Kuchuk invites the villagers to dinner. As they discuss the history of Islam in Central Asia, Kargabay shares what he has learned at the medrese, impressing everyone with his knowledge. Kuchuk is proud of his son. But Kargabay leaves the medrese before completing his studies and returns home. Kuchuk is deeply saddened and disappointed. The hopes he had placed in his beloved son have been shattered.

Kargabay Cannot Adapt to City Life Kargabay tells his father that he cannot endure the harsh discipline at the medrese. Once, he is beaten for urinating against a wall. Another time, in the bazaar, he is beaten after catching a glimpse of a veiled girl's face as she lifts her veil. Kargabay decides to leave the school. He believes he can read and write, recite the Quran, and perform the religious services required of him. He sees little reason to remain at the medrese. He cannot adapt to life in the city. He is a nomad by blood and by nature, meant to ride freely across the open steppe rather than live behind walls. Kyrgyz women do not cover their faces, either. After returning home, Kargabay dreams of becoming a wealthy merchant like the men he has seen in the cities. From time to time, he brings his father a few gold coins. Kuchuk is pleased and wishes his son a long and healthy life. He never suspects that Kargabay is kidnapping and selling girls.

Kidnapping of the Girls

The Girls Beg for Mercy Kargabay kidnaps two girls from Andijan and takes them on his horse, tying their hands. One girl sits in front of him, while the other sits behind him. When he reaches the village where Kozuke and Keldibek live, the girls realize that he intends to sell them and begin to beg him. "Please, do not sell us!" they cry. Kargabay says, "I have rescued you from the Khan's entertainment house." The girls protest, "No! We would have lived in the palace with the Queen." Then they plead, "We are virgins. Please, make a halal nikah—a lawful Islamic marriage—for us. Do not sell us."

The Journey to Kashgar Hearing the girls' pleas, Kargabay changes his plan. He decides to take them to Kashgar while they are still virgins, believing he can sell them for a higher price. Kozuke and Keldibek are drawn to the girls but Kargabay says, "These sedentary girls are not for us nomads. We need strong women who can set up a yurt, ride horses, and milk cows and mares." The three men travel toward Chinese Turkestan through the Kara-Kulja Valley. Eventually, they reach the home of Temirjan, a wealthy and famous merchant whose name is known throughout China, India, and Afghanistan.

At Temirjan's House That year, Urumqi is renamed Dihua. Alda Seren, the Dzhungar Khan, is slain, and the Chinese Khan orders the Oyrats put to death. The names of cities and places are changed into Chinese, yet the people of the region continue to call the city Urumqi.

Kargabay, Kozuke, and Keldibek bring the girls to Temirjan's house. Delighted by their youth, beauty, and virginity, Temirjan keeps them in his household. In return, he gives Kargabay, Kozuke, and Keldibek some

gold and money. But Kargabay soon gambles it all away and falls into debt. With nothing left to him, he is forced to flee Urumqi with Kozuke and Keldibek.

The Red Wolves of the Endless Steppe Three men cross the endless steppe. Kargabay leads his limping horse. Hungry and exhausted, Kozuke and Keldibek suggest leaving it behind, but Kargabay refuses. “A horse is the wings of a man,” he says, because a horse is essential to a nomad’s journey. They carry *kurut*, dried fermented yogurt balls, and *kymyz*, fermented mare’s milk. When Keldibek reaches toward the *kanjyga*, the saddle straps used to carry their belongings, they see red animals approaching. Keldibek looks closely and says, “They are baby foxes.” But they are not foxes. They are wolves. Suddenly, the young wolves rush toward Keldibek and attack him. Kargabay and Kozuke can only watch in horror as the silent steppe closes around them.

The Horse’s Scream Kargabay finally leaves his horse behind, fearing that their slow pace will attract another pack of wolves. As he and Kozuke continue their journey, they suddenly hear the horse’s terrible scream behind them. Kozuke cries out, but Kargabay says, “They could barely save themselves.” They reach a spring, eat their last food, and fill the *chanach*, a traditional container made from goat leather, with water. Soon they arrive at an old cemetery, where they discover an ancient *kumboz*, a tall tomb built of clay bricks, with fir-wood supports inside. The top of the grave has collapsed, leaving the burial place open to the sky.

Kozuke’s Death Kozuke decides to sleep inside the ruined *kumboz*, while Kargabay climbs onto the top. In the middle of the night, Kargabay hears his brother’s terrible scream. Looking down, he sees wolves howling around the grave, while some have entered and are devouring Kozuke. Kargabay reaches for his knife, but horror overwhelms him. He grips the *turkuk*, a wooden supporting post, and waits helplessly for dawn. At noon, he sees horsemen in the distance and waves his white shirt. They ride toward the grave. Kargabay embraces his brother’s bloody body and begins to tell them his tragic story.

The Meeting with Shermat

The Stranger Who Knows Kargabay Kargabay tells the horsemen that he and his companions have come from Kashgar, a city in present-day Xinjiang, China, historically known as Chinese Turkestan. The men tell him that those lands are under the Dzungars, and that so many people have died that the wolves have grown accustomed to human flesh. They warn Kargabay to be careful, especially without rifles. They are amazed that the wolves even pull Kozuke’s rifle away before attacking him. The travelers have now reached Kara-Kulja in the Fergana Valley, in present-day Kyrgyzstan. One man says, “Come with me. My maternal uncle lives here.” Kargabay refuses, saying he wants to go alone. The man laughs: “If you become lonely, I’ll find you a more beautiful girl than the girls you delivered to Urumqi.” Kargabay is stunned. How does this stranger know him?

The Stranger Reveals His Secrets The man looks at Kargabay and says, “You have sold those girls very cheaply.” Kargabay is shocked again. “You have gold worth almost five horses. Because of that gold, you have taken the wrong road and lost two of your men.” Kargabay stares at him. “How do you know all this about me?” he asks. The man continues, “Your name is Kargabay Karakchy—Kargabay the Robber. You have left the medrese in Samarkand, an Islamic religious school, before completing your studies. You have kidnapped two innocent girls and sold them. I am an *oluya*, a holy man. You have also gambled in Urumqi and lost everything. You have even become the stake in a gambling game and then fled from Urumqi.” Kargabay stands speechless, terrified by the stranger’s knowledge.

Kargabay’s Remorse The man continues, “I saw you in the bazaar where women are offered for temporary *nikah*, a marriage arranged for a limited period. You bought a *choeke*—a spoiled, pampered woman—for a temporary marriage. She told me about you. I also took that woman as my wife for two days. She was happy with you during those days. You spent generously on her and treated her well.” Kargabay replies, “Even a *choeke*—a spoiled, pampered woman—is still a human being.” The man looks at him sharply. “Then why do you feel sympathy for her when you have shown no mercy to the two innocent girls?” The two men ride on through the darkness. Remorse weighs heavily on Kargabay. He thinks of the

two companions he has lost and the innocent girls he has wronged. For the first time, he makes a solemn promise to himself: he will never do such a thing again.

The Oath and the Girls The strange man asks Kargabay to bring him more girls to sell. Kargabay refuses. "I swore an oath. I cannot do it." The man laughs at him. "Why feel guilty? You did not kill them, nor did you harm them. You only took them away from Erdana Khan's harem. They would never have known a man there. The women in the harem are guarded by castrated men, and their lives would have been miserable. At least now, they may have a chance to marry." Kargabay remains silent, still uncertain. The man finally says, "Come. We will rest for a few days at my maternal uncle's house." Soon they reach a nomad pasture camp. The girls are there, singing the songs and entertaining themselves.

Shermat Becomes Kargabay's Companion The stranger looks at Kargabay and says, "Let us become friends and companions. Swear that you will be my honest companion and trading partner." Kargabay agrees. "I give you my word." The man nods. "A man is only as good as his word." Kargabay then makes an ancient Kyrgyz oath: "If I ever break my word, may Tengri strike me. May the earth itself strike me down." The man continues, "When times are hard and the wolf comes, become a wolf. A brave man's fortune comes seven times." Kargabay asks the man his name. The stranger smiles. "I have many names. My real name is Shermat. In Chinese Turkestan, I am Jusup; among the Kazakhs, Markabay; in Khiva and Samarkand, Abdurahman; among the Turkmens, the Khazars, and the Ottoman Turks, Shahberdi; and in the Edil, the Volga basin, Kyrgyzbay."

Shermat's Lessons About Life Shermat continues, "I have many wives—mostly Kyrgyz. I have one in Tashkent, one in Andijan, one in Urumqi, and several in Khiva and Kokand. I have two or three children with each wife, and all my sons know their lineage. I belong to the Boru, a smaller clan of the great Adigine clan of the Kyrgyz." Then he tells Kargabay what life has taught him. "The most expensive thing in this world is a woman. Rich men spend fortunes on beautiful women. Yet a woman can also be the cheapest thing of all. A beautiful girl in slavery can become any man's toy. When death is near, life becomes the sweetest thing, because all a man wants is to survive. Yet life is also cheap. Khans and rulers kill ordinary people as they please." Shermat then urges Kargabay to give up gambling. Kargabay swears that he will never gamble again. Shermat finishes with a warning: "A man who breaks his oath will be punished."

The Search for Gold

Shermat's Secret Kargabay spends the entire summer with Shermat, who is known here as Abdurahman. The more time he spends with him, the more curious Kargabay becomes about what kind of man he really is. One day, they travel to a village where the nomads have gathered for a holiday. A wrestling match is being held, and an old man defeats every challenger who steps forward. Then Shermat (Abdurahman) tells him, "Take off the scarf around your waist." The old man refuses at first, but the crowd joins Abdurahman in demanding that he remove it. At last, he has no choice. When he wrestles again, he cannot defeat anyone. Kargabay is astonished. "What is the secret?" he asks. Shermat (Abdurahman) points to the scarf. "There was gold hidden inside it. That gold is what gave him his strength."

The Power of Gold Shermat tells Kargabay that gold is a source of strength. A man who has gold should never let others know how much he possesses—not even his own wives. Gold brings a man confidence and energy. It makes him look younger, stronger, and more attractive, and gives him the charm to draw the attention of even the most beautiful women. It can also protect him from the evil eye. Gold, Shermat says, can open doors. A man can give it as a gift to people of rank and, in return, gain favor and rise in status. It has power over women as well, giving them beauty, vitality, and charm. "The Kyrgyz nomad loves his cattle," Shermat says. "But what happens when an enemy comes and drives them all away? The herd is gone, and with it goes all his wealth. A man who keeps his wealth in cattle can lose everything in a single day."

The Sign of the Gold As they ride on, Shermat points to the vultures circling over a pasture. "Those birds may be circling over a place where a gold treasure lies buried," he says. Kargabay is astonished and quickly urges his horse forward. Before long, they come upon the ruins of an old city and an ancient cemetery. "How can we find where the gold is buried?" Kargabay asks. Shermat looks around.

"Gold is usually guarded by snakes. But it is late autumn now, and the snakes are asleep." He points to a faded tree beside a dried-up spring. "That is where the gold is buried." Shermat rides over and suddenly begins shouting, "The gold is here! The gold is here!" Then he explains that grass cannot grow where gold is buried. The tree standing above hidden gold, he says, grows larger and thicker than the others.

The Treasure Shermat points to a patch of ground where no grass grows. "Gold is buried here," he says. "Bees are often found near places where treasure lies hidden." He searches the earth and finds a small red-gold coin. Shermat is overjoyed. Then a man's voice comes from among the old graves: "Don't do it." They both stop. "Treasure is often guarded by strange creatures," Shermat says. "These are sacred places. I told you, a real man may find treasure only once in his lifetime."

The White Figure among the Graves Kargabay looks toward the graves. "Perhaps it was the soul of an old man," Shermat says. "I think it was simply a human voice," Kargabay replies. "Let's go. There are too many ghosts here."

"Will we come back?" Kargabay asks. "Yes. We'll return after we give to charity and slaughter a few sheep for the souls of the dead." They turn and ride away. But Kargabay looks back once more. Among the ruined graves, he sees a pale, white-headed figure standing in the distance. He says nothing to Shermat. As they ride on, Kargabay cannot stop thinking about the treasure. His heart is full of joy as he imagines the rich and abundant life that awaits him.

The Prayer of the Ancestors Kargabay and Shermat continue on their journey. They rarely stop for the five daily Islamic prayers. But every morning, when the sun rises, Shermat—also known as Abdurahman—turns toward the sun and prays. Kargabay knows that this is not the Islamic way of praying. Shermat is following the ancient Kyrgyz faith of his ancestors, who prayed to the sun. Kargabay does not question him. He believes that God lives in every person's heart, and that each person finds his own way to Him. Afterward, they sit down for breakfast. Shermat breaks off a piece of barley bread. "Barley bread is the best," he says. Kargabay is about to argue for wheat, but Shermat stops him. "When barley grows thin, hunger is coming. When it grows tall and thick, the harvest will be good. Where gold is buried, barley grows especially tall and thick."

Esenbay and the Prophecy

The Mountain Giant While Kargabay and Shermat (Abdurahman) are eating, a huge, powerful-looking man suddenly approaches. He is angry that the two travelers have not greeted him and demands to know why they ignored him. Shermat (Abdurahman) looks at him calmly. "You are Esenbay," he says. "You have chosen to live far from others, with your family in the mountains. But you have forgotten an old nomad custom: the young must greet their elders first." The man is stunned. How could this stranger know his name and so much about his life? Shermat (Abdurahman) tells him about his father and his clan. He even knows why Esenbay withdrew from society. Jealous of his beautiful wife, Esenbay chose to live in isolation in the mountains. His two eighteen-year-old sons died in battle. Now he has only two little children—a daughter and a son. Then Shermat (Abdurahman) tells him what awaits him: one day, Esenbay will die beneath an avalanche, while his wife will be carried away by a bear and dies there.

Shermat's Prophecy Shermat (Abdurahman) continues:

"Your children's future is tied to Kargabay. Your son will become brave and clever, your daughter very beautiful. Kargabay will become famous throughout the region and change his name." Esenbay is amazed. "Are you a holy man? Then can you kill my horse?" A loud bang rings out, and the horse falls dead. Esenbay and Kargabay stare in shock. "A pistol," says Shermat (Abdurahman). "I am Abdurahman." "You are the Abdurahman who owns the hidden gold?" "No. He lives in Aksy." "You are the one. You hide gold everywhere." Esenbay invites them to stay and asks to hear more about his children's future. Shermat (Abdurahman) refuses. They must continue to another place.

Esenbay and His Children As they leave, Kargabay asks Shermat (Abdurahman) why he believes he will become connected to Esenbay and his children. Shermat (Abdurahman) explains: "When we come back this way, we will visit Esenbay's home. He will welcome us warmly. He has thousands of wild-animal skins,

and they may be useful to you one day. He is also the kind of man who can dig out the gold we found. He is not greedy. To him, a piece of meat is worth more than gold." "Then why did you say he would die?" "He eats yak meat and bear meat. His body runs hot, so he often lies on the glaciers to cool himself. One day, that may cost him his life. And his wife may be taken by a bear. If a bear comes near her, she could die there from fright."

The Power of the Pen Kargabay remains curious. "But why would I become connected to his children?" Shermat (Abdurahman) says: "In time, they may grow used to you and become close to you. That is how you will become part of their lives." He pauses, then continues: "I told you that you would become famous for a reason. You are an educated man. The world will one day be ruled by the pen. Those who can read, write, and think will have power." Then his expression turns serious. "But whatever happens, stay away from gambling. Never, ever return to it." Kargabay lowers his head. Shermat's words stay with him as they continue down the road.

The Treasure and Shermat's Death

The Buried Gold One day, Kargabay, Shermat (Abdurahman), and Esenbay return to the cemetery where they believe gold may be buried. Esenbay begins digging, first removing the wooden supports from the top of the grave. Kargabay stands nearby, praying and reciting verses from the Quran. Esenbay widens the opening and climbs down into the grave. "Is there anything there?" Shermat (Abdurahman) asks. "Did you find the gold?" "There is nothing here," Esenbay replies. "Only the bodies of four men."

Shermat (Abdurahman) suddenly becomes excited.

"Then I understand! The people who buried the gold must have hired these four men to dig the grave and hide the treasure. Afterward, they killed them and buried them here so they would never reveal the secret."

The Discovery of the Treasure Esenbay continues searching the grave, but he finds nothing. Finally, he climbs out, and Shermat (Abdurahman) goes down into the grave and begins digging with a pickaxe. They have brought several tools with them, and as Shermat strikes the hard ground, his pickaxe suddenly hits something beneath the earth. A sharp, hollow sound echoes from below. He quickly digs around the spot and soon uncovers a large, flat stone. But the stone is too heavy for him to move, so he calls Esenbay. Esenbay, a giant of a man, climbs down and easily moves the stone aside. Beneath it, they discover an underground storage chamber filled with jars containing treasure. Shermat (Abdurahman) is overwhelmed with joy. His eyes fill with tears, and he can hardly keep himself from crying out in happiness.

The Gold and the White Snake The jars are made of clay and tightly sealed with lids. They are filled with gold. The men take four jars out of the underground storage chamber.

Shermat (Abdurahman) is overwhelmed with happiness. He takes several gold coins from one of the jars, lets them run through his fingers, and holds them tightly in his hands.

"Finally, the gold is ours! Thank God!" Then he suddenly remembers something. "Oh, I left some coins in the cemetery. Let me go collect them. We must not waste a single one."

The snake He hurries back toward the cemetery and begins gathering the coins he left behind. But as he steps out of the underground chamber and stands near the bodies, something suddenly coils around his neck. "God! Oh, God!" he screams. Shermat (Abdurahman) desperately pulls the creature away. It is a pale, whitish snake. The snake slips from his hands, drops to the ground, and quickly disappears back into the underground chamber.

The Snake's Venom Kargabay asks anxiously, "Did the snake bite you?" Shermat (Abdurahman) touches his throat. "I felt a slight sting in my throat. Maybe it did bite me."

Esenbay looks closely and notices a little blood on his throat. "The snake bit you," he says. "Can you suck the poison out?" Shermat (Abdurahman) asks. Esenbay shakes his head. "If I suck it out, the poison will enter my body through my saliva. I want to live." Kargabay immediately begins sucking the venom from the wound. Suddenly, a dog barks somewhere nearby. Shermat (Abdurahman) looks around uneasily. A feeling of regret comes over him. Just moments ago, he had been celebrating the discovery of the gold. Now he begins to wonder whether the treasure is worth his life. "Is someone there? Maybe God will not let me have

this gold after all.” A little later, he touches his throat again. “My throat is swelling. The poison is spreading through my body.”

The Gold Belongs to the Snake and the Dog Shermat (Abdurahman) looks at the gold and then toward the place where the snake disappeared. “This gold belongs to the snake and the dog,” he says. “We were supposed to perform the holy rites first and give charity by slaughtering sheep. But now we have to leave this place.”

He turns to Esenbay. “Take all the jars of gold and hide them somewhere safe. We’ll divide the gold later. Then come back here, slaughter a male goat, and bury it properly. We must make the offering here.” Esenbay looks at him. “Where are you going?” “We’re going to see a healer named Tabib Derbish,” Shermat (Abdurahman) replies. “Maybe he can save me from the snake’s poison.”

The White-Headed Figure Returns As Esenbay gets ready to leave with the jars of gold, Shermat (Abdurahman) calls out to him: “Take good care of that gold. If you lose it, I’ll kill you.” “Don’t worry. I’ll keep it safe,” Esenbay says.

Then he turns to Kargabay. “If Shermat (Abdurahman) dies, all this treasure will be yours. You’ll be the richest Kyrgyz man alive.” Shermat (Abdurahman) suddenly loses his temper. “You bastard! Are you wishing for me to die? You’re talking as if I’m already dead. Kargabay, go get the horses.”

By now, Shermat (Abdurahman)’s throat is badly swollen from the snake’s venom. As they prepare to leave, Kargabay glances back at the cemetery. Among the graves, he sees the same white-headed figure he noticed there the year before. Then, from somewhere among the graves, the dog starts barking again.

Shermat’s Last Journey A little later, Shermat (Abdurahman) could no longer speak. The poison had reached his brain, and he became so weak that he could not even stay on his horse. They stopped at the first village they came to. They had not yet reached the healer, Tabib Derbish. Before they could go any farther, Shermat (Abdurahman) died. Shermat was a wealthy and successful merchant. He was even the first man to sell fish from Lake Issyk-Kul to Russia, at a time when the local Kyrgyz did not consider fish to be meat. He had built his fortune through such ventures and had traveled widely in pursuit of trade. Yet now, surrounded by all that gold, he could not even speak his final words. Kargabay looked at him and thought about how helpless a human being becomes in the face of death. Kargabay took part in Shermat’s burial. He was devastated and cried bitterly. He had lost his best companion—a remarkable, gentle man of noble blood.

Kargabay’s Return to His Old Ways

The Mystery of Shermat’s Wealth Shermat’s (Abdurahman’s) family has become curious about where he has hidden his wealth. They suspect that Kargabay knows about it, so they question him and become suspicious of him. However, Kargabay genuinely has no idea. He swears on the Holy Quran that he does not know where Shermat has hidden the money. He explains that Shermat has died before he has had a chance to tell anyone. That year, Kargabay does not go looking for Esenbay. The following year, when he returns to the pasture, he cannot find Esenbay there. He regrets not looking for him earlier, but there is nothing he can do. Later, Kargabay goes to the cemetery. He hopes to find some clue or discover a hidden mystery, but this time he sees nothing unusual. Nothing has changed, and he finds no clue about Shermat’s wealth. Eventually, Kargabay becomes bored with his life and returns to his old ways. He starts kidnapping girls and selling them again.

Kargabay Confesses to His Father One day, Kargabay goes to his father and tells him about the life he has been living and all the wrong things he has done. His father tells him that he has committed a serious crime and can no longer stay in the Fergana Valley. He says that Kargabay should never have kidnapped the young girls of their sacred homeland and that his sins are unforgivable. He advises Kargabay to leave the valley and go to the northern Kyrgyz, where he can seek refuge with his maternal uncle, Tynay. Tynay is the leader of the northern Kyrgyz, while his son Atake is an educated and respected ruler in the Chuy Valley. Kargabay’s father also tells him about the historical genealogy of the Kyrgyz, explaining the lineages of both the southern and northern Kyrgyz.

Kargabay Becomes Abdurahman Kargabay's father advises him to change his name because he has brought so much shame upon himself in the Fergana Valley that there is no longer a place for him there. Kargabay also fears that he may be killed if people discover that he has been kidnapping young girls. Before Kargabay leaves for the north, his father tells him about a dream he had. He says, "I saw you riding a horse at the top of a mountain. Perhaps you will succeed with Tynay, and your efforts will benefit the Kyrgyz people." He encourages his son, saying, "You are a brave man, so do not cry." He then says good-bye and adds, "My son, you will not be there to bury me when I die." In 1756, Kargabay changes his name to Abdurahman and leaves the Fergana Valley for the north. He goes to his uncle Tynay and begins a new life among the northern Kyrgyz. Three years later, his father dies.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kargabay

Kargabay is a complicated character who changes throughout the story. He is strong-minded, independent, and ambitious, but he also makes mistakes because he sometimes acts according to his emotions and desires. His relationship with his father, Kuchuk, is important in understanding his personality.

Kargabay wants to control his own life and does not like being controlled by others. His desire for a better life and his interest in wealth sometimes lead him to make dangerous decisions.

However, Kargabay is not simply a selfish or bad person. He has a conscience and is capable of feeling regret. His experiences force him to think about his past and gradually change as a person.

Rebellious Kargabay is a rebellious person because he does not easily accept authority or rules. He wants to make his own decisions instead of following what other people expect from him. His relationship with his father, Kuchuk, shows this side of his personality. Kargabay often wants to choose his own path, even when his decisions create problems. His rebellious nature comes from his strong desire for freedom. He does not want other people to control his future. However, this attitude can also make him act without thinking carefully about the consequences. Therefore, his rebelliousness is both a strength and a weakness.

Ambitious Kargabay is ambitious. He wants a better and more successful life, and he is willing to take risks to achieve his goals. His interest in wealth and opportunities shows that he is not satisfied with simply accepting his current situation. He wants more for himself and is determined to find a way to achieve it. However, his ambition sometimes becomes dangerous because he focuses so strongly on what he wants that he does not always consider the consequences. His ambition makes him brave and determined, but it can also lead him toward poor decisions.

Conscientious Although Kargabay can behave selfishly, he is also conscientious. He is capable of thinking about his actions and feeling guilty when he realizes that he has made mistakes. His past continues to affect him, and he cannot completely escape the consequences of his decisions. This shows that he has a moral side. He is not completely indifferent to other people's feelings or suffering. As the story develops, his conscience becomes more important because he begins to question his earlier choices. This makes him a more realistic character because he is able to recognize that some of his actions were wrong.

Changeable Kargabay is also a changeable character. His personality is affected by the events he experiences and by the people around him. At some moments, he is confident and determined, while at other moments, fear, anger, or regret influences his decisions. He does not remain exactly the same throughout the story. His experiences force him to reconsider his beliefs and choices. This change shows that Kargabay is still developing as a person. His character is interesting because he has different sides: he can be strong but also uncertain, ambitious but also regretful. These contradictions make him feel like a real human being.

Regretful As Kargabay looks back at his past, he begins to understand the consequences of his decisions. He realizes that some of the things he wanted or did in the past were not worth the problems they caused. His regret shows that he is capable of learning from his experiences. It also connects him to the theme of guilt and the past. Kargabay cannot simply forget what happened. Instead, his memories

continue to influence him. His ability to feel regret suggests that he still has the possibility of changing and becoming a better person.

Shermat (Abdurahman)

Shermat, also known as Abdurahman, is one of the most mysterious and unusual characters in the story. Unlike Kargabay, he appears to have a deeper understanding of the spiritual and hidden side of life. He knows things about Kargabay's past and seems able to predict or understand what may happen in the future. His connection with old traditions, ancestors, prayer, and spiritual beliefs gives him an almost saint-like or mystical quality.

At the same time, Shermat is not simply a holy figure. He can be brave, ambitious, and mysterious. His knowledge and strange behavior make other characters take him seriously. Through Shermat, the story explores fate, spirituality, mystery, and the unknown.

Wise Shermat is clearly a wise character. He seems to understand things that other people do not. He knows about Kargabay's past and can recognize important details that others might overlook. He also speaks about the future in a way that makes him seem knowledgeable and experienced. His wisdom does not come only from ordinary education. It appears to come from his experience, traditions, and understanding of people. Other characters are influenced by what he says because they believe that he has a deeper understanding of life. His wisdom makes him an important figure in the story and gives his character authority.

Mystical / Saint-like Shermat can be described as mystical and almost saint-like. His connection with spiritual traditions and his unusual knowledge make him seem different from ordinary people. He describes himself as an *oluya*, which gives him a religious or spiritual identity. He also follows traditional practices such as praying toward the sun and shows a strong connection to his ancestors. His ability to know things about the past and speak about the future adds to his mysterious image. However, he should not necessarily be understood as a literal saint. Rather, his character has a mystical, spiritual, and almost prophetic quality.

Brave Shermat is also *brave* because he is not easily frightened by difficult or dangerous situations. He is willing to travel, search for things, and face uncertainty. His confidence comes partly from his strong beliefs and his knowledge of the world around him. Even when other people might hesitate, Shermat appears calm and determined. His courage is different from Kargabay's because Shermat's actions seem to come from experience and confidence rather than only from emotion. He does not simply react to danger; he seems to believe that he understands the forces affecting his life. This makes his courage an important part of his mysterious personality.

Ambitious Although Shermat has a spiritual side, he is also ambitious. He is interested in discovering valuable things and understands the importance of wealth and opportunity. His knowledge about signs connected with treasure shows that he is not completely separated from material concerns. This creates an interesting contrast in his personality. On one hand, he appears spiritual and connected to traditions; on the other hand, he can be interested in worldly rewards. This contradiction makes him more complex. Shermat is therefore not simply a wise or holy character. He also has personal goals and desires, which make his actions more difficult to judge as completely good or bad.

Mysterious and Contradictory Shermat is a mysterious and contradictory character. There are many things about him that are difficult for the other characters to understand. He seems to know more than he reveals, and his statements about the past and future make him appear almost supernatural. At the same time, he has ordinary human desires, including ambition and an interest in material things. This combination of spirituality and human weakness makes him unpredictable. The reader cannot always be sure what motivates him. His contradictions are important because they prevent him from becoming a simple "good" or "bad" character. Instead, Shermat remains one of the most fascinating figures in the story.

THEMES

Flaws: Greed and the Irony of Fate

People often believe that wealth can open every door, that a man with gold will always stay strong. Shermat thinks exactly that. To him, gold is not just money. It is power, respect, even health. He believes a man who owns gold looks younger, stronger, more attractive. But the ending the story prepares for him teaches a hard lesson.

Shermat and his companions find a hidden treasure in an old cemetery. The strangest part is this: the gold that was supposed to make life beautiful is buried in a place of death. When Shermat sees the jars filled with gold, he becomes the happiest man in the world. For a moment he feels nothing can harm him. Then, at the height of that joy, a pale white snake bites him on the throat.

That is where fate plays its real game. The man who was just shouting that he would be the richest man alive is suddenly fighting for his life. The gold he trusted so much does nothing. It cannot stop the venom. It cannot pull him back from death.

Before he dies, Shermat says, "This gold belongs to the snake and the dog." He finally understands that worldly wealth is not truly ours. Nature takes back what was never meant to stay in human hands. Greed leads a man all the way into a grave, and he leaves that grave empty-handed. When death comes, gold is only a cold stone.

Illustrative moment: Esenbay moved the heavy stone aside. The jars beneath it were full of gold. Shermat jumped down, scooped the coins into his hands, and cried, "At last the gold is ours! Thank God!" He let the coins run through his fingers. Then he remembered the few coins he had left behind and went back for them. Something coiled around his neck. He screamed, tore it away — a pale, whitish snake. It slipped from his hands and vanished into the chamber. His throat began to swell. A dog barked among the graves. "This gold belongs to the snake and the dog," he said. "Maybe God will not let me have it after all."

Sin: Guilt and Remorse

Kargabay's story is not only an adventure. It is a man with his own conscience. Young, poor, and hungry for wealth, he kidnaps two innocent girls and sells them. At first he does not fully see the wrong in it. He tells himself it is only trade. He even invents excuses: they would have had a miserable life in the khan's harem anyway.

Then Shermat holds up a mirror. He asks one question that Kargabay cannot answer: "Why do you feel sympathy for a spoiled woman, when you showed no mercy to those two innocent girls?" That question wakes something that had been sleeping. For the first time Kargabay feels shame. He thinks of his lost companions and of the girls he wronged. He makes a solemn promise: he will never do such a thing again.

But changing is harder than swearing. After Shermat dies and life grows empty, Kargabay goes back to his old ways. He kidnaps girls again. That is the bitterest part of the story. Remorse can last an evening. Staying true to it takes a lifetime. Kargabay loses that fight the first time.

In the end he cannot bear it. He goes to his father and tells him everything. His father does not throw him out, but he does not pretend the crime is small. "You can no longer stay in the Fergana Valley," he says. "Change your name. Go north." Kargabay leaves. He can change his name and his city. He cannot leave himself behind.

Illustrative moment: They rode through the darkness. Shermat said, "I saw you in the bazaar where women are offered for temporary nikah. You bought a *choeke woman* for entertainment. You spent generously on her and treated her well." Kargabay answered, "Even a choeke woman is still a human being." Shermat looked at him sharply. "Then why do you feel sympathy for her when you have shown no mercy to the two innocent girls?" Kargabay fell silent. Remorse weighed on him. For the first time he promised himself: he would never do such a thing again.

Nature: Man vs. Nature

In this story the steppe is not a backdrop. It is one of the main characters — silent, endless, and without mercy.

When the young wolves attack Keldibek, Kargabay and Kozuke can only watch. Later Kozuke sleeps inside a ruined tomb, thinking the walls will protect him. The wolves enter anyway. Kargabay hears his brother's scream in the night. He reaches for his knife, but horror freezes him. He grips a wooden post and waits for dawn. That is real helplessness.

For a nomad, a horse is everything. "A horse is the wings of a man," Kargabay says, and he refuses to leave his limping horse behind. In the end he has to. They hear its terrible scream behind them. Kozuke cries out. Kargabay can only say they could barely save themselves.

One detail is especially grim. So many people have died in the wars that the wolves have grown used to human flesh. Man's own violence has turned nature against him.

Shermat's death belongs to the same lesson. He finds the treasure and feels invincible. One snake-bite brings him down. Nature does not hate anyone. It simply follows its own rules. On the open steppe a man may think himself clever and strong. The truth is simpler: the land is large, and he is small.

Illustrative moment: In the middle of the night Kargabay heard his brother's terrible scream. Looking down, he saw wolves howling around the grave. Some had already gone inside and were devouring Kozuke. Kargabay reached for his knife, but horror overwhelmed him. He gripped the wooden post and waited helplessly for dawn. At noon he saw horsemen in the distance and waved his white shirt. He embraced his brother's bloody body and began to tell them his tragic story.

Human being: Knowledge and Power

In this novella, power first looks like muscle, horses, and gold. But the story keeps whispering that the real power is knowledge.

Shermat has no army. He does not need one. He looks at Kargabay and names him: Kargabay Karakchy, the robber. He lists the medrese he left, the girls he sold, the gold he lost at gambling, even that he once became the stake in a game and fled Urumqi. Kargabay stands speechless, terrified. Shermat never raises a weapon. He only knows — and that is enough.

The same thing happens at the wrestling match. An old man beats every challenger. Shermat tells him to take off the scarf around his waist. Gold is hidden inside it. That gold was his strength. Once it is gone, he cannot defeat anyone. People saw power. Shermat saw the secret.

Kargabay's father sent him to the medrese so he would become an educated man. One evening Kargabay impresses the whole village with what he has learned. Then he leaves school, thinking reading and writing are enough, and chases gold instead. He puts money before knowledge.

Shermat's most important lesson is this: "The world will one day be ruled by the pen. Those who can read, write, and think will have power." It is said in the eighteenth century, and it still holds. In the end it is education, not gold, that opens Kargabay's new life in the north.

A horse dies. Gold stays in the ground. Muscles grow old. Knowledge travels with a man wherever he goes.

Illustrative moment: The man looked at Kargabay and said, "You have sold those girls very cheaply. You have gold worth almost five horses. Because of that gold you have taken the wrong road and lost two of your men. Your name is Kargabay Karakchy. You left the medrese in Samarkand before completing your studies. You kidnapped two innocent girls and sold them. I am an oluya, a holy man. You gambled in Urumqi and lost everything. You even became the stake in a gambling game and then fled." Kargabay stood speechless, terrified by the stranger's knowledge.

Philosophy: Tradition, Belief, and Syncretism

Religion in eighteenth-century Central Asia was not one color. Islam was there, but so were much older Kyrgyz beliefs. This story shows how two faiths can live inside the same man.

Shermat rarely stops for the five daily Islamic prayers. But every morning, when the sun rises, he turns toward it and prays. Kargabay knows this is not the Islamic way. It is the old faith of the ancestors, who prayed to the sun. Kargabay does not question him. He believes that God lives in every person's heart, and that each person finds his own way.

They are Muslims. They speak of the Quran, of lawful marriage, of charity. At the same time they believe gold is guarded by snakes, that one must give charity and slaughter sheep for the souls of the dead before touching a treasure, that cemeteries are sacred and strange figures walk among the graves.

The most striking moment is Kargabay's oath. He swears: "If I ever break my word, may Tengri strike me. May the earth itself strike me down." Tengri is the old sky god of the Kyrgyz, from before Islam. A Muslim man swears by his ancestors' god, and no one finds it strange.

Shermat himself lives this mixing of worlds. In Chinese Turkestan he is Jusup; among the Kazakhs, Markabay; in Khiva and Samarkand, Abdurahman; among the Turkmens, Shahberdi; in the Volga basin, Kyrgyzbay. He moves through cultures as easily as he moves through faiths.

Belief here is not a rigid rule. It is a living fabric. People weave their religion together with the faith of their fathers and find their own balance.

Illustrative moment: They rarely stopped for the five daily prayers. But every morning, when the sun rose, Shermat turned toward the sun and prayed. Kargabay knew this was not the Islamic way. Shermat was following the ancient Kyrgyz faith of his ancestors. Kargabay did not question him. He believed that God lives in every person's heart, and that each person finds his own way to Him. Afterward they sat down for breakfast. Shermat broke off a piece of barley bread. "Barley bread is the best," he said.

Relationship: The Father-Son Relationship

Kuchuk is nearly fifty when Kargabay is born. For years he is his only son, and always his favorite. He wants him to become a good and educated man, so he sends him to a medrese in Samarkand. One evening, when Kargabay shares what he has learned and impresses the whole village, Kuchuk is proud. Then Kargabay leaves school and comes home. The father's hopes collapse.

Worse still is what the father does not know. From time to time Kargabay brings him a few gold coins. Kuchuk is pleased and wishes his son a long and healthy life. He never suspects that the money comes from kidnapping and selling girls.

At last Kargabay tells him everything. Kuchuk does not turn his back, and he does not pretend the sin is small. He says the crime is unforgivable and that Kargabay can no longer stay in the Fergana Valley. He tells him to change his name, go north, and take refuge with his maternal uncle Tynay. The father is both judge and savior.

The farewell is the most moving scene in the story. Kuchuk tells his son a dream: "I saw you riding a horse at the top of a mountain. Perhaps you will succeed with Tynay, and your efforts will benefit the Kyrgyz people." Then he says, "You are a brave man, so do not cry." And finally: "My son, you will not be there to bury me when I die."

In 1756 Kargabay takes the name Abdurahman and leaves. Three years later his father dies. The son is far away.

But the dream comes true. Kargabay becomes the first Kyrgyz envoy sent to Russia. His name remains in history. Kuchuk does not live to see it, but the son he sent away with a broken heart becomes the man he once hoped for — not through the medrese, but through a harder road. A father's love, even after disappointment, is the love that still shows the way.

Illustrative moment: Before Kargabay left for the north, his father told him about a dream. "I saw you riding a horse at the top of a mountain. Perhaps you will succeed with Tynay, and your efforts will benefit the Kyrgyz people." He said, "You are a brave man, so do not cry." Then he said goodbye. "My son,

you will not be there to bury me when I die." In 1756 Kargabay changed his name to Abdurahman and left the Fergana Valley.

Culture: Mysticism and Prophecy

Life on the steppe is not only what the eye can see. There are signs in the earth, voices among the graves, and men who know more than they should. Shermat is such a man — an oluya, a holy man, who reads people's past and future as if they were written down.

When he first meets Kargabay, he names his sins one by one. That knowledge feels less like detective work than like a gift from another world. Nature speaks in the same language. Grass does not grow where gold is buried. The tree above hidden gold grows larger than the others. Bees gather near treasure. Snakes guard it. A pale, white-headed figure stands among the ruined graves. A dog barks where no dog should be.

Shermat knows the rules of that world: perform the holy rites first, give charity, slaughter sheep for the souls of the dead. They skip those rites. The snake bites him. He dies before he can speak his last words.

His prophecy to Esenbay is just as exact. He knows the man's name, his clan, why he fled to the mountains and that his two grown sons died in battle. Then he tells him the rest: Esenbay will die beneath an avalanche; his wife will be carried away by a bear. Their children's future is tied to Kargabay. The son will be brave and clever, the daughter very beautiful. Kargabay will become famous and change his name.

Kuchuk's dream belongs to the same order of things. He sees his son riding at the top of a mountain. Years later that son, as Abdurahman, becomes the first Kyrgyz envoy to Russia. Mysticism in this story is not decoration. It is how people understand fate, and how fate, in the end, keeps its word.

Illustrative moment: Shermat looked at him calmly. "You are Esenbay. You have chosen to live far from others, with your family in the mountains. You have forgotten an old nomad custom: the young must greet their elders first." He told him about his father and his clan, and why he had withdrawn from society. Then he told him what awaited him: one day Esenbay would die beneath an avalanche, while his wife would be carried away by a bear. "Your children's future is tied to Kargabay. Your son will become brave and clever, your daughter very beautiful. Kargabay will become famous throughout the region and change his name." Esenbay asked, "Are you a holy man? Then can you kill my horse?" A loud bang rang out, and the horse fell dead.