

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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***SARYTAY: THE NOMADIC GENTLEMAN / SARYTAY MYRZA* (1992)**

Asanbek Stamov (1938-2010)

Reference: Stamov, A. (1992). *Jortuul* [Baskın]. Uçkun

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 the novella *Sarybay, the Nomadic Gentleman (Sarytay Myrza)* as the second part of the novel *Jortuul (The Raid)*. It consists of three independent novellas, each of which can be read as a separate work. The book was published in 1992 in Bishkek by the Uchkun Publishing House.

Published after independence, this novella provides a detailed look at 18th-century nomadic politics and leadership—something that would have been difficult to present freely during the Soviet period. Soviet literature often focused on class struggle and viewed aristocrats and traditional customs critically. Today, greater creative freedom allows writers to present the past in a more balanced way. It also makes it possible to portray nomadic leaders as visionary statesmen and to highlight traditions of honor and early diplomacy as important parts of the nation's history.

Background

The novella *Sarybay, the Nomadic Gentleman (Sarytay Myrza)* is set in 1786, a period of profound danger and transformation for the Kyrgyz tribes of Central Asia. Following the Qing Empire's destruction of the Dzhungar Khanate in 1755, the region descended into instability, leaving the fragmented Kyrgyz caught between the expanding Kokand Khanate, the powerful Chinese Empire, and raiding Kazakh khans such as Ablay Khan.

In this hostile landscape, survival depended on forging strategic alliances, a necessity that drives the historical mission of Atake Baatyr, the ruler who famously sent the first Kyrgyz embassy to Empress Catherine II of Russia.

Rooted in the traditions of the nomadic elite, the story explores a world governed by strict etiquette, ancestral honor, and the complex social contract of the bride price. It reflects a culture where few words are spoken and where silence, signs, and gestures carry immense weight.

The narrative also captures the shifting spiritual landscape, where shamanism, Islam, and Christianity intersect and are often wielded as tools of political survival.

Blending documented history with the intimate drama of a coming-of-age tale, the novella follows the young nobleman Sarytay as he journeys across the Shamshy Pass to win his bride, ultimately proving himself worthy of uniting and leading his people.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Sarytay – The young Basyz biy (prince) and suitor seeking to win Atake Baatyr's daughter.

Atake Baatyr – The powerful ruler of the Chuy Valley and the wise father of the bride.

Karabay Bek – Sarytay's father and the political strategist who arranged the alliance.

Iman – The elderly wise man and counselor who guides Sarytay on nomadic customs.

Syrga – Atake Baatyr's sixteen-year-old daughter and the object of the marriage proposal.

Teke Baatyr – The rival Kazakh leader who invades the valley under the guise of a suitor.

Koysary – Sarytay's brave warrior who boasts of the bride price and eventually kills the rival Teke Baatyr.

SYNOPSIS

In 1786, 25-year-old Sarytay, youngest son of Karabay Bek of the Basyz clan in Uch Kurtka (Naryn region), sets out across the Shamshy Pass with 40 warriors and the wise elder Iman. He is going to the Chuy Valley to ask for the hand of Syrga, 16-year-old daughter of the powerful Atake Baatyr. The caravan carries a huge bride price of horses, gold, silver, silk and camels. On the pass the warriors boast that nothing is missing, but Sarytay quietly says something important is lacking.

A few days earlier his father had explained the match. Sarytay already has a family in Andijan, but custom requires a local wife. The marriage would give Sarytay influence over Chuy, Issyk-Kul, Talas and Andijan. Karabay recounts the Basyz clan's ties to the Kokand Khanate, old battles, the 1754 Chinese destruction of the Dzungars, and Ablay Khan's raids that killed Jaiyl Baatyr and almost wiped out the Solto clan. He tells Sarytay that one day Kokand will attack the Kyrgyz and that Sarytay himself may become their khan. Atake's father Tynay once received help from the Basyz clan, Karabay believes Atake will not refuse.

Sarytay arrives at Atake's simple court of new yurts decorated only with felt shyrdaks. Atake, dressed like a herder with a war-split lip tied by a scarf, greets them kindly but holds no wedding ceremonies. After three days of rich food the guests grow bored. Iman realizes the missing item in the bride price is slaves, a customary gift among the elite.

Sarytay asks permission to hunt and is given 40 extra warriors. The party rides to Kok-Oyrok, raids Kalmyk villages in Khoton, drives off thousands of horses and captures nine men.

Meanwhile Teke Baatyr, a Kazakh leader, marches on Kemin Valley claiming he also wants to marry Syrga. Atake, unprepared because of wedding plans, sends envoys to delay him. After insulting exchanges about custom and bride price, Atake pretends to agree and asks for two days. Teke attacks anyway. Sarytay and Niyazbek arrive with their forces, surround Teke and capture him. Teke is killed. His head is brought to Atake, but he wanted Teke alive.

Atake accepts Sarytay as son-in-law. Mourning for the villagers who died in Teke's attack cancels any wedding feast. As *Jurt Agasy* (Leader of the Nation) he introduces Sarytay to the Chuy nobles and continues seeking a Russian alliance to protect the Kyrgyz.

SCENES

The Aristocratic Journey to Chuy In the year 1786, the biting winds of the Shamsky Pass bore witness to a procession of remarkable discipline and status. Sarytay, the son of Karabay Bek—the ruler of Uch Kurtka in the Naryn region—was leading his party toward the fertile Chuy Valley. Though only in his mid-twenties, Sarytay moved with the refined grace of the Kokand Khanate elite, strictly adhering to the etiquette of the nomadic aristocracy. Beside him rode the elderly sage Iman, while forty young, brave warriors followed behind, fulfilling his every command with immediate precision. This was no ordinary expedition; Sarytay was traveling to the court of the powerful Atake Baatyr to formally ask for the hand of his daughter, the beautiful Syrga, in marriage.

The Boast of the Bride's Price During a brief rest on the rugged pass, a warrior offered Sarytay a sip of pure Chinese vodka to ward off the mountain chill. As the group looked back at their sprawling caravan, one of the warriors, Koysary, spoke with swelling pride. "My Lord," he exclaimed, "we carry a fortune that defies comparison. Hundreds of the finest horses, camels burdened with heavy gold and silver, and rolls of the most exquisite silk and satin. There is no defect in this bride's price; surely, no man has ever offered so much for a woman's hand." To the warriors, the wealth they carried seemed to guarantee their success, as the sheer volume of the tribute was enough to dazzle any ruler.

The Hidden Deficiency Despite the shimmering wealth behind him and the confidence of his men, a visible worry clouded Sarytay's brow. He did not share in the warriors' celebration; instead, he seemed burdened by a thought they could not grasp. When he spoke, his voice was quiet but firm, cutting through the talk of gold and silk. "You believe that wealth is the measure of this union," Sarytay remarked, signaling for the company to resume their march. "But you do not realize that there is something great lacking in this bride's price" With those words, he turned toward the Chuy Valley, leaving his men to wonder what essential thing their magnificent tribute was missing.

The Command of Karabay Bek A few days before the journey, Karabay Bek, the ruler of Uch Kurtka, called for his youngest and most beloved son. "Sarytay," the old Bek began, looking at his son with both pride and expectation, "you have reached twenty-five years, born under the auspicious sign of the Snake in the eastern calendar. While you have a wife and children in Andijan to secure your house there, the customs of our land demand you take a wife here to strengthen our roots. I have found the perfect match to unite our people with the Chuy Valley: Syrga, the daughter of the great Atake Baatyr, son of Tynay."

The Strategic Match When Sarytay expressed his hesitation, calling Syrga an "old lady" or *Kara Daly*, Karabay Bek corrected him with the wisdom of a seasoned ruler. He explained that at sixteen, Syrga was not old, but rather remained unmarried because few dared to approach a father as powerful and famous as Atake Baatyr. Karabay urged his son to look past conventional beauty, noting that the girl was clever and that, according to ancient belief, it is strong, sturdy women—not delicate beauties—who mother the greatest warriors. "If you win her hand," Karabay argued, "you gain the key to ruling the Chuy region, Ysyk-Kol, Talas, and Andijan." Karabay Bek insisted they focus entirely on the bride's price, ensuring it was so magnificent and flawless that the great Atake Baatyr could find no defect or reason to refuse the union.

The Basyz Lineage and the Ketmen-Tobo Victory Karabay Bek then recounted his ancestry, tracing it to the Basyz clan whose members had long held honored places in the palace of the Kokand Khanate. He

told how Erdana Biy once launched an attack to conquer the Kyrgyz of the Ketmen-Tobo valley, yet Satyke Baatyr of Ketmen-Tobo resisted so fiercely that every attacker perished. That triumph, Karabay explained, made their clan move from the south to the north.

The Fall of the Dzungars and the Search for Shelter Karabay also recalled the year 1754, when the Chinese Khan shattered the power of the Dzungars who had ruled Central Asia, especially the heart of Dzungaria in the Ile region of Chinese Turkestan. Countless people died in the slaughter that followed. The surviving refugees fled in search of shelter under the protection of the Kazakh Khan Ablay Khan.

Lessons from the Kokand Palace Karabay Bek explained that Narboto Biy, the fifth ruler of the Kokand Khanate, still refrained from attacking the nomad Kyrgyz, for previous campaigns had ended in failure. He knew such matters intimately: as a boy he had been sent to the Kokand palace for his education, placed there by his father alongside Sharipbek, the son of Abdrahim Biy, since the Khanate sought friendship with the nomad rulers. Returning home at seventeen, versed in politics and court intrigue, Karabay had formed his own conviction. "The Kyrgyz must join Kokand," he told his son, "or the Chinese Khan will surely swallow us whole."

The Prophecy of a Kyrgyz Khan Karabay Bek warned that Kokand would not hesitate forever. "One day they will march against the Kyrgyz and conquer us," he said. "For now, they fear Atake Baatyr and rulers like him, but that fear will pass." When that hour came, he predicted, the Kyrgyz would have no choice but to submit. "Perhaps I will be dead by then, but you will live to see it. And when you do, it will fall to you to separate the Kyrgyz from the Kokand Khanate and rule them as their own Khan." He acknowledged that Narboto Biy had done much to make the Khanate flourish, yet the Kyrgyz refused to understand a simple truth: it was far better to stand beside Kokand than to kneel as slaves before the Chinese Khan.

Atake Baatyr's Appeal to Russia Karabay Bek then told Sarytay that Atake Baatyr had sent envoys to the Russian Empire, their horses loaded with rich pelts of wild animals and gifts of gold, together with a letter declaring that the Kyrgyz wished to live under Russian protection. Atake felt the growing threat of the Chinese Khan. Sarytay objected that the Russian Empire was culturally and religiously alien to their people. Karabay answered that Atake had no choice: the Chinese Khan threatened from the east, Ablay Khan of the Kazakhs had recently raided the Chuy Valley, and the Ketmen-Tobo region itself lay under the shadow of Kokand. In this dangerous hour Atake Baatyr now regarded himself as the equal of Narboto Biy, ruler of the Kokand Khanate.

The Shadow of Ablay Khan and the Promise of Kinship Karabay Bek then spoke of Ablay Khan, the Kazakh ruler who had attacked the Chuy Valley, slain many warriors including the valiant Jaiyl Baatyr, and through cunning nearly wiped out the Solto clan. That raid shattered the old unity and friendship between Kyrgyz and Kazakh. It was this betrayal, together with the looming Chinese threat, that drove Atake Baatyr to send envoys to Russia seeking a fair protector. Atake knew that once Ablay died his heirs would return to raid again. Yet Atake himself could never proclaim himself Khan, for his ancestors had not been Biy elites. "That is why kinship with Atake will open every door for you, my son," Karabay told Sarytay. "Your time will arrive."

A Debt of the Past and Karabay's Final Counsel Karabay Bek wished his son Sarytay luck and recalled how Atake Baatyr's father, Tynay, had fled the Kalmyk raids in the north for the southern regions. There, Karabay's clan provided him with land, property, and cattle, and Atake grew up in the Andijan region—the present-day Fergana valley of Kyrgyzstan. Because of this historical debt, Karabay felt certain Atake would not refuse the marriage proposal. He urged Sarytay not to worry if Syrga lacked beauty, noting that while a powerful ruler could eventually have many beautiful women; beautiful women rarely gave birth to strong warrior sons.

The Missing Element of the Tribute Sarytay finally arrived at the *Ordo*—the nomadic court and headquarters of Atake Baatyr. Along the way, Koysary continued to wonder how anyone could possibly refuse such a magnificent proposal. The wise elder Iman explained that many famous and powerful men had already been turned away, as Atake Baatyr was known for finding even the smallest faults in a bride's price to justify a refusal. Iman revealed the specific void Sarytay had sensed: the absence of a slave in their list of offerings.

During that era, it was the custom of the powerful elite to include human servants as part of the bride's price alongside cattle and gold; without this, the tribute might still be seen as incomplete by a ruler of Atake's stature.

The Simple Welcome of Atake Baatyr Sarytay's party was welcomed into three large, brand new yurts. Although Atake Baatyr was a wealthy ruler, the interiors were very simple, decorated only with new *shyrdaks*—traditional, handmade felt carpets. Twelve additional yurts were provided for the warriors, with Sarytay and his chief warrior sharing one. When they first arrived, Atake Baatyr greeted them personally, asking kindly after Karabay Bek, his wife, and their people. He was dressed very simply, wearing a coat and a *kalpak* that were worn out. However, three days have now passed with no sign of a wedding, and Sarytay's warriors are beginning to grow bored.

Rich Meals, Silent Customs Atake Baatyr did not receive Sarytay as a son-in-law, nor did he show any wedding customs. Yet the guests were fed well—horse meat, lamb, and kymyz, all respected meals. The feast was rich, but the silence was richer. Sarytay and his warriors grew bored. They longed to see the vast Chuy Valley and to hunt, for Sarytay was a skillful hunter. Some warriors could sing well and make a wedding joyful, but no tradition was kept. Wise Iman grew worried and went to Atake. His yurt was plain too, and he wore the simple jacket of a herder. His lip, split in two by a war wound, was tied with a small scarf.

Neither Yes Nor No When Iman met Atake, he said, "Thank you for your welcome. We wish to return home. My lord, you know the purpose of our visit." Atake answered, "I have missed the Basyz clan. Stay longer; we will host you more. Enjoy your visit." He said neither yes nor no. Iman told Sarytay, "I think Atake has found fault with the bride's price. We must find a solution." Then Sarytay, the brave warrior, went to Atake himself. He gave his greeting, knelt on one knee, and said, "Three days of eating have made us restless. We want to hunt. Give us forty more warriors, and we will hunt until your answer is ready."

The Clever Request on the Eve of the Hunt Atake liked the brave, strong young warrior and said, "You may go this afternoon." When the eighty horsemen were ready, Atake went out to see them off, admiring the strength and energy radiating from the line of young men. He was particularly captivated by Sarytay's horse, a rare crossbreed of a Kyrgyz mountain horse and a Turkmen horse, exceptionally fast and strong in war. Testing the young man, Atake asked Sarytay to leave the horse behind, claiming it might be lost or injured during the hunt. Knowing that if he parted with his prized steed now, he would never get it back, Sarytay replied with sharp wit, "My Lord, could you then give me your horse as well, so that I may ride them both?" Amused by his quick thinking, Atake agreed, and Sarytay rode off to the hunt with two magnificent horses.

The Raid on the Kalmyk Lands Sarytay and his warriors rode to Kok-Oyrok and on into the Kalmyk region of Khoton. There they attacked the villages and drove thousands of horses back to the Kyrgyz land. Two warriors perished in the raid. The men decided not to bring the bodies into the village, for a wedding must not be mixed with mourning. So they laid their fallen comrades in caves beside the glaciers, planning to return for them after the wedding. They also captured nine Kalmyk warriors, who could now be offered as part of the bride's price. Thus Sarytay passed the ordeal of Atake Baatyr—and returned not only with horses, but with the very thing his tribute had lacked.

The Tiger Hunt and the Lost Kyrgyz Sons After the raid, Sarytay went hunting for a tiger. The hunters offered a mare as bait to deceive the beast, and while the tiger was distracted by its prey, they closed in and caught it. Afterward, Sarytay wished to see the Kalmyk captives. When they were brought before him, two of the nine turned out to be Kyrgyz: Bagdoolot and Nurdoolot. Their mother had been taken captive by the Kalmyks during a raid long ago; there she had married and borne three more children besides them. At first Sarytay did not believe they were Kyrgyz. But when they named their clan and spoke their Kyrgyz names, he ordered them set free.

The Cruel Custom of Niyazbek One of the nobles, Niyazbek, who had joined the hunt, asked for one of the captives and was given a fair-complexioned young man of nineteen. Sarytay spoke with the Kalmyk captives through Bagdoolot, one of the freed Kyrgyz, who served as translator. He told them they would all be taken to the Kyrgyz ruler. Bagdoolot translated their answer: every one of them swore he would run

away one day. Niyazbek replied that he would cut open the soles of his slave's feet, stuff them with horse-hair, and sew them shut—after that, the slave could never walk far. Sarytay did not like the idea of such torture.

The Price of Conversion Bagdoolot suggested that the captives would not run away if they were converted to Islam through circumcision. Even if they did escape, the Kalmyks would never accept them back once they learned the men had embraced Islam. Sarytay supported the idea. But when the captives heard they were to be converted, they grew furious. Still, they asked to be set free for a while to pray to their sky god. One of them, Choku, who had been a leader in his community, climbed the rocky mountain, threw himself from the cliff, and died. After this, the warriors decided to return to the court of Atake Baatyr.

The Gathering Storm over Kemin Valley While Sarytay and his men were on their way back to the Chuy Valley, a sudden threat loomed over Atake Baatyr's court. Teke Baatyr, a formidable forty-five-year-old Kazakh Biy, had marched with an army of two thousand warriors with the sole aim of conquering the fertile Kemin Valley. Two of Atake's horsemen spotted the invading force and rushed to inform their ruler. Because he had been entirely focused on the wedding preparations, Atake was caught off guard. Realizing he needed at least three days to mobilize a large enough force to counter the threat, Atake sent out scouts to monitor the enemy's movements. He then dispatched envoys to meet with the leaders of Teke Baatyr's vanguard, hoping to delay the attack through strategic negotiations and buy precious time.

The Pretext of the Proposal The Kyrgyz envoys met the Kazakh vanguard to demand the purpose of their sudden march. Teke's commander claimed they came because Syrga was choosing a groom, and their Teke Biy wished to seek her hand. The envoys retorted that Syrga would only marry whom her father chose, according to ancient custom. Teke's messengers revealed their leader was furious over a previous rejection. When negotiations resumed the next day, Atake's men hinted Teke's lineage, calling him a mere Turkmen slave, while the Kazakhs fiercely defended Teke as a noble of the Kazakh Orto Juz clan.

The Battle of Customs Atake's envoys asked where Teke's bride price was if he truly sought a marriage. Teke's men insolently demanded that Atake simply deliver his aging daughter. The Kyrgyz responded with an ancient proverb: "There is no bride without customs, even if she marries without a bride's price," warning that Teke could not humiliate their leader. Unmoved, the Kazakhs boasted of Teke's martial might, claiming a great warrior had the right to demand her, and ordered the bride to be brought to their camp by the following morning.

The Diplomatic Delay Maintaining their diplomatic composure, Atake's messengers patiently replied, "We shall inform Atake Baatyr of your words." Back in his court, Atake listened to the report. Knowing his troops were still scattered and unprepared for a battle against two thousand warriors, he decided to play along with the ruse to buy precious time. He sent word back to the Kazakh camp, declaring that he was ready to yield his daughter to Teke Baatyr, requesting only a two-day delay to prepare her for the journey.

The Fall and Capture of Teke Teke declared, "If your daughter does not arrive tomorrow, I will attack your court." The next day, he fulfilled his threat, devastating the Kyrgyz villages. But Niyazbek and Sarytay soon arrived with their armies to defend their people. Realizing he had been deceived, Teke found himself surrounded and defeated. Sarytay captured him, while his warrior Koysary placed a noose around Teke's neck. "Who captured me?" Teke demanded. "I am Sarytay," came the reply. Teke was deeply humiliated to have been defeated by a young man. Bitterly, he said it would have been better to become the prisoner of a more famous warrior.

Teke's Final Defiance Teke began mocking Sarytay's tribe, saying that the Basýz clan was not truly nomadic but sedentary, and therefore not a warrior clan. Enraged, Sarytay replied, "You are a slave; you do not even have a clan of your own." Still arrogant, Teke refused to accept defeat. "You are not the man who will kill me. Take me to Atake Baatyr," he demanded. Sarytay ignored him. Teke then cursed him, saying, "I wish your life will end as mine has." Hearing this, Koysary struck Teke down with his sword. They buried his body and tied his head to the horse's crupper. When they met Atake, he was deeply embarrassed to see Teke's severed head.

The Test and Reward of Sarytay Atake said, “I needed Teke alive.” Hearing this, Sarytay was deeply embarrassed. Yet he had already proved himself worthy through Atake’s ordeal. He had brought back slaves, driven away the Kalmyks’ horses, and killed Teke, Atake’s enemy. Impressed by Sarytay’s courage and loyalty, Atake agreed to give his daughter in marriage to him. However, the wedding celebrations were never held, because of mourning for the villagers killed in the attack. Atake was a man who strictly observed the etiquette of the nomadic world. Before departing, he introduced Sarytay to the noblemen and respected elite of the Chuy Valley, formally welcoming him into their circle.

Atake’s Vision and the Russian Alliance Atake was a man who had earned the title *Jurt Agasy*, meaning “Leader of the Nation,” a title regarded as higher than that of a khan. A keen and wise leader, Atake understood the growing danger surrounding the scattered Kyrgyz tribes. Recognizing the need for a powerful ally, Atake began turning his attention toward the Russian Empire. At that time, the Great Silk Road passed through Kyrgyz lands, but merchants and travelers were often robbed by various groups. Atake protected Russian merchants and first studied the customs and mentality of Russian travelers. He then visited Kazakh villages where Russians lived, carefully gathering knowledge that would help him establish relations with the Russian Empire.

Atake’s First Mission to Russia Atake learned much about the Russians from merchants who traveled along the Edil (Volga) River. They told him that the Slavs were just and strong people. Atake asked whether the Russians forced people to convert to Christianity. The merchants assured him that they did not. Encouraged by what he had learned, Atake sent two envoys to the Russian empress. However, two years passed, and no news came from them. Atake grew deeply concerned and regretted that he had heard nothing about their fate. One of the envoys was Abdurahman, a renowned merchant, accompanied by his adopted son, Shergazy. Abdurahman was highly educated, knew the Chagatai language, and had a deep knowledge of the Qur’an. He personally wrote the letter to the Russian court.

The Robbery of the Russian Merchants The previous year, Atake had learned that Russian merchants traveling along the Silk Road had been robbed. He came to believe that Teke Baatyr of the Kazakhs was behind the attacks. The robbers reportedly shouted “Atake! Atake!” during their raids, deliberately using his name to make it appear that Atake himself was responsible. However, the Russian Empire did not accuse Atake directly or hold him responsible for the crimes. Atake feared that his envoys might have been taken captive. He regretted that Teke was no longer alive to be questioned about the robberies. He suspected that Teke might have committed the crimes while acting in the interests of Ablay Khan, Atake’s old enemy.

Atake’s Hope for an Alliance with Russia Despite these troubling events, Atake did not abandon his hopes for friendship with the Russian Empire. He had already extended his hand in alliance and continued to await news of his envoys. He believed that Russia was a just and powerful state and hoped that cooperation with the empire would bring greater security and a better future for the Kyrgyz. For Atake, this alliance was more than a political strategy. He saw it as a path toward protecting the Kyrgyz lands, strengthening their position, and building peaceful relations with a powerful neighboring empire.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Sarytay

Sarytay, youngest beloved son of Karabay Bek of northern Uch Kurtka place from the Basyz clan, is twenty-five, born in the Snake year. Raised partly in the Kokand palace, he blends nomadic bravery with courtly etiquette. Already a husband and father in Andijan, he is sent to Chuy in 1786 to marry sixteen-year-old Syrga, daughter of Atake Baatyr, for political alliance. Leading forty warriors and wise Iman across Shamschy Pass with immense bride-price, he evolves from obedient suitor into tested warrior, ultimately earning Atake’s acceptance through raids, mercy, and victory over Teke while foreshadowing his destiny as future Khan of the Kyrgyz.

Disciplined Aristocrat On Shamschy Pass, despite cold, vodka, and youthful warriors, Sarytay maintains Kokand-learned restraint, silencing boastful talk of bride-price with quiet concern. At Atake’s ordo, housed in three brand-new yurts decorated only with shyrdaks, he endures three days of rich horse meat,

lamb and kymyz without wedding rites, showing no complaint or arrogance. Dressed simply before simply dressed Atake, he inquires politely after Karabay's family. Later he kneels on one knee to request hunting, honoring elder authority. This discipline proves his elite upbringing even when bored and uncertain, distinguishing him from ordinary impatient raiders seeking immediate glory and future leadership.

Perceptive and Humble Strategist During rest on Shamshy, Koysary boasts hundreds of horses, camels with gold, silver, silk prove flawless bride-price, but Sarytay quietly insists something great is lacking. He dislikes empty boasting and halts celebration, ordering march to Chuy. On road, wise Iman explains Atake rejected many powerful suitors for faults in bride-price, specifically absence of slaves alongside cattle and gold. Instead of pride, Sarytay absorbs lesson, recognizing father's warning that Atake must find no defect. This intuition, combining Kokand political education and humility before elders, drives his later raid to capture Kalmyks, turning abstract worry into concrete solution.

Courageous Raider and Hunter Given forty extra warriors and Atake's permission, Sarytay leads eighty horsemen to Kok-Oyrok and Khoton, attacks Kalmyk villages and drives thousands of horses to Kyrgyz land. When two warriors perish, he orders bodies hidden in glacier caves to return after wedding, refusing to mix mourning with marriage rites, showing battlefield composure. He then hunts the tiger, using mare as bait and seizing beast while distracted. At Kemin, he returns to defeat Teke's two thousand with Niyazbek, capturing Teke himself. Each action proves strength beyond lavish gifts and fulfills the ordeal Atake silently imposed upon every ambitious suitor.

Humane and Just Leader Confronting nine captives through translator Bagdoolot, Sarytay discovers two are lost Kyrgyz sons whose mother was seized long ago, and frees them once they name clan and Kyrgyz names, refusing disbelief. When Niyazbek receives nineteen-year-old fair youth and proposes cutting soles of slave's feet, stuffing horsehair and sewing shut to prevent escape, Sarytay rejects torture with disgust. He prefers Bagdoolot's proposal of conversion to Islam by circumcision, which would prevent Kalmyk reacceptance, as firmer but non-cruel bond. Even when captives rage and leader Choku leaps from cliff to honor sky god, Sarytay does not brutalize survivors, revealing ethics rare among raiders.

Quick-Witted Diplomat Before hunt, Atake admires Sarytay's fast strong Kyrgyz-Turkmen cross and asks him to leave it fearing loss, a test no return would follow. Sarytay instantly replies, give me your horse too so I may use both, turning appropriation into honor and departing with two horses, delighting Atake with wit. Similarly he kneels on one knee, reframing boredom of three days eating into respectful request for forty warriors to hunt until answer is ready, giving Atake time and himself purpose. Facing captured Teke's mockery of sedentary Basyz and curse, he coldly answers you are slave without clan, asserting legitimacy.

Atake Baatyr

Atake Tynay Biy Uulu, widely known as Atake Baatyr or Atake Biy, was an important Kyrgyz military and political leader of the eighteenth century.

He was born in 1738 in the Andijan region, where his family had moved after the Dzhungar conquest forced many Kyrgyz communities from their traditional lands. Atake grew up during a difficult period and became interested in military skills from an early age. As a young leader, Atake Baatyr participated in the struggle to return Kyrgyz people to their northern territories. Together with other Kyrgyz leaders, including Berdike Baatyr, he fought against the Dzungars. Their forces eventually helped liberate areas of the Talas and Chüy valleys. Atake became an influential leader among the northern Kyrgyz and served as their Unified Leader (*Jurt Agasy*) from about 1780 to 1787.

Atake Baatyr is especially remembered for his diplomatic efforts. Understanding that the Kyrgyz were surrounded by powerful



neighboring states, he supported establishing relations with the Russian Empire. In 1785, the Kyrgyz sent envoys Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu (Abdrakhman Kuchakov) and Shergazy to Saint Petersburg with a letter for Empress Catherine II. The envoys reached the imperial court and met Catherine in March 1786. She accepted Atake's proposals of friendship and sent him a favorable reply.

Atake Baatyr died around 1787. He is remembered in Kyrgyz history as both a courageous military leader and an important diplomat who helped establish the first official contacts between northern Kyrgyz leaders and the Russian Empire.

Ascetic Simple Man Despite ruling rich Chuy pastures, Atake lives like a poor herder. When Sarytay arrives with forty warriors expecting gold display, he finds three large brand-new yurts decorated only with new shyrdaks, handmade felt carpets, plus twelve plain warrior yurts. Atake greets guests himself, asks kindly after Karabay Bek, his wife and people, wearing a worn coat, worn kalpak, later a herder's jacket. His upper lip, split in war and divided in two, is tied with a small scarf. Yet he feeds them royally with horse meat, lamb and kymyz for three days. Need shows power without display and commands respect.

Patient Diplomat Who Says Neither Yes Nor No When Iman enters Atake's yurt and says thank you for welcome, we want to return home, you know our purpose, Atake does not refuse or accept. He answers I have missed the Basyz clan, stay longer, we will host you more, enjoy your visit. He says neither yes nor no. The same skill appears when Teke Baatyr marches with two thousand men to seize Kemin under pretext of marrying Syrga. Unprepared while arranging a wedding, Atake sends envoys to ask purpose, demand proposal and bride-price, quote custom, then beg two days. Courtesy becomes strategy to gather troops and await Sarytay.

Strict Guardian of Custom and Ordeal-Giver Atake has refused many powerful suitors by finding fault with bride-price, as Iman explains on the road. The fault in Sarytay's caravan of horses, gold, silver, silk is absence of a slave alongside cattle and gold, required by elite custom. Atake never announces rejection; he imposes ordeal through three days of eating without wedding rites. When Sarytay kneels on one knee and asks for forty more warriors to hunt until answer is ready, Atake likes the youth and grants eighty horsemen that afternoon. He tests him by admiring his Kyrgyz-Turkmen cross and asking to leave it. Only captives prove worth.

Far-Sighted Geopolitician Pressed by Qing China after Dzhungar destruction, Kokand pressure on Ketmen-Tobo, and Ablay Khan's raid that killed Jaiyl Baatyr and shattered Solto, Atake understands tribes cannot survive alone. Though equal to Narboto Biy, fifth Kokand ruler, he cannot proclaim khan for lack of biy ancestry, so he seeks a protector. He protects Russian merchants on Silk Road, questions Volga traders whether Slavs are just and force Christianity, learns they do not. Then in 1785 he sends merchant Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu and Shergazy with furs, gold and letter to Catherine II. Even when envoys vanish and robbers shout his name, he persists.

Honorable Unified Leader and Upholder of Etiquette Known as the Jurt Agasy, or "Leader of the Nation," a title considered higher than that of a khan, Atake strictly observed the etiquette of the nomadic world. When Koysary killed the cursing Teke and Sarytay brought back his head tied to the horse's crupper, Atake was embarrassed. He said, "I needed Teke alive so that I could question him about the Russian merchants who were robbed while hearing shouts of 'Atake!'" Thus, a military victory became a source of regret because valuable intelligence had been lost.

Yet Atake judged Sarytay fairly and honored his courage. Sarytay had brought slaves, driven away Kalmyk horses, and killed Atake's enemy. As a result, Atake agreed to accept Sarytay as his son-in-law. However, he held no wedding feast, as the Kyrgyz villages were mourning those killed during Teke's raid—not Teke himself.

Before his departure, Atake introduced Sarytay to the nobles of the Chüy Valley, formally welcoming him into his circle of kin and allies.

Grateful Patriarch Atake never forgets that his father Tynay fled north to south from Kalmuk raids and the Basyz clan gave him land, property, cattle and shelter. He himself grew up in Andijan region, present Fergana valley, under their protection. That memory shapes his reception of Karabay's son. Though he tests Sarytay with silence, three days waiting and Kalmyk ordeal, he greets him himself, asks after

Karabay Bek, wife and people, and says I have missed Basyz. When Sarytay returns proven, Atake repays old bread with kinship, accepting marriage despite mourning and presenting youth to elite. Past hospitality becomes present alliance today.

THEMES

Family: Marriage as a Political Alliance

In the nomadic world of 1786 marriage was far more than a personal bond because it served as a primary mechanism of regional diplomacy and tribal survival. The union between Sarytay and Syrga serves as a clear illustration of this theme where the domestic sphere is inseparable from statecraft. Karabay Bek who is Sarytay's father explicitly designs this alliance to bridge the geographical and tribal divides between the Naryn and Chuy regions. For Karabay the bride is a strategic asset. Her father Atake Baatyr holds the prestige and power of a Leader of the Nation and by joining their bloodlines Karabay seeks to secure a future where his son can rule over the Chuy Ysyk Kol and Talas regions.

A significant aspect of this political union is the perception of the bride herself. Syrga is described as *Kara Daly* which is a term used to signify an old lady in the context of marriage as she remained unwed at sixteen. However Karabay Bek dismisses this social stigma viewing her not through the lens of delicate beauty but through political utility. To him her maturity cleverness and physical strength are assets that will produce a legacy of strong warrior heirs. In this worldview marriage is an investment in the future strength of the clan and the old lady label is merely a sign of a high status woman whose hand is difficult to win.

The meticulous attention paid to the bride price including hundreds of horses gold silk and eventually captives further reflects the political nature of the transaction. It is a public display of the Basyz clan's economic and military strength. Sarytay's realization that the tribute is lacking shows his understanding of this political theater because without the captives his status as a powerful military ally is incomplete. Ultimately the marriage remains valid even when the celebration is canceled due to village deaths because the core political objectives were successfully achieved through Sarytay's defeat of the rival Teke Baatyr.

Illustrative moment: In 1786 marriage functions as statecraft to unite the Naryn and Chuy regions. Karabay Bek urges Sarytay to marry Syrga who is called *Kara Daly* which means an old lady for marriage at sixteen. Although Sarytay hesitates over her age and unconventional looks Karabay explains that she remains single only because of the immense power of her father Atake Baatyr. For these nomadic rulers marriage is a strategic alliance where Syrga acts as the key for Sarytay to rule over Chuy Ysyk Kol and Talas.

Politics: Political Survival and Statehood

The novella explores the precarious state of the Kyrgyz tribes in the late eighteenth century as they were sandwiched between the expanding Kokand Khanate in the south and the powerful Qing Empire in the east. Internal threats from Kazakh khans like Ablay and Teke made tribal survival nearly impossible without broader coordination. Karabay Bek recognizes that tribal fragmentation is a death sentence and he teaches Sarytay that the Kyrgyz must choose between joining Kokand or being swallowed by the Chinese. This political realism sets the stage for a shift from simple tribalism to a more structured search for statehood.

Atake Baatyr embodies this transition from a local chieftain to a national leader. Though he lacks the big elite ancestry required to officially call himself Khan he earns the title *Jurt Agasy* which means Leader of the Nation. This title represents a new sense of national responsibility and Atake understands that protecting the Silk Road and the nomadic way of life requires an ally beyond their immediate borders. His leadership is not just about tribal raids but about the long term security of all Kyrgyz people in the Chuy Valley and beyond.

The most significant evidence of this quest for statehood is Atake's diplomatic reach toward the Russian Empire. Driven by the threat of the Chinese Khan and the instability of the Kazakh steppe Atake sends a formal mission to Catherine II. He chooses the highly educated merchant Abdurahman Kuchuk uulu to write the letter in Chagatai and lead the envoys. They carry rich pelts and gold to Empress Catherine to signal a desire for Russian protection. Even when the envoys vanish and rivals like Teke try to sabotage his reputation Atake does not waver. He views a partnership with Russia as a fair alternative to the religious

and cultural pressures of his other neighbors. Through these envoys Atake lays the early foundations for Kyrgyz international diplomacy and a more stable form of statehood.

Illustrative moment: Atake Baatyr sends his envoys west toward the court of Empress Catherine II. Rather than relying on isolated tribal raids, he studies the Russians first, protecting their merchants on the Silk Road and questioning traders along the Edil River about whether the Slavs force conversion to Christianity. Reassured, he entrusts the mission to Abdurahman, a learned man fluent in Chagatai, who composes the formal letter himself. The gifts of furs and gold transform a nomadic chief into a statesman negotiating with an empire. When the envoys disappear for two years and Teke tries to blame him for the merchant robberies, Atake's refusal to retreat reveals a leader thinking beyond his own lifetime toward lasting security for the Kyrgyz.

Transformation: The Making of a Ruler (Coming of Age)

Sarytay's journey across the freezing Shamsky Pass marks his transition from a privileged, palace-educated youth into a battle-hardened leader. Raised in the refined courts of the Kokand Khanate, he understands the strict etiquette of the nomadic aristocracy, yet he remains untested by the brutal realities of the steppe. His coming of age requires him to prove that he possesses not only his father's vast wealth, but also the cunning, moral fortitude, and martial strength necessary to rule.

When Atake Baatyr tests the young suitor by asking him to leave behind his prized Kyrgyz-Turkmen horse, Sarytay realizes that surrendering the animal means losing it forever. Instead of refusing or submitting weakly, he demonstrates sharp political wit. He drops to one knee and boldly requests Atake's horse as well, riding out with two magnificent steeds and earning the older ruler's quiet respect.

His true evolution into a just sovereign is forged during the Kalmyk raid. After capturing nine warriors to fulfill the missing human element of the bride price, Sarytay is confronted by the brutal traditions of the older generation. When the Chuy nobleman Niyazbek demands a captive and proposes cutting the soles of the slave's feet to stuff them with horsehair to prevent escape, Sarytay firmly rejects the torture. He then personally speaks with the captives and, upon discovering two of them are lost Kyrgyz sons, immediately sets them free.

The final step in his transformation happens in the smoke of the Kemin Valley. When Teke Baatyr ravages the Kyrgyz villages, Sarytay abandons his role as a mere suitor and becomes a military commander. He surrounds the Kazakh invaders, captures Teke, and coldly dismantles the rival's insults about his lineage. Through wit, mercy, and battlefield victory, Sarytay proves he is ready to lead.

Illustrative moment: Sarytay's coming of age is shown by his conduct during the raid on the Kalmyk lands. When two of his warriors die in the fighting he does not panic or retreat but makes the difficult decision to leave their bodies in the glacier caves, resolving to bring them back to the village for proper burial only after the wedding, so that mourning will not spoil the celebration. This choice reveals a young leader learning to place the mission above personal grief. His maturity deepens when the captives are brought before him and the noble Niyazbek proposes cutting the soles of their feet and stuffing them with horsehair. Sarytay refuses the cruel torture, proving that his authority is guided by honor rather than brutality.

Culture:

Lineage and the Definition of Beauty

In the harsh landscape of the eighteenth-century steppe, physical beauty and aristocratic lineage were judged by utility and survival rather than delicate aesthetics or empty titles. The novella challenges superficial standards primarily through the unseen character of Syrga. When Sarytay learns he is to marry her, he hesitates because she is sixteen, an age considered past a woman's prime in their culture, earning her the label of *Kara Daly*, or "old lady." Furthermore, she is famously large and powerfully built, lacking the fragile grace celebrated in the poetry of the Kokand courts. However, Karabay Bek swiftly redefines this standard for his son. In the nomadic worldview, a woman's worth is tied directly to the resilience of the bloodline. Delicate beauties do not birth the fierce, broad-shouldered warriors required to defend the clan from Chinese or Kazakh invasions. Syrga's physical sturdiness and sharp intellect make her the ultimate prize for a ruler seeking a lasting dynasty.

The concept of lineage is subjected to a similar pragmatic shift, where pure bloodlines hold less value than proven capability. Atake Baatyr is arguably the most formidable ruler in the region, yet he cannot officially proclaim himself Khan because his ancestors were not of the *biy* elite. Instead, his people grant him the higher title of *Jurt Agasy*, meaning *Unified Leader* proving that merit supersedes strict genetic pedigree. Conversely, the antagonist Teke Baatyr boasts of his noble Kazakh heritage, but his authority is undermined by persistent rumors that he is merely a former Turkmen captive. When Teke attempts to insult the Basyz clan as weak and sedentary, Sarytay immediately attacks his rival's lack of true roots. Ultimately, both beauty and lineage are measured by the strength to survive and protect the nation.

Illustrative Moment: When Sarytay dismisses Syrga as a plain and aging bride, Karabay Bek immediately reshapes his understanding of value. He points out that her single status is a testament to her father's terrifying power, not a personal defect. He then invokes the ancient belief that sturdy women, rather than fragile beauties, are destined to mother heroes. In this moment, worth is stripped of vanity and tied directly to bloodline potential, teaching Sarytay that a bride's greatest asset is the strength she brings to the future lineage.

Honor, Custom, and Etiquette

In the eighteenth-century nomadic world, true power is rarely loud. The Kyrgyz aristocracy operates on a rigid code of honor and etiquette where excessive words are considered a sign of weakness. Instead, profound silence, subtle gestures, and measured pauses carry the heavy weight of statecraft. A ruler's legitimacy is constantly tested by his ability to read these unspoken cues and strictly adhere to ancestral laws. Every kneel, every shared cup of kymyz, and every withheld sentence acts as a binding political contract. To speak too much is to lose dignity; to act without tradition is to forfeit honor.

This strict code profoundly shapes Sarytay's approach to leadership. Although he is only in his mid-twenties and commands forty warriors of the exact same age, he refuses to act as their peer. Drawing from his refined education in the courts of the Kokand Khanate, Sarytay maintains a deliberate, polite distance from his men. While his youthful warriors naturally seek to joke, boast about their wealth, and bond as brothers-in-arms, Sarytay remains an aloof, solitary figure. He understands that casual familiarity erodes command. By never breaking protocol to share a lighthearted moment, he forces his men to view him not as a companion, but as their absolute sovereign. His polite but impenetrable exterior guarantees instant obedience.

When Sarytay arrives in the Chuy Valley, the high-stakes negotiations do not unfold through grand speeches. Atake Baatyr communicates his judgment entirely through environment and action. By hosting the suitor in minimalist yurts and feeding him royal feasts while maintaining a deliberate, unbroken silence regarding the wedding, Atake delivers a powerful message. This non-verbal ordeal forces Sarytay to realize his bride price is flawed without Atake ever uttering the insult of a direct refusal. To the nomad elite, a prolonged delay is as communicative as a written decree.

Atake Baatyr, despite finally accepting Sarytay as his son-in-law, cancels the wedding celebrations entirely.

Because villagers had perished in Teke Baatyr's raid, Atake will not permit festivity to stand beside grief. Instead of feasting, he formally introduces Sarytay to the nobles and respected elders of the Chuy Valley, honoring the alliance through dignified recognition rather than joy. This decision reveals that for Atake, the observance of proper mourning outweighs personal triumph, and that even the union he has tested and approved must yield to the deeper demands of nomadic custom.

Illustrative Moment: The power of non-verbal etiquette is perfectly captured when Sarytay seeks permission to leave the stagnant camp. Rather than complaining about Atake Baatyr's frustrating silence or loudly airing his boredom, Sarytay approaches the older ruler and drops gracefully to one knee. This single, highly respectful physical gesture communicates his submission to Atake's authority without sacrificing his own dignity. He then speaks only a few precise words, asking to go hunting. Atake immediately understands the unspoken subtext—that Sarytay intends to secretly correct the flawed bride price—and grants his silent, approving permission for the expedition.

Conflict:

Religious Identity and Cultural Conflict

The novella captures Central Asia at a volatile spiritual crossroads where expanding Islam, the ancient shamanic practices of the Kalmyks, centered on the worship of the Sky God, and Russian Orthodox Christianity intersect.

In this harsh nomadic world, religion is rarely treated merely as a private matter of faith; spiritual identity acts as a strict boundary between ally and enemy, and religious conversion is often weaponized as a tool for assimilation and control.

When Sarytay captures Kalmyk warriors, the dilemma of how to secure their loyalty arises. The suggestion to force their conversion to Islam via circumcision highlights this political utility. By making the captives physically and culturally Muslim, the Kyrgyz ensure that the Kalmyks, who strictly adhere to their shamanic roots, would never accept them back. Religion becomes an unbreakable chain, far more effective than physical torture.

However, the story also honors the fierce independence of ancient indigenous beliefs. The old ways of the steppe, rooted in the shamanic worship of the Sky God, represent an unyielding cultural pride that refuses to be erased by newer, dominant religions.

On a broader geopolitical level, religious conflict dictates international statecraft. Atake Baatyr's desperate search for a foreign protector is heavily constrained by the fear of cultural annihilation. Sarytay and other elites fear that an alliance with an Orthodox Christian power will destroy their Islamic heritage. Atake's entire diplomatic strategy hinges on the promise of religious tolerance; he only sends his envoys to Catherine II after confirming that the Russian Empire does not force its subjects to convert, proving that political survival is meaningless if it sacrifices their cultural soul.

Illustrative Moment: Sarytay agrees to Bagdoolot's pragmatic suggestion to forcibly convert the prisoners to Islam, knowing their shamanic community will reject them once converted. Enraged by the prospect of losing his spiritual identity, the Kalmyk leader, Choku, begs for a brief moment of freedom to pray to his traditional Sky God. Standing on the edge of a rocky cliff, Choku chooses death over religious submission, hurling himself into the abyss. His tragic suicide vividly demonstrates a fierce, unbreakable devotion to the ancient shamanic faith.

Betrayal and Tribal Rivalry

The novella portrays the fragile and often treacherous nature of alliances among the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. In a world without stable borders or centralized authority, tribal bonds could shift overnight, and trust was a currency easily spent and easily broken. This atmosphere of suspicion and rivalry drives much of the tension in the story, revealing how survival depended on the ability to recognize deceit and respond with decisive force.

The historical roots of this theme are established through the memory of Ablay Khan, the Kazakh ruler who once attacked the Chuy Valley, killed the valiant Jaiyl Baatyr, and nearly destroyed the Solto clan. His cunning shattered the ancient friendship between the Kyrgyz and the Kazakhs, leaving a legacy of distrust that colors every later interaction. This betrayal explains why Atake Baatyr feels compelled to seek a distant protector in Russia, knowing that even after Ablay dies, his heirs will return to raid again.

The most direct expression of tribal rivalry appears in the figure of Teke Baatyr. He arrives not as an honest suitor but as an invader who disguises his ambitions behind a false marriage proposal. By claiming he wishes to marry Syrga while secretly planning to seize the Kemin Valley, Teke weaponizes the very customs of courtship, turning a sacred tradition into a tool of deception. His treachery forces Atake into a diplomatic game of delay, and ultimately into open war.

The resolution of this conflict reinforces the harsh logic of the nomadic world. Teke's deception is answered with violence, and his death becomes both a punishment for his betrayal and a warning to other rivals. Through these interconnected stories of broken trust, the novella argues that tribal unity was precious precisely because it was so easily undone by ambition and treachery.

Illustrative Moment: Teke Baatyr's envoys demand Syrga under the guise of a marriage proposal. Instead of offering a proper bride price, they insolently order Atake to simply deliver his aging daughter,

backing their demand with the threat of two thousand warriors. When the Kyrgyz envoys invoke the proverb that there is no bride without customs, Teke's men dismiss it, claiming a great warrior has the right to take what he wants. This exchange exposes the betrayal at the heart of the invasion, transforming the sacred ritual of courtship into a thin mask for conquest and open aggression.