

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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TIME FLIES / MEZGIL UCHAT (1947)

Aaly Tokombaev (1904-1988)

Reference: Tokombaev, Aaly. *Kuunun syry: Povestter jana angemeler* [The Secret of the Melody: Novellas and Short Stories]. Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2010. 373 pp.

OVERVIEW

Author

Aaly Tokombaev was born in 1904 in Kaiyngdy village, Kemin district. In 1922, he was admitted to the Soviet Party School in Tashkent, and from 1923 to 1927 he studied at the Central Asian Communist University named after V. I. Lenin.

In 1927, he began working as head of the district department of public education in the Chuy District, an early Soviet administrative unit in present-day Kyrgyzstan.

From 1927 to 1929, he served as editor of the newspaper Kyzyl Kyrgyzstan. Between 1930 and 1931, he worked in Moscow at the Central Publishing House as editor of the Kyrgyz section.

From 1931 onward, he became chief editor of Kyrgyzmambas. Between 1934 and 1949, he chaired the Board of the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan, while also serving as editor-in-chief of the journal Soviet Kyrgyzstan and as director of the Institute of Language, Literature, and History of the Kyrgyz branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

In 1955–1956, he was editor-in-chief of the satirical journal Chalkan.

From 1962 to 1978, Tokombaev contributed to the nine-volume Concise Literary Encyclopedia on Kyrgyz literature.

During the Stalinist purges, he was falsely accused of nationalism, membership in a “Social-Turan Party,” and espionage for Japan. He was imprisoned from November 1937 to June 1939, and all his previously published works were destroyed. He was released on June 4, 1939.

In 1988, after his death, Tokombaev's works were officially rehabilitated. In 2007, a national literary prize named after him was established to honor achievements in prose, drama, poetry, and journalism.

His poem “*The Time of October's Arrival*” was published in the first issue of the first Kyrgyzstani newspaper Erkin-Too on November 7, 1924. His first poetry collection, *About Lenin*, was published in Tashkent in 1927 and later revised and reissued as *Lenin* in 1936.

Tokombaev's works were widely translated into Russian and other languages, including Ukrainian, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, and Lithuanian, and some were published abroad. He also translated works by Samuel Marshak, Abai Kunanbayev, and Jambul Jabayev into Kyrgyz.

He was one of the authors of the Kyrgyz SSR State Anthem and contributed to Kyrgyz translations of the USSR anthem and *The Internationale*. His novel *Before Dawn* (*Tang aldynda*) received the Toktogul State Prize of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1967. He was a member of the USSR Writers' Union since 1934, Tokombaev was awarded the title of People's Poet of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1945.

Novella

The novella *Time Flies* (*Mezgil Uchat*) was written in 1947, after World War II. Later, it was translated into other languages and gained wide recognition. It is regarded as one of the most important and successful novellas in Kyrgyz literary tradition, valued for its artistic depth and its reflection of the life and experience of Gapar Aitiev, the first professional artist in Kyrgyz fine art.

Background

The story is biographical. The main character, Japar, is based on the Kyrgyz painter Gapar Aitiev. Japar's father Aitike is modeled on Aitiev's real father. While writing the novella, the author had many conversations with Gapar Aitiev, learning about his childhood, family, hardships, and artistic development. He also used archival and documentary sources and likely shared drafts with the prototype himself.

Gapar Aitiev (1912–1984) was the first professional painter of Kyrgyzstan and one of the founders of national fine art. Born in Toloykon village near Osh, he studied in Moscow under Nikolai Krymov from 1935 to 1938.

During World War II, he fought and was wounded, returning in 1943. Despite hardship, he created important works such as *“Letter from the Front”* (1943), *“Cotton Picking”* (1944), and *“Boats”* (1947), showing everyday life and nature.

He later became a leading portrait and landscape painter. His famous work *“Issyk-Kul – the Sea of Kyrgyzstan”* earned him the Toktogul State Prize in 1967. He also contributed to public art and architecture. The novella reflects not only his life but also the formation of early Kyrgyz Soviet intellectuals and artists in the 1930s–1950s.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Japar – central character based on painter Gapar Aitiev

Aitike – Japar's father, poor worker struggling for survival, deeply loving and protective toward his son

Mamas – boarding school teacher who lost his son in the war, sees Japar as his own child

Uzak – friend of Japar, notices his strange postwar behavior and worries about his mental state

Abdybek – friend of Japar, tries to understand his emotional and inner conflict

Semen Chuykov – famous Kyrgyz artist in Frunze in real life, supports and develops Japar's artistic talent

Vera – art student in Moscow, kind supporter who encourages Japar during creative struggle

Natasha – teacher, early supporter who recognizes Japar's artistic gift and helps him grow

SYNOPSIS

The story begins with Japar and his father Aitike traveling in search of work, food, and survival. They arrive in Kokand, exhausted and hungry, hoping for help at the Rabat Gates, but instead face rejection and harsh treatment. No one offers real support, and Aitike is forced to beg and accept any kind of labor to feed his son. Despite humiliation and poverty, his love for Japar remains strong and protective. Eventually, he finds temporary work as a builder and craftsman, but life stays difficult. While Aitike struggles, young Japar quietly observes the world and begins shaping clay figures, revealing his early artistic imagination even in hardship.

Later, after returning to their village and the changes brought by the October Revolution, Japar is accepted into a boarding school, where teachers discover his extraordinary talent. He continues his studies in Frunze, where he meets Semen Chuykov and other prominent Soviet artists, becoming one of the first professional artists of Kyrgyz origin. His talent grows further when he is sent to Moscow, where the Tretyakov Gallery and art academies deepen his artistic vision.

During World War II, Japar joins the army. After returning, he loses his inspiration and struggles emotionally, but eventually begins to regain his creative strength, preparing for a new and major artistic journey.

SCENES

Aitike, His Son Japar and the Dog

Aitike and His Son Japar Aitike speaks quietly to himself, wondering why happiness always slips away. He has lived honestly, earned his bread fairly, harmed no one. Yet he feels empty. Perhaps he has angered God. Perhaps he is ungrateful. “Forgive me,” he whispers. Though others have hurt him, he believes he has never hurt anyone. Beside him, his young son stirs in his sleep. “Mother... my feet...” the boy murmurs, smiling as if hugging someone in a dream. Aitike's heart softens. Tears fall onto his beard as he kisses him. “Japar, my dear son.” The boy wakes and whispers, “Your beard is wet.” Aitike gently asks him, “Do you want some mulberries?”

A Quiet Healing Japar understands that his father is crying. He says he has washed his face, but he can feel Aitike's sadness. Japar vaguely remembers his mother's death, and his father often speaks of her, so his memories feel new and fragile. When Japar lowers his eyelashes, Aitike senses how much the boy misses his mother. "Do you miss your mom?" Aitike asks softly. Japar weeps and hugs his father. The dog under the mulberry tree comes closer, licking Japar's face and hands. Crying, Japar frees his hands and starts playing with his dog. The sadness slips away with the scene.

The Road to Kokand Aitike's world revolves around his son, Japar, sharing every joy and sorrow. He constantly whispers his dreams for Japar's future: "Will you be safe, happy, and healthy, a credit to your father?" Japar's sweet lisp, unable to pronounce 's' and 'r' sounds, only deepens his father's affection. When Japar asks for water, even for his dog (though not from a teapot), Aitike prepares for a journey. Placing a *kurjun*, a double-sided saddlebag, on their donkey, he carefully settles Japar into one pocket and his belongings into the other. Thus, Aitike, Japar, and their loyal dog set off for Kokand.

Rabat Gates

Sunset at the Rabat Gate As the sun bleeds across the Kokand sky, Aitike halts his donkey. He carefully removes Japar from the saddlebag, but the boy cries, his feet and toes aching from being folded. Aitike, tearing a strip from his old coat, gently bandages Japar's sore toe. The boy drinks water and nibbles dried bread, sharing his last piece with their watchful dog, a gesture that warms his father's heart. "Soon, Japar," Aitike assures him, "we'll find the Rabat Gates in Kokand." A quiet hope settles over them as they prepare to continue their journey.

Rabat Gates In Central Asian cities, a *Rabat* often referred to the caravanserai or a fortified quarter outside the main city walls, where travelers, merchants, and sometimes artisans would stay. The *gates* (darbazar) would be the entrances to these areas or to large, wealthy compounds within them. Japar knows the Rabat Gates promise work and food for his father. But Kokand's dusk brings only closed doors. Veiled women and scarf-clad men turn them away, some offering a crust, others harsh words.

Stone Boots Aitike, exhausted, murmurs, "Rabat for the rich, injustice for the poor." He finds one grand, ornate gate, hoping for kindness. A man appears, asking his trade. Aitike, with a desperate wit, offers to sew stone boots if given a knife for stone, an awl for piercing, and thread from sand. The man, enraged, shoves him away. "Disappear, fool!" Aitike begs to stay for the night, pointing to Japar, but the man merely gestures to the wall. "Here's your place!" Aitike, heart heavy, pulls his son close. "My bright star, without you, my days would end. You are my soul."

No Weariness in the Laborer At dawn, a forlorn figure, Aitike, sits hunched by Rabat Gate, an entrance to a grand, wealthy quarter, chin on knees, a shaggy black dog curled beside him like a giant cap, pressed close to his sleeping son. From the minaret, the muezzin's "Allahu Akbar" rings out, but Aitike hears only the baker's cry: "Hot bread!" He rises, drawn by hunger. The muezzin on high, annoyed, scolds, "Infidel, heed God's voice, not bread!" Aitike mutters, "If God's house is dust, where's sustenance for me? A piece of bread is dearer." He catches himself, pleads forgiveness, and then challenges the muezzin's piety. The holy man, shrinking back, calls him a devil and dismisses him. Aitike, though victorious, bristles at the insult, "Infidel."

Bread for a Spade A boy, balancing a basket of hot bread on his head, dances through Kokand's narrow streets, calling "Hot bread!" Japar, now awake and complaining, cries, "Father, bread!" Aitike calls out, and the baker stops, asking which bread he'd like. "Give me one," Aitike replies in Uzbek, then showing his spade: "My son, I have no money. How much bread for this?" The baker snatches a piece from Japar's hand, who weeps. Aitike, trembling, begs for bread "for God's sake," offering the spade. "It's worth at least one bread." The baker says, "I'm not a baker, I have a master. Can you build walls?" Aitike, desperate, lists his skills: "Yes, I know, son. I build clay ovens, houses, carve saddles, craft two-stringed lutes, and I sing."

The Tanner and His Hope "No, I won't take it," the baker says, dismissing Aitike. "My master needs a wall builder. You might be just right." As he walks off, the scent of hot bread fills Aitike's nostrils, making Japar

cry out. Aitike finds a man building a clay oven, who, mistaking him for a wealthy Kyrgyz, offers him work: "You'll stay here, build these walls. We'll feed you, give you three som and fifty tyiyn." "Agreed," Aitike replies, stroking Japar's forehead. "All my effort is for this child." The baker leaves, content. Aitike embraces his son, whispering, "You are the lesson of my life. Will you become a man, like a great man's son? Do you know your unhappy father's sorrow?" He kisses the hand holding the bread, his hope for Japar fueling his tired spirit.

The Well Japar slides from his father's arms, wondering. He tugs his dog's ear, "Is your tummy empty? I won't give my bread, no, no! Will you cry?" He hugs the dog, then asks Aitike, "Shall I give it?" Without waiting for an answer, he feeds the dog. Aitike nods, lost in thought, watching the dog eat. The baker, Ashymakhun, emerges, asking Aitike's name. "Aitike Saryk." Ashymakhun says, "Water is far. Take this. Go past the tanneries, left towards Rabat Gate, behind it is the well. Fetch water from there. That's where you'll get water for building." He tells Japar to wait. But Japar, ignoring him, calls his dog and follows Aitike. The large goat hide waterskin, full to Aitike's chest, makes him sweat and grow dizzy mid-journey. "Not from weakness, but from hunger," he thinks, remembering Ashymakhun's words. "No weariness in the laborer," he mutters, staggering on.

The Birth of an Artist

Mud Bread and a Cry Beside the half-built fortress wall, a muddy pit lies like sour dough. Japar plays there, shaping little "breads" from clay and tossing them to the black dog. "Here, eat!" he laughs. The dog runs, sniffs, and finds nothing. He shows it a clay donkey. "If you won't take it, I'll ride away to my father," he says. He presses a clay camel to the dog's nose. The dog only stares. Disappointed, it howls at the sky. The baker strikes it. The dog limps away. "Don't hit him!" Japar cries. Aitike drops the heavy goatskin of water and runs. His beard trembles like a frightened cat's fur. "What happened?"

Japar and His Inspiration Ashumakhun says the dog howls and must be killed. The boy hugs it, calling it "poor," afraid but protective. His father, Aitike, feels hurt by harsh words about fate and poverty. He looks at his son and quietly wonders what kind of life awaits him. The boy plays in the dust, shaping small figures from clay, a dog, a donkey, even a man. He proudly shows them, full of innocent joy. Aitike watches, thinking of his lost wife and the life they never shared. Then he takes his komuz and begins to play. Soft music rises, and in that moment, a quiet dream is born.

A Father's Lament They always sleep by the wall. At night, when the mat is spread, Japar gathers his clay dolls, holding his favorites close and whispering to them until he falls asleep. Aitike usually rises to fetch water, but not tonight. He stays and plays the komuz softly beside his son.

Tashbay, the bread seller, hears the music and sits next to him. "You seem inspired. Where is your home? Your family?" he asks. Aitike sighs. "I once have land, but Atabek takes it. After my wife died, I married again and again. None stayed. Stepmothers wounded a child deeper than an axe."

A Broken Childhood Aitike tells that after the boy's mother, another woman entered their lives. She worked hard, but her words were sharp and cruel. She called the boy unlucky, pulled his ears, and struck him, forcing him into silence. Fear slowly settled in the child's heart. When pain came, he no longer cried out; he only hid his face and curled up. Later, other women did not beat him, yet their coldness still hurt. The boy cried quietly, asking his father for protection. Aitike watched, unable to ease the pain, carrying it within himself. Now he looks at the small clay toys in his son's hands. With quiet pride, he holds onto a simple hope that one day, the boy will grow into a true master.

Returning Homeland

Harvest Time In Fergana's orchards, apricot trees sway like drunken dancers. Their branches bend low, heavy with fruit. When the wind whispers, apricots rain down like blessings. Ashymakhun, generous in harvest time, invites the poor: "Come, eat as much as you wish. Help us sell a little, dry the rest. You'll earn your bread." But this year, the young men are gone. Rifles on their shoulders, stars on their caps, they march to defend Bukhara. Only old women, old men, Aitike, and Tashbay remain. They work slowly. Ashymakhun scolds them: "You eat well but tire quickly!"

Japar watches silently, shaping apricots into tiny figures.

My Life's Only Fortune Aitike walks with his son. Japar points to a high apricot. Aitike sets down his basket, reaches with a stick. The branch bends; ripe apricots fall like rain. The rich owner shouts, "Lazy beggar! Will you burst eating fallen fruit?" Aitike's face flushes. The word "lazy" always stings. Yet he answers calmly: "Sir, don't be angry. It is my son who wants it," he says gently. The man sneers: "Your son? God gave you a crippled child. Be content with your fate." Aitike's voice trembles: "This boy is my life, my only fortune. His fate may yet be greater than yours."

The Fight Ashymakhun's eyes widen as if his fate is slipping away. He feels everything breaking, like rotten apricots falling to the ground. He senses danger and panic. Suddenly, he grabs Aitike and drags him out, shouting insults. Aitike does not respond with anger, only asks to settle accounts calmly. The argument grows. Japar cries and throws fruit, begging for his father. Ashymakhun pushes the boy, but his dog attacks him fiercely. The fight explodes. Aitike bleeds but keeps fighting. Soon others arrive and separate them. Ashymakhun is badly beaten and collapses under a tree, groaning in pain.

A Quiet Farewell The old men send Tashbay for water. He runs quickly through the apricot trees, but returns with calm words instead of fear. He warns Aitike that he should leave, because trouble may come. Aitike quietly wipes the blood from his face and listens. He does not fight anymore. Instead, he accepts the moment with silent understanding. Aitike drinks water and speaks softly about his own uncertain future. They say goodbye with respect, as if sharing a brief moment of peace in a harsh world. Aitike then decides to return to the village, and his son quietly asks where they will go next.

Returning Home Aitike looks at his son with sadness and tells him they are going back to the village. The boy quickly gathers his clay toys, wanting to take them along. His father tells him to leave them, but the boy keeps one small clay donkey, saying he will show it to other children. Aitike gently agrees and packs it away. They begin their journey, leaving the place behind. The dog follows them in silence. The boy asks where the village is. Aitike says it lies beyond the mountains, where he was born and where his mother rests. The boy walks beside him, holding his clay toy, and smiles softly, imagining he can even make his mother from clay and keep her at home.

The Clay World of Japar A lonely old poplar tree stands in the wind like a silent witness of time. At its base, a small boy named Japar plays in the dust, shaping clay animals and people. His world is made of earth and imagination. Two riders arrive and watch him quietly. The boy does not notice at first, lost in his play. When they speak, he slowly stands and answers shyly. He says the clay figures are his animals, his toys, even his mother. The riders smile in surprise. One man realizes the boy is Japar, a child he once knew.

A Forgotten Friend Returns Satar Torobaev meets Japar and realizes the boy is the son of his old friend Aitike. He remembers the past, when they shared life, music, and hardship. Holding the old komuz, he feels deep emotion and speaks about how long it has been since they last met. He looks at Japar's clay toys with surprise and affection. Japar tells stories about his father and their struggles. Satar listens carefully, remembering old times and lost friendships. He feels both joy and sadness as the past comes alive again through the boy.

A Child between Two Worlds Satar offers Japar a chance to study, promising food, clothes, and a better life in school. He speaks of a new world filled with books and opportunity. Japar listens but does not fully understand. He feels afraid to leave his father, thinking he might be lost without him. The idea of school is exciting, but separation feels painful. He asks if his father can come too. Satar gently explains they can meet again later. Japar becomes hopeful but unsure, holding onto his clay toys and his love for his father.

Broken Dreams in the Steppe Japar meets the blacksmith, who remembers the past. He speaks of Aitike Saryk as a skilled man, a komuz player and craftsman, once full of life. The old man's voice trembles as he recalls death of Aitike's wife and the suffering left behind. Uulbala, the wife of Aitike, lay dying in a dim room, her strength already fading. She asked to see the world one last time, but darkness filled the doorway instead. She worried for her son Japar and spoke his name with quiet love. Aitike held the child close as

she weakened. Before her hand could reach him, it slipped away. Silence fell like night over the room. The family stood frozen in grief, carrying the weight of a life that ended too soon and a love that remained unfinished.

Hope for the Orphan Boy The travelers discuss Japar's future. Satar suggests taking the boy to study, offering food, care, and a better life. The child listens quietly, thinking of his father and toys. He fears losing home but is drawn to new hope. "I will not leave you," Satar promises. The old blacksmith agrees to help. In the fading light, they decide to protect the boy. A fragile promise of future and freedom begins to form.

The Man with Ayran A handsome dark boy with a red silk tie steps out of the dormitory and looks around as if waiting for someone. Behind the old wall hides a flat-faced, limping boy. He whistles softly. The boy with the tie runs toward him. "We'll catch the thief today. He stole my shirt again," he says, peeking toward the yard. "Do you see him?" "No. Maybe he's stealing now." A man with a bucket stops nearby. "Do you sell ayran?" the boy asks. The man smiles gently. "No, sons. Are you boarding school children? Is there a boy named Aitikeev here?"

A Memory Aitike offers ayran from a small jug, calling the boys kindly to drink. One proud boy refuses, saying the jug is old and that he already knows Aitike. Another boy drinks quietly, swallowing a few mouthfuls. Aitike gently asks who their parents are. The limping boy whispers that they should speak respectfully, as Satar taught them. Silence falls over the group. One boy finally says he is Atabek's son. Atabek is remembered as a powerful man who once took Japar's land by force during troubled times. Aitike pauses, troubled by the name. He wonders why Atabek's son is here. The boy answers quietly that his father is no longer a wealthy man.

The Suspicion Atabek's son speaks to Aitike with mockery, echoing his father's pride. He calls Japar a thief and rushes to tell Satar. Aitike trembles, asking what was stolen, believing the boy cannot be guilty. Fear and old memories rise in him, and the word "thief" burns his mind. Satar and others approach the dormitory, watching carefully through the windows. The boy, Japar, sits inside quietly, unaware of the accusations growing outside. He plays in his own world while strangers judge him through the glass.

The Innocence Revealed Inside the dormitory, Japar is surrounded by watching shadows. He thinks they are trees moving in the sun. When he finally notices people, he looks up with confusion, not guilt. The room fills with silence and tension. Then Natasha, a teacher, runs in, overwhelmed with emotion. She hugs him tightly, calling him dear and golden, realizing he is innocent. Her voice breaks the fear in the room. Japar stands surprised, while the adults slowly understand their mistake.

The Hidden Talent Aitike stands outside the room, afraid to enter among the people. He feels their eyes judging him and imagines shame being placed on his son. He moves quietly, peeking through the window. Inside, Satar recognizes him and calls him warmly, inviting him in. Aitike hesitates, hearing strange whispers in his mind. Inside, Japar sits surrounded by people, quietly drawing on wooden boards, unaware of the tension. His soft voice and calm hands reveal a quiet gift that others begin to notice.

The Discovery Satar guides Aitike closer, showing him the child's drawings. Natasha gently cleans Japar's face and smiles with surprise. She calls him a "Kyrgyz Repin," a local version of a great Russian painter. Aitike, confused, holds his son tightly, not understanding what he sees. Satar explains that the boy has a rare gift and needs care and materials to grow. The room grows still as they realize the child's drawings are more than play, they are signs of future art and hope.

Eternal Friendship

The Valley of Art In June, Frunze turns green and alive like a silk cloth. Snow mountains shine above the city, while soft wind moves the fields like waves. Painter Abratsov often works alone near the mountains, capturing light and shadow. One morning, he paints with young artist Semen Chuykov beside him. They talk about art and talent. Abratsov shares stories of students at the art school, saying many children show hidden gifts. He remembers one boy whose drawings once surprised everyone. The land, the sky, and the wind feel part of their quiet creative world.

The False Claim and True Talent Abratsov tells Semen about a classroom story. A small boy named Japar from a lower class creates bright, imaginative sketches of birds, animals, and strange beautiful forms. Another student, Kudung, takes Japar's drawings and pretends they are his own. At first, the teacher admires Kudung's "work," but the classmates know the truth. They whisper among themselves and finally tell the teacher that Japar is the real artist. The teacher realizes the mistake and recognizes Japar's natural talent. Even in silence and doubt, the child's creativity speaks louder than imitation.

The Quiet Dreamer A shy boy named Japar appears at the classroom door, asking to see drawings. He is small, nervous, and full of hope. The teacher gently questions him, and Japar says he loves drawing and has work to show. Inside the room, students gather and watch with curiosity. Japar points to his simple sketches with confidence. The teacher sees something special in him. Though others once doubted him, his quiet passion stands out. He leaves softly, and the teacher believes he may grow into a true artist one day.

The Boy Who Does Not Notice When Semen Chuykov hears the boy's difficult story, his heart grows heavy. "Show him to me today," he says. On Dzerzhin Street, students plant trees, laughing and singing. "Where is Japar Aitikeev?" they ask. "There he is drawing." They approach quietly from behind. Japar stands absorbed, changing brushes, stepping back, studying his work. Semen coughs loudly, even sneezes, but Japar does not turn. The boys laugh behind him, yet he notices only the shift in their poses. Japar says: "Uzak, your posture changed. Stand as before. Yes—show the sapling. Smile." He sees movement, not noise.

The First Recognition When Japar finishes, he steps back and nods with quiet certainty. "Now it is done. Enough," says Semen, moving closer. Japar startles and almost drops his stand. Then he sees Abratsov and smiles shyly. They introduce him to Semen Chuykov. Sweat shines on Japar's face. He feels small before the two artists. Semen embraces him warmly. "Now we are three," he says. "But you are the first painter from Kyrgyz. Let today begin a friendship that will never end. Japar lowers his eyes, yet inside him something rises, like a young sun beginning to burn.

Moscow

The Light of Tretyakov Gallery When Japar first sees Moscow he feels he has stepped into another world. All the hard and hungry days behind him fade away. Semen Chuykov does not ask what he wants to see. He takes him from museum to museum, until at midday they enter the Tretyakov Gallery. Semen tells him the story of each painting, the life of each painter, quiet and word for word. Japar cannot sleep at all that night. The paintings pass before his eyes like a ribbon. A quiet fear enters his heart. Semen once said there is nothing easy in this world. Japar nods to himself. Yes. Nothing is easy. You must overcome it with strength.

The First Lesson When they enter the art school, the smell of turpentine hits Japar like a warm blow. Boys and girls stand before blank canvases, drawing. A grey bearded professor walks between them, correcting their poses. "Your line has changed. Hold your left arm closer to your head. Your knuckles have disappeared. Japar does not recognize the man he once knew only from distant stories. "To be a painter you must first learn to see," the professor smiles and says. "One day you will say these same words. Now go home. Draw this model today. We will begin your private lesson tomorrow." Japar bows shyly. "Forgive me, professor."

The Struggle of a Young Artist Japar's first day at the Moscow art studio is very difficult. He is a shy young man from Kyrgyzstan who has never seen a naked woman before. When he has to draw the female model, he feels trapped and ashamed. His charcoal pencil feels as heavy as lead, and his hands do not move. He feels like everyone is watching him and laughing at his nervousness. Japar begins to doubt himself and misses his old life as a schoolteacher. He worries that he does not have enough courage or talent to become a real artist in the big city.

True Beauty and New Friends While Japar struggles, a boastful student named Sergey mocks his appearance. Sergey is handsome but very arrogant. Japar defends himself by saying that true beauty is found inside a person's soul, not just in their face. A kind girl named Vera agrees with him. She tells Sergey that his beauty is cold like a stone, while Japar's heart is warm. Vera's kindness reminds Japar of his old teacher, Natasha. With her help and encouragement, Japar finally feels brave enough to start his drawing. He realizes that he is not alone and can find friends even far from home.

Finding His Confidence Japar calms down and starts to focus on the model. He holds his charcoal pencil freely and begins to draw with smooth strokes. He stays quiet for a long time, only stopping sometimes to look at the model carefully. Then he continues drawing the figure with skill and confidence. The other young artists watch him closely. They whisper to each other and point at his work. Some of them nod their heads with approval when Japar draws certain parts well. They smile because they see that he has real talent. Japar finally feels comfortable and his fear disappears completely.

The Professor's Encouragement The bell rings and a professor enters the art studio. Vera runs to him and whispers something in his ear. The model wants to rest and starts to move, but Japar asks her to wait because he is drawing her feet. The professor watches Japar work and is very impressed. He hugs Japar warmly and praises his talent. He tells Japar that he will not let him leave until he becomes a true artist. The professor says that Japar's people expect great things from him. He reminds Japar that life is short and he must work hard.

War is Sorrow, War is a Great Test

The Bitter Soldier In a military hospital, wounded soldiers rest after the war. One soldier with a missing leg complains bitterly about his fate. He walks with crutches and feels angry about his disability. He says that nobody will want him now, not even the girls who used to admire him. He thinks his life is ruined and wishes he had died in battle instead. He curses his situation and feels sorry for himself. The other wounded soldiers listen quietly to his complaints. Some of them understand his pain, but others think he is being too negative about life.

The Brave Response A soldier with no legs and one blind eye sits on his bed. He listens to the bitter soldier complain and decides to speak up. He grabs the complaining soldier's crutch and throws it at him playfully. The other wounded soldiers laugh as the bitter soldier jumps away in fear. The brave soldier points out that the complaining soldier does not really want to die. He proves that despite his injuries, the bitter soldier still values his life. This moment of humor brings some lightness to the hospital room and makes everyone think differently.

Pride in Sacrifice The legless soldier speaks seriously to his comrades about their sacrifices. He tells them they should feel proud, not ashamed. They lost their limbs fighting for their Motherland, their families, and all Russian people. He says nobody has the right to mock them because they are heroes. The Soviet people will thank them for their protection and bravery. The other soldiers agree with his words. Even the bitter soldier finally understands and admits the legless soldier is right. Together, they decide to go see new posters in the hall, moving forward with courage and hope.

A Call for Help in the Hospital Hall "Help us, sister, please help us," the wounded soldiers call out as they look toward the door. A thin, pale woman with white hair enters, holding a poster. "Come here, comrades!" she says. "This attack is your achievement!" A frustrated soldier walks through the hall, muttering to himself. He jokes with her, asking her not to call them "comrades," but to call them "my children." The woman laughs warmly and replies that every soldier is her child. The men relax and smile, then turn to study the poster carefully, trying to understand what it shows.

Questions, Pride, and a Lesson in Respect The white-haired woman suddenly looks at a soldier named Japar Aitikeev. She asks if he recognizes her, but he does not. Japar apologizes and says her voice sounds familiar and warm. The woman smiles sadly and says even her own mother cannot recognize her now. She reveals that she is Vera, his classmate from art school. Japar is completely shocked. He remembers her

as the beautiful young girl who helped him draw his first picture. He cannot believe that this old-looking woman is his young friend Vera.

A Reunion That Heals Old Wounds The woman smiles gently, and her voice sounds young and familiar. She says she is not his mother, but his classmate. She asks if he remembers Vera, the kind girl who once guided him with a large charcoal pencil when Japar began drawing. Japar's confusion fades as warmth returns. He embraces Vera and presses his forehead to her chest. Vera's eyes fill with tears as she promises that she never forgets him. The room becomes quiet with respect, and she offers to explain everything from the beginning. The frustrated soldier apologizes and sits down, humbled.

The Trial of War

Why Her Hair Turned Grey Vera is still young, yet her hair is already white. When asked why, she begins her story of war. Her voice is quiet but heavy with memory. She tells how fear, loss, and suffering changed her in a single day. She remembers the camp, the silence, and the moment when life and death stood side by side. "Fear colored my hair," she says softly. War did not only wound the body; it reached the soul. From that day, she was no longer the same, and her youth faded under the weight of what she had seen.

The Father's Courage In the camp, prisoners are forced to face death. Vera's father refuses to betray others to save himself. He calls people to die with honor, not fear. He stands firm before the captain, speaking with strength. When he is beaten, he does not fall in spirit. Even when death comes, he remains brave. His family rushes to him, but nothing can save him. His courage becomes his final act. In that moment, Vera sees what true strength is—not survival at any cost, but dignity even in death.

The Death Camp After the shooting, the survivors are driven to another place called the death camp. The weak fall along the road and are killed without mercy. Hunger, fear, and exhaustion follow them. Only a few reach the camp alive. Vera carries these memories forever. Her voice trembles as she speaks, but she does not forget. Japar listens in silence, feeling the weight of her story. He understands that war leaves marks that cannot be seen. It takes youth, peace, and hope, leaving behind only memory and quiet pain.

After the War

He Walks in Silence They return from the war, but Japar does not return the same. No one understands what is happening inside him. It feels as if a hidden fire burns quietly in his heart. Sometimes he speaks with sudden irritation, and at other times he falls completely silent, looking at people with distant, pleading eyes. When asked what troubles him, he only says, "You don't need to know." His friend Uzak believes this is not ordinary behavior. He thinks Japar is either in love, deeply hurt, or carrying a sorrow he cannot share. Abdybek doubts this, but Uzak is certain there is a quiet pain living inside Japar.

A Man Lost in Thought Japar walks slowly down the street, his collar open, his eyes fixed on the ground as if counting each step. He does not notice the people around him, the laughing children, the passing woman, or the noise of the city. He seems completely alone, as if walking through an empty field. Uzak watches him carefully and tells Abdybek that something is wrong. Abdybek begins to worry, saying Japar does not look well and might be lost in his own mind. The trees stand still around him, and it feels as if the world itself is careful not to disturb his thoughts.

Calling Him Back Suddenly, Abdybek calls out loudly, trying to bring Japar back to reality. His voice draws attention, and people turn to look. Some smile, thinking it strange to shout in such a place. Abdybek feels embarrassed but continues, worried about his friend. Uzak laughs quietly and suggests they follow Japar instead. As they pause, they meet Bolotbek, who greets them warmly and jokingly calls them engineers of the human soul. He compares them to bees that search for sweetness, gathering words that can warm hearts and give strength, even in moments of confusion and silence.

The Restless Mind of a Talent Bolotbek listens calmly and smiles, saying they may be poor "engineers of the human soul" if they cannot understand their friend. He explains that people of art are often troubled not by real suffering, but by their own talent. They are hungry for beauty, for life, for meaning. True creators

feel restless because nothing satisfies them fully. Japar, he says, is not a small man. He carries honor and strength inside him. His unease may come from creative tension, not sorrow. Perhaps he dreams, imagines, or searches. Such people need feeling, love, and inspiration to awaken their inner world.

Searching for the Unseen Later, they see Japar again. He walks alone near the flowing water, stopping now and then like a child at play. He watches the stream, drops leaves into it, and follows them with quiet focus. He does not notice anyone around him. To strangers, he might seem lost or unwell. But his friends remain silent, watching from afar. Uzak wonders if he should call him back, but they decide not to disturb him. Bolotbek reflects deeply and says Japar is a man of thought. Inside him live poetry, dreams, and conflict. He is not lost. He is searching for something unseen, something only he can find.

Under the Silent Stars Abdybek and Uzak return from Japar's house after midnight. The sky is wide and full of stars, shining like sparks on a dark sea. They walk slowly, speaking of their friend. Uzak believes love has touched Japar's heart, that someone has lit a quiet fire inside him. He says love often escapes reason. Abdybek disagrees and insists that reason must guide a person, or else he will lose himself. Still, he admits that Japar carries a hidden sorrow. They cannot understand it. Before parting, they decide to meet again and speak honestly about him.

A Mind Awake at Night Near the workshop, a light suddenly goes out. Abdybek pauses, thinking it might be a guard, but it is Japar inside. Alone in the dark, he opens the wide windows and leans forward, looking at the quiet street and silver trees under the moonlight. He seems lost between dream and reality. He speaks softly to himself, questioning his own talent and purpose. Once, he believed in his gift, but now it feels distant, like a fading dream. He feels pressure to create something new, something great, yet his nights pass in restless thought without peace or answer.

Restless Before the Canvas Japar sighs heavily and lights the lamp again. He stands before the large canvas, staring at the charcoal sketch for a long time. He wants to paint, but something stops him. Frustrated, he walks outside into the quiet street. The sky is deep and clear, the mountains shine under the moonlight, calm and powerful. He feels small before their beauty. He thinks he is simply tired, yet it feels as if unseen forces disturb his mind. Returning inside, he searches for meaning in books, stopping at Raphael's Madonna, but even that cannot hold his thoughts.

Memory Awakens in the Night Japar lies down, but his mind does not rest. He turns off the light and opens the window wide. In the darkness, the tall poplar trees appear like shadows in a dream. One tree reminds him of his childhood. Long ago, his father Aitike built a small hut under such a tree. That place changed his life, where he met the poor jeweler and Satar, who took him to the boarding school. The memory feels alive. He remembers letters about those who raised him, their pride and care. As he lies there, his past returns like a quiet, endless story.

Mamas' Letter Japar remembers a letter from Mamas, his boarding school teacher. In it, Mamas writes about the war that took his only son, Uson. Victory came at a terrible cost, and his son did not return from the battlefield. The letter speaks with quiet sorrow, as Mamas tells Japar that age and loneliness have now become his companions. He calls Japar his child as well and asks him not to forget the boarding school. He begs him to write letters often, to keep contact, and not to leave him alone in silence, as if he were truly without children.

Art and the Restless Mind of Japar Japar's thoughts move from the letter into the world of art. He sees, in his mind, the great paintings he once learned about, as if they are unfolding before his eyes. Works by masters like Rembrandt, Raphael, and Repin pass through his imagination like a living gallery of light and shadow. He feels as if these images are speaking to him, questioning his own purpose and talent. His mind cannot rest, filled with emotion, memory, and vision. Art and life blend together inside him, and he feels both inspired and lost, as if he is searching for something he cannot yet name or reach.

The Living Images in Japar's Mind Japar stares at his sketch and suddenly the simple lines begin to change. The drawn figures seem to dissolve like mist, and new images appear in their place. He sees strong soldiers standing with tense muscles, looking directly at him. A girl with long dark hair appears in the

center, speaking as if she is about to say something important. An old man and woman reach out with longing hands, as if searching for someone they have lost. Around them, a crowd gathers, waiting and watching. Japar feels as if he is inside this world, standing among them and breathing their emotions.

The Birth of a New Vision The images in Japar's mind grow stronger and clearer. He sees a heroic young man walking forward through the crowd, while people react with surprise and admiration. A mother lifts her child, searching for answers in the distance. The scene feels alive, moving like a real memory rather than a drawing. Japar suddenly understands what he wants to create. He erases the old sketch quickly and begins drawing with new energy. His hand moves fast, as if the ideas are already waiting inside him. Time feels like it is rushing past, and he knows he must capture this vision before it disappears.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Japar Gapar Aitiev (1912–1984)

Japar is the central character of the story, based on the painter Gapar Aitiev. He is a poor boy who grows up in hardship and later becomes an artist. His life is shaped by poverty, war, and emotional struggle, but also by a strong inner sensitivity and creative talent that gradually leads him toward art and self-discovery.

Sensitive Japar was born into a poor family, and from early childhood he develops a deep emotional awareness of the suffering around him. He can sense his father Aitike's sadness even when nothing is said aloud. When Aitike claims he has washed his face, Japar still feels the hidden pain behind his words. His memory of his mother is faint and fragile, yet it becomes emotionally powerful because of his father's frequent, sorrowful mentions of her. When Aitike gently asks if he misses his mother, Japar breaks into tears and hugs him, showing how quickly emotions rise within him. Later, he witnesses his father working hard for wealthy people, and this also leaves a strong emotional impact on him, deepening his sense of compassion and quiet suffering.



Imaginative Japar has a rich and active imagination that constantly reshapes reality into inner images. Even in difficult conditions, he turns simple clay and dust into a whole living world. He makes clay bread, small toys, camels, donkeys, and other figures, and he plays with them as if they are real companions with their own lives and emotions. His imagination is so strong that he even thinks he can shape his mother from clay and bring her presence back into his world. Later, his artistic gift is noticed in the boarding school, where teachers recognize his unusual ability to see life in forms and images. This leads to his journey to Frunze, where his talent continues to develop, and eventually to Moscow, where his imagination expands further under formal artistic education.

Introspective Japar is deeply introspective, often turning his thoughts inward rather than outward. He spends long periods questioning his identity, purpose, and future, especially as he struggles to understand his place in the world. For example, after returning from war, he walks alone in silence, avoiding conversation and asking himself why his inspiration has disappeared and whether he has truly lost his artistic gift. Instead of expressing his emotions openly, he processes everything internally, creating a constant inner dialogue that others cannot easily see. Even when people speak to him or try to comfort him, he often responds with silence or short unclear words, showing how much remains unspoken inside him. This habit makes him thoughtful but also isolated, as even close friends struggle to understand his inner state. During moments of uncertainty, such as nights in the workshop when he cannot paint, he reflects on talent, failure, and the meaning of life. Through this constant self-examination, he slowly begins to rediscover his artistic direction and inner truth.

Aitike

Aitike is Japar's father and a central figure in the story who represents endurance, sacrifice, and parental devotion. He is a poor but skilled man who struggles to survive in harsh social and economic conditions while raising his son alone. After losing his wife and facing constant poverty, he becomes deeply devoted to Japar's survival and future. Aitike travels from place to place in search of work and food, taking on any labor he can find, even when it brings humiliation or rejection. Despite exhaustion and suffering, he never abandons his responsibilities. His life is defined by hardship, but also by a strong moral strength that keeps him moving forward for his son's sake.

Devoted Father Aitike's defining trait is his deep devotion to his son Japar, as his entire life revolves around the child's well-being and future. He constantly shares Japar's joys and sorrows, treating every small moment in the boy's life with great emotional importance. Aitike often whispers his hopes for Japar, asking whether he will grow up safe, happy, and respected. Even Japar's small childlike speech, including his inability to pronounce certain sounds, only increases Aitike's affection and tenderness. He is always ready to sacrifice his own comfort for his son. For example, when Japar asks for water or shows a simple need, Aitike immediately prepares for a journey, carefully organizing their travel and placing Japar safely in the saddlebag. This constant care and readiness to endure hardship for his child define his character as a deeply devoted and loving father.

Self-sacrificing Aitike is defined by his self-sacrificing nature, as he constantly places his son Japar's needs above his own comfort, dignity, and safety. Even when he is rejected at the Rabat Gate, insulted, and forced to endure humiliation, he does not think of his own suffering but only of protecting Japar from hunger and cold. He accepts any harsh condition without complaint, whether sleeping by a wall or working exhausting labor, as long as it helps his child survive. When he finally finds work, he immediately agrees, seeing it only as a means to secure food and stability for Japar. His words to his son show this devotion clearly, as he calls Japar the meaning of his life and his only hope.

Protective Aitike's protective nature is clearly shown during the harvest scene in Fergana's orchards, where he consistently prioritizes Japar's dignity and well-being above all else. When the owner insults his son, calling him "crippled" and mocking their poverty, Aitike does not stay silent or accept the humiliation. Instead, he firmly defends Japar, declaring that the boy is his "life" and "only fortune," showing how deeply he values and shields him emotionally. Even when tension escalates into violence and he is physically harmed, Aitike continues to act out of protection rather than anger or revenge. His actions during the conflict, including his attempt to calm the situation and his concern for Japar's distress, highlight his instinct to guard his son from both physical and emotional harm.

THEMES

Poverty: Survival The novel presents survival and poverty as a central theme, especially in the period before the October Revolution, when social inequality was very deep.

In northern Kyrgyzstan, poor people often survived by working as servants for wealthy cattle owners, completely dependent on them for food and protection. In the southern regions, people like Aitike lived under similar hardship, working for rich landowners in harvest fields, construction, and other heavy labor just to earn minimal food and shelter.

The Rabat Gates symbolize this inequality more clearly, representing wealthy districts and caravanserais with large houses and guarded entrances. Poor travelers like Aitike come there seeking work and food, but they are often rejected or treated with disrespect. Despite this, Aitike continues to search for any opportunity to survive.

Aitike himself has no permanent home. He lives as a wandering laborer with his son Japar, a donkey, and a dog, sleeping outdoors in the open air. Even though the southern climate is mild, life remains extremely harsh for the poor, who endure cold nights without shelter or shoes, often with injured and sore feet.

Illustrative moment: A boy, balancing a basket of hot bread on his head, dances through Kokand's narrow streets, calling "Hot bread!" Japar, now awake and complaining, cries, "Father, bread!" Aitike calls out, and the baker stops, asking which bread he'd like. "Give me one," Aitike replies in Uzbek, then showing his spade: "My son, I have no money. How much bread for this?" The baker snatches a piece from Japar's hand, who weeps. Aitike, trembling, begs for bread "for God's sake," offering the spade. "It's worth at least

one bread.” The baker says, “I’m not a baker, I have a master. Can you build walls?” Aitike, desperate, lists his skills: “Yes, I know, son. I build clay ovens, houses, carve saddles, craft two-stringed lutes, and I sing.”

Art: Gift of Fine Art In traditional Kyrgyz culture, fine arts such as painting were not widely developed or socially supported, partly due to strong oral traditions and partly because of Islamic interpretations that viewed figurative painting with caution. Instead, cultural expression was mostly preserved through oral folklore, epic storytelling, music, and crafts. Because of this, painting and visual fine art were not easily understood or valued in society.

Japar’s (Gapar Aitiev’s) artistic development becomes significant in this context, as his talent grows not from tradition but from education and historical change brought by the October Revolution. The new school system and cultural institutions introduce him to drawing, structure, and professional art training, allowing his natural sensitivity to be shaped into a real artistic skill.

Growing up in southern Kyrgyzstan, especially in the fertile Fergana Valley, Japar is surrounded by rich natural beauty that deeply influences his imagination. He observes endless apricot orchards, grape fields, rivers, and hardworking rural people whose lives are closely connected to the land. This environment becomes his first school of art, where he learns to see color, movement, and emotion in everyday life. Later, these early impressions are transformed into his paintings, where he captures not only landscapes but also the emotional and social life of his people. His gift of fine art is therefore a combination of natural sensitivity, cultural change, and lived experience.

Illustrative moment: A shy boy named Japar appears at the classroom door, asking to see drawings. He is small, nervous, and full of hope. The teacher gently questions him, and Japar says he loves drawing and has work to show. Inside the room, students gather and watch with curiosity. Japar points to his simple sketches with confidence. The teacher sees something special in him. Though others once doubted him, his quiet passion stands out. He leaves softly, and the teacher believes he may grow into a true artist one day.



Gapar Aitiev “During the Grape Harvest” (1957)

Parenthood: Emotional Sacrifice Fatherhood in the novel is shown through Aitike’s constant sacrifices for Japar, expressed in concrete moments of hardship and care. When Japar cries in the saddlebag during their journey to Kokand, Aitike immediately stops, removes him carefully, and bandages his sore toes using a strip from his own coat. Even when he has very little food, he gives Japar water and bread first, showing that his son’s comfort always comes before his own.

On the road to Rabat Gates, Aitike continues to carry heavy burdens, such as the water-skin, despite hunger and exhaustion that make him dizzy. He still repeats to himself that he must endure for Japar’s sake. When Japar feeds bread to the dog without thinking, Aitike quietly watches instead of stopping him, showing patient understanding and emotional restraint.

His sacrifice becomes deeper in moments of humiliation, such as when wealthy men insult Japar. Aitike does not respond with pride or anger for himself, but defends his son’s dignity, saying that Japar is his “only fortune.” Even when beaten or pushed out, he continues working and searching for survival.

Later, when Japar's talent is discovered, Aitike stands outside the room, afraid to enter, silently suffering but still watching over his son. These scenes show fatherhood as constant sacrifice, where love is expressed through endurance, protection, and quiet suffering rather than words.

Illustrative moment: Aitike tells that after the boy's mother, another woman entered their lives. She worked hard, but her words were sharp and cruel. She called the boy unlucky, pulled his ears, and struck him, forcing him into silence. Fear slowly settled in the child's heart. When pain came, he no longer cried out; he only hid his face and curled up. Later, other women did not beat him, yet their coldness still hurt. The boy cried quietly, asking his father for protection. Aitike watched, unable to ease the pain, carrying it within him-self. Now he looks at the small clay toys in his son's hands. With quiet pride, he holds onto a simple hope that one day, the boy will grow into a true master.

Identity: Self-Discovery Japar's search for identity unfolds through concrete scenes that show how his life moves from poverty toward artistic self-awareness.

The journey begins when he travels with his father Aitike in search of food and work. Sleeping in the open air, suffering hunger, and witnessing his father's humiliation at places like the Rabat Gates, Japar forms his earliest sense of self through hardship and silence. Even as a child, he observes everything closely, shaping clay figures from mud and turning ordinary objects into imaginative forms, without fully understanding that this is the beginning of his artistic identity.

At the boarding school, his identity begins to change when teachers discover his drawings on wooden boards. Natasha's emotional recognition and Satar's surprise mark the moment when Japar is no longer only a poor boy but someone with a visible talent. When Satar calls him in and others begin to study his sketches, Japar first experiences the feeling of being seen and valued for what he creates.

In Frunze, Japar's identity develops further under the guidance of Semen Chuykov and Abratsov. Walking through green valleys and discussing art, he slowly enters a new world where talent is shaped by training. His participation in the classroom scene, where his drawings are recognized as more authentic than others, strengthens his belief in his own vision.

In Moscow, identity becomes a struggle. At the Tretyakov Gallery, he is overwhelmed by great paintings, feeling both admiration and fear. In the art school, when he cannot draw the model and feels ashamed, his identity is shaken again. However, Vera's support and the professor's encouragement help him regain confidence.

Illustrative moment: After returning from the war, Japar is no longer the same person, and this moment becomes another turning point in his search for identity.

No one around him can understand what is happening inside his mind. It feels as if a hidden fire burns quietly in his heart. Sometimes he speaks with sudden irritation, and at other times he falls completely silent, looking at people with distant, pleading eyes. When asked what troubles him, he only replies, "You don't need to know." This silence shows that his inner identity is still unstable and unfinished.

His friend Uzak carefully observes these changes and senses that something deeper is disturbing Japar. He thinks Japar may be in love, deeply hurt, or carrying a sorrow he cannot express. Abdybek doubts this explanation, but Uzak remains certain that a quiet emotional conflict lives inside him. This war-time return marks a crisis in Japar's identity, where his artistic mind and emotional wounds collide, pushing him further into reflection, silence, and inner struggle.