

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Kanybek 1 (1939) Kasymaly Jantoshev (1904–1968)

Film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUVPZJKkis>

OVERVIEW

Author

Kasymaly Jantoshev (1904–1968) was a Kyrgyz writer, prose author, and playwright. He was born in the village of Tepke, now in Ak-Suu District, Ysyk-Kol region of Kyrgyzstan. He learned to read at age sixteen with the teacher Orozakun Ilepes uulu and saw a book for the first time in 1920, as he describes in his memoir *The New School in Tepke* (*Tepkedegi jangy mektep*). In 1921, he joined the Komsomol, the Soviet youth organization for young communists, and studied at a village school until 1924.

In 1926, Jantoshev enrolled in the Pedagogical Technical School (College) in Frunze (Bishkek), where he began writing plays. His early works included one-act plays such as *Shepherds* (*Koychular*), *In a Dream* (*Tushto*), and *We Komsomol Members* (*Biz komsomoletster*), as well as multi-act dramas including *Karachach* (*Karachach*, 1928) and *Alym and Maria* (*Alym menen Mariya*), staged in 1929–1930.

He published textbooks and guides for teachers, including *Reading Book* (*Okuu kitebi*), *Program and Teaching Methods for Kyrgyz Language for the Illiterate* (*Sabatsyzdar uchun kyrgyz tilinin programmasy jana okutuu metody*), *Textbook for Collective Farmers* (*Kolkhozchular uchun okuu kitebi*), and guides on language and arithmetic.

In the early 1930s, he worked as a teacher, district education head, and methodologist in southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. His experiences influenced his prose. The novella *The Young Ones* (*Eki jash*, 1938) depicted social changes and class conflicts during collectivization.

Jantoshev worked in both prose and drama. His historical novel *Kanybek* (*Kanybek*) was first published in three volumes (1939, 1941, and 1948) and later revised into a two-volume edition. His plays included *Kurmanbek* (*Kurmanbek*, 1942), *Revenge* (*Och*, 1942), and *The Folk Singer* (*Eldik yrchy*), based on the life of poet Toktogul Satylganov. Later prose works include *Dream* (*Tilek*, 1949), *Fiery Youth* (*Jalynduu jashtar*, 1952), *The Shepherd of Khan Tengri* (*Khan Tengirlik chaban*, 1963), and *My Fate* (*Menin tagdyrym*).

He also translated works by Russian authors Mikhail Lermontov and Alexander Ostrovsky, and by Hans Christian Andersen (from Russian translations), into Kyrgyz. He received honors including Distinguished Figure of the Literature of the Kyrgyz SSR (1946), People's Writer of the Kyrgyz SSR (1968), Medal for Service in World War II (1941–1945) and state medals. Jantoshev died in 1968. Institutions named after him include the Ysyk-Kol Regional Drama Theater, schools, and libraries.

Novel *Kanybek* is a two-volume historical novel by Kasymaly Jantoshev. The first book of *Kanybek* was published in 1939, the second in 1941, and the third in 1948. The author worked on the novel for nearly nine years. Director Gennadiy Bazarov filmed the feature movie “*Kanybek*” in 1979 at the Kyrgyz film studio. However, film critics later assessed that the director could not fully realize the novel's depth in the film. According to the National Library of Kyrgyzstan, the novel is among the most widely read books.

Background The novel is set in the Alay Valley of southern Kyrgyzstan and the Uluu Chat region, as well as Kashgar city in Xinjiang (Eastern Turkistan), China.

Uluu Chat was Kyrgyz territory with nomad pastures and camps, while the Alay region was under the Russian Empire, which imposed taxes and administrative structures but largely preserved traditional social hierarchies.

Kashgar, an important trade center, had markets, caravanserais, and a social hierarchy.

Kanybek's story unfolds amid these geographic and political realities, showing how ordinary Kyrgyz navigated slavery, social hierarchy, oppression, and imperial influence. Powerful figures such as Tulkubek and Aydarbek Datka exploit the weak for wealth and prestige. The mountains, valleys, and trade routes influence Kanybek's escapes, his family's movements, and his conflicts with local elites. The novel highlights oppression, resistance, and the struggle for freedom and justice, with geography and social structures central to the narrative.



Glossary

Ash – A memorial feast for the deceased with prayers and shared food.

Ayat – A verse from the Qur'an.

Bek – A noble or local ruler in Turkic societies.

Biy – A respected clan or community leader who guided the group and resolved disputes according to customary law.

Bolush – A local administrative official who governed a small district (volost), sometimes acting with ulterior motives despite appearing fair.

Caravan-saray – A roadside inn providing lodging and services for merchants, travelers, and caravans along trade routes.

Chanach – A leather container used by nomads to store or carry liquids and dairy products.

Choor – A traditional Kyrgyz end-blown flute made from reed or wood, used in folk music.

Dar – A gallows or execution by hanging as a form of capital punishment.

Datka – A high-ranking political or military leader in Central Asia with administrative authority.

Elechek – A traditional Kyrgyz women's headdress made of long white cloth wrapped in a turban-like form.

Er Saiysh – A traditional Kyrgyz horseback game in which two riders charge at each other with spears.

Eshens – Respected religious leaders or Islamic scholars responsible for teaching and guiding the community in faith.

Janaza – The Islamic funeral prayer performed before the burial of the deceased.

Jigit – A warrior and vazir (advisor) in traditional Kyrgyz or Central Asian society.

Kazy – An Islamic judge who applies Sharia law.

Kojo (Khoja) – A respected religious figure, often believed to descend from the Prophet Muhammad or to belong to a learned religious lineage.

Korpo – Lamb skin used in traditional Kyrgyz clothing and household items.

Kun – Blood compensation paid to a victim's family under traditional Kyrgyz customary law.

Mullah – An educated person in Kyrgyz society, often a Muslim cleric, who taught religion, literacy, and general knowledge, including Cyrillic or Latin scripts.

Pristav – A Russian imperial administrative or police officer responsible for maintaining order in local districts.

Starchy (Starshina) – A village elder or local headman who represented the community in administrative matters.

Tamga – A tribal or clan emblem used by Turkic peoples to mark property, livestock, or group identity.

Toy – A celebration or festivity marking weddings, births, or other important social events.

Ulak Tartysh – A traditional Kyrgyz horseback game in which riders compete to grab and carry a goat carcass.

Uezd – An administrative district in the Russian Empire.

Kyrgyz proverb “Marry your mother to the man who killed your father” – A saying emphasizing extraordinary forgiveness and the ability to let go of personal grievances.

The etymology of *personal names*

Kyrgyz people, like people everywhere in the world, wish their children to be prosperous, healthy, and long-lived.

Kanybek – a Kyrgyz name from *kan* and *bek*. *Kan* has two meanings: “blood” and “khan” (ruler). *Bek* also has two meanings: “lord/noble” and “be strong/steadfast.” The combination suggests that Kanybek's parents wished him to grow into a strong, noble, and capable leader. Many Kyrgyz male names use the *-bek* suffix because both meanings carry positive and aspirational connotations.

Ajar (Hacer) – a female name, means beautiful.

Sansyz / Sansyzbay – a proper name in Kyrgyz/Turkic cultures. *Sansyz* means “impossible to count” or “uncountable.” With the suffix *-bay* (“rich”), *Sansyzbay* refers to a very wealthy person with uncountable wealth. The name symbolizes abundance, prosperity, and high social status.

Tulkubek – a Kyrgyz/Turkic name from *tulku* (“fox”) and *bek* (“noble”). In Kyrgyz culture, the fox symbolizes cleverness and cunning. In the novel, Tulkubek is a noble ruler. The name was used until the 20th century but isn't used today.

Karyp – a Kyrgyz/Turkic name meaning “poor” or “beggar,” referring to a person who is vulnerable and without protection. Among the nomadic Kyrgyz, prenatal and infant deaths were common, and couples sometimes had many children, few of whom survived harsh conditions. To protect a newborn from evil eyes or misfortune, parents sometimes gave the child a name like Karyp, emphasizing the spiritual idea of being unprotected. Sometimes the child was temporarily “given” to someone else, hoping this would help them

survive. Later, the child could be “bought” back with cattle and given names such as *Satykul* or *Satylgan* (meaning “bought” or “sold”).

Kumush – a Kyrgyz/Turkic name meaning “silver.” Names of precious metals, such as gold (*Altyn*) or silver (*Kumush*), are given to both males and females. For males, the suffix *-bek* is often added to emphasize nobility or strength.

Begaiym – a Kyrgyz/Turkic name with two elements: *bek*, meaning “noble ruler,” and *aiym*, meaning “lady,” a term traditionally used to address women over 50 and usually referring to a noble or respected woman.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Kanybek – son of Sansyz and Ajar, slave, later herder, husband of Begaiym and Anarkhan

Ajar – mother of Kanybek, raised Aym after his mother died

Sansyz – father of Kanybek

Karyp – friend of Sansyz, father of Aym

Tulkubek – wealthy Kyrgyz noble, brother of Shamyrbek Datka

Joloy – elderly man, once loved Raushan, friend of Kanybek’s family

Zunnakhun – merchant in Kashgar, brother of Anarkhan

Supakhun – mother of Zunnakhun

Samsakhun – servant of Zunnakhun, friend of Sansyz and Kanybek

Begaiym – Kanybek’s first wife

Anarkhan – sister of Zunnakhun Bek, Kanybek’s second wife after divorce from Begaiym

Aydarbek Datka – Kyrgyz noble leader

Saltanat – first wife of Aydarbek Datka

Erkeaiym – second wife of Aydarbek Datka

Karabek – elder son of Aydarbek Datka

Toichu Datka – local noble man

Aym – son of Karyp, raised by Ajar

Sooronbay Bolush – leader of volost, administrative province under the Russian Empire

Juma – musician in Alay

Kumush – wife of Tulkubek

SYNOPSIS

The narrative follows the life of Kanybek, a Kyrgyz boy born into poverty and slavery in the borderlands between Eastern Turkestan and the Alay region. His father, Sansyz, had been taken as a slave in childhood and spent his life serving powerful nomadic nobles. After Sansyz dies as the result of brutal exploitation during a memorial feast organized by the elite, Kanybek and his mother attempt to escape their fate. Their flight fails, and Kanybek is eventually taken to Kashgar as a slave. There he endures harsh treatment but also encounters people who shape his character, including the courageous Anarkhan and the compassionate teacher Akmat Mullah.

Kanybek’s life becomes a struggle against injustice, social inequality, and the abuse of power by wealthy *datka* leaders, merchants, and corrupt religious figures. Through suffering, imprisonment, and repeated escapes, he gradually gains courage and independence. With the help of loyal brothers such as Aym, he eventually regains his freedom and returns to the nomadic world of the Kyrgyz pastures.

In time, Kanybek becomes a respected leader among poor villagers, defending them from unjust taxes and the oppression of local nobles. His actions challenge powerful figures such as Aydarbek Datka and Sooronbay Bolush, whose rivalry reflects broader political tensions under Russian imperial rule. While traditional customs, elections, and alliances shape the political landscape, Kanybek’s growing reputation threatens established authority. The story ends with Kanybek’s arrest after a political betrayal, leaving his family and community waiting anxiously for his fate.

SCENES

Life in Uch-Tash and the Burden of Debt

Kanybek on the Cliff Kanybek stood on the rocky cliff, watching over his sheep. His father, Sansyz, told him that he had come to Shamyrbek Datka as a boy slave. His father used to tell from the cliff that the wide view of the Alay region eased the longing for home that never fully left him. Kanybek's eyes traced the Pamir Mountains to the southwest, the Uch Tash pastures to the southeast, the faint peaks of Alay-Kuu and Arpa Mountains, the Kakshaal Mountains to the east, and Kichi-Korgoshun and Chong Korgoshun Mountains to the south. Beyond them, Kashgar city seems to lay quietly. Born and raised in Uch Tash, Uluu-Chat, Eastern Turkestan, China, the boy Kanybek knew only these lands.

The Burden of Debt Kanybek thought about his father, Sansyz, who owed Atabek Datka 300 bundles of grass for one *korpo*, lamb skin, though he had taken it for only 30. Uluu-Chat seemed like a desert, with only rocky cliffs, and for ten years there had been little grass. Over time, the debt grew to 300 bundles. If they had lived in Alay, the debt would already be paid, for as his father said, Alay was full of grass, trees, and bushes, and people were not slaves. Tulkubek could pay my father's debt. Kanybek imagined asking a sheep from Tulkubek to give to Atabek Datka and return to Alay. He remembered that last year, Tulkubek had asked Sansyz to teach Kanybek herding while helping Kumush with house chores, though no one knew why.

The Uch Tash Caravan Uch Tash, the most famous pasture in the Kakshaal region of Eastern Turkestan, had belonged to Shamyrbek Datka and then to his brother Tulkubek. Today a caravan of nomads arrived, led by Kumush in an *elechek* headwear and silk, with Kylymkhan, Atabek Datka's daughter, beside her, her braids and hat showing she was unmarried. Behind them came Atabek's wife on a gray horse. Behind her were women, old men, and children leading camels loaded with household items: blankets, dishes, clothes, and more. Ajar, Kanybek's mother, was riding a horse as well, and five camels were being towed behind her slow-moving horse. Sansyz was also riding a horse behind, driving the cattle. Behind them came the milkmaids, herders, and workers, loading their small tents onto camels, bulls, and donkeys.

The Caravan of Lament Karyp and his family followed the caravan. He was walking, while his wife rode a donkey, which was also towing a camel carrying their tent. Their two little children were wrapped in an old blanket on the camel, and the elder children walked beside them. Next to this caravan came another caravan, that of the deceased Shamyrbek Datka. His wife wore a black *elechek* headpiece and sang a lament, joined by the other women. Singing laments during a caravan was a custom to honor the deceased.

The Memorial Feast at Aidyng Kol To the south of Uch Tash pasture lay Aidyng Kol Lake. Shamyrbek Datka's caravan settled next to the spring to the east of the lake, while Tulkubek's caravan settled next to the spring to the west. Some people were arriving, crying out as a sign of mourning for the deceased Shamyrbek. Sansyz told Kanybek that these people were visiting because the *ash*, memorial feast for Shamyrbek would be held, and they were talking about it. The feast would include many horse races, with numerous cattle as prizes. Sansyz sighed, "Even people may go as prizes." Karyp added, "If they ask for cattle as prizes, poor families would have to give their only cow or sheep. If they ask for people as prizes, your family could get into trouble."

The Memorial Feast and the Cruel Power of the Nobles

Fury at Tulkubek's Yurts The wealthy and powerful came to Tulkubek's yurts, crying and mourning, while leaders of smaller tribes also joined them. Sansyz and Karyp slaughtered two mares and began cooking the meat. Poor, starving elders and children stood beside the open-air oven, hoping for a small piece. Karyp tried to give a little meat to an elderly man, but Kumush, Tulkubek's wife, screamed furiously, "This meat is for the honored guests, not for you, starving and dirty! Go away!" She scolded Karyp as well, anger flashing in her eyes.

Discussions The elites of the Kyrgyz nomads gathered, discussing the memorial feast. Kadyrbek, Tulkubek's father-in-law, asked the local mullah Borubay if Sharia allowed it; he said yes. Atabek approved, asking about procedures. Tulkubek insisted Aydarbek Datka of Alay and Sooron Datka, once resented, be invited. Atabek declared 200 yurts settled, 100 mares and 200 sheep slaughtered, each family contributing.

Koko, leader of the Chor Tamandar, protested because his poor tribe had no cattle and served only the rich. Someone warned that if contributions failed, people of Koko themselves might be taken as prizes. Kanybek sat by the yurt, heart pounding, remembering that his father had been a prize and came as a slave at nine.

Feast of the Wealthy, Burden of the Poor Tulkubek sent invitations to Aydarbek Datka and Toichu Datka in the Alay region, Sooron Datka in the Kakshaal region, and Zunnakhun Bek, a famous merchant in Kashgar city, announcing that a memorial feast in honor of Shamyrbek Datka would be held in autumn. Guests were instructed to prepare their racing horses, as horse games would take place. The wealthy contributed cattle to the feast. The poor, such as the Chor Tamandar tribe, faced great hardship. Some married off their daughters to pay for sheep, others sent their sons to work for the rich, and some had no way out. The nomad elite oppressed those who could not contribute.

Chor Tamandar Tribe and the Feast Tulkubek and Atabek visited the Chor Tamandar camp, poor and barren, with only two goats and a single kid. Koko said they had given one sheep and could find no more. An elder recalled sending his eldest son last year for eighteen months of labor to a wealthy man for the previous feast, while his younger son worked eight months to pay for a single sheep for this year's feast. His back was injured, and his wife was sick. Another man had sold his thirteen-year-old daughter and forced another daughter into marriage with an old man to pay contributions, pleading, "Do you want me to sell my wife?" Tulkubek, fearing rebellion, cunningly promised eleven sheep for the elderly and fifty for each family, to be repaid later or through labor, though no one knew his plan.

Autumn at the Feast In the autumn, people moved back to the seasonal pastures. This year, Tulkubek made them settle in a specific spot because of the memorial feast. Two hundred yurts were set up, and preparations for the feast began. Only the poor were slaughtering the sheep and horses, while their wives and children helped beside the open-air ovens. Koko's tribe was also ordered to help, even though they had not contributed. They requested proper clothing to participate, but some had to work long hours afterward to repay the cost of the clothes they borrowed.

Guests and Tensions Guests had arrived a week ago, each yurt flying the tribe's *tamga*, emblem. Aydarbek Datka came with Sooronbay Bolush, Alybai Starchy, and Ashyr, his horse trainer. The previous night, his poet Juma competed in improvisational poetry against Toichu Datka's singer but lost, leaving Aydarbek furious. He sent the singer and Ergesh, the horseman, to herd the horses. Tulkubek arrived at Aydarbek's yurt, where Aydarbek complained about being served by poorly dressed Koko and his ugly wife, who were not from an elite clan. Toichu had mocked him for it. Cunningly, Tulkubek immediately replaced the servers, knowing he and Zunnakhun Bek had plans with Aydarbek Datka.

Deadly Games and the Tragedy of Kanybek's Family

Kanybek and the Choor Flute Kanybek herded Tulkubek's sheep, saddened that he could not see the feast. His father warned him not to leave, as someone might steal the flock among the hundreds of people. Suddenly, he heard music from a choor flute. Two men herding horses approached. Juma, the flute player, asked who he was. Kanybek hid that he was the son of the slave Sansyz, claiming instead to be the son of Tulkubek's *jigit*, warrior. He said he was learning choor from another shepherd. Noticing his interest, Juma handed him the flute. Kanybek learned that Juma and Ergesh came from Alay, his father's homeland. Juma played komuz melodies on the choor, delighting Kanybek, who ran to fetch meat and soup for them. Juma praised him as talented.

Games of Blood and Prizes The games began. Three hundred horses were set into the great race. Another contest was *er saiysh*, where two riders charged each other on horseback with spears. It was to be fought between men of Uluu-Chat and Alay. From Alay came the famous Asanbek, but from Uluu-Chat they forced Koko to compete. Koko knew he would die. After refusing to give cattle for the feast, Tulkubek and Atabek hated him. Koko was killed in the duel. In the horse race several young riders also died. The winning horse belonged to Akhun from a village near Kashgar but ran for Zunnakhun Bek. The prizes were a thousand sheep, a hundred horses, and one human slave. Zunnakhun Bek asked if the slave prize still stood. Tulkubek answered yes.

The Price of the Race Sansyz, Kanybek's father, left for Kashgar with Zunnakhun Bek and Tulkubek. Kanybek and his mother Ajar were happy, hoping Sansyz would bring gifts such as clothes, since he had served Tulkubek faithfully all his life. A month later Zunnakhun, Tulkubek, Sansyz, and Samsakhun, Zunnakhun's servant, returned. Sansyz brought nothing and coughed constantly. In secret he told Ajar that he had been taken to Kashgar as the human prize of the horse race. When he resisted, he was beaten with a whip, his back left festering. Ajar wept bitterly. Karyp's family came to comfort them. Kanybek cooked the meat of a partridge, but his father was dying.

A Slave's Funeral Sansyz died after three nights. No funeral gathering came, only two or three poor people. When Karyp washed the body, there was no cloth for a shroud, so he asked Kumush, Tulkubek's wife, who gave a small piece. Karyp asked Mullah Borubay to perform the *janaza* prayer, but he refused. Karyp sadly thought that if there had been a gift, the mullah would have come. Tulkubek arrived unwillingly after Zunnakhun reminded him that Sansyz was his slave. When the mullah refused, Tulkubek told Karyp to pray himself. Kanybek stood by the grave, remembering Shamyrbek Datka's grand funeral, and understood the bitter loneliness of a slave's death.

Flight toward Freedom

The Old Debt One day Samsakhun brought cruel news: Tulkubek planned to give Kanybek as a slave to Zunnakhun in Kashgar. The poor were heartbroken. Ajar remembered how Sansyz had once asked Atabek for a lambskin to make a cap for newborn Kanybek. Atabek demanded thirty bundles of grass. Now, even after his death, Atabek wanted Kanybek to serve him. Tulkubek declared that Karyp, Sansyz's faithful friend, would work twelve years to pay the debt. Karyp whispered a secret hope: "Flee to Kok-Suu in the Alay Valley, where your father's parents live, under the Russian Empire."

Flight to Kok-Suu Zunnakhun Bek, a Uighur merchant from Kashgar, boasted of sixty stores in the city. He and Tulkubek sought friendship with Aydarbek Datka of Alay, hoping to deliver goods to Kyrgyz lands under the Russian Empire and grow rich. Meanwhile, Ajar and Kanybek fled from Uluu-Chat, heading toward Sansyz's paternal homeland Alay region. Hungry wolves stalked them, teeth glinting in the dusk, until an old hunter appeared, shooting the beasts. He led them to a cave, offering meat from a wild argali. Warmed and fed, he asked their names and warned them to continue their journey only after sunset.

The Story of Raushan and Joloy

Raushan and Joloy The old hunter told them an old story. Once Kadyrbai, a wealthy local man, brought a young Kazakh girl named Raushan as a captive from war. She was only thirteen and very beautiful. Kadyrbai planned to marry her and kept her in his household until she grew older. Kerech, the old man, and his wife once asked to adopt the girl, but Kadyrbai refused. His wife Kanysha grew jealous and took her own life. Kadyrbai paid the customary *kun*, compensation with cattle and slaves for death to Kanysha's clan. Later he wished to marry sixteen-year-old Raushan, but her heart belonged to Joloy, a slave taken to Kadyrbai's in-laws.

Joloy's Decision One day Kerech visited the pasture where Joloy and the other herders were tending cattle. Speaking carefully, he "told an old story" about a girl who loved a young man and begged him to come save her from cruelty. Joloy understood the message. It was Raushan calling for help. He answered quietly that he would come one day, though he did not know when. Later Joloy came to Kerech's lonely house in the hills. He said the day had come and he would take Raushan away. Kerech's wife brought them the saddle from their youth and a warrior's coat strong enough to stop bullets.

The Rescue of Raushan Kerech also gave Joloy his rifle, a military axe, and a spear. Joloy had bought the rifle from a merchant from Tashkent the previous summer after stealing six horses for him. A wedding between Kadyrbai and Raushan was being held, with games and prizes. Kerech won the contest of coin shooting, where a rider fires at a bag filled with gold coins. The prize was cattle and a slave boy named Karyp, but Kerech took only the boy and raised him as his own. During the wedding feast, Kerech secretly signaled Joloy. Joloy rode in and opened fire, mortally wounding Kadyrbai. Panic spread as people fled, and Joloy carried Raushan away toward Kashgar.

Joloy the Hunter Joloy and Raushan stayed in Kashgar at the house of a Uyghur man named Bakirakhun. They planned to travel to Raushan's six brothers. Joloy had stolen two horses from Sadyr Datka to escape

with her, and Kyrgyz nobles were already searching for Kadyrbai's killer. A wealthy Uyghur named Aznakhun, who had six wives, desired Raushan. Pretending friendship, he invited them as guests and learned they were fugitives. His servants seized Joloy and threw him into a deep well prison. The next day he forced a marriage with Raushan. She fled but, knowing she would be captured, drowned herself in the river. Joloy remained imprisoned fifteen years before escaping. The old hunter looked at Kanybek and his mother and said quietly, "That Joloy is me."

Joloy's Farewell Joloy continued his story. Years earlier his friend Bakirakhun had written that Raushan was alive. Believing Joloy dead, she had married a rich man named Emilakhun in Khoten and had a daughter, Anarkhan. Joloy later went to Kashgar searching for her, but Bakirakhun had died. There were several men named Emilahun, and one had died years before, his family moving to Kashgar, people said. Leading Ajar and Kanybek through the mountains, Joloy finally stopped. "You are safe now. Beyond the Nura River lies Kok-Suu in the Alay Valley." Then he added softly, "Ajar, I know you. I once protected you from Shamyrbek's wife. Kanybek, be a good man and guard your secrets."

Capture

The Oath of the Village In the morning Tulkubek and the villagers could not find Ajar and Kanybek. Zunnakhun Bek accused Tulkubek, saying, "You do not want to give the slave to me, so you have hidden him." Tulkubek felt deeply humiliated. He ordered the people of the village to be questioned and asked Borubay the mullah to make them swear on the Qur'an. One by one the villagers placed their hands on the holy book and swore they knew nothing. After hearing all the oaths, Borubay finally said that Ajar and Kanybek must have fled on their own. Tulkubek remained silent, anger burning in his heart.

Along the Nura On their journey, Ajar and Kanybek suddenly faced horse herders sent to capture them. A middle-aged herder, Janybay, intervened, helping them escape. Along the Nura River, there was the nomad camp of Kadyrbek Datka, who had five brothers and was Tulkubek's father-in-law. A horse rider arrived with a letter searching for Ajar and Kanybek, and the herders complained that Janybay had let them go. Janybay stood silently, feeling guilty. The Nura River split into three branches. Ajar and Kanybek reached Zymkana, the last border checkpoint between China and the Russian Empire, with telegraph wires and small Uyghur-style houses. Noise filled the area, but they did not cross. Beyond the river branches lay a hill; if they passed it, they would reach the safety of Russian territory. But as they approached the third branch, they saw people chasing them. Border officers with rifles arrived, and Ajar and Kanybek were devastated.

Kanybek as a Slave Kadyrbek sent a messenger: Ajar and Kanybek had been caught. They were handed over to Tulkubek, and Zunnakhun was taking Kanybek to Kashgar as a slave. Karyp, his wife, and Samsakhun wept in despair. Kanybek was placed on a horse, towing a sledge behind him. He longed to embrace his weary, torn, and sorrowful mother, but no one allowed it. Ajar cried silently, powerless to stop the separation. The boy's heart ached, and the mountains themselves seemed to mourn, their peaks heavy with the weight of sorrow.

Kanybek in the City of Kashgar

In Kashgar City Kanybek began a new life in Kashgar as the personal slave of Supakhan, Zunnakhun's mother. She was cruel, often beating Kanybek, Samsakhun, and his wife Aybadak. Supakhan traveled to various toy celebrations, and feasts with her daughter Batmakhan and her daughter-in-law Ainarsakhan, Zunnakhun's wife. Zunnakhun himself had three other wives in different cities and planned to marry the daughter of Aydarbek Datka in Alay the following summer. Supakhan favored her daughter-in-law Ainarsakhan, though she often quarreled with her son Zunnakhun. She was also harsh toward Anarkhan, the daughter of her late husband Emilakhun and his last wife, Raushan.

The Story of Raushan One day, Samsakhun, Kanybek's father's friend and servant of Zunnakhun, and his wife Aybadak recounted the story of Raushan. Kanybek became excited, as he had heard it from Joloy before. They told him that after throwing herself into the river, Raushan clung to a deep hole near the bank. A caravan belonging to Emilakhun discovered her, rescued her, and brought her to Khoten City. He summoned healers and promised generous rewards. Emilakhun grew fond of Raushan, and the healers cured her pneumonia. Later, she asked Zunnakhun about her "brother" Joloy. Samsahun discovered that

Joloy had been hanged at *dar*, the “Place of the Skull,” for killing soldiers in prison. Raushan gave birth to a daughter, Anarkhan, and died when her daughter was seven, possibly poisoned by Supakhan, according to Aybadak.

Anarkhan, daughter of Raushan Supakhan hated Anarkhan, as people said she was more charming than her daughter Batmakhan; Anarkhan was beaten for it and restricted from going out. Kanybek thought of Joloy, who had helped them, fearing he might have been killed by Tulkubek. His mind also lingered on Anarkhan, drawn to her kindness. One day, she spoke of her mother, saying she had been Kyrgyz or Kazakh, believing the two peoples were the same. She described city life, and Kanybek explained how nomads lived in pastures. Then she sang the song Raushan had devoted to Joloy, in Kazakh. Kanybek was captivated, her beauty, gentleness, and extraordinary charm made his heart stir. In that moment, he felt she was the most beautiful girl in the world.

A Gift Samsakhun had recently returned from Uluu-Chat, attending to Zunnakhun’s trade matters. Kanybek eagerly asked about his mother, Ajar. But Samsakhun said he had not seen her, she had gone to Kumush’s paternal village. He added that Ajar had promised to make an embroidered scarf for her son. Kanybek felt sad at missing his mother’s gift. Samsakhun, however, knew the truth: Ajar had been sent as a slave prize for the feast of deceased Kumush’s father, Tulkubek’s father-in-law. When Anarkhan learned this, she asked Aybadak to bring two embroidered scarves from her mother Raushan. One she gave to Kanybek, who was overjoyed.

Kanybek’s Bravery and Supakhan’s Fury Supakhan was furious when she learned that Anarkhan had given a scarf to Kanybek. “You love the slave who is not our equal!” she screamed, beating Anarkhan all night. Kanybek tried to escape on a horse he tended, but was stopped. Zunnahun commanded him to dig a piece of land, his own grave. When Kanybek remarked, “A fine place to be buried,” Zunnakhun was stunned by his courage and almost shot him. At that moment, a letter arrived from Aydarbek Datka in Alay, requesting Kanybek as the bride-price for Zunnahun’s future wife. Supakhan tried to poison him, but seeing Anarkhan cry, Kanybek paused, and she gestured for the tea to be spilled.

Kanybek’s Return Kanybek was taken to Alay with a caravan of goods under the guidance of Samsakhun and other servants of Zunnakhun. One day, he seized the chance to run away. Taking one of the best horses, he rode toward Uluu-Chat. There he visited the cemetery, searching for his father’s grave, but he could not find it. He went to the old camp where his family had once lived, yet no one remained there. Thinking of his mother, his heart grew heavy. At last, Kanybek decided to return, not wishing to bring trouble upon Samsakhun and his wife, who had always treated him kindly. When he came back, Samsakhun and the two other men were overjoyed to see him alive.

Kanybek in the Alay Region

Aydarbek Datka’s Camp Samsakhun and the merchant caravan arrived at the camp of Aydarbek Datka in the Alay region, a powerful leader of his lineage. He had two wives, Saltanat and Erkeaiym. Saltanat had three children: Aiymbacha, Karabek, and Kylych, while Erkeaiym had none. Aiymbacha was promised in marriage to Zunnakhun. People in Kashgar wondered what kind of bride she was. Samsakhun replied carefully that a daughter lives under her father’s fame and they should see for themselves. Oshurakhun visited the camp and returned laughing, saying Aiymbacha was ugly. Meanwhile, Zunnakhun’s goods were sold, and Oshurakhun secretly raised the price of silk cloth for profit.

Disappointment in Alay Although slavery was rarer under the Russian Empire, Datkas and other nobles still kept servants and slaves. Kanybek arrived in Alay as part of the bride price and began herding sheep. The old shepherd Chong Koychu invited him to his yurt, where his wife Surmash and their daughter Begaiym lived. Samsakhun had left some cloth for Kanybek, and Surmash kindly sewed him new clothes. It was the only comfort he found there. Soon he realized his dream of just Kyrgyz nobles in Alay was false. Aydarbek Datka and others were as harsh as Tulkubek. Thinking of his mother, he listened as Chong Koychu said he had served twenty years for only a few cattle.

Story of the “Holy Eshens”

The Holy Book and the Black Cat One day the *eshens*, religious figures came to the camp, led by Sabyrjan Eshen, who claimed he “knew” every soul’s fate. The previous year he had registered everyone

in the village, and now the other eshens copied his census into thick books written in Arabic script that no one could read. People lined up for blessings and amulets. Opening his “holy” book, Sabyrjan accused a woman, Sanambu, wife of Esen of adultery with him, though he had forced her during his earlier visit. When she revealed the truth, he fled in shame and now took revenge; soon after, she committed suicide. That night Kanybek saw Sabyrjan kissing Erkeaiym. The next morning, while Kanybek was served tea in her yurt, Sabyrjan eshen declared he carried a wicked black cat behind him and ordered him out.

Kanybek and the Wicked Black Cat At night, Kanybek saw Sabyrjan approach Erkeaiym’s yurt. He sprang forward, yanking the eshen’s coat with his teeth, barking like a dog. Sabyrjan woke Erkeaiym, claiming his coat was missing. Kanybek demanded he catch the “wicked black cat” within him before he would return it. Terrified of her husband Aydarbek Datka, Erkeaiym pleaded. Sabyrjan promised hundred soms and secrecy. Kanybek told the story to Juma, and Esen, husband of Sanambu, learned the truth of Sabyrjan’s past ‘deeds’. The men beat Sabyrjan, and Saltanat, outraged at the disrespect and knowing his crimes, expelled him from the camp.

Truth, Religion, and Education

The Gift of Music Kanybek met Juma, Chong Koychu’s father-in-law, the man who once gave him a choir flute in Uluu-Chat. Juma taught him melodies on the komuz, the stringed instrument, patiently guiding his fingers. Kanybek practiced with care, each note a step toward freedom in spirit. One day, Begaiym, Chong Koychu’s daughter, gifted him a new komuz, a quiet sign of trust and encouragement.

Kanybek Meets Akmat Mullah Kanybek, a slave, walked with frostbitten feet in worn clothes. Though Chong Koychu and his wife had given him new garments, Saltanat, Aydarbek Datka’s wife, gave them to a dervish, as his slave status did not allow him to wear new outfit. Barely able to walk, Kanybek was made to light a fire for Akmat Mullah, who was twenty-five. Akmat cared little for money, even during Ramadan or for funeral prayers, living humbly. He advised Aydarbek that seeking benefit in Islam was not right. Surprised by Akmat’s knowledge of Russian, Aydarbek admired him but could not understand why he did not work as an interpreter.

The Teacher of Truth Akmat Mullah in the village read the sign on the komuz from Begaiym to Kanybek and smiled, making Kanybek blush. Akmat Mullah shared his life with Kanybek. Orphaned, he was adopted by Adigine Starchy, who placed him under the care of Russian lawyer Burev. There, he learned Russian, helped care for Burev’s daughter Zoya, and studied literature. He completed six grades of Russian school, then madrasa school, mastering Islamic knowledge. Burev inspired him to help the poor; Akmat once distributed Burev’s revolutionary papers at a railway station against the Tsar. Fleeing after Burev’s arrest, he secretly taught Islam and Russian in Kazakh and Kyrgyz villages. In Alay, his teaching career did not interest Aydarbek Datka, who noticed that local mullahs interpreted Islam differently. Akmat taught it’s just and true postulates and expressed his wish to teach Kanybek too.

Kanybek’s Melody and Akmat’s Trial Kanybek became renowned among women and young men for his singing. One day, young women came to the pasture where he herded sheep, asking him to sing. He performed, and joy spread among them. Later, he played the melody “Koychunun Kuusu” (Shepherd’s Melody), learned from Juma, for his friends. Meanwhile, Aydarbek Datka received a letter from nobles in Osh, claiming Akmat Mullah was not a true mullah, he had lived with Russians and eaten pork, forbidden in Islam. Police came for Akmat; he was wounded and perhaps arrested, though his fate remained unknown.

Kanybek’s Victory at the Wedding The wedding of Zunnakhun and Aiymbacha began. Though Zunnakhun disliked her, Aydarbek Datka insisted, claiming the marriage honored his name and secured trade across Kyrgyz lands under the Russian Empire. Aydarbek was proud and commanding, respected by his people for wisdom and fairness, but always wary of rivals. Toichu Datka, his longtime competitor, attended with sharp eyes and a competitive spirit, always seeking to outshine Aydarbek in games and influence. Games were held, including *ulak tartysh*, the goat-grabbing contest. Kanybek, lacking a horse, rode Esen’s bull or ox and watched. Toichu Datka asked who he was; Kanybek admitted he was Aydarbek’s slave. Mocking him, Toichu Datka provoked him into playing. Kanybek won the first round, bringing the prize to Aydarbek, who gloated victoriously. In the second round, he rode Esen’s horse and won again.

Begaiym herded his sheep that day; Kanybek hugged and kissed her, but she pulled away, constrained by propriety.

Kanybek's Marriage, Injustice, and Divorce

Kanybek's Trials and Thoughts of Freedom Kanybek married Begaiym and their small tent was set beside his father-in-law's. When his in-laws moved to another village Kanybek considered asking Aydarbek Datka for his freedom that summer. After his wedding game victories his status had risen and he became a horse herder. One day thieves killed Alybai Starchy's herder and wounded Kanybek. The thieves were from Toichu Datka who later invited him showing respect and forgiveness. Kanybek remained sick for months as Aydarbek moved to another pasture. He received two *chanaches*, sheepskin containers of kymyz and a bag of lamb meat, checking his health. The gesture made him reconsider freedom. Samsakhun told him Anarkhan had married wealthy Kerimakhun, forced by Zunnahun.

The Compensation and Divorce Some days ago, Kanybek asked Aydarbek Datka for his freedom, but Datka said, "We will see." One day, at the wedding of a wealthy man's daughter, a game required men and women to sing and play together. Kanybek was asked to sing with Sooronbay Bolush's daughter, but she refused because he was a slave. The next day, resentful, Sooronbay sent his men to the horse herd to steal horses, but Kanybek defeated all three. Sooronbay went to Aydarbek Datka to complain. Kanybek explained the men were thieves, shaming Sooronbay. Still, Kanybek was ordered to pay eighteen cattle as *kun* compensation for dishonoring Sooronbay's daughter and beating his men. Kanybek had nothing to pay. The mullah said he could pay by selling his wife. Begaiym was brought, and the mullah recited *ayats* from the Quran to divorce her. An old man paid the eighteen cattle, and Begaiym was to marry him, leaving her to cry in despair at the injustice.

Betrayal and Escape Begaiym was forced to marry Eshen, a sixty-year-old man who already had three wives and no children. The mullah performed the marriage, making it valid even though Begaiym never consented. Meanwhile, Kanybek was beaten severely and left lying by the cattle yard under pouring rain. Eshen wept, and Surmash, Begaiym's mother, came and cried, but no one could intervene due to Aydarbek Datka's cruel orders. Kanybek lost all hope for a better life. When he recovered, he was no longer a horse herder but a shepherd. Pretending meek, unhappy, and dull, everyone thought he had gone mad. One day, when the men were away, he seized Aydarbek Datka's best horse and escaped.

Kanybek's Desperate Attempt Kanybek rode swiftly toward his friend Japek, who tended the horses of another wealthy man. He told Japek the story of his daring escape and asked for help rescuing Begaiym. The next morning, Japek learned that Aydarbek Datka had burned Ashyr alive, his horse trainer, for allowing a horse to be stolen. Japek warned Begaiym that Kanybek would come in the evening. She ran to the hill where he waited, and they rode off together. But some of Eshen's herders saw them. Chaos erupted in the village. Kanybek was caught, nearly lifeless, whipped by Eshen. Begaiym was beaten, her hair cut, tortured with thorns, and barely survived.

Kanybek Takes a Risk Kanybek lay tied in a shed, badly beaten and barely conscious. That night his friends Japek and Kubat secretly came and rescued him. They untied him and helped him mount the same horse on which he had tried to escape before. Under the darkness of night, Kanybek fled again toward the mountains. Among the rocky paths he told Japek to go to Uluu-Chat and see his mother. Kanybek anxiously asked about Begaiym, hoping she might still be alive. Japek said she had disappeared after the punishment. No one knew what had happened to her. Hearing this, Kanybek feared the worst and thought she might have been killed.

Reunion with Family

The Melody of Hidden Blood Kanybek rode toward Uluu-Chat, crossing the Kok-Suu and resting in a thick forest. While his horse grazed, he played two *kuu* melodies. An old couple appeared and thanked him. They said they were Urum and Turum, once slaves taken from Chuy valley to Alay, and that their only son Sansyz had been taken as a prize slave to Uluu-Chat. The old woman wept, recalling that Sansyz had a wife, Ajar, and a son named Kanybek. Kanybek hid his identity but played the sorrowful lament "Karagul Botom, my child," revealing Sansyz's death. The couple cried. Before leaving, Kanybek asked them to bless their grandson, saying he was Kanybek's friend. As he rode away, they realized he was Kanybek himself.

Arrival in Uluu-Chat Kanybek reached the valley of Uluu-Chat and met three men driving donkeys loaded with goods. He asked if they knew where Tulkubek's camp was, but they did not. Soon he noticed a young girl playing near a spring on the hillside. When he asked her name, she grew frightened and silently led him to a cave that served as her home. Inside the cave were many argali skins and pieces of dried meat. A sick woman lying inside slowly raised her head and asked who he was. Kanybek answered that he was a beggar and asked the girl's name. She said she was Sakaday.

The Reunion An old man soon arrived carrying firewood. When Kanybek said he was looking for people from Tulkubek's village, the man noticed his komuz and recognized it, saying it had been made by Juma from Alay. Another old hunter came dragging the body of an argali. The men spoke about a fugitive named Kanybek who had stolen Aydarbek Datka's horse and whom Tulkubek was also searching for. When Kanybek asked about the sick woman. They explained she was Ajar, wife of Kadyrakhun, once a slave of Ergesh Datka, now freed in old age, with only one daughter, Sakaday. Joloy said Kadyrakhun had wounded her while traveling. Hearing this, Kanybek revealed himself. Ajar cried that she had lost her sight, yet recognized him by his birthmark. They embraced, and Kanybek rejoiced to find his mother and sister.

Reunion by the Nura River Tulkubek received letters from Aydarbek Datka concerning his stolen horse and Kanybek. Zunnakhun also wrote, insisting that the horse be returned to Aydarbek and that Kanybek be returned to him. Meanwhile, Tulkubek heard rumors of a little girl living on a small island in the Nura River. He invited a man who had seen her, and with his people, they went to the river branch to wait. When the girl came to fetch water, they quietly followed her and discovered her tent. Joloy and an old man went to gather food and clothes, while Kanybek slept. His mother, overjoyed, showed him her love and affection.

Kanybek in Prison in Kashgar

Alym's Quest for Kanybek Alym set out for Kashgar to search for Kanybek, his brother in all but blood. He could not find his Chinese friend Li and stayed at a *caravan saray*, overhearing talk of Zunnakhun. He became acquainted with Kerimakhun, Zunnakhun's brother-in-law, and began working as a servant in Zunnakhun's household, where Supakhun took a liking to him. One day, Samsakhun and Aybadak brought a young, beautiful woman crying for Kanybek, she was Anarkhan. Alym also learned that Kanybek was imprisoned. Disturbed by a bad dream, he gave charity to prisoners, delivering bread to Kanybek. On the way home, he reunited with Li. Living in poverty with Li, Alym and his cousin Chan attempted to rescue Kanybek from prison, but the attempt failed, and Chan was killed while drilling the prison wall.

Alym's Hidden Plan Alym began working at Kerimakhun's house, tending the horses. A young girl, Daryakhan, showed affection for him. When Kerimakhun planned to leave the city for seven months, Alym stayed with Daryakhan and Anarkhan. One evening, during dinner, Anarkhan asked if Alym knew folk tales and jokes, and he shared many, including the story of Anarkhan and Kanybek, pretending ignorance. Suddenly, she asked if he was hiding anything or knew Kanybek personally. Revealing her own story, Anarkhan confessed she still loved Kanybek and never her husband Kerimakhun. Together, they began secretly planning to rescue Kanybek from prison.

The Plan with Appakh Kojo In Kashgar there was a man called Appakh Kojo who claimed to heal people. One day Anarkhan sent Alym to him disguised as a wealthy Kyrgyz bek carrying a bag of gold. Alym said his sister was sick and needed healing. The *kojo*, religious official told him to bring her. Instead, Anarkhan asked Alym to rescue Gulsarakhan, the daughter of Bakirakhun, who had once helped Joloy and Raushan. Gulsarakhan had been forced into prostitution. Alym searched the bazaar, found her, and secretly brought her to the poor house of his Chinese friend Li. Daryakhan also came there, and Gulsarakhan realized Alym was kind.

A Dangerous Request Later Alym and Anarkhan dressed Gulsarakhan as a young Kyrgyz girl and brought her to Appakh Kojo. Seeing her beauty, the healer admired her and quickly prepared an amulet with Quranic verses. The other people who work with Appakh Kojo even arranged a dinner for Alym and Gulsarakhan. Alym soon understood that Appakh Kojo had fallen in love with her. Taking advantage of this, he spoke privately and asked the healer to help free Kanybek from prison, explaining that Kanybek was his brother. Appakh Kojo hesitated. He said the task was dangerous and difficult, since Zunnakhun had already reported Kanybek's story.

Suspicion in the Household One day Supakhan came to Anarkhan's house and noticed that the horses were not well cared for, because Alym had been busy dealing with Kanybek's troubles. She asked angrily why Alym was neglecting the horses. Anarkhan replied that it was none of her business. Offended, Supakhan returned home and wrote a letter to Kerimakhun, claiming that Anarkhan and Alym might have a romantic relationship. Her accusation created suspicion and danger for them, as Kerimakhun was far away but still powerful. What had begun as a secret effort to help Kanybek now risked being exposed by jealousy and household rivalry.

Alym's Calculated Dinner Meanwhile Alym arranged a lavish dinner and invited Appakh Kojo and a local government official. Daryakhan and Gulsarakhan were also present, and their beauty attracted the guests' attention. The evening was carefully planned, allowing Alym to gain favor and trust. The government official, impressed by the hospitality, later spoke to a higher authority about Alym. Soon Alym was introduced to this powerful official, hoping that such connections might one day help him influence the authorities and find a way to free Kanybek from prison.

Anarkhan's Defiance Kerimakhun returned home in the evening furious, carrying a large dagger. Anarkhan sensed something was wrong and seized the weapon, asking whom he intended to kill: her, Alym, or Daryakhan. She declared that during his absence no one visited except Supakhan, Batmakhan, and Aynysakhan, and accused Supakhan of slander. Anarkhan said Alym was like her son and Daryakhan like her daughter, already promised in marriage. She challenged Kerimakhun to summon Supakhan and kill them all openly, or she herself would strike him. Frightened, Kerimakhun hesitated. Alym calmly confirmed his planned marriage to Daryakhan. Shaken and ashamed, Kerimakhun rode away, warning them not to reveal his return.

The Bargain for the Brides Alym arrived Li at the house of a government official, where Appakh Kojo was also present. They claimed they could not release Kanybek from prison, yet both showed interest in marrying Gulsarakhan and Daryakhan. Alym replied cleverly that his parents had just arrived and he had asked their permission for the marriages of his "sister" Gulsarakhan and "cousin" Daryakhan. His parents agreed only on one condition: if the grooms could not wait until next year, each must pay five hundred gold zer as the bride price for marriage.

Greed The government official laughed and said Kyrgyz sometimes paid a thousand sheep and eight hundred horses for a bride, so five hundred gold zer was acceptable to him. Appakh Kojo, however, was famous for his greed and disliked paying money. The official mocked him, saying that if he refused to pay for Gulsarakhan, he himself would pay and marry both girls. Alarmed, Appakh Kojo quickly protested that such a thing would be against sharia. Swearing by Allah, he promised to pay the five hundred gold zer immediately, even if the government official paid first, and he would return the money without delay.

Rescue from Prison

The Secret Bargain Alym and Li came to the chief prison official and brought five hundred gold zer. They asked him to release three prisoners: Kanybek, Chan, and a Uyghur man Dautakhun. They promised friendship and loyalty if he helped them. The powerful official calmly agreed. Soon after, he secretly killed the prison guard with a dagger. Then he went to the key keeper's office and placed the bloody dagger there. He gave the frightened key keeper the five hundred gold zer and ordered him to release the three prisoners immediately. Terrified and confused, the key keeper obeyed the command without resistance.

A Cruel Deception After the prisoners were released, the chief official ordered the key keeper to return the five hundred gold zer, promising he would give it back later. The terrified man obeyed and handed the money back. Then the official fired several shots into the sky to raise alarm. Other officers quickly arrived. The chief pretended concern and said there was no guard at his post and something might have happened in the key office. When they searched the room, they found the bloody dagger there. The frightened key keeper was accused of murder and was executed the next day.

Freedom and Building a New Life

Kanybek's Days in Kashgar Kanybek stayed in the suburbs of Kashgar at the house of Jalilakhun, the father of Dautakhun. There the old Chinese healer Chzhu Vey Hu treated him for tuberculosis and his frostbitten feet. One day Kanybek received a letter through Samsakhun saying that Begaiym had

disappeared. The news filled him with deep sadness. Soon Anarkhan came and brought troubling information. She said Supakhan had sent a letter to Zunnakhun through Samsakhun, asking whether Kerimakhun had returned because of her earlier message accusing Anarkhan of disgraceful behavior. But Kerimakhun was nowhere to be found, and people feared someone might have killed him.

A Dangerous Letter Supakhan's letter claimed that Anarkhan had dishonored herself by having a relationship with Alym. It also reported that Kanybek, who had stolen Aydarbek Datka's horse, had been released from prison with the help of the key keeper, and that Anarkhan and Alym were involved in this matter. By spreading these accusations, Supakhan created serious danger for all of them. After telling Kanybek about the letter, Anarkhan warned that the situation in Kashgar was becoming unsafe. Bad rumors about Anarkhan and Alym had already spread throughout the city.

Escape Plans in Kashgar Alym urged Kanybek to marry Anarkhan, who had loved him through every hardship. Kanybek hesitated, still grieving for the missing Begaiym, but Alym assured him she would rejoice knowing he was safe and free. Soon, Kanybek and Anarkhan were wed, Alym married Daryakhan, and Jalilakhun took Gulsarakhan as his wife. Anarkhan's four horses, along with two newly purchased, were ready for escape. Leaving the city was perilous, the horses were famous, and no buyer dared risk them. When Supakhan visited, Anarkhan embraced her warmly and offered a white dress and jacket, gifts originally intended for Kanybek's mother, concealing their true plan. Supakhan noticed the horses' long nails and advised proper shoeing. Alym promised to take the horses to a trusted local master for care.

The Vanishing Brides Appakh Kojo and the government official asked Alym about the wedding date. He said his parents would arrive the day after tomorrow and suggested beginning the government official's wedding with Daryakhan in two days. They went to Osmonakhun's house, where they usually met Alym, and knocked. The garden worker opened the gate and said that the two girls had gone first, carrying all their belongings on donkeys. The next day, their brother left with the two covered "women". He added that the keys should be returned to Osmonakhun. Shocked, Appakh Kojo and the official realized the house was empty. Meanwhile, Supakhan had gathered women and prepared food and music. She sent one of the servants to call Anarkhan, but he returned, saying the house was empty, doors left open.

Kanybek in the Alay Region

Return to Uluu-Chat Kanybek and Alym, accompanied by their wives, returned to Uluu-Chat, visiting relatives and friends. Kanybek's mother was alive, and they settled new yurts. Soon, letters from Zunnakhun reached local nobles, accusing Kanybek and Anarkhan of stealing Kerimakhun's horses and wealth. She also wrote to Sooron Datka, claiming Alym had killed the black camel years ago. Alarmed by these rumors, Kanybek knew they had to relocate again to a secluded Balykty area rarely visited by people. It was a Kyrgyz pasture under the Russian Empire. To sustain themselves, Kanybek and Alym traveled to small village bazaars, buying grains and selling or giving them to locals, quietly rebuilding their lives.

Akmat Mullah's Trial Kanybek received a letter from Akmat Mullah, his old teacher, who had recently been released from prison. Kanybek invited him to stay, and Akmat began teaching him politics and geopolitics. He recounted how he was shot in the knee in the pasture when Aydarbek Datka sent the police, survived, and fled to Tashkent. There, he met two Russian revolutionaries, who were arrested. A local doctor amputated his knee, and soon the police captured him again. At the hearing, Akmat cleverly pretended to be a beggar, claiming he had come to ask the Russians for food. He was taken to Osh, where Alybai Starchy recognized him and informed the authorities. During interrogation, revolutionary books were found, which Akmat claimed belonged to Aydarbek Datka's son. Despite lingering suspicion, he was released but had to report regularly to the authorities. After recovering from his illness, he finally departed for Tashkent.

News from Afar One day, Choko's neighbor's son arrived with a letter. He said he had been shepherding sheep among the rocks when a young woman appeared and handed it to him. Kanybek read that it was from Begaiym, his former wife. She had married a horse herder, was happy, and expecting a child. She had also heard that Kanybek had married Anarkhan and wished them well. Begaiym explained that she had married another man believing Kanybek was dead. She added that Aydarbek Datka had received a letter from Tulkubek, claiming Kanybek had killed Kerimakhun, Anarkhan's former husband, and still demanded his stolen horse. Kanybek felt sorrow, yet a small relief accompanied the news.

Rebellion against the Nobles

Kanybek Defends His Neighborhood In a neighborhood of fifty people, Kanybek had been chosen as *eluu bashy*, the leader of the community of approximately 50-60 people. One day, three horse riders arrived: Alymbek, the local Starchy; Tagay, a warrior of Sooron Datka; and Kulbarak, another leader overseeing fifty houses. Cruel and rude, they demanded twenty soms as tax. Choko replied that such matters were decided by their leader. The riders asked who had appointed Kanybek. The people said, "We did." Kanybek spoke firmly, explaining that twenty soms equaled a two-year-old horse, yet the people could barely afford a baby goat. He reminded them that the nobles had taken two horses last year and demanded their return, insisting they leave with only one horse.

Kanybek's Reputation Spreads Sooron Datka and Aydarbek Datka were afraid to confront Kanybek directly. Instead, they wrote a complaint to the Osh Uezd head. They claimed that some Russian Empire officials had been measuring lands and that five or six of their horses were stolen. They admitted they had taken five horses from five *starchys*, heads of community, to compensate. According to their letter, Kanybek stole these horses and sold them in Kashgar. They also accused him of killing a Russian guard the previous year, witnessed by their people. They admitted Kanybek was an excellent shooter, too cruel to confront, and rumored to have brought one hundred rifles from Kashgar. In response, the *pristav*, government official arrived with twenty soldiers, while the three riders sent earlier to collect twenty som acted as scouts to assess Kanybek's strength. Kanybek told the three men, "Go and tell your Sooron and Aydarbek: if they can, let them throw their sky on us," meaning they were not afraid of whatever threats came.

Fear and Courage Kanybek's neighborhood was terrified. No one had ever dared speak to the local nobles so boldly. Women and men worried deeply, saying even if they died, they would still have to pay twenty soms. Some women wept, saying, "We stepped on the dragon's tail," meaning they had insulted the nobles by taking their horses. Kanybek did not know how to comfort or persuade his people. He took a komuz and began singing. A young man named Adyl arrived and asked if they had really taken the leaders' horses. The villagers confirmed they had. Adyl warned that the *pristav* had arrived with twenty police to arrest Kanybek and all other men. Kanybek treated Adyl to dinner, and Anarkhan gave him a dress for his wife, Gulaiym. Gulaiym, formerly Begaiym, had suffered abuse from an old man named Eshen and nearly drowned in the river, but Adyl had saved her and married her.

Confrontation on the Road Kanybek and five men waited all night along the road to their village, expecting the police. In the morning, they saw Tagay, a warrior of Sooron Datka, Karabek, son of Aydarbek Datka, and soldiers approaching, speaking in Russian. Suddenly, Tagay insulted Kanybek. Unable to endure it, Joloy, the old man, gave the order to open fire. Tagay's horse dropped dead instantly. Kanybek turned to Karabek: "Your father and you caused me so much suffering. Do you remember burning Ashyr alive for a stolen horse? I want to burn you alive too." All Russian soldiers fled, and Tagay walked away in fear. Karabek, the elder son of Aydarbek Datka, remained in captivity.

Humiliation of Aydarbek Datka Kanybek's camp had relocated to the plain, cooking horse meat. Suddenly, two men appeared on horseback: Aydarbek Datka himself and Alybai Starchy, who brought an extra horse for his son's ransom. Seeing Joloy with a rifle, they froze in fear. Aydarbek Datka draped his whip around his neck, a nomadic gesture of surrender, saying, "Our souls and heads are yours, please, do not kill us (We offer you our lives and our heads, please spare us.)" The wealthiest and mightiest man in Alay region sat in the snow, humiliated, yet a spark of relief appeared knowing his son Karabek survived. Alybai Starchy remarked, "Do you see how times have changed, your former slave Kanybek, once eating your leftovers, now humiliates you utterly."

Forgiveness from a Former Master When Kanybek stepped out of his yurt and saw Aydarbek Datka, he was shocked. Aydarbek Datka stood and greeted, "Salam Aleikum." Thinking of saving his son and executing his own plan, he said, "Kanybek, you were once my slave. I treated you harshly, I did not help when the mullah divorced you and your wife. I sought revenge for the horse you took so long ago. Now I forgive you, even if you take a hundred horses. I did not know you were a true man. Please forgive me. You have an eight-year-old sister; let my son marry her when she grows." Kanybek did not trust his words. Alybai Starchy disapproved of Aydarbek Datka humiliating himself, but said, "Forgiveness is in our culture; *marry your mother to the man who killed your father*, to show extraordinary forgiveness and mercy. Please forgive him."

Reconciliation and Nomadic Justice The poor and kind villagers began to believe Aydarbek Datka's words, but Kanybek remained skeptical. "I do not trust him," he said firmly. Then, swearing by a nomadic oath, Aydarbek Datka declared, "If I lie, may the souls of my ancestors curse me." The elder Erkimbay spoke wisely: "Kanybek, follow our ancient nomadic customs. Let the *aksakals*, the wise elders, decide." Kanybek felt ashamed, knowing nomadic laws were sacred. The elders invited Aydarbek Datka into the yurt. They discussed old resentments at length. Aydarbek forgave Kanybek for the stolen horse, offering a horse for his son Karabek's life in return. The villagers rejoiced, trusting in justice, peace, and a secure future. Choko released Karabek from their nomadic captivity.

Volost Elections, Betrayal, and Arrest

Volost Leadership and Karabek's Role Aydarbek Datka, sensing his power waning, decided that his son Karabek must participate in the volost elections. A volost was a local administrative district in the Russian Empire's rural regions, led by a volost leader responsible for taxes, justice, and order among multiple households. Though Karabek had become a merchant and was uninterested in politics, his father insisted he take part. Aydarbek summoned the villagers, but few responded. He commanded that those who had fled be brought back, stressing the importance of voter numbers. Karabek's participation symbolized both family authority and local governance within the nomadic hierarchy.

Sooronbay Bolush Sooronbay Bolush, the current volost leader, acted with apparent fairness and generosity to win the villagers' trust, masking his real intentions. He slaughtered a horse and shared its meat, signaling his commitment to resolving local issues. Villagers brought complaints: a man's son had died herding a wealthy landlord's cattle, an elderly man requested exemption from taxes, and a woman sought a divorce from her polygamous husband. Sooronbay Bolush acted decisively, ordering compensation, scolding negligent leaders of fifty households (*eluu bashy*), and instructing the *kazy*, judge to grant the divorce. He also encouraged more voter participation, ensuring families who had fled returned to the elections.

Alliance through Marriage One day, Sooronbay invited the leaders of fifty households (*eluu bashy*) and ten households (*on bashy*), announcing they would visit Kanybek's village to request his sister's hand for his fourteen-year-old nephew. This union aimed to strengthen ties and secure his victory in the elections, as Kanybek might otherwise support Aydarbek Datka. They brought horses and fine clothing. Upon arrival, Sooronbay greeted Kanybek warmly, saying, "Forgive my past wrongs; I divorced you and your wife unjustly. Let us now be in-laws." Though cautious, Kanybek trusted Sooronbay's honor and agreed. The local poor, Joloy, Karyp, and others, rejoiced, seeing powerful figures treat them with respect and equality.

Politics and Deception in the Uezd The night before the marriage alliance, Sooronbay Bolush sent a letter to the head of the *Uezd*, the administrative district in the Russian Empire responsible for local governance, taxes, and justice, casting doubt on Aydarbek Datka's loyalty and intentions. Kanybek was widely seen as a dangerous man. He had killed a Russian official, stolen five horses, and recently almost attacked twenty police. Aydarbek Datka had promised to capture him, but in reality, he befriended Kanybek, undermining Russian authority. Sooronbay Bolush aimed to exploit this tension to become volost leader by discrediting Aydarbek Datka and appearing loyal to the authorities.

Election Intrigues and Kanybek's Visit Election tensions grew as both Sooronbay Bolush and Aydarbek Datka sent letters slandering each other, each trying to increase the number of voters supporting their community. The local people, however, cared more about the expenses they would bear during the elections. Sooronbay's wife visited Kanybek's house to see the future bride, bringing a foal to slaughter. Kanybek was pleased, thinking Sooronbay Bolush was a good man. One day, Sooronbay sent a letter via his messenger: "Kanybek, I am going to the Uezd capital, so you should come because Aydarbek Datka has complained about us to the Uezd head." Kanybek had to leave, but none could accompany him, as his wife had just delivered a son, Erkin.

Betrayal in the Night Kanybek arrived at Sooronbay Bolush's house and was greeted with honor. Hoping to end the rivalry, Sooronbay had written to Aydarbek Datka suggesting reconciliation despite the election struggle. He proposed that if Karabek won the election, he would become volost leader and Sooronbay would serve as *biy*, but if Sooronbay won, Karabek should take that role. That night Sooronbay waited for Aydarbek Datka. When he arrived, Sooronbay quietly gave Kanybek a pistol, saying he could use it if

someone tried to kill him. Suddenly five police and three officers burst into the yurt, ordering everyone not to move. Sooronbay demanded Kanybek show the pistol. Kanybek threw it down, saying, "Now it is clear."

Kanybek's Arrest and the Waiting Village Kanybek was arrested and taken to the city of Osh. Aydarbek Datka said he would accompany the authorities himself. Soon rumors spread that Aydarbek Datka had come with the popular outlaw Kanybek to kill Sooronbay Bolush, and that both men had therefore been detained. Aym traveled to Osh several times trying to help, but he could do nothing. In the village, people gathered daily at Kanybek's house to support Anarkhan and Ajar. Kanybek's grandfather and grandmother also moved there to share their grief. In those difficult days, the only one who could bring them joy was little Erkin, Kanybek's newborn son.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kanybek

Kanybek is a fearless and determined young boy whose life is shaped by slavery, injustice, and family separation. He demonstrates remarkable courage by confronting oppression directly in multiple situations: resisting captivity in Tulkubek's house, escaping Zunnakhun's control, and taking daring actions in Aydarbek Datka's village, including stealing the horse and fleeing cruel humiliation. His sense of justice is deeply personal and extends to those he loves, he fights to protect his wife Begaiym and his beloved Anarkhan, showing loyalty and devotion. Beyond personal struggles, Kanybek evolves into a defender of his community, striving for justice and equality for all. His actions reveal a character defined by bravery, resourcefulness, determination, and a relentless commitment to freedom and fairness.

Courageous Kanybek repeatedly faces life-threatening situations and cruel oppressors. In Tulkubek's house he resists slavery and escapes with his mother toward the Alay region. During their difficult journey they encounter wolves, showing how dangerous their flight is. After being captured, he is sent to Zunnakhun's house as a prize slave at the memorial feast. There he suffers constant violence and humiliation from Supakhan, Zunnakhun's mother, while Zunnakhun himself threatens to kill him and bury him near his shed as a cruel gift for Anarkhan. Despite these threats, Kanybek refuses to submit to fear. Later he is given to Aydarbek Datka in the Alay region. For a short time he hopes for a peaceful life after marrying Begaiym, yet injustice follows him again when powerful men force him to divorce her after he confronts the people of Sooron Datka. Throughout these hardships he does not surrender to those who abuse their power. Instead, he continues to resist humiliation and domination, showing determination and strength in the face of danger and injustice.

Intelligent Kanybek shows practical intelligence and sharp observation when he exposes the hypocrisy of Sabyrjan Eshen. The eshen arrives at the camp claiming that he can read people's fate and uses thick Arabic-script books to impress villagers who cannot read them. He accuses Sanambu, the wife of Esen, of adultery, even though he himself had forced her earlier. After she reveals the truth, Sabyrjan flees in shame and later seeks revenge; not long after, Sanambu commits suicide. One night Kanybek secretly sees Sabyrjan kissing Erkeaiym. The next morning, when Sabyrjan declares that Kanybek carries a "wicked black cat" and orders him out, Kanybek uses the accusation against him. At night he seizes Sabyrjan's coat and frightens him, claiming he will return it only after the eshen catches the "wicked black cat" within himself. Frightened of Aydarbek Datka, Sabyrjan promises money and silence. Kanybek then tells the truth to Juma, and Esen learns about the eshen's past crimes. As a result, the men beat Sabyrjan and Saltanat drives him out of the camp. Through this clever action, Kanybek reveals the false holiness of the eshen and protects the community from his deception.

Determined Kanybek demonstrates strong determination when he defends his neighborhood as the eluu bashy, the leader of about fifty to sixty people. When Aylmbek, the local starchy, Tagay, a warrior of Sooron Datka, and Kulbarak, another leader arrive demanding twenty soms as tax, Kanybek refuses to submit. He explains that twenty soms equals the price of a two-year-old horse, while the people in the neighborhood can hardly afford even a baby goat. He reminds them that the nobles had already taken two horses the previous year and demands their return, insisting that they leave with only one horse, so the two men had to leave their horses. His firm response shows his determination to protect the poor people of his community from exploitation. Kanybek's reputation soon spreads across the region. Sooron Datka and Aydarbek Datka become afraid to confront him directly and instead send a complaint to the head of the Osh

Uezd. They accuse him of stealing horses, selling them in Kashgar, killing a Russian guard, and even bringing rifles from Kashgar. In response, a pristav arrives with twenty soldiers to investigate, while the earlier riders act as scouts to observe Kanybek's strength. Despite these threats, Kanybek does not retreat. He boldly tells the riders to inform Sooron and Aydarbek that they are not afraid of their power, showing his unwavering determination to defend his people and stand against injustice.

Ajar

Ajar not only embodies maternal love and resilience but also acts as a moral compass within the narrative. Her suffering and perseverance highlight the stark contrast between innocence and the cruelty of oppressors, making the injustices Kanybek faces even more poignant. She inspires Kanybek's courage and determination; her presence motivates him to fight for freedom and justice, showing that personal strength is often rooted in familial bonds. By surviving slavery, enduring separation, and maintaining hope, she symbolizes resilience and the quiet heroism of those who endure injustice without wielding power, grounding the story in emotional realism.

Caring Ajar's care for her family is unwavering, even in the face of extreme adversity. When Kanybek is captured and sent to Tulkubek's household, she suffers in silence but never abandons hope for his safety and return. Her attention to the well-being of her son demonstrates not only maternal love but also her ability to provide emotional support under impossible circumstances. Beyond her own child, she extends her care to others in need, raising Suiumkan and Aлым, Karyp's children who lost their mothers.

Resilient Ajar's life is marked by repeated hardships: slavery, family separation, social oppression, and the constant threat of violence. Yet she adapts and survives without surrendering to despair. Her resilience is evident in her ability to endure the flight with Kanybek to Alay, the subsequent capture, and her own period of servitude. She navigates the challenges of marriage to Kadyrakhun, raising a daughter, and returning to Uluu Chat, all while managing to survive in various households under difficult circumstances. Through each trial, she maintains her hope and determination, ultimately reuniting with Kanybek.

Sorrowful Ajar carries the weight of profound grief throughout her life, shaped by the loss, separation, and suffering of those she loves. She and her husband Sansyz were lifelong slaves, and one day Tulkubek takes Sansyz to Kashgar. Ajar hoped that Tulkubek would appreciate Sansyz's loyal work and even imagined beautiful clothes for herself and their son Kanybek. But Sansyz returned without gifts; Tulkubek ignored his wishes, and Sansyz was beaten for refusing to remain a slave as a "prize" for the memorial feast. He fell gravely ill and died. Even his death was marred by injustice: the mullah refused to perform the final prayer, and Tulkubek only appeared because Zunnakhun reminded him that Sansyz was his slave. They did not even have proper cloth to wrap him. Ajar felt humiliated and sorrowful, carrying this grief alongside her twelve-year-old son Kanybek, embodying the deep personal cost of oppression and the enduring pain of injustice.

Sansyz

Sansyz's life illustrates the enduring cycle of oppression. He was brought as a slave from the Alay region to Uluu-Chat, while his parents, Urum and Turum, were enslaved from the Chuy Valley in northern Kyrgyzstan. After his death, his son Kanybek and wife Ajar were also forced into slavery, continuing the cycle of oppression that had plagued their family for generations. This generational slavery highlights how exploitation is passed down, trapping ordinary families in systemic injustice. His death, denied a proper burial, underscores the fragility of human dignity and the brutal consequences of hierarchical oppression.

Honest Sansyz embodies integrity and diligence, faithfully serving his master despite the harsh conditions of slavery. He consistently fulfills his duties, such as tending flocks and assisting with household chores, even when faced with unfair debts and impossible demands. For example, he owed Atabek Datka 300 bundles of grass for one korpo and a lambskin, though he should have paid only 30 bundles of grass, and lived in Uluu-Chat, a barren place with scarce pasture for ten years. Sansyz's perseverance in the face of such exploitation highlights his moral steadfastness and tireless work ethic.

Dignified Sansyz maintains his sense of self-respect and honor even under the crushing weight of slavery and exploitation. Despite being treated as property, forced to pay excessive debts, and ultimately denied proper recognition in life and death, he carries himself with quiet pride and moral integrity. His dignity is

evident not only in his own conduct but also in how he teaches Kanybek to live an honest and just life: to be a good shepherd, avoid theft, and refrain from wrongdoing, passing on values of honor and morality even amid oppression.

Sorrowful Sansyz's life ends in tragic suffering, revealing the relentless cruelty of the slave system. For refusing to remain a slave under Zunnakhun, he is brutally beaten, and his back is lacerated from the severe punishment. He had hoped to bring gifts to Ajar and Kanybek, believing it was his only chance to make them happy, yet Tulkubek mocks him instead. This merciless treatment leads to his death, leaving Ajar and young Kanybek vulnerable and grief-stricken.

Tulkubek

Tulkubek uses his intelligence and social position to control others and maintain authority. He manipulates traditions and social customs for his own benefit, presenting his actions as normal or justified while exploiting the poor. By organizing the memorial feast and demanding extreme contributions, he strengthens his influence over the community and forces dependent families to obey him.

Cruel Tulkubek is cruel and indifferent to the suffering of others, whether people or animals. When his camp settles near Aidyng Kol Lake, he begins hunting the ducks there without restraint. First, he sends his eagle to capture a duck, and when that does not satisfy him, he uses his gun to shoot the birds. Later, he orders his warriors to bring a tuzak (Kyrgyz: тузак – a trap or snare used to catch animals or fish). Using this trap, they capture a duckling and bring it to the camp. The mother duck even comes near the village searching for her duckling, but Tulkubek shows no concern or compassion.

Manipulative Tulkubek Datka uses manipulation to strengthen his control over poor families. When the nobles prepare for the ash, the memorial feast for Shamyrbek Datka, they demand that each household contribute cattle, without considering whether the people can even afford basic food. When the Chor Tamandar tribe, the poorest clan in the village, explains that they can only contribute according to their limited means, Tulkubek pretends to help them. He announces that he will pay eleven sheep for the elderly and fifty sheep for each household, claiming they can repay him later when they are able. However, this apparent generosity is deceptive. If they cannot repay the debt, they are forced to work for him for most of their lives. In this way, Tulkubek traps ordinary people in endless debt and turns them into lifelong servants, using manipulation to expand his power and wealth.

Arrogant Tulkubek Datka displays arrogance and contempt toward the poor during the memorial feast. Each tribe is required to set several yurts, but the Chor Tamandar tribe cannot afford to do so. Instead, Tulkubek orders every member of the clan to serve at the feast: they must slaughter cattle, cook meat in the open air, and take care of the guests' horses. Koko, the leader of the tribe, and his wife are assigned to serve in the yurt where Aydarbek Datka stays. Tulkubek insults them, saying they look dirty and that their clothes are poor, and orders them to find better clothing. Many members of the tribe borrow clothes, and to repay the borrowed items they must work for others for many years. When Toichu Datka mocks Aydarbek Datka for being served by the poor Koko and his "ugly" wife, Tulkubek immediately replaces them with young and attractive servants. Afterwards, he develops hatred toward Koko without reason and sends him to the *er sayysh* horseback spear game, where another rider kills him with a spear. This episode reveals Tulkubek's arrogance, cruelty, and disregard for the dignity and lives of the poor.

Zunnakhun Bek

Zunnakhun Bek represents another layer of oppression in Kanybek's life. After Tulkubek, his household becomes another place where Kanybek experiences injustice and danger. Through this character, the story further exposes the cruelty of the ruling elite and the vulnerability of enslaved people, strengthening the narrative's critique of social inequality and abuse of power.

Opportunistic In the novel, Zunnakhun Bek is portrayed as a well-known merchant who constantly looks for ways to increase his wealth and expand his trade connections. His actions are guided by personal benefit rather than genuine relationships or moral considerations. One clear example is his marriage to Aydarbek Datka's daughter. Although he does not like her, he agrees to the marriage because it strengthens his economic and political ties with influential Kyrgyz leaders living under the Russian Empire. In this sense, he "marries" Aydarbek Datka as much as his daughter, using the alliance to secure access to new trade routes and markets.

Authoritarian Zunnakhun Bek is focused on trade and authority, which creates constant tension in his household. He frequently quarrels with his mother Supakhan because he resents her manipulation, yet he also ignores the feelings and opinions of his wife Aynysakhan. Their strained relationship, where she attempts to influence him through emotional appeals, reveals his domineering and emotionally distant character, as he struggles to maintain harmony in his own family despite his wealth and status.

Selfish Zunnakhun Bek places his personal wealth, fame, and social standing above justice and human decency. He insists on taking Kanybek as a slave for the horse race prize to enhance his prestige, ignoring the boy's freedom and the suffering of the poor. He could have refused the slave and allowed Kanybek to be free, but he chooses to claim him as part of his fame and dignity. Even when his own horse does not win the race and another man's horse wins on his behalf, Zunnakhun takes the prizes including Kanybek as if they were rightfully his. This demonstrates that he exploits every situation purely for personal gain, he does not show any regard for fairness, justice, or the rights of others.

Aydarbek Datka

Aydarbek Datka shows the power and unfairness of local Kyrgyz leaders. He creates problems for Kanybek and his family, showing how ordinary people suffer under the rich and powerful. He protects his status and family reputation more than fairness, using his authority to control others, decide marriages, punish mistakes, and enforce strict social rules.

Opportunistic Aydarbek Datka consistently prioritizes personal and familial gain over fairness or loyalty. He arranges his daughter's marriage to Zunnakhun Bek not out of affection but to secure political influence and economic advantage, aiming to benefit his son Karabek through trade connections. He strategically uses people like Akmat Mullah for his own benefit and actively engages in translating letters from Russian officials to maintain his social position. However, when danger arises, such as the police coming to capture him, he does not protect those who helped him, revealing that his actions are guided by self-interest rather than moral responsibility or genuine care for others.

Callous Aydarbek Datka demonstrates a striking lack of empathy and concern for the well-being of others, prioritizing social arrangements and personal gain over human dignity. By requesting Kanybek as part of his daughter's bride price, he treats a living boy as property rather than a human being. Kanybek is forced to sleep next to the cattle yard, without a proper yurt, and suffers from severe injuries and exposure to the rain, yet Aydarbek and his wife remain unconcerned. This behavior highlights his cold, self-serving nature and willingness to ignore suffering in pursuit of status and advantage.

Oppressive Aydarbek Datka demonstrates injustice and oppression in his treatment of Kanybek. Despite Kanybek defending Aydarbek's horses and participating in the singing game without wrongdoing, the nobles blame him, forcing him to pay compensation he cannot afford. His wife Begaiym is forcibly taken from him and married to another man, while Kanybek is beaten severely and left to suffer in the open air. Aydarbek Datka's failure to recognize Kanybek's loyalty and his readiness to allow such punishment highlight a character that prioritizes social hierarchy and control over fairness,

THEMES

Social Hierarchy: The novel *Kanybek* highlights the rigid social structures of Kyrgyz society, showing how power, wealth, and status shaped daily life. In the Uluu Chat region and the Kashgar area, both in modern Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan), China, people lived according to traditional hierarchies. Nomadic Kyrgyz had clearly defined social roles, and slavery was a common part of life for the poor. Nobles and wealthy families controlled land, livestock, labor, and marriages, while ordinary people had little chance to improve their social position. Crimes and conflicts were often settled through *kun*, a system of compensation in which wrongdoers paid cattle to the victim or their family. This system maintained social order but also reinforced the power of the elite and the subordination of the lower classes. Under Russian Empire rule in the Alay region, the traditional hierarchy continued, supplemented by administrative structures such as uezds, volosts, taxes, and elections. In contrast, Kashgar, a key city on the Silk Road, had a more urban social system, with merchants, caravanserais, and prisons, showing the differences between nomadic and settled societies. Through Kanybek's experiences, the novel demonstrates how social hierarchy affected daily life, freedom, and justice. The strict expectations of nobles, the practice of *kun*, and the rigid division of roles limited opportunities for ordinary people, making them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Illustrative moment: During the memorial feast organized by Tulkubek Datka, each tribe was required to contribute livestock and labor. The Chor Tamandar, one of the poorest tribes, could barely afford to provide anything. Tulkubek demanded that every member of the tribe serve during the feast, cooking, caring for horses, and preparing yurts for the wealthy guests. When the tribe protested that they had nothing to offer, Tulkubek insisted they either pay or serve indefinitely, effectively making them lifelong laborers. Koko, the tribe leader, and his wife were personally humiliated when Tulkubek criticized their appearance and forced them to borrow clothes, indebting them further. Eventually, Koko was killed during the *Er Saiysh* game, orchestrated by Tulkubek's orders, to assert control and enforce the social hierarchy.

Slavery: Oppression One of the central themes in *Kanybek* is slavery and oppression. The novel shows the harsh lives of ordinary Kyrgyz people who suffer under powerful and cruel elites. Kanybek, his parents, and his grandparents endure forced labor, beatings, and separation from their loved ones. They experience humiliation, fear, and unfair treatment, which affects their decisions and relationships. Wealthy and powerful figures such as Tulkubek, Zunnakhun Bek, and Aydarbek Datka exploit the poor to maintain their social status and increase their wealth. During the memorial feast, for example, poor tribes like Koko's are forced to provide livestock, cook, and care for horses, and risk being taken as human prizes if they cannot meet the demands. Slavery affects multiple generations. Kanybek's father, Sansyz, and his grandparents were taken as slaves, and their suffering shapes Kanybek's determination to resist oppression and protect his family. The novel shows that slavery is not only physical but also emotional and psychological, creating fear, pain, and a constant struggle to maintain dignity. Through the story of Kanybek and his family, the narrative emphasizes the cruelty of oppression and the courage of those who fight for freedom and justice.

Illustrative moment: One day Samsakhun brought cruel news: Tulkubek planned to give Kanybek as a slave to Zunnakhun in Kashgar. The poor were heartbroken. Ajar remembered how Sansyz had once asked Atabek for a lambskin to make a cap for newborn Kanybek. Atabek demanded thirty bundles of grass. Now, even after his death, Atabek wanted Kanybek to serve him. Tulkubek declared that Karyp, Sansyz's faithful friend, would work twelve years to pay the debt.

Freedom and Resistance: A central theme in *Kanybek* is the struggle for freedom and the refusal to submit to oppression. Kanybek constantly resists being treated as a slave and fights for the safety and dignity of himself and his loved ones. He does not accept cruel circumstances passively. When Tulkubek plans to give Kanybek as a slave to Zunnakhun in Kashgar, Kanybek and his mother Ajar are devastated, but the thought of escaping to Kok-Suu in the Alay Valley gives them hope. Even after being captured and sent away, Kanybek's desire for freedom remains strong. He endures humiliation, brutal beatings, and the forced marriage of his wife Begaiym to a much older man in the Alay region. Left alone and suffering under Aydarbek Datka's harsh orders, he pretends to be meek and defeated, while secretly planning his escape. This shows his patience, intelligence, and resilience. Eventually, he seizes an opportunity to steal Aydarbek Datka's best horse and escape, demonstrating his courage and determination to resist injustice. The novel emphasizes that freedom is not given but must be fought for, and true resistance requires both physical

courage and mental strength. Kanybek's actions reflect the universal human desire for dignity, self-determination, and justice.

Illustrative moment: Kanybek lay tied in a shed, badly beaten and barely conscious. That night his friends Japek and Kubat secretly came and rescued him. They untied him and helped him mount the same horse on which he had tried to escape before. Under the darkness of night, Kanybek fled again toward the mountains. Among the rocky paths he told Japek to go to Uluu-Chat and see his mother. Kanybek anxiously asked about Begaiym, hoping she might still be alive. Japek said she had disappeared after the punishment.

Gender: Polygamy Polygamy is a key aspect of the social hierarchy in *Kanybek*, reflecting both wealth and status among the Kyrgyz elite and wealthy Uighur men. In the novel, only nobles or rich men could afford multiple wives among the Kyrgyz, while ordinary people typically had one spouse. Polygamy served to display wealth, consolidate alliances, and enhance social prestige rather than for personal affection. For instance, Zunnakhun already had four wives, and his fifth wife, Aiymbacha, was married for trade relations with Aydarbek Datka. Aydarbek Datka had two wives, Saltanat and Erkeaiym; Erkeaiym did not love him and engaged in adultery.

Aydarbek Datka also forced Kanybek's wife Begaiym to marry an older man who already had three wives. This marriage was arranged not for love or personal choice but to uphold social norms and reinforce the authority of the powerful. Similarly, Tulkubek and other nobles exercised control over women's lives to demonstrate dominance and maintain family status.

Polygamy in the novel highlights social inequality because it shows how the elite manipulate marriage for political or personal gain, while ordinary people like Kanybek and Begaiym have little agency.

Illustrative moment: Once Kadyrbai, a wealthy local man, brought a young Kazakh girl named Raushan as a captive from war. She was only thirteen and very beautiful. Kadyrbai planned to marry her and kept her in his household until she grew older. Kerech, the old man, and his wife once asked to adopt the girl, but Kadyrbai refused. His wife Kanysha grew jealous and took her own life. Kadyrbai paid the customary *kun*, compensation with cattle and slaves for death to Kanysha's clan. Later he wished to marry sixteen-year-old Raushan, but her heart belonged to Joloy, a slave taken to Kadyrbai's in-laws.

Leisure: Music Music and singing play a vital role in *Kanybek*, providing emotional strength and linking oppressed individuals to their cultural heritage. For Kanybek and others, music is more than entertainment; it preserves hope, conveys unspoken feelings, and asserts dignity under harsh social conditions. Shepherds typically learned the choor flute while tending sheep, and Kanybek followed this tradition. He also mastered the komuz under Juma, a skilled komuz player and poet from the Alay region. Through these instruments, Kanybek maintains a sense of self and communicates courage, defiance, and resilience in the face of slavery, humiliation, and injustice.

Music also unites communities, creating solidarity among those subjected to oppression. At weddings, gatherings, and other communal events, songs share stories of struggle, loss, and love, fostering collective emotional strength. Laments hold special significance in Kyrgyz culture during periods of migration or grief. For example, Kanybek performs the mournful melody "Karagul Botom, Karagul My Child" while recounting his father Sansyz's death to his grandparents. Through this musical storytelling, he honors his father, expresses sorrow, and strengthens emotional connections with his family, showing that music functions as both comfort and a subtle form of resistance against dehumanization.

Illustrative moment: Kanybek became renowned among women and young men for his singing. One day, young women came to the pasture where he herded sheep, asking him to sing. He performed, and joy spread among them. Later, he played the melody "Koychunun Kuusu" (Shepherd's Melody), learned from Juma, for his friends.

Political Ideas: The Echo of Bolshevik Rule In *Kanybek*, early revolutionary ideas reach even remote Kyrgyz communities, reflecting the broader geopolitical tensions of the region. The Alay region, under Russian Empire control, neighbored areas like Uluu Chat and Kashgar in China, where Kyrgyz and Uighur populations lived according to traditional customs. These borderlands were influenced by two very different powers: the Russian Empire, which imposed administrative structures, taxes, and elections, and Qing-era China, where trade along the Silk Road flourished and social hierarchies persisted. Akmat Mullah, adopted by a Russian man named Burev, learns revolutionary ideas in this context and later works at the train station, distributing booklets and flyers promoting social change. The spread of Bolshevik ideology into

nomadic Kyrgyz society illustrates how political currents from Russia penetrated neighboring regions, challenging entrenched local hierarchies. The novel shows the tension between traditional social systems and the emerging ideas of equality, freedom, and revolution, highlighting how geopolitics shaped even the lives of ordinary people like Kanybek and his community.

Illustrative moment: Akmat Mullah shared his life with Kanybek. Orphaned, he was adopted by Adigine Starchy, who placed him under the care of Russian lawyer Burev. There, he learned Russian, helped care for Burev's daughter Zoya, and studied literature. He completed six grades of Russian school, then madrasa school, mastering Islamic knowledge. Burev inspired him to help the poor; Akmat once distributed Burev's revolutionary papers at a railway station against the Tsar. Fleeing after Burev's arrest, he secretly taught Islam and Russian in Kazakh and Kyrgyz villages. In Alay, his teaching career did not interest Aydarbek Datka, who noticed that local mullahs interpreted Islam differently. Akmat taught it's just and true postulates and expressed his wish to teach Kanybek too.