

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Feruza Shermatova-Omerani, Ph.D.

THE ORPHANS / JETIMDER (1970)

Zuura Sooronbaeva (1924-2012)

References:

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OVERVIEW

Author

Early Life and Journalism Zuura Sooronbaeva was born on August 15, 1924, in the village of Jolgot in the Ak-Suu district of Kyrgyzstan. After graduating from secondary school in 1940, she began working as a secretary-typist at the newspaper *Ysyk-Kol Pravdasy* (*Issyk-Kul Truth*). Between 1959 and 1974, she worked as a correspondent for the regional newspaper *Komunistik Emgek* (*Communist Labor*), later returning to *Ysyk-Kol Pravdasy*, where she continued her journalism career until 1979.

Poetry and Literary Beginnings Sooronbaeva entered literature as a poet. Her first poetry collection, *My Village* (*Menin Aiylym*), was published in 1960. Her 1966 collection *Friendship* (*Dostuk*) included both poems and the narrative poems *Friendship* (*Dostuk*) and *Adopted Son* (*Asyrandy uul*). Although critics initially doubted her transition from poetry to prose, she soon proved herself as a talented fiction writer.



Success as a Prose Writer Her first major prose work, the novella *The Aster Flowers* (*Astra Gülü*), was published in 1971 and brought her widespread fame. During the 1970s, she produced several important works, including *Orphans* (*Jetimder*), *Andrey* (*Andrei*), and *The Gray-Haired Woman* (*Ak Chach Ayal*). The 1980s were also highly productive years for her. During this period, she published the collection *The Mountains Know* (*Toolor Bilet*), the children's book *Rest, Mother* (*Es Alchy, Apa*), and the novella *Letter from Leningrad* (*Leningraddan Kelgen Kat*). Her writings attracted readers through their realistic and emotionally rich portrayal of ordinary people and everyday life. One of her best-known works, the novel *The Stranger* (*Choochun Kishi*), was published in 1988. Focusing on the painful emotional relationship between a husband and wife, the novel became highly popular and earned Sooronbaeva renewed literary acclaim. At readers' request, a sequel was published in 2002, and the novel remains relevant today.

Drama and Theatre Sooronbaeva also wrote several plays, including *The Groom* (*Erkek Kolukmu*), *Broken Shrine* (*Sinğan Mazar*), *Wealth and Love* (*Baylyk jana Mahabat*), and *Fiery Dawn* (*Örttüü Tang*). Her play *Broken Shrine* (*Sinğan Mazar*) was translated into Kazakh under the title *Illness* (*IlDET*) and staged at the Abai Zhambul Theatre. It was later performed in both Kazakhstan and Russia.

Honors and Legacy Sooronbaeva became a member of the Soviet Journalists' Union in 1953 and the Soviet Writers' Union in 1954. She received several state honors, including certificates of merit from the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyzstan, the medal For Valiant Labor during World War II, and the commemorative medal dedicated to Lenin's centenary. In 1995, she was awarded the title of People's Writer

of Kyrgyzstan. Her name was later given to the school she attended in her native village and to a street in the city of Karakol.

Novella *The Orphans (Jetimder)* is a novella published in 1970 by Kyrgyz writer Zuura Sooronbaeva. It was later republished in 2007 in Bishkek by *Biyiktik* Publishing House. *The Orphans* is a Soviet Kyrgyz realist novella. It focuses on family life, orphanhood, poverty, and the social consequences of political conflict. Written in a realistic style, the work reflects the humanistic concerns of Soviet-era Kyrgyz literature and pays particular attention to the experiences of ordinary people.

Background The novella is a family story set during the turbulent years of early Soviet Kyrgyzstan. While Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik forces clash in the background, the focus is not on politics itself. Instead, it shows how these events tear ordinary families apart, especially women and children who are left unprotected. At the center is Choko's family. He is killed in the conflict, leaving his wife Shaiymkul alone with their children during a time of hunger and fear. With no proper food, support, or medical care, life becomes unbearable. Eventually, Shaiymkul dies of pneumonia, and her youngest child is left orphaned. The children are separated and grow up in different places, losing both parents and each other. Through this story, the novella shows the human cost of war and conflict. It is not about politics or battles, but about everyday people whose lives are destroyed by historical events—families broken, childhoods lost, and survival becoming the only goal.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Choko – Father of Nurlan, Rahat, and Tolkun; fighter against the Basmachi movement
Shaiymkul – Mother of Nurlan, Rahat, and Tolkun; widowed, struggles with poverty, dies of illness
Nurlan – Eldest son of Choko and Shaiymkul; boarding-school student, later prosecutor
Rahat – Daughter of Choko and Shaiymkul; educated, independent, raised in boarding school
Tokush (Tolkun) – Youngest daughter; adopted and renamed Tolkun, unaware of her origins
Sultanbek and Zairakan – Adoptive parents of Tolkun
Samat – Man who forces Tolkun into a kidnapping-based marriage
Abbas – Tolkun's fiancé
Sydyk and Nikonor – Bolshevik officials; support the children's education and help reunite the family

SYNOPSIS

After the Bolshevik Revolution, life in a Kyrgyz village becomes harsh, shaped by poverty, war, and uncertainty. Choko returns home briefly to his wife Shaiymkul and their children, but the moment is fragile and short-lived. He leaves again to fight in the conflict and is soon killed, leaving Shaiymkul alone with four children and almost no means to survive. Hunger spreads through the household, and one child, Tynchylyk, dies. Shaiymkul struggles on, but illness and exhaustion eventually take her life as well, leaving her youngest daughter, Tokush, completely orphaned.

Tokush is adopted by Sultanbek and Zairakan and given a new name, Tolkun. At the same time, her older siblings Nurlan and Rahat grow up in a boarding school, far from their original home, carrying the pain of losing their mother. Tolkun grows up in safety, but later suffers from an eye illness. After failed traditional treatments, she finally receives proper medical care in Karakol, where she slowly recovers. During this time, she is pursued by Samat and is later forced into a kidnapping-based marriage, but she ultimately escapes and returns to her family home.

Years later, Tolkun continues her education at university, while Nurlan becomes a prosecutor. His investigation into a death case leads him to Tolkun, and he slowly realizes she resembles his lost sister. In the end, the truth comes out: Tolkun is Tokush, and the long-separated siblings are finally reunited.

SCENES

Choko Returns Home During the difficult years following the Bolshevik Revolution, Shaiymkul lived in a poor village hut with her four children: Rahat, Nurlan, Tynchylyk, and Tokush. Hunger and uncertainty affected every family. Her husband, Choko, was away fighting against the Basmachi movement and rare-

ly returned home. One day he appeared unexpectedly. Instead of joy, Shaiymkul felt fear because the conflict had become increasingly dangerous. Choko was surprised by her reaction and explained that he simply wished to see his family. He shared a single piece of candy among the children, creating a brief moment of happiness in their troubled household.

Choko and Shaiymkul Argue After Choko's arrival, he and Shaiymkul discussed the political situation. Shaiymkul feared the violence surrounding the struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Basmachis. She complained that the new government had brought little improvement to ordinary people and that their family still suffered from poverty and fear. More than political change, she wanted peace and a stable life with her husband and children. Choko disagreed. He believed that the old order had oppressed poor people and that fighting for the new government was necessary. Although Shaiymkul begged him to stay, Choko remained committed to his cause.

Choko's Death Soon after leaving home, Choko became involved in another armed clash. Gunfire echoed across the village, causing panic among the residents. Nurlan ran toward the sound, hoping to find his father, while Shaiymkul desperately tried to stop him. The boy repeatedly shouted for his father, refusing to listen. Suddenly he saw Choko's horse returning alone. Realizing what had happened, Shaiymkul broke down in grief. She understood that her husband had been killed and would never return.

Hunger in the Hut After Choko's death, Shaiymkul faced overwhelming difficulties. The family lived in extreme poverty, and food was scarce throughout the village. Her children frequently asked for bread and meat, but she had almost nothing to give them. Most days she prepared a simple soup from roasted wheat flour known as *talkan*. While mourning her husband according to local custom, she also worried constantly about keeping her children alive. Every meal became a struggle.

Shaiymkul Helps an Old Woman One day, despite having almost no food herself, Shaiymkul demonstrated remarkable generosity. An elderly neighbor came seeking assistance and asked whether she had anything to eat. Although her own family was hungry and she possessed only a small amount of roasted wheat, Shaiymkul shared what little she had. Her decision reflected both compassion and respect for community values during difficult times. The act also highlighted her character. Even while facing personal tragedy, poverty, and uncertainty, she refused to ignore another person's suffering.

The Rich Woman's Refusal Desperate to find food for her children, Shaiymkul visited a part of the village where wealthier families lived. She hoped that someone might spare a piece of bread or some leftovers. Instead, she encountered hostility. A wealthy woman refused to help and harshly criticized the Bolsheviks for destroying the traditional way of life enjoyed by prosperous nomadic families. She even blamed Choko and people like him for the hardships facing the region. Shaiymkul returned home empty-handed and discouraged.

Choko's Comrades Visit When Shaiymkul returned home, her children shared unexpected news. Several of Choko's former comrades had visited while she was away and left some money to support the family. The gesture moved her deeply, bringing both gratitude and sorrow. The visitors had not forgotten Choko's sacrifice and wished to help his widow and children survive. They also promised that one day Nurlan and Rahat would have an opportunity to study. For a brief moment, Shaiymkul felt hopeful about her children's future. The kindness of Choko's friends showed that his struggle and loyalty were still remembered.

Tynchylyk's Death The family's brief sense of hope was shattered by another tragedy. While Shaiymkul had been searching for food, her young son Tynchylyk became seriously weakened. Later, when she tried to wake him, she discovered that he had already died. The loss devastated her. Having recently buried her husband, she now faced the death of one of her children. Hunger and poverty had taken another victim. The small household was overwhelmed by grief, yet life offered little time for mourning. Shaiymkul still had to care for her surviving children while enduring the emotional pain of another heartbreaking loss.

The School Proposal Some time later, Choko's comrades Sydyk and Nikonor visited the family with an important proposal. They believed that Nurlan and Rahat should be sent to a boarding school in Pishpek, where they would receive food, clothing, and an education. At first Shaiymkul hesitated, especially about

sending Rahat. She felt that a girl could attend a future local school instead. However, Sydyk explained that establishing village schools would take time. Realizing that her children might otherwise continue suffering from hunger, Shaiymkul reluctantly agreed. She hoped that education would provide them with opportunities and a safer future than she could offer.

Departure for Boarding School Nurlan and Rahat soon left for the boarding school in Pishpek. Although the separation was painful, the children entered a new stage of life. At school they received clean clothes, regular meals, and better living conditions than they had known at home. Rahat carefully saved her old clothing, thinking about her younger sister Tokush and hoping it might one day be useful. The departure filled Shaiymkul with mixed emotions. She missed her children deeply, yet she also understood that the school offered them a chance to escape hunger and build a better future through education.

Rahat Decides to Study Although Rahat had entered boarding school, she initially struggled with her studies. Being separated from her family and adjusting to a new environment was difficult. One day, her teacher spoke with her privately and encouraged her to think about the future. The teacher explained that if she studied well, she could gain an education, find a good profession, and eventually help her mother. The conversation deeply affected Rahat. She began to understand the value of education and the opportunities it could create. From that moment, she became more motivated and worked harder in her classes, hoping to improve her family's future.

Move to Chuy While Nurlan and Rahat remained at boarding school, Shaiymkul decided to relocate with her youngest daughter, Tokush, to the Chuy Valley, where she had been born. She hoped that returning to her homeland might provide better conditions for survival. However, the reality was disappointing. The house she moved into was old and nearly ruined. Food remained scarce, and mother and daughter continued to suffer from poverty. Life became increasingly difficult. One day, little Tokush asked her mother for food, but Shaiymkul had nothing to give.

Shaiymkul's Death The hardships eventually became too much for Shaiymkul to endure. Years of hunger, exhaustion, and poor living conditions weakened her health. She developed pneumonia, but there was no medical treatment available to help her recover. One day, neighbors named Sultanbek and Zairakan visited the house and made a tragic discovery. Shaiymkul had died, leaving her young daughter alone. Tokush, only two years old, sensed that something terrible had happened. She cried constantly, became unusually quiet, and showed signs of grief despite her young age. With her mother's death, Tokush was left completely orphaned.

Tokush Is Adopted Sultanbek and Zairakan felt great sympathy for the little girl. They had no children of their own and could not bear to leave Tokush without a family. After arranging Shaiymkul's burial, they decided to adopt her and raise her as their daughter. The decision changed the course of Tokush's life. Although she was too young to understand everything, she gradually became attached to her new parents. Sultanbek and Zairakan treated her with kindness and care. Their adoption saved her from abandonment and gave her a chance to grow up in a stable household despite the tragedy she had experienced.

Tokush Becomes Tolkun After adopting the child, Sultanbek and Zairakan changed her name from Tokush to Tolkun. As the years passed, the girl slowly adjusted to her new identity and family. At first she often visited the ruined house where her mother had died, as if searching for memories she could not fully understand. Gradually, those visits became less frequent. Fearing that villagers might reveal the truth about the adoption, Sultanbek and Zairakan eventually moved to the Ysyk-Kol region. There Tolkun grew up believing she was their biological daughter. The relocation helped protect the secret that would remain hidden for many years.

Search for Shaiymkul Sydyk and Nikonor never forgot Choko's family. As former comrades of the fallen fighter, they often wondered what had happened to Shaiymkul and her children. After learning that she had left her village and moved to the Chuy Valley with little Tokush, they tried to find information about her whereabouts. Sydyk even wrote a newspaper article about Choko's service and sacrifice. At the end

of the article, he asked Shaiymkul to contact them if she read it. However, no reply ever came. The silence worried them and left them uncertain about the fate of the widow and her youngest child.

News of Their Mother's Death As time passed without any news from Shaiymkul, Nikonor concluded that something tragic had likely happened. He advised Sydyk that Nurlan and Rahat deserved to know the truth. Sydyk therefore visited the boarding school where the children were studying. The meeting was painful. He informed them that their mother had most likely died and would never return. The news devastated both children. For two years they had hoped to see her again and dreamed of being reunited with their family. Instead, they learned that they were now completely orphaned. The loss left a deep emotional wound in both siblings.

Tolkun's Eye Disease Years later, Tolkun grew into a beautiful and intelligent young woman. As she approached the end of her secondary education, however, she developed a serious eye condition. Her vision gradually worsened, causing concern for both her and her parents. Sultanbek and Zairakan tried to find help, but medical services were limited in their rural community. They worried that the illness might permanently affect her future. Tolkun herself feared losing her eyesight and becoming dependent on others. The problem soon became the family's greatest concern, leading them to seek every possible remedy in hopes of restoring her health.

The Healer's Goat Ritual Before turning to professional medicine, Sultanbek followed local advice and sought help from a traditional healer. The healer claimed he could remove Tolkun's illness through a ritual. According to his method, the disease would be transferred from the girl to a goat. After performing the ceremony, he left the animal far from the village. However, rumors later circulated that the healer secretly retrieved the goat for himself. The treatment produced no improvement in Tolkun's condition. The episode disappointed her family and raised doubts about the effectiveness of such practices. Nevertheless, they continued searching for someone who could help their daughter.

The False Mullah After the failure of the traditional healer, Sultanbek heard about a respected mullah who supposedly cured illnesses through prayer. The family invited him into their home and treated him generously. They slaughtered a sheep, prepared meals, and brought kymyz for their guest. The mullah promised that he would heal Tolkun within a week by reciting verses from the Qur'an. However, his intentions soon became clear. He confessed inappropriate feelings toward Zairakan and later attempted to assault Tolkun while she slept. Furious, Sultanbek attacked the mullah and destroyed the amulet he had prepared. The family realized they had been deceived.

Journey to Karakol After the failure of traditional remedies, Sultanbek finally decided that Tolkun needed proper medical treatment. Although he was a respected carpenter and blacksmith with many responsibilities, his daughter's health became his highest priority. A government official named Kasym learned about Tolkun's condition and offered assistance. He helped arrange transportation and supported the family's trip to Karakol, where a well-regarded hospital operated. Sultanbek and Zairakan were grateful for the help. Despite the difficulties of travel and the uncertainty surrounding Tolkun's illness, they felt hopeful that professional doctors might succeed where healers and mullahs had failed.

Treatment at the Hospital Tolkun was admitted to a hospital in Karakol, one of the better medical institutions in the region. Although the number of doctors was limited, the staff worked diligently and provided careful treatment. Gradually, Tolkun's condition improved, and her eyesight began to recover. While she remained in the hospital, Kasym's brother Samat started visiting frequently. Kasym was a government official who helped Tolkun get to the hospital and supported her access to medical treatment during her illness. He brought food, gifts, and news from her village. At first these visits seemed friendly, but Samat quickly developed a strong interest in the young woman. Meanwhile, Tolkun focused on her recovery, unaware that his growing attention would soon create serious problems in her life.

Samat Courts Tolkun As Tolkun's health improved, Samat became increasingly persistent in his efforts to win her affection. He regularly visited the hospital and looked for opportunities to speak with her alone. Although he tried to present himself as caring and devoted, Tolkun did not share his feelings. She remained polite but distant. Samat interpreted her kindness as encouragement and continued pursuing her.

His determination grew stronger despite her lack of interest. Rather than respecting her wishes, he became convinced that she should become his wife. This misunderstanding laid the foundation for the conflict that would later threaten Tolkun's freedom and reputation.

Abbas's Letters During her stay in the hospital, Tolkun often thought about Abbas, a young man she had known since her school years. He had admired her for a long time and had expressed his feelings through letters delivered by her brother Kanatbek. When Abbas once asked whether she would marry him, Tolkun replied that she wanted to complete her education first. As a sign of affection and respect, she gave him a white embroidered handkerchief. Remembering these exchanges brought her comfort. Unlike Samat's unwanted attention, her memories of Abbas were associated with sincerity, patience, and mutual understanding.

Samat's Proposal One day Samat brought another letter and attempted once again to gain Tolkun's affection. She rejected his advances and even tore up the letter he had given her. Seeing this from outside, Samat confronted her directly and asked her to marry him. Tolkun firmly refused. Her answer left no room for misunderstanding, yet Samat would not accept it. Returning home disappointed, he sought help from his sister-in-law Rahima. He claimed that despite having been married three times before, Tolkun was the woman with whom he wanted to spend the rest of his life. Rahima soon began helping him pursue his goal.

The Kidnapping Plot After Tolkun rejected his proposal, Samat refused to accept defeat. Encouraged by his sister-in-law Rahima, he began planning to obtain Tolkun through bride kidnapping. Rahima believed that once Tolkun entered their household, social pressure would make it difficult for her to leave. While Tolkun remained in the hospital, Rahima gained her trust and looked for an opportunity to deceive her. She even misled other family members by suggesting that Tolkun had agreed to marry Samat. What began as an unwanted courtship gradually turned into a deliberate scheme designed to ignore Tolkun's wishes and force her into marriage.

The Forced Wedding When doctors declared that Tolkun could leave the hospital, she wished to wait for her parents. However, there was limited space for patients, and she had to leave. Tolkun was taken to Kasym's house, believing she would stay there only temporarily. Upon arrival, she discovered that guests had gathered and wedding preparations were already underway. Traditional bridal clothing and a headscarf had been prepared for her. Tolkun repeatedly protested and refused the marriage, but her objections were ignored. Confused, frightened, and pressured by those around her, she was forced to participate in a wedding she had never accepted.

The Parents Learn the Truth Back in the village, Sultanbek and Zairakan were preparing to bring their daughter home after her treatment. They expected a joyful reunion and had gathered gifts and food for her arrival. Their plans were shattered when they learned that Tolkun had been kidnapped several days earlier. The news came unexpectedly and left the family devastated. Unable to believe what they had heard, they immediately sought confirmation. When the story proved true, both parents were overwhelmed with anger and grief. They knew Samat's reputation and feared for their daughter's future, making them determined to bring her home.

The Birth Certificate Scheme As criticism of the kidnapping increased, Samat's relatives searched for ways to avoid legal consequences. Akmat, a respected elder connected to Samat's family, approached local officials with a proposal. He asked them to alter Tolkun's birth records so that her age would appear different. Such a change could protect Samat and Kasym from punishment. However, both the kolkhoz chairman and the village council leader refused to participate. They respected Sultanbek's honesty and recognized that falsifying official documents would be wrong. Their refusal demonstrated that not everyone was willing to sacrifice justice for family interests.

Tolkun Returns Home Sultanbek and Zairakan eventually confronted Kasym's family and demanded to see their daughter. When Tolkun appeared, she openly stated that she had been kidnapped against her will. Her parents immediately asked whether she wished to return home. Through tears, she answered yes, but worried about gossip and public judgment. Sultanbek remained firm and declared that his daughter

ter's freedom mattered more than custom or reputation. Faced with growing pressure from community leaders and witnesses, Samat finally agreed to let her leave. Tolkun returned home with her parents, ending the forced marriage and regaining control over her future.

Gossip and Punishment Although Tolkun had returned home, the controversy did not end. Many villagers criticized Sultanbek and Zairakan for bringing their daughter back after a bride kidnapping. According to local custom, some believed that a woman should remain with the man who had taken her, regardless of her wishes. Tolkun and her parents became the targets of gossip and judgment. Meanwhile, authorities investigated the case. Samat received a sentence of labor in the kolkhoz, and Kasym was officially reprimanded for his role in the incident. Despite social pressure and criticism, the family remained relieved that Tolkun was safe at home.

University Admission After returning home, Tolkun rarely appeared in public because of the rumors surrounding her. However, an important opportunity soon changed her outlook. Zainidin, the school principal who had supported her during the kidnapping case, submitted her documents to the Agricultural University without informing her in advance. The university later sent an invitation for entrance examinations. Sultanbek and Zairakan were delighted by the news and viewed it as a chance for their daughter to build a successful future. Some villagers spread false rumors that Zainidin intended to marry Tolkun, but he had only acted to support her education.

Abbas Returns The family celebrated Tolkun's admission opportunity by inviting guests to their home. During the gathering, unexpected news arrived that Abbas had come to visit. Tolkun became excited when she heard his name. Abbas entered and spoke warmly with Sultanbek, Kanatbek, and the other guests. While talking, he used a white embroidered handkerchief to wipe his forehead. Zairakan immediately recognized it as the handkerchief Tolkun had once given him. The gesture revealed that Abbas had carefully preserved her gift for years. Understanding the feelings between the two young people, Zairakan quietly expressed her support and wished them happiness.

War Begins Tolkun successfully entered the Agricultural University and completed her first year of studies. In the summer of 1941, however, her personal happiness was overshadowed by a historic tragedy. The war began, and many young men prepared to leave for the front. Tolkun worried constantly about Abbas, her brother Kamchybek, and her father Sultanbek. Eventually she had to say goodbye to Abbas as he departed for military service. The separation was painful, and she missed him deeply. Abbas later sent a letter informing her that his unit was moving toward the front lines, increasing her anxiety about his safety.

Summons to the Prosecutor's Office While studying at the university, Tolkun received an unexpected letter ordering her to appear at the prosecutor's office. The notice frightened her because she could not imagine why officials wanted to see her. Upon arrival, she met a young prosecutor named Nurlan Chokoev. As soon as he saw her, he was startled by her appearance and mistakenly called her Rahat. Tolkun corrected him and explained who she was. The officials questioned her about Samat because they were investigating the disappearance of Zainidin. Although the meeting concerned a legal matter, Nurlan became increasingly intrigued by Tolkun's striking resemblance to members of his family.

Nurlan's Suspicion During their conversations, Nurlan carefully examined Tolkun's photographs and listened to her personal history. The more he learned, the stronger his suspicions became. Tolkun resembled both his mother and his sister Rahat, and her age closely matched that of his long-lost younger sister Tokush. Nurlan remembered stories his mother had told about a distinctive birthmark possessed by the missing child. Although he did not yet have proof, he began to wonder whether the young woman before him could actually be his lost sister. Tolkun, however, believed she was Sultanbek and Zairakan's biological daughter and dismissed such possibilities.

The Story of Rahat To explain his suspicions, Nurlan shared the story of his sister Rahat. While studying at a theatrical institute in Moscow, Rahat had fallen in love with a young man named Satybek. Unfortunately, jealous rivals framed her by hiding stolen items in her suitcase. Even Satybek's watch was secretly placed among her belongings. Accused of theft and publicly humiliated, Rahat became desperate and

attempted to drink vinegar. Fortunately, a teacher intervened and saved her life. Nurlan explained that Rahat later recovered, became a teacher at the institute, and eventually married. Through this story, Tolkun learned more about Nurlan's family history.

The Investigation of Zainidin's Death Meanwhile, the investigation into Zainidin's disappearance continued. His body was eventually discovered near a ravine, confirming that he had been murdered. Investigators questioned numerous villagers and gathered evidence concerning his final movements. Attention soon focused on Samat. During the inquiry, a married woman with whom Samat had maintained a secret relationship provided crucial testimony. She revealed details about his behavior and motives. Tolkun also testified, describing how Samat had attempted to force her into marriage. Combined with other evidence, these statements strengthened the case against him and helped investigators uncover the truth about Zainidin's death.

The Adoption Revealed Nurlan continued investigating Tolkun's background and eventually learned that she had been adopted. Armed with this information, he visited Sultanbek and Zairakan together with his wife. During the emotional meeting, he explained that he believed Tolkun was actually Tokush, the youngest child of Choko and Shaiymkul. Faced with the evidence, Sultanbek and Zairakan finally confirmed the truth. They described how they had found the orphaned child after Shaiymkul's death and raised her as their own daughter. Nurlan thanked them sincerely for their kindness and for giving his sister a loving home during her childhood.

The Family Reunion When Tolkun returned home, Zairakan gently revealed the truth about her origins. At first she could hardly believe what she heard. The people she had always considered her parents explained that she had been adopted as a small child. Nurlan then introduced himself as her biological brother and recounted the history of their family. Gradually, Tolkun understood why he had shown such interest in her and why they resembled one another. The emotional reunion brought joy and tears to everyone present. Nurlan promised that Sultanbek and Zairakan would always remain his parents as well, uniting the two families forever.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Nurlan

Nurlan is the eldest son of Choko and Shaiymkul in the novella. After his father is killed in the conflict and his mother dies of illness and poverty, he is separated from his siblings and raised in a boarding school. Growing up without his family shapes his personality and life direction. Despite early loss and hardship, Nurlan becomes educated, responsible, and determined. He later works as a prosecutor, which places him in a position to investigate social crimes and injustices. His role in the story is important because he gradually uncovers the truth about his lost family and helps bring them back together.

Responsible Nurlan's most defining trait is that he is responsible. From a young age, he is forced to grow up without parental care, which makes him mature earlier than other children. Instead of becoming lost in grief, he focuses on survival and education. In the boarding school, he takes his studies seriously and behaves with discipline. As an adult, he becomes a prosecutor, a job that requires strong moral responsibility and careful judgment. Even when emotionally disturbed by personal discoveries, he continues his duties. His responsibility is not only personal but also social, as he seeks justice in the cases he handles and remains committed to uncovering truth.

Observant Nurlan is highly observant, which becomes essential in his work and in his personal journey. As a prosecutor, he pays close attention to details in investigations, especially in the case of Zainidin's disappearance. His careful observation also extends to people. When he meets Tolkun, he notices similarities between her appearance and his missing sister, Tokush. He does not ignore these details but reflects on them deeply. This trait drives him to question identities and search for connections that others overlook. His observant nature ultimately becomes the key factor that allows him to reconstruct his family history and recognize Tolkun as his long-lost sister.

Determined Nurlan is also highly determined, especially in his search for truth. Once he suspects that Tolkun might be connected to his past, he does not give up, even when the evidence is unclear or people doubt him. He continues investigating, gathering information about her background and family. His determination is not only professional but emotional, as he is driven by the desire to find his lost sister and restore his broken family. This persistence leads him through difficult conversations and emotional discoveries. In the end, his determination is rewarded when he successfully identifies Tolkun as Tokush and reunites with his family after years of separation.

Tolkun

Tolkun, originally named Tokush, is the youngest daughter of Choko and Shaiymkul in the novel. After her father is killed and her mother dies of illness and poverty, she becomes an orphan during early Soviet turmoil. She is adopted by Sultanbek and Zairakan, who rename her Tolkun and raise her as their own child. Growing up, she experiences both care and hardship, including illness, forced social pressure, and an attempted kidnapping marriage. Despite these challenges, she survives and later continues her education. Her life reflects themes of loss, identity change, and eventual self-discovery when her true family identity is revealed.

Resilient Tolkun is deeply resilient, as she endures many difficult experiences throughout her life. From early childhood, she loses her biological parents and grows up in a completely new family. Later, she suffers from a serious eye disease that threatens her future. Even after failed traditional treatments and emotional pressure, she continues to fight for recovery. She also survives psychological and social trauma, including being forced into a marriage she never agreed to. Despite all these hardships, she does not break down completely. Instead, she continues living, studying, and adapting, showing strong inner strength in the face of repeated adversity.

Vulnerable Tolkun is also a vulnerable character, especially in relation to society and tradition. As a young woman without strong protection from her biological family, she becomes exposed to decisions made by others. Her illness makes her physically weak and dependent on caregivers. More importantly, she is vulnerable to social customs such as bride kidnapping, which strips her of personal choice in marriage. Even when she resists, her voice is often ignored or overridden by others. This vulnerability highlights how young women in her society can be controlled by family pressure, social expectations, and male authority, limiting their freedom and independence.

Confused (Identity) Tolkun's identity is marked by confusion and uncertainty. She grows up believing Sultanbek and Zairakan are her biological parents, unaware of her true origin as Tokush. This hidden truth creates an unconscious gap in her sense of self. When she later meets Nurlan, she begins to feel emotional and psychological confusion due to unexpected similarities and reactions. She does not immediately understand why she feels connected to him or why her past seems incomplete. Only at the end of the story does her real identity become clear. This late discovery explains her lifelong feeling of displacement and unresolved inner questions.

Rahat

Rahat is the daughter of Choko and Shaiymkul and sister of Nurlan and Tolkun. After her father is killed in war and her mother dies of pneumonia and poverty, she grows up separated from her family in a boarding school with Nurlan. She later studies at a theatrical institute in Moscow, where she becomes a student of acting and later a teacher. Her life is shaped by repeated separation, movement between institutions, and survival without parents. She experiences both support and injustice, including a false accusation during her studies. Despite emotional breakdown, she survives and continues her professional life in education and theatre.

Independent Rahat is independent because she grows up without her parents and builds her life on her own from an early age. After being sent to boarding school with Nurlan, she does not return to live with family again. She continues her education in different institutions and later moves to Moscow for higher studies at the theatrical institute. There she lives and studies far from home, without parental pro-

tection or guidance. Even after becoming a teacher, she remains outside her original family home. Her life shows continuous self-reliance, as she survives and develops through schools, dormitories, and workplaces rather than family support.

Hardworking Rahat is hardworking because she continues her studies despite separation, loss, and emotional pressure. At boarding school, she struggles at first but continues learning instead of giving up. Later, she enters the theatrical institute in Moscow, which requires discipline and effort. She not only studies acting but also becomes a teacher at the same institute, showing long-term dedication to her field. Even after the scandal where she is falsely accused and humiliated, she does not abandon her education or profession. Instead, she continues working in the same academic environment, proving consistent commitment to learning and teaching throughout her life.

Enduring Rahat is enduring because she survives multiple serious life crises. At the institute, she is falsely accused when stolen items are placed in her suitcase, and Satybek breaks up with her without believing her. This causes deep emotional pain. In despair, she writes a letter to her brother Nurlan and tries to drink vinegar, showing how far her suffering goes. However, she is saved and recovers. Despite this breakdown, she does not disappear from life. She continues living, later becoming a teacher. Her life shows that even after injustice, humiliation, and emotional collapse, she is able to recover and continue forward.

Sultanbek

Sultanbek is a skilled carpenter and blacksmith living in the village. He and his wife Zairakan adopt Tolkun (Tokush) after she is left orphaned following Shaiymkul's death from illness and poverty. He raises her as his own daughter and provides for the family through constant physical labor. Sultanbek is closely involved in Tolkun's life, especially when she becomes seriously ill, and he takes her to Karakol for medical treatment. He is respected in the community for his work and fairness. His role in the story centers on caregiving, protection, and making difficult decisions for the wellbeing of his family.

Protective Sultanbek is protective toward Tolkun throughout her life. When she is ill, he does not rely on traditional healers alone and instead takes her to Karakol for proper medical treatment. Later, when Tolkun is taken through a forced kidnapping marriage with Samat, he strongly reacts and demands to see her. He does not accept the situation and insists on bringing her back home. Even when villagers begin gossiping, he prioritizes his daughter's safety and freedom over social opinion. His protective behavior is direct and action-based, always focused on removing Tolkun from danger or unfair treatment.

Responsible Sultanbek is responsible because he consistently provides for his household through hard work. As a carpenter and blacksmith, he earns a living by making and repairing tools and fulfilling orders. After adopting Tolkun, he fully accepts responsibility for her upbringing as his daughter. He ensures she is fed, cared for, and taken to medical treatment when needed. Even during difficult times, he does not abandon his duties or shift responsibility to others. His role as a provider is not passive; he actively works and makes decisions to secure the survival and wellbeing of his family.

Moral Sultanbek is moral in the way he responds to unfair situations involving his daughter. When Tolkun is forced into a marriage, he opposes the practice despite its acceptance in local custom. He also rejects attempts to solve problems through dishonest means or manipulation of official records. When confronted with injustice, he chooses direct action rather than silence. His moral strength is shown in his willingness to challenge social pressure and stand against wrongdoing, even when it brings shame or criticism to his family. He prioritizes what is right for Tolkun over what society expects.

THEMES

Education:

Boarding Schools

Boarding schools in the novella represent both survival and separation for children growing up during war and poverty. After Choko is killed in the conflict, Shaiymkul is left alone with her children in extremely difficult living conditions. She struggles with hunger, lack of money, and the responsibility of caring for all four children. Because she cannot provide enough food or safety, Nurlan and Rahat are sent to a boarding school in Pishpek. This decision is not made out of rejection, but out of necessity for survival.

At the boarding school, the children receive regular food, clothing, and shelter. Compared to their village life, the school offers stability and basic care. Rahat is given new clothes, and both children are placed in a structured environment where education becomes their main focus. In this way, the boarding school represents a system that tries to protect orphaned and poor children during a time of crisis.

However, the emotional cost is very high. Even though Shaiymkul is still alive at the time, she is forced to send her children away, which creates distance within the family. Nurlan and Rahat grow up without their mother's daily presence and also become separated from their younger sister Tokush. This separation becomes one of the central sources of pain in the story. Rahat, in particular, struggles at first in school and feels the absence of home strongly.

The boarding school also changes the children's identity and future. It introduces them to education and new opportunities, but at the same time it replaces family life with institutional care. Children learn discipline and study, but lose the emotional support of parents.

Overall, boarding schools in the novella symbolize a double reality: they are places of protection that save children from hunger and death, but they are also spaces of loss where family bonds are weakened.

Illustrative moment: Nurlan and Rahat soon left for the boarding school in Pishpek. Although the separation was painful, the children entered a new stage of life. At school they received clean clothes, regular meals, and better living conditions than they had known at home. Rahat carefully saved her old clothing, thinking about her younger sister Tokush and hoping it might one day be useful. The departure filled Shaiymkul with mixed emotions. She missed her children deeply, yet she also understood that the school offered them a chance to escape hunger and build a better future through education.

Family:

Adoption and Cultural Belief

Sultanbek and Zairakan are the adoptive parents of Tolkun (Tokush) in the novella, and their story reflects how adoption functioned in Kyrgyz nomadic culture. Life in traditional society was often harsh, with limited medical care, maternal deaths, poverty, epidemics, and conflicts leaving many children orphaned. In such conditions, adoption was a common and socially accepted way to ensure a child's survival and protection.

After the death of Choko in war and Shaiymkul from pneumonia and lack of treatment, Tokush is left alone. Sultanbek and Zairakan take her into their home and raise her as their own daughter, renaming her Tolkun. They give her food, shelter, and emotional care, fully accepting her as part of the family. Their decision reflects not only compassion but also a cultural understanding that family is built through care, not only blood.

In Kyrgyz tradition, childless couples sometimes adopted children deliberately. In some cases, adoption was also connected to belief or ritual thinking, where people considered an adopted child as a blessing that could bring balance or fortune to the family. Sultanbek and Zairakan also later have biological children, but Tolkun remains equally loved and valued. She is not treated as separate or inferior; instead, she becomes central to the family's emotional life.

However, adoption in village society also carried secrecy. Families often did not openly discuss adoption, fearing gossip or future emotional harm to the child. In the novella, Sultanbek and Zairakan are also aware of this risk. They worry about *eldin sözü* (people's talk) and potential stigma, which is why they later move to another region to protect Tolkun's identity and prevent rumors from reaching her.

The Kyrgyz saying "*Bala tapkandyky emes, bakkandyky*" ("a child belongs not to the one who gives birth, but to the one who raises and cares") reflects their role perfectly. Sultanbek and Zairakan show this idea through their actions, proving that true parenthood comes from care, protection, and upbringing rather than biological connection.

Illustrative moment: Sultanbek and Zairakan take Tokush into their home after she is left completely orphaned. Following the death of Choko in war and Shaiymkul from pneumonia and lack of medical treatment, the child is alone with no protection. At this moment, Sultanbek and Zairakan decide to adopt her, give her shelter, and rename her Tolkun. This simple act becomes the turning point in her life, as she moves from abandonment to family care.

From the beginning, they treat her not as an outsider, but as their own daughter. Zairakan cares for her daily needs, while Sultanbek provides food and stability through his work as a carpenter and blacksmith. Their home becomes a place of safety in a harsh environment where many children lose parents due to illness, poverty, and conflict. This reflects how adoption in Kyrgyz nomadic life often functioned as a practical response to survival.

Reunion of Siblings

The reunion of siblings in the novella focuses on Nurlan and his younger sister Tokush (later known as Tolkun), who are separated after the death of their parents during war and poverty. After Choko is killed in the conflict and Shaiymkul dies from illness and lack of medical care, the children are scattered. Nurlan and Rahat grow up in a boarding school, while Tokush is adopted by Sultanbek and Zairakan and given a new identity as Tolkun. Because of this separation, they grow up without knowing each other for many years.

The process of reunion begins when Nurlan meets Tolkun during an investigation and notices her strong resemblance to his lost sister Tokush. This resemblance creates emotional shock and suspicion in him. He carefully compares her appearance with old memories and photographs, becoming convinced that she may be his sister.

A key moment occurs when Nurlan tells Tolkun about his past. He shares how he and his sister Rahat grew up in an orphanage, how they were later brought back to their village, and how he lost his younger sister Tokush. However, Tolkun rejects the idea that she might be his sister. She insists that she has her own biological parents and feels offended by the suggestion. This rejection creates emotional distance and uncertainty between them.

Despite her refusal, Nurlan continues to search for the truth. He cannot ignore the resemblance and begins to investigate further, believing that her identity may be hidden by adoption and past events.

Eventually, through investigation and confirmation of family history, the truth is revealed: Tolkun is Tokush, Nurlan's long-lost sister.

Illustrative moment: Nurlan continued investigating Tolkun's background and eventually learned that she had been adopted. Armed with this information, he visited Sultanbek and Zairakan together with his wife. During the emotional meeting, he explained that he believed Tolkun was actually Tokush, the youngest child of Choko and Shaiymkul. Faced with the evidence, Sultanbek and Zairakan finally confirmed the truth. They described how they had found the orphaned child after Shaiymkul's death and raised her as their own daughter. Nurlan thanked them sincerely for their kindness and for giving his sister a loving home during her childhood.

Marriage:

Forced Marriage

Forced marriage through bride kidnapping is shown in the novella as a harmful practice that some individuals in society still carry out, even though it is not a universal or accepted custom for everyone. It is portrayed as a violation of women's rights, where personal consent is ignored and social pressure is used to justify control over marriage decisions.

Tolkun becomes a victim of this practice after her stay in the hospital. Through deception and manipulation, she is taken to Kasym's house, where wedding preparations are already made. Although she clearly refuses the marriage, her objections are ignored. She is dressed as a bride and forced into a situation she did not agree to. Samat plays a key role in this process, insisting on marrying her and using family connections to pressure others into supporting his decision.

The turning point comes when Sultanbek and Zairakan discover what has happened. Sultanbek does not accept the situation and immediately moves to bring his daughter back. He does not care about

village rumors, gossip, or social judgment. Even though people may criticize him for breaking expectations or disturbing social order, he prioritizes Tolkun's safety and freedom above reputation. His actions show that protecting his daughter is more important than maintaining public image or avoiding conflict with others.

When Tolkun returns home, the village reacts with gossip and criticism toward the family. However, Sultanbek remains firm and does not allow public opinion to influence his decision. His focus stays on his daughter's wellbeing rather than social approval.

Illustrative moment: Sultanbek and Zairakan eventually confronted Kasym's family and demanded to see their daughter. When Tolkun appeared, she openly stated that she had been kidnapped against her will. Her parents immediately asked whether she wished to return home. Through tears, she answered yes, but worried about gossip and public judgment. Sultanbek remained firm and declared that his daughter's freedom mattered more than custom or reputation. Faced with growing pressure from community leaders and witnesses, Samat finally agreed to let her leave. Tolkun re-turned home with her parents, ending the forced marriage and regaining control over her future.

Society

Fear of Social Judgement/ What will people say?

Fear of social judgement is a central force in the novella, expressed through the idea of "*el emne deyt?*" ("what will people say?"). In village society, *namys* (honor) and reputation strongly influence decisions, and people often fear gossip more than injustice or personal suffering.

This is clearly shown in Tolkun's forced marriage situation. Kasym pressures Tolkun by saying "*eldin betin kantip karaysynar?*" ("how will you face people?"). He warns her that divorce is a big shame, and asks what will happen if she divorces Samat, who will marry her after that? His words are not about her happiness or safety, but about future reputation. He uses fear of *uyat* (shame) and long-term social judgement to silence her. In this way, *eldin sözü* (people's talk) becomes a tool of control over a young and inexperienced girl.

Tolkun herself also feels this pressure emotionally. She fears that Abbas, her former love interest, will never forgive her or look at her again if he learns she has been forced into this situation or associated with Samat. This shows how social judgement affects not only family decisions but also personal relationships and self-worth. Even love becomes controlled by fear of reputation.

Zairakan also experiences this pressure when she and Sultanbek go to bring Tolkun back. She worries about what the elders (*aksakals*) and villagers will say, and whether the family will face shame for breaking expectations. This hesitation shows how deeply *el emne deyt* shapes even parental decisions.

After Tolkun returns home, the village spreads rumors and the family experiences stigma. However, when Tolkun receives an invitation from the university to take entrance exams, the family's *namys* is restored. Education reduces gossip and brings respect.

Illustrative moment: Although Tolkun had returned home, the controversy did not end. Many villagers criticized Sultanbek and Zairakan for bringing their daughter back after a bride kidnapping. According to local custom, some believed that a woman should remain with the man who had taken her, regardless of her wishes. Tolkun and her parents became the targets of gossip and judgment. Meanwhile, authorities investigated the case. Samat received a sentence of labor in the *kolkhoz*, and Kasym was officially reprimanded for his role in the incident. Despite social pressure and criticism, the family remained relieved that Tolkun was safe at home.