

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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***THE WOUNDED HEART/ JARALANGAN JUROK* (1941)**

Aaly Tokombaev (1904-1988)

References: Tokombaev, A. *The Wounded Heart: Novellas and short stories*. Frunze: Mektep. 294 pp.

OVERVIEW

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

In 1927, he began working as head of the district department of public education in the Chuy District, an early Soviet administrative unit in present-day Kyrgyzstan. From 1927 to 1929, he served as editor of the newspaper Kyzyl Kyrgyzstan. Between 1930 and 1931, he worked in Moscow at the Central Publishing House as editor of the Kyrgyz section.

From 1931 onward, he became chief editor of Kyrgyzmambas. Between 1934 and 1949, he chaired the Board of the Writers' Union of Kyrgyzstan, while also serving as editor-in-chief of the journal Soviet Kyrgyzstan and as director of the Institute of Language, Literature, and History of the Kyrgyz branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In 1955–1956, he was editor-in-chief of the satirical journal Chalkan. From 1962 to 1978, Tokombaev contributed to the nine-volume Concise Literary Encyclopedia on Kyrgyz literature.

During the Stalinist purges, he was falsely accused of nationalism, membership in a “Social-Turan Party,” and espionage for Japan. He was imprisoned from November 1937 to June 1939, and all his previously published works were destroyed. He was released on June 4, 1939. In 1988, after his death, Tokombaev's works were officially rehabilitated. In 2007, a national literary prize named after him was established to honor achievements in prose, drama, poetry, and journalism.

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

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

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

Novella The novella *The Wounded Heart (Jaralangan Jurok)* was published in 1941 by the Kyrgyz State Publishing House (Kyrgyzmambas) in Frunze. It was translated into Russian as *The Wounded Heart (Ranennoe Serdtse)* by G. Sharipova.

Background Aaly Tokombaev's powerful novella, *The Wounded Heart (Jaralangan Jurok)*, stands as a cornerstone of Kyrgyz literature, dramatizing one of the most tragic periods in Central Asian history. Set against the backdrop of the devastating famine surrounding 1920, the novella follows the harrowing journey of Bekturgan and his family as they navigate a desolate steppe defined by hunger and loss.

Tokombaev masterfully contrasts the cruelty of the wealthy with the quiet heroism of the starving, illustrated by Bekturgan's decision to rescue an orphaned infant even in his own desperation. The narrative serves as a poignant bridge between the old world of feudal inequality and the emerging Soviet era, which promised relief and a new future for the dispossessed. Through its deeply emotional portrayal

of survival, loss, and eventual family reunion, *The Wounded Heart* captures the resilience of the human spirit in the face of unimaginable hardship.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Bekturgan - a Kyrgyz father wandering the steppe with his hungry sons and saving an orphaned baby

Isman - the eldest son growing from a starving child into a brave Red Army commander

Omurbek - a gentle poet finding solace in writing after losing his first love to cruel deception

Tabyldy - the rescued infant vanishing for years only to return as a pilot and reunite with his father

Gulai - a loving university student whose heart is shattered when false letters destroy her happiness

Ayscha - a desperate dying mother begging strangers to save her baby before taking her last breath

SYNOPSIS

During a devastating famine in Central Asia, an old man named Bekturgan wanders the desolate steppe with his young son Omurbek, struggling to survive. Along their desperate journey, they encounter both human cruelty and rare acts of kindness. Bekturgan saves an orphaned baby from a dying mother and names him Tabyldy, meaning "found." When the Bolsheviks arrive offering aid to the starving poor, the family finds new hope and survives.

Years pass, and Bekturgan's sons grow into the new Soviet era. Isman becomes a Red Army commander fighting against Basmachi rebels in the mountains. Omurbek and Tabyldy attend boarding school in Pishpek, but tragedy strikes when Tabyldy mysteriously disappears while studying in Tashkent. The family searches for years without success.

Meanwhile, Omurbek falls deeply in love with a university student named Gulai, but their relationship is destroyed when a jealous rival intercepts their letters and spreads lies, breaking their hearts forever. Omurbek turns to poetry and writing to heal.

Decades later, an elderly Bekturgan finally experiences complete joy when his family reunites at his home. The long-lost Tabyldy appears as a pilot, fulfilling his father's final wish. After years of suffering, separation, and longing, the family is whole again, bringing peace to the old man's heart.

SCENES

The Famine

The Gloomy Steppe A bleak steppe stretches endlessly, empty of fields or life, with only wormwood trembling in the cold wind beneath a gray sky. Dust rises as telegraph wires hum along a deserted road. Among abandoned graves, shadowy figures briefly appear and vanish. One is Bekturgan, an old man weakened by hunger, traveling with his young son. As the boy prepares a thin porridge, he notices his father crying for the first time. The child, suddenly mature, urges they continue their journey. He asks about his mother's grave, dreaming of honoring her one day, but Bekturgan remains silent, lost in grief.

Hunger and Memory Bekturgan recalls the tragic death of his wife at the Ak-Oguz pass, imagining her trapped in ice, crying for help and calling for him and their son, Omurbek. The memory overwhelms him. Meanwhile, the starving boy drinks spilled porridge mixed with dust. Filled with pity, Bekturgan comforts him and promises they will soon reach a village and find food. They speak gently; the father hopes his son will grow kind and generous. Omurbek agrees. With nothing left, they continue walking across the empty steppe, weak but hopeful, as Bekturgan urges him forward, saying the village is close.

Pride in Hunger The boy imagines bread, butter, and food, gaining strength as they approach a small camp of yurts. Smelling fried fat, they enter the richest yurt and greet the hostess, but he ignores them. The hungry child stares at a bowl of *boorsok*, *fried bread* only another poor boy secretly shares one piece. The landlords show no kindness. Humiliated, Bekturgan begs for his son, but is ignored again. Anger overcomes him. He curses their cruelty and declares who he once was a strong, respected man. Though now reduced to begging, he believes his dignity and better days will return.

The Cry No One Heard A day later, a starving woman with a baby reaches the same yurt, only to be attacked by a black dog. Her name is Aysha. Bleeding, she crawls inside and begs the landlords to take her child, knowing she will soon die. Her voice trembles with love and despair, but hearts remain cold. The landlady, harsh and cruel, insults her and drives her away, even striking her. No one offers help. Clutching her crying baby, the wounded mother leaves, limping into emptiness. Her sorrow echoes in silence, a mother's final plea, unanswered, fading into the merciless steppe.

A Brief Kindness Climbing out of the ravine, Aysha sees Bekturgan and his son digging roots to survive. She begs for food. Though poor himself, Bekturgan shares his last bread. Aysha feeds her baby, softened by gratitude and pain. She tells of cruelty, bitten by a dog, driven away by harsh landlords. Bekturgan gently gives her more herbal roots and a little flour, though he has almost nothing left. Tears fill her eyes. Knowing she cannot continue, she stays behind. He bids farewell with quiet compassion, and walks on with his son, leaving her in sorrow, yet touched by rare human kindness.

Voices of the Dead A dying woman thanks Bekturgan, asks him to pray for her, and worries for her child. He cannot comfort her and leaves with his son. Weak and exhausted, they wander until sunset among graves. A black dog barks near a collapsed grave. Thinking its master is alive, Bekturgan calls out, then climbs inside. He finds only the dead but takes some barley and a knife, lying to his son to give him hope. As they leave, the dog howls mournfully. Bekturgan walks on, glancing back, haunted by loss, while the sound fades into the empty steppe.

Lost and Accused Little Omurbek cries alone in a hut, calling for his father. Hurt and frightened, he imagines skeletons surrounding him and falls asleep in fear. Meanwhile, Bekturgan walks far away, thinking of his son and hoping he is safe. He reaches a crowded hill where a harsh voice speaks of violence. Confused, he pushes through the people and greets them. A small man with a beard angrily calls him a thief and shows a tied young man, claiming they are his "students." Bekturgan is shocked and does not understand what is happening or why he is being accused.

False Accusation Bekturgan is shocked when a man in a turban accuses him of being a thief and calls a tied young man his "student." Bekturgan denies it angrily, refusing to accept insults and defending his honor. Tension rises as the crowd watches. The turbaned leader threatens to hang him, but Bekturgan boldly declares he is not weak and has supporters. Some people admire his courage. The bound young man says he is being punished unfairly for a small theft of food. He insists a grave is being dug for him. Fear and anger spread as the group prepares for judgment.

Unjust Judgment A crowd stands before a harsh "tribunal" of a Russian and two Kyrgyz judges under Moldo Supa. They control the fate of starving people. A young worker named Isan is accused of stealing a handful of food and is sentenced to death. The judges force another man, Eshim, to choose: kill Isan or die with him. The crowd is horrified by the cruelty, but remains silent under pressure. Bekturgan watches in anger and confusion, realizing the injustice. Eshim refuses to obey and rejects both choices, showing courage.

The Final Cry A young man named Isan is sentenced to death by a cruel tribunal for stealing food while starving. He insists he is innocent and asks for a quick, merciful death. His friend Eshim is forced to kill him, but refuses, saying their lives are equal and they grew up together. A grieving woman begs for mercy, but is ignored. The crowd watches in horror, powerless. Bekturgan protests in anger, but cannot stop the injustice. In desperation and confusion, Eshim strikes. The execution ends in a tragic, emotional moment, leaving the people shocked, broken, and filled with silent grief. Isan dies.

Life among the Ruins Bekturgan rests near farmers after a long journey, watching birds struggle for food and reflecting on how life is a constant fight for survival. He remembers his sons and dreams of a better future. As he continues his way, he passes starving people and dead bodies along the road, realizing he too may end the same way. He finds the body of a woman he once met, with her baby still alive beside her. Deeply moved, he feeds the child with softened grain and tries to protect him. Overwhelmed by sorrow, he prays silently for the dead mother.

The Last Walk of Bekturgan Bekturgan buries a dead woman, Aysha, praying for her soul in his own simple words. He honors ancient customs, then continues his painful journey across the empty land. Exhausted, he crosses a river and thinks of his sons, wishing they could one day reunite. Suddenly, a riding son from a rich Russian family of Mitriy appears and accuses him of theft. The man attacks him cruelly with a whip, making the old man suffer. Yet instead of giving in, Bekturgan feels a sudden strength rise inside him. Grief, anger, and injustice ignite his spirit as he prepares to resist or fight back.

Misjudged and Broken The young Russian man continues attacking Bekturgan, but the old man strikes back with his stick and knocks him down. The young man escapes in fear. Just then, strangers arrive in a cart and question the situation. Confused and shaken, Bekturgan is accused of stealing a goose. "No, sir, I didn't steal anything. I am a beggar," Bekturgan replied, casting a pitiful glance at the stranger. Mitriy's son said something to the stranger in Russian and, coming up to Bekturgan, pointed at his bulging chest. "Hey, old man," the stranger addressed him, "why did you hide someone else's goose under your clothes?! You should have asked instead of stealing..."

A New Hope Bekturgan opens his worn coat and reveals a starving child he rescued from a dead mother. People first think he is a thief, but he explains the truth. A kind woman takes the baby, feeds him, and carefully wraps him, then gives the child back alive and safe. The strangers realize Bekturgan's goodness. They give him bread and money. Overwhelmed, the old man cannot believe it. After so much suffering, he finally feels hope. Holding the child close, he whispers with tears that they will live. For the first time in a long time, life feels possible again.

Dawn of Hope At dawn, Bekturgan sits alone on a stone, watching the sky shift from dark clouds to golden light. After long suffering, he feels calm like a bird resting after flight. Suddenly, his son Isman arrives, and joy fills the old man's heart. They share news: a baby has been saved and people are offering help to the poor. Bekturgan also mentions unexpected money and survival. Isman speaks of a kind man gathering the hungry and giving support. For the first time, hope replaces despair. The family, once broken by hunger, begins to believe they may finally live.

Bolsheviks Arrive Isman tells Bekturgan that a man named Bolchaibek (a man from Bolsheviks) has come to Pishpek gathering the poor and helping them survive. He assures his father they will no longer starve. Bekturgan's heart fills with joy, like a dim light coming alive again. Isman describes seeing Bolchaibek (a man from Bolsheviks) and others speaking to the people, promising help. Though still uncertain, Isman feels hope after witnessing change. As they reach their shelter, they hear Omurbek's voice calling happily. The family reunites, and Isman brings food as a gift.

Bekturgan Is Sick Bekturgan introduces the rescued baby, Tabyldy, as his own son, believing the child has brought happiness to the family. Isman rejoices and speaks of a kind man in Pishpek who helps the poor, offering hope that their suffering may end. Bekturgan, however, is weak and sick, likely with typhus. He admits his condition has worsened but tries to stay strong for his sons. As they discuss food and survival, Isman dreams of buying flour and living through the winter.

Return after Darkness After many days of silence in the empty steppe, Isman returns and finds a dying young man near the hut, then rushes inside to his father Bekturgan. His father, weakened after a long illness, slowly regains consciousness. He is confused, thinking only a day has passed, but learns he has been sick for thirteen days. Isman explains he had taken the children to Pishpek for safety. Bekturgan remembers a kind man who cared for him during his illness and asks where he is. He has died, but his son keeps secret. As memory returns, he realizes how close he came to death.

The Road to the City After midnight, Bekturgan and Isman cook a thin barley porridge by a dying fire in the reeds. Weak after illness, Bekturgan watches the pot while Isman cares for him with quiet patience. Isman insists on carrying his father, saying it is his duty after years of care he received as a child. Bekturgan tries to walk on his own but cannot, his body still broken by disease. They move toward the city together, with Isman carrying him on his back, speaking lightly to ease the journey, while the old man rests silently, exhausted but alive.

Toward the Unknown City Isman, strong from hard labor, carries his weakened father Bekturgan on his back through the night road. Though exhausted, he hides his fatigue and gently reassures his father at each stop. Bekturgan notices his son's strain and tries to slow their journey, speaking with concern and affection. Isman, however, is driven by hope of reaching the city and meeting Bolchaibek, a man said to help the poor. His dream gives him strength. As they rest, Isman hears the sound of wheels behind them, suggesting strangers approaching. Tension rises as they prepare for whatever may come next.

The Ride to New Times Bekturgan and Isman are picked up by passing carts on their way to the city. They explain they are searching for Bolchaibek, a man believed to help the poor. A Russian official named Vlasov's assistant tells them that Bolchaibek is not a person but Bolshevik party name, and that they are carrying out food distribution for the starving. He also speaks of new political times, mentioning "Red Guard" and "communists," unfamiliar terms to Bekturgan. Though confused, Isman pretends understanding.

Letter after Years Years passed quickly. A Red Army commander Isman, the eldest son of Bekturgan, receives his first letter from his village in five years and reads it aloud to his friends. The letter is from his uncle Akysh. It says that Bekturgan, Isman's father is still alive and living with relatives in Karakol. The commander's younger brothers are now in a boarding school and have grown up. Many refugees have returned home, received livestock, tools, and houses from the state, and now live better lives. Akysh explains that they were worried for years without news and asks him to write more often. The letter brings news of long separation.

Isman's Letter Home Isman quickly writes a letter to Akysh, saying he is healthy and serving as a commander for a year. He reports fighting against Basmachi groups who disturb peaceful people and mentions receiving official awards. He explains he has not received previous letters due to constant movement. He recalls earlier campaigns, including against Annenkov's forces and in Bukhara. Isman says he has learned Russian well and experienced much, though he cannot describe everything. He sends his photograph, asks for pictures of his brothers, and sends greetings to family. He ends by saying he hopes to visit home in two months if possible.

Ambush in the Gorge Isman leads a small Red Army unit into a narrow mountain gorge where a large group of Basmachi fighters appears. Though outnumbered, Isman quickly sets a trap, hiding his soldiers among rocks and blocking the enemy's only path. When the Basmachi enter the pass, Isman orders fire, causing panic and heavy losses. Despite being only seven men left, his group uses grenades and a machine gun to hold the position. Surrounded and confused, the Basmachi begin to retreat in fear. Isman's calm leadership and quick decisions turn a dangerous battle into a decisive victory in the mountains.

The Surrender in the Gorge During the fierce battle, a wounded Red Army soldier falls from a cliff, shouting for his comrades to keep fighting. Moments later, he detonates his remaining grenades, causing panic among the Basmachi fighters. Terrified, they drop their weapons and beg for mercy. Isman orders his men to stop firing and demands the enemy surrender. One by one, the Basmachi come out with raised hands. Their leader admits they were misled by false information and vastly outnumbered. Isman remains calm, spares their lives, and takes control of the situation as the defeated group lays down its arms in silence.

Return to His Sons In 1927, Bekturgan, now an old man, rides through the Chuy Valley filled with harvest and peace. Bekturgan tells travelers he is going to Pishpek to find his sons after ten years. One son lives in Jalal-Abad and works in the executive committee as a commander, awarded a red Soviet order after being wounded in war. The two younger sons are in a boarding school in Pishpek. The youngest was only a baby when he last saw him. He shows an old photograph of all three boys and cries, remembering their hard past and new lives.

The Long-Awaited Reunion In Pishpek, Bekturgan arrives after years of searching for his sons. Near the orphanage, a young boy greets them and helps with the horses. When Bekturgan asks about his children, the boy smiles and reveals the truth—he is his son Omurbek. Bekturgan trembles with emotion, remembering that his son can be recognized by a small birthmark under his ear. The boy confirms it by turning his head. Overcome with joy, Bekturgan collapses and embraces him tightly, crying and kissing his face.

Farewell at the Orphanage Bekturgan, filled with joy, asks to see his other son, Tabyldy, but the boy explains he has left for Tashkent to study. The travelers praise Bekturgan for having such fortunate children in the new era of education. Meanwhile, at the orphanage, children prepare to depart. Omurbek runs to his father, firmly shakes his hand, and says goodbye, promising to write letters. He then climbs onto a cart with his friends, waving back to the teachers and the orphanage. As the cart moves away, Bekturgan watches his son leave, feeling both pride and sadness in his heart.

A Quiet Moment at Home Jyldyz, the daughter of Isman runs to her father when she hears his cough. Isman lifts her, kisses her, and gives her new toys. She plays happily, then brings her mother, Zoya, outside. Zoya seems worried, but Isman tries to cheer her up. He laughs, picks a red apple, and gives it to her. For a moment, she smiles. Isman speaks about life without war and asks her to recall the past. Zoya says her dreams come true, they have a child. She seems uneasy and concerned about something more. Noticing her worry, Isman becomes serious and asks what is wrong.

A Troubling Letter Zoya silently hands Isman a letter. He reads that Tabyldy has disappeared, and no one knows what happened. Though worried, Isman hides his fear and calmly says they should send a telegram. Zoya follows him, holding their daughter, but painful memories return—she recalls losing her brothers and mourning her mother. For a moment, she feels alone again, but then reminds herself she has Isman and their child. Her fear slowly fades. She approaches Isman, embraces him, and gently kisses his forehead. Despite the worry in their hearts, they try to stay strong together, facing uncertainty with quiet courage and love.

Loss and Quiet Love Isman receives many letters from Omurbek, but all say the same: Tabyldy is still missing. After searching in Tashkent and placing notices in newspapers like Pravda Vostoka and Kizil Uzbekistan, he finds nothing. Omurbek grows thin from grief and loses hope. Life continues. Omurbek studies at the university and does well. He becomes close to a girl named Gulai. Their friendship slowly turns into love, though neither dares to speak openly. When they meet, they feel shy and emotional; when apart, they feel empty. They plan to confess their feelings but always lose courage. Small smiles and gentle looks become their only way of expressing love and comfort.

The Romance

A Smile and a Secret Gulai sometimes pretends to be upset with Omurbek, but his warm smile quickly makes her happy again. She thinks his kindness can melt even stone. Omurbek believes her eyes can take away any sadness from his heart. After classes, they often meet “by chance” and talk. One day, Gulai invites him to study together in the evening. He agrees but jokes about not waiting if she is late. She smiles, knowing he will. Later, Gulai finds his notebook and reads a short love poem addressed to her. Blushing, she looks in the mirror and sees herself glowing with happiness.

Secrets in a Notebook Sagida enters the room suddenly and surprises Gulai. They joke, laugh, and Sagida leaves to bring dinner. Alone, Gulai opens Omurbek’s notebook and reads his personal notes. He writes about his lost brother Tabyldy, his father’s sorrow, and his belief that his brother has died. His words are full of pain and loneliness. Then she reads about herself. He writes that his heart jumps when he sees her and that he wants to confess his love but forgets everything when they meet. Gulai feels happy and shy. She secretly copies the poem, afraid of being caught, like she is doing something wrong.

A Playful Secret Revealed Sagida brings dinner and teasingly calls Gulai “Gul,” hinting she knows about her love. Gulai realizes her secret is no longer hidden but feels happy, not upset. They joke until Gulai leaves for the reading hall. Outside, she eagerly looks for Omurbek. He suddenly appears and jokes about waiting. They talk playfully; he pretends to be upset, then forgives her with a kiss on the cheek. Gulai acts shocked but soon softens. Their teasing turns tender. Shy but trusting, Gulai lowers her eyes, quietly accepting her feelings as their love grows stronger.

A Letter That Ends Love Omurbek travels by car through the hot roads of Bukhara, tired and half asleep. He dreams of Gulai, hearing her loving voice and feeling her warmth. When he wakes, the dream leaves him uneasy. At home, he finds a blue letter from Gulai. In it, she says their love is over and asks him not to

write again. Shocked, he reads it many times, unable to believe it. Memories of their happy moments make the pain stronger. Though heartbroken, Omurbek hides his feelings. He decides to accept her choice and sends a short telegram, wishing her happiness and saying goodbye.

Goodbye without Answers Omurbek feels uneasy after a strange dream about Gulai, but he calms himself, believing she loves him. Lost in thoughts of their future, he arrives home and finds a blue letter from her. In the letter, Gulai writes that their love is over and asks him not to write again. Shocked, Omurbek reads it several times, unable to understand. Memories of their happiness bring him pain, and tears fill his eyes. Though deeply hurt, he hides his feelings. Thinking he must be strong, he accepts her decision and sends a short telegram, wishing her happiness and saying goodbye.

Broken Love and Anger Omurbek once ended his letters with warm words like “your beloved” and “your nightingale,” but now he signs his telegram coldly, like a stranger. Love turns into jealousy and pain. His room feels empty and unfriendly. In anger, he tears up Gulai’s old letters and destroys a poem he once wrote for her. Overcome with emotion, he accuses her of never loving him and calls her cruel. He feels betrayed and loses control, walking and shouting in despair. Later, the phone rings. His friend Isman calls with news about his poems being published. Omurbek responds calmly, hiding his inner emotional collapse.

From Love to Writing Omurbek’s sadness begins to fade when he learns that his poems are being published. His heart, once broken by Gulai, now feels lighter. He realizes that success in writing can ease emotional pain. Still, jealousy briefly returns, and he decides to write to Gulai. In his letter, he speaks of their lost love and says she has chosen someone else. He tells her to be happy and not think of him. He also shares his pride in his poetry and his decision to dedicate his life to writing. For him, literature now replaces love and becomes his new passion.

The Reunion

A Joyful Old Man Time passes like beads on a string, and Bekturgan grows very old, yet he remains cheerful and full of life. He says he is only “twenty-two,” joking that he began living properly after turning sixty-three. Though others think he is over eighty, he continues working every day. He cares for animals, enjoys tea, listens to his son Omurbek’s songs on the radio, and stays active. He believes every small task is important and says great work begins with small efforts. Sometimes he acts like a child, sometimes like a wise man, but he always enjoys life with calm happiness.

Waiting for Family Omurbek visits his father Bekturgan only three times over the years. Each time, the old man happily asks about his children and hopes to see his grandchildren. He dreams of family gatherings and even prepares for them by planting apple trees for each grandchild. Bekturgan lives a simple but joyful life, caring for animals and spending time in his garden. He often talks about his longing for his family and believes dreams and signs show whether they will come. Though lonely, he stays patient and kind, telling his wife that the children are now important people and must live their lives.

Delayed Journey and Pilots’ Celebration Omurbek prepares to visit his father after a failed fortune reading. His brother Isman suggests waiting a few days to organize a proper welcome, but Omurbek insists on going soon. Eventually, he agrees to delay briefly and attends a meeting with a school friend, a pilot. At the gathering, Omurbek sits with aviators discussing famous Soviet flights, including Valery Chkalov’s historic journey over the North Pole. They raise toasts to pilots and young airmen. Omurbek proudly adds that Kyrgyz pilots have already been flying over their land for a long time, showing national pride and respect for aviation progress.

A Surprising Discovery At the aero club, new young pilots arrive, including the first Kyrgyz flyers. Omurbek becomes interested in them and asks for their names. While reading their files, he suddenly becomes deeply emotional when he learns one pilot’s tragic past; he was separated from his family and now believes he is completely alone. Omurbek is shocked and moved to tears, realizing the pain of lost families. He asks where the pilots are staying and wants to meet them. After the meeting, he plans to visit his father in the village, but first he prepares to see the young pilots again that evening.

A Confusing Search Omurbek rushes to the hotel, deeply excited and anxious about meeting a young pilot who may be connected to a painful past. He feels nervous and confused, wondering if it is really him. At the hotel, he cannot find the pilot in the room and becomes panicked, thinking he was mistaken. Outside, he accidentally bumps into a young pilot and asks about the person he is searching for. During the conversation, Omurbek sees a book with his own name on the cover but does not reveal that he is the author. Instead, he continues searching for the pilot's brother.

Reunion and Return Home Omurbek finally meets the pilot and discovers he is his long-lost brother, Tabyldy. After recognizing each other, the brothers embrace with great joy. The long separation ends in happiness and relief. The next day, Omurbek prepares to travel with his family. He tells Tabyldy to visit their father in five days as a surprise. They plan everything carefully and share hopeful goodbyes. Later, Tabyldy flies an airplane toward his father's village. The sky is bright, and he feels proud and emotional. The long search ends with reunion, and the family's story comes together again in peace and happiness.

A Life Fulfilled Bekturgan feels the happiest he has ever been. His sons, their wives, and grandchildren gather at his home. A plane even lands nearby, bringing more joy, as if happiness itself has arrived. The old man falls asleep from exhaustion and emotion. At the table, guests listen to his life story. He speaks about his hardships and how his wishes changed over time from food, to clothes, to revenge, to seeing his family succeed. All his dreams have come true, and he feels complete joy. Yet he says one wish remains, showing that even a fulfilled life still carries longing.

A Father's Final Wish Bekturgan tells his guests that a person's dreams never end, but his deepest wish has remained unfulfilled. He says he has always suffered because his youngest son, Tabyldy, a name meaning "found", disappeared long ago. He never saw him grow up and considers this his greatest sorrow. Hearing this, Tabyldy can no longer stay silent. He reveals himself as the lost son. Bekturgan is shocked, then overjoyed, and embraces him tightly. At last, the old man's lifelong pain disappears. His family is reunited, and he feels complete happiness and peace after years of longing.

A Broken Love Story The narrator meets Omurbek on a train and asks about his past with Gulai. Omurbek says he is now married to someone else and explains sadly that fate separated them. Although they loved each other, their relationship ended because of deception. A man named Tarpanbay secretly intercepted their letters and sent false messages in Omurbek's name, making Gulai believe he no longer loved her and even married another woman. He also sent a fake photo, which deeply hurt Gulai and drove her to despair. After the truth came out, Gulai wrote a final goodbye letter, and their love ended forever.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Bekturgan

Bekturgan is much more than just a survivor; he is the quiet, steady pulse of humanity in a land that has grown cold and indifferent. During the 1920 famine, when the world seems to have forgotten kindness, he refuses to let the hunger turn his heart to stone. He carries the heavy memories of a lost wife and a broken past, yet he remains a bridge to a better future for his children. For Bekturgan, staying alive isn't just about finding a piece of bread; it's about keeping his soul intact when everything around him is falling apart.

Compassionate Even when his own stomach is empty and his strength is fading, Bekturgan's first instinct is to help. When he meets the dying mother, Aysha, he doesn't turn away to save himself; instead, he shares his last bit of roots and herbs, offering her a final moment of human connection. His most beautiful act of love happens when he finds her orphaned baby. While others might see only a burden or another mouth to feed, Bekturgan sees a reason to keep going. He tucks the child inside his worn coat, shielding the tiny life with his own body and enduring beatings and insults rather than letting go of that small spark of hope. By naming the boy Tabyldy, or "Found," he turns a tragic loss into a new beginning, proving that even a wounded heart can heal by protecting someone even more vulnerable than itself.

Dignified Bekturgan possesses a quiet, stubborn pride that hunger cannot touch. Even when he is forced to beg for a scrap of food to keep his sons alive, he refuses to crawl or lose his sense of self. When wealthy

yurt owners treat him with cold contempt, he doesn't just hang his head in shame; he stands tall and reminds them that he was once a man of strength and respect. He understands that while poverty might strip a person of their home, it only takes their honor if they allow it. This inner fire is what gives him the strength to fight back with his walking stick when he is bullied, proving that his spirit is far from broken. He teaches us that true dignity isn't found in a full stomach, but in the way a person carries themselves when they have absolutely nothing.

Resilient There is a deep, patient strength in Bekturgan that allows him to outlast the most brutal storms of life. He endures the crushing grief of losing his wife and survives a near-fatal illness that leaves him unconscious for thirteen days, yet he never becomes a bitter man. Instead of dwelling on the darkness of the past, he chooses to look forward with a heart full of hope. In his old age, he doesn't sit around mourning his losses; he plants apple trees for grandchildren he hasn't even met yet, trusting that life will eventually bloom again. By joking that he is only twenty-two years old, he shows a beautiful emotional resilience—a refusal to let the tragedies of 1920 define his entire story. He proves that the human spirit is like a bird resting after a long flight, always capable of finding peace and joy once the wind dies down.

Isman

Isman represents the transition of the Kyrgyz people from the helpless suffering of the famine to the active, self-reliant strength of a new generation. If his father, Bekturgan, is the heart of the family, Isman is its shield and its strength. He embodies the change from a child who watched his family starve to a man who ensures they never will again. He is the bridge to the "new times," a leader who uses his hard-won maturity to rebuild a world that once tried to break him.

Dutiful Isman is the kind of son who grows up the moment he sees his father's first tear. From a young age, he understands that love is a physical responsibility, not just a sentiment. This is most movingly seen when he carries his sick, weakened father on his back toward the city. Even though his own legs are heavy with exhaustion and his lungs burn from the effort, he speaks lightly and cheerfully, hiding his own pain so that Bekturgan won't feel like a burden. He takes the years of care his father gave him and returns it with a fierce, quiet devotion, proving that his greatest mission in life is to be the foundation his family can lean on.

Resolute Having witnessed the absolute worst of human cruelty and hunger, Isman develops a steel-like determination to protect the peace he helped build. As a Red Army commander, his bravery isn't born from a love of war, but from a love of stability. He leads his men through dangerous mountain passes with a calm, tactical mind because he knows that every victory means a safer world for his younger brothers. Even when faced with personal heartbreak—like the mysterious disappearance of his brother Tabyldy—he never stops searching. He writes letters, places advertisements, and refuses to give up hope. Isman is a man of action who believes that while fate might wound you, it is your own resolve that determines if you stay down or keep moving forward.

Protective Under the stern uniform of a commander lies a man whose every action is driven by a deep tenderness for his family. Isman doesn't just provide physical safety; he provides a future. He is the one who ensures that Omurbek and Tabyldy receive an education, pushing them toward a life of the mind that he never had the chance to enjoy himself. Even in the middle of a war, his heart is always back home. This softness is most visible in the quiet moments—like when he notices his wife Zoya's worry and picks a red apple for her just to see her smile, or the way he carries the grief of his missing brother as if it were his own. Isman is the proof that a soldier's strength is only as valuable as the love he is protecting, and that a true leader is someone who carries his loved ones toward the light, no matter how heavy the burden.

Omurbek

Omurbek is the kind of person who feels everything too deeply and loves too completely for his own good. He is the beating emotional heart of a family that survived the worst of times, and he carries that collective pain in his chest like a stone he cannot put down. While his brother Isman fights battles with a sword and a rifle, Omurbek fights his with a pen and a broken heart. He grew up watching his father cry for the first time

in the cold steppe and never forgot what that looked like. That image stayed with him and shaped everything he became.

Sensitive Omurbek is a man who was simply not built to love halfway. When he falls for Gulai, he falls completely, filling notebooks with poems about her eyes and her smile, dreaming of a future that feels within reach. So when a jealous rival intercepts their letters and poisons everything they built together, the blow nearly destroys him. He reads her goodbye letter over and over, unable to believe that something so real could be taken away so easily. He tears up her old letters in a moment of raw, uncontrollable grief, then immediately regrets it. His sensitivity is not a weakness but a sign of how fully he engages with life, even when life breaks his heart in return.

Intellectually Resilient What saves Omurbek is his ability to take the worst moments of his life and turn them into something that lasts. He could have let the famine, the grief, and the heartbreak swallow him whole, but instead he channeled all of it into his writing. When Gulai leaves, he does not collapse permanently; he picks up his pen and writes poems that speak for an entire generation of people who have lost something precious. He discovers that creativity is not just an art form but a lifeline, a way of saying that even the most painful experiences deserve to be remembered and honored. His published poems become proof that a person can transform suffering into beauty.

Deeply Devoted Even in the middle of his own heartbreak and career, Omurbek never stops thinking about the people he loves. He spends years searching for his missing brother Tabyldy, writing letters and placing advertisements in newspapers, refusing to accept that someone he loves could simply vanish without a trace. When he finally sits with his aging father Bekturgan and watches the old man's eyes light up with joy, everything he has been carrying feels worth it. Omurbek shows us that devotion is not a grand gesture but a quiet, daily choice to keep showing up for the people who matter, no matter how much distance or time stands between you.

THEMES

Family In the middle of the starving times, family was the only thing that kept people's hearts from turning to stone. For Bekturgan, his boys were his entire world. Even when he was so weak from hunger that he could barely stand, he kept walking because he knew they were counting on him. It was not just about his own biological children either. When he found a tiny baby crying next to his dead mother on the frozen ground, Bekturgan did not see a stranger or a burden. He saw a child who needed a father. He tucked that little boy inside his own ragged coat and gave him a name and a place in his heart. That baby, Tabyldy, became part of their family because Bekturgan believed that love and mercy were more important than blood.

As the years passed, the children grew up with a deep sense of filial duty, understanding that their father had literally carried them through the valley of death. This responsibility was most visible when Bekturgan fell gravely ill with typhus. Isman, the eldest son, did not hesitate to put his weakened father on his back and carry him for miles toward the city, speaking kind words to hide his own exhaustion. It was a beautiful reversal of roles; the child who was once shielded from the frost was now the protector of the man who saved him. This devotion ensured that Bekturgan lived to see his family thrive and witness the arrival of a new generation.

In his quiet old age, Bekturgan lived for his grandchildren, planting an apple tree for each one in his garden. He wanted them to grow up in the shade of a peace he had fought so hard to find. For him, family was a sacred circle that began by saving a child from the snow and ended with a whole new generation playing under the trees he had planted for their future.

Illustrative Moment: A beautiful moment occurs when the elderly Bekturgan stands in his garden, watching his grandchildren play near the apple trees he planted for them. Suddenly, Tabyldy, the son he "found" on the frozen steppe, returns home as a pilot, landing his plane nearby to reunite with the family. As Tabyldy embraces his father, Bekturgan realizes that the "wounded heart" of his youth has finally healed. He sees his biological sons and his adopted son standing together, bound by a lifetime of filial duty and love. At that moment, the old man understands that his legacy is not the hunger he survived, but the forest of hope he built for his children and their children to come.

Famine: The famine in Central Asia during the early 1920s was a time when the earth itself seemed to turn against the people. It was not just a shortage of food but a total collapse of the world as they knew it. After years of war and a brutal drought, the grain disappeared, the animals died, and the once vibrant steppes became silent and dusty graveyards. For a nomadic family, losing their livestock meant losing their life. This left thousands of parents with nothing to give their children but tears.

During these years, the landscape was filled with shadows. Families like those of Bekturgan wandered aimlessly while digging for roots in the frozen ground and sleeping in ruins. It was a time of impossible choices where a mother might have to leave her baby behind in hopes that a stranger might have a crust of bread to save it. The hunger was so deep that it did not just hurt the body. It wounded the heart and broke the bonds of community as people became desperate just to survive another night.

But this dark time was also the beginning of a massive change. As aid slowly arrived, orphanages and schools were built to care for the thousands of children left alone by the famine. For those who survived, the 1920s became a bridge between two worlds. They carried the scars of the hunger forever, but they also became the first generation to see their children trade a wooden herding stick for a pen or a pilot's controls. It was a decade defined by the most painful loss but also by the incredible resilience of people who refused to let the silence of the steppe be the end of their story.

Illustrative moment: Bekturgan is walking across the silent and gray steppe. He comes across the body of Aysha, the young mother he had met only a day before. She is lying still on the frozen ground, her life taken by hunger and exhaustion. Beside her, a tiny baby is crying and shivering while trying to find warmth against her cold chest. Bekturgan has nothing of his own. He is starving, his clothes are in rags, and he has no idea where his next meal will come from. Yet when he looks at the child, he does not see a burden or a complication. He sees a spark of life that must be protected. He picks up the infant and tucks it deep inside his worn coat, holding the baby against his own skin to share his remaining body heat. In a world filled with death and indifference, this simple act of kindness is a quiet rebellion against despair. By naming the child Tabyldy, which means Found, Bekturgan transforms a scene of absolute loss into a new beginning. This moment shows that even when people have lost everything, the one thing they can still give is their humanity.

Trauma: The wounded heart is the central theme of the novella because it reflects the collective trauma of a nation broken by successive waves of tragedy. This deep sorrow is not just a personal emotion but a historical weight carried by the Kyrgyz people. It begins with the internal oppression of the wealthy nomad elite who exploited their own kind long before foreign empires arrived. This was followed by the crushing occupation of Russian settlers who seized fertile lands and forced the nomads into increasingly harsh environments. These layers of injustice created the first scars on the national spirit.

The most painful wound came with the 1916 rebellion and the mass killings that followed. The tragic exodus known as the Urkun saw a vast part of the population flee over icy mountain passes toward China. This journey was marked by staggering loss as thousands perished from cold and violence. When the survivors finally returned, they found a desolate land and a merciless famine that claimed even more lives in the early 1920s. These historical events are the true sources of the sadness that saturates the novella.

This haunting history provides Kyrgyz literature with its characteristic mood of melancholy and deep reflection. Every character in the story carries these traces of blood and hunger within them. Bekturgan is not just an old man but a living memory of a people who were nearly erased. When the novella speaks of a wounded heart, it is referring to the spiritual exhaustion of a population that has endured constant survival. The sad mood of the narrative is a tribute to those who were lost and a reminder of the high price paid for the peace that followed.

Illustrative moment: A deeply moving moment occurs when Bekturgan pauses during his long walk across the gray steppe to remember the Ak Oguz mountain pass. This is where the ice and snow claimed his wife during the desperate escape from violence years before. As he stands in the cold wind, he imagines her voice still calling out to him from beneath the frozen ground.

This scene perfectly captures the wounded heart of the Kyrgyz people who lost so much during the exodus and the subsequent famine. Bekturgan is not just mourning a person but is carrying the weight of a whole generation that was broken by occupation and displacement. The silence of the vast landscape around him reflects the sad and heavy mood of a nation that has seen its population vanish into the mountains and the earth. His tears are the physical proof of historical scars that can never be fully erased. This

memory shows that the heart is wounded because it remembers every person and every dream that was buried along the way.

Transformation: The story shows a powerful change from a dark and difficult past to a hopeful future. For Bekturgan, this change is not about politics or big events. It is something personal and emotional. It is the moment when he sees that his children are finally safe. In the past, his sons were weak from hunger and lived in fear. They could not even speak freely. Now, they are strong and confident. This feels like the end of a long, cold winter and the beginning of a warm, peaceful time.

This change is especially clear in the lives of his sons. When they were young, they lived in poverty and suffered greatly. As they grow older, they find their own paths in life. Isman becomes a commander, choosing to protect the peace that he never had as a child. Omurbek, instead of being trapped by painful memories, turns to books and poetry. He finds strength in knowledge and creativity. Their lives show that even a painful past does not have to control a person's future.

The most touching moment in the story is when Tabyldy returns. He was once a small, weak baby saved from the freezing ground. Years later, he comes back as a pilot, flying an airplane. For Bekturgan, this feels like a miracle. The baby he once protected is now strong and free, flying high in the sky. This moment symbolizes hope and a new beginning for the next generation.

Illustrative moment: Bekturgan stands in his peaceful garden and shields his eyes from the bright sun as a mechanical bird roars across the Kyrgyz sky. Just a few decades ago, his only concern was finding a single grain of barley to keep his sons from starving. Now, he watches as a plane lands near his own village. When the pilot steps out, it is not a shielded stranger but Tabyldy, the baby he once found shivering against a dead mother on the frozen steppe. This child, who started life with nothing but a name that means "Found," is now a master of the sky. To Bekturgan, this is the ultimate proof that the long and dark night of the famine has truly ended.

Love: Betrayal and the Fragility In the first part of the novella, the characters struggle against a clear and frightening enemy, hunger and the freezing steppe. Later, when life becomes more peaceful, the story focuses on a different kind of suffering, human cruelty and broken trust.

Omurbek, who survived famine as a child, faces a new pain as an adult. He learns that a person's heart can be hurt just as deeply by lies as the body can be hurt by hunger. His love for Gulai is shown as pure and hopeful. They share poems, kind feelings, and a strong emotional bond. Their relationship represents a new generation that finally has the chance to dream. However, their happiness is destroyed by Tarpanbay, a jealous rival.

Tarpanbay uses modern tools like letters and the post office to separate them. He steals and changes their messages so they stop trusting each other. He even sends a fake photograph that makes Gulai believe Omurbek has married another woman. Because of this lie, their love slowly falls apart. This shows how jealousy can still exist even in a more modern and peaceful world. It spreads through small lies instead of violence, but the damage is still great.

In the end, Omurbek reacts by shutting down his feelings. He destroys his poems and becomes cold and distant. He has to live with a broken heart. The story shows that even when society improves, human cruelty and lies can still cause deep emotional pain.

Illustrative moment: Omurbek is traveling through the hot roads of Bukhara, feeling tired and half asleep. He is thinking about Gulai and the warm sound of her voice. When he returns home, he finds a small blue letter waiting for him. It is written in Gulai's handwriting, but the words are cold. She says their love is over and asks him never to write to her again.

Omurbek reads the letter again and again, but he cannot understand it. The woman who once inspired all his poems now feels like a stranger. He does not know that Tarpanbay has been stealing their letters and replacing them with fake ones for a long time.

The letter hurts him deeply, even more than the hardships he faced as a child. In his pain, Omurbek tears up his old notebooks and destroys the poems he wrote for Gulai. The pages scattered on the floor show how broken his trust is.