

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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THE DIFFICULT PASSAGE / KYIYN OTKOOL (1980)

Kasymaly Bayalinov (1902-1979)

Reference:

Kasymaly Bayalinov. *Collection of Works*. Volume IV. Edited by N. Yysaeva. – Bishkek: Imak-Offset, 2015. – 496 pages. – (Reader's Bookshelf Series).

OVERVIEW

Author Kasymaly Bayalinov was born on September 25, 1902, in Kok-Moynok village, Issyk-Kul region, into a well-off family. He lost his parents early and was raised by relatives. During the Urkun in 1916, at age 14, he fled to China with his people.

After the October Revolution, he returned to his homeland and worked various jobs, including as a servant, cook's assistant, and pharmacy helper. In 1919, he joined the Komsomol and studied in Tashkent.

He later became an important literary figure, joining the Soviet Writers' Union in 1939 and leading the Kyrgyz Writers' Union during several periods. He also worked as a researcher in language and literature.

His famous story *Ajar* (*Ajar*, 1926) depicts the hardships of Kyrgyz people during difficult historical times and is considered a foundation of Kyrgyz prose. His last autobiographical work, *I Join the Bolsheviks* (*Bolshevikterge jazylam*), reflects his life, beliefs, and dedication to his country and ideals. Between 1929–1940, he wrote stories about new Soviet Kyrgyz life, including *Murat* (*Murat*) and *The Happy Herdsman* (*Baktyluu jylkychy*). His war-themed cycle *In the Fire* (*Ot ichinde*) focuses on wartime experiences. In 1948, his article *Some Suggestions to Mr. Poynton* (*Poynton myrzaga ayrim sunushtar*) defended the development of national cultures in the USSR. *The Kurman Valley* (*Kurman oroonu*, 1958) portrays an episode of the 1916 uprising.

Major works such as *Brotherhood* (*Boordoshtor*, 1962), *On the Shores of Ysyk-Kol Lake* (*Kol boyunda*, 1947), and *Murat* (*Murat*, 1929) hold an important place in Kyrgyz cultural and spiritual life. At the end of his career, Bayalinov was one of the first professional translators in Kyrgyz literature. He translated works by Maxim Gorky and Alexander Pushkin, including *Makar Chudra* (*Makar Chudra*), *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* (*Kavkaz tutkunu*), *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (*Ruslan menen Lyudmila*), and *Eugene Onegin* (*Yevgeniy Onegin*). His own works were translated into many languages.

He received several state awards and the title People's Writer of Kyrgyzstan in 1968. One of the main libraries in Bishkek is named after him, reflecting his lasting contribution to Kyrgyz culture and literature.

Kasymaly Bayalinov died on October 3, 1979, at the age of 77.

Novella The autobiographical novella *The Difficult Passage* was written and first published in 1980. However, for many years it remained largely unavailable to readers. In 2015, the work was republished as part of the National Program for the Development of the Kyrgyz Language and the Improvement of Language Policy in the Kyrgyz Republic for 2014–2020.

The edition was compiled by N. Yisaeva and published in Bishkek by "Imak Offset" in 2015. The volume contains 496 pages and includes the novellas *The Difficult Passage* and *Kurman's Valley*, along with several short stories. The Difficult Passage is one of the author's longest novellas.

Background *The Difficult Passage* is an autobiographical novella in which the author narrates the events of his own life through the character Kara Togolok. Set during the early twentieth century in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia, the work portrays both a deeply personal journey and a period of major historical transformation. Through memories of childhood, exile, poverty, political upheaval, and education, the author reflects on his struggle for survival and self-development during years of war, migration, and social unrest.

At the same time, the novella depicts the broader transition of Kyrgyz society from a feudal and patriarchal system dominated by manaps, wealthy landowners, and local rulers to the emergence of Soviet socialist rule after the Russian Revolution. The narrative shows how ordinary people suffered under inequality, forced marriages, exploitation, and violence, while also presenting the hopes and contradictions brought by revolutionary change and the rise of Soviet institutions.

By combining personal experience with historical events, *The Difficult Passage* becomes both a memoir of hardship and a literary record of social transformation in Kyrgyz society during a decisive era.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Kara Togolok – Main character; a poor Kyrgyz boy whose life journey reflects social and political change
Sakyp Jamal – Kara Togolok's childhood friend
Jeenbay – Kara Togolok's elder cousin who supports and protects the family during exile and hardship
Seyilkan – Jeenbay's mother; strong and respected woman who keeps the family united in difficult times
Moldaly – Kara Togolok's elder brother; later dies from illness after years of suffering
Abdybek – Kara Togolok's younger brother
Bubush – Moldaly's wife and Kara Togolok's sister-in-law
Baryktabas – Kara Togolok's close childhood friend, musician, and fellow student
Aydarkan manap – Sakyp Jamal's greedy stepfather who arranges her forced marriage
Tabyldy – old man who marries Sakyp Jamal against her will
Ismail mullah – religious figure who marries Kara Togolok's stepmother
Yrsaly – powerful and oppressive local ruler who terrorizes displaced families
Tokson – wealthy man who exploits Kara Togolok's labor
Anton – Russian employer at Eski Beket who mistreats refugees
Sabitakhun – rich Uyghur landlord in exile who profits from refugees' suffering
Tursun – woman Kara Togolok meets during the revolutionary period
Rovnyagin – Russian teacher who encourages Kara Togolok's education
Dudnik – Red Army secretary who supports Kara Togolok
Dubovitsky – Red Army commander
Mustafa Yangulov – Soviet official involved in reforms and revolutionary work
Musulmankul – Kara Togolok's friend who later becomes a militia officer
Salyima – young woman escaping forced marriage who later joins the family
Ivan – Russian cattle owner who employs Kara Togolok
Sergey – poor Russian worker who explains Bolshevik ideas to Kara Togolok

SYNOPSIS

The story follows Kara Togolok, a Kyrgyz boy growing up in Kok-Moynok village during the turbulent early twentieth century. After his father's death, he lives with relatives and witnesses injustice early in life, especially the forced marriage and tragic fate of his beloved childhood friend, Sakyp Jamal. Her suffering under patriarchal customs leaves a lasting wound on him.

The 1916 Central Asian uprising against the Tsar brings chaos, forcing Kara Togolok's family into exile in China, where they endure hunger, loss, exploitation, and constant fear. Returning home, they face new oppression from local strongmen who abuse their power. Kara Togolok survives through hard labor, courage, and resilience, repeatedly risking his life to support his starving family.

With the fall of the Tsar and the rise of Soviet power, Kara Togolok joins the Red Army, finding purpose and belonging. He becomes involved in political change, education, and youth organization work, hoping to build a fairer society. Despite personal tragedies, including the deaths of loved ones and Sakyp Jamal, he continues striving for knowledge and justice.

SCENES

Village Memories and Family Changes The narrator, nicknamed Kara Togolok, lives in Kok-Moynok village. After his father's death, he lives with his stepmother. He plays with Baryktabas and Sakyp Jamal at night, while Baryktabas plays komuz and sings. He has a younger brother Abdybek and an elder brother Moldaly, who is married to Bubush. Their peaceful life changes when Ismail mullah marries his stepmother and takes Abdybek away. The narrator feels anger and sadness toward Ismail mullah. Jeenbay, their paternal cousin, appears in daily life and plays *toguz korgool*, a Kyrgyz mancala-style game, with Moldaly. Jeenbay lives with Seyilkan, his wife Ayjan, and their four-year-old son Idris.

Sakyp Jamal's Forced Marriage Kara Togolok learns from his sister-in-law Bubush that his friend Sakyp Jamal is being forced to marry an older man named Tabyldy. The marriage is arranged by Aydarkan manap, her stepfather. At first he cannot believe it, but Bubush confirms it, saying she heard it from Asylkan, Sakyp Jamal's friend. Sakyp Jamal is a beautiful, kind, and thoughtful girl, while Tabyldy is old and unpleasant in appearance. Aydarkan manap agrees to accept a bride price of five hundred *som*, two hundred sheep, and forty horses from the groom's side.

Sakyp Jamal's Tragic Fate Sakyp Jamal is the smartest and most beautiful girl in the village, kind and talented in singing and poetry. She and the narrator Kara Togolok grew up together like siblings, and their families were close friends. After her father's death, her stepfather Aydarkan manap takes control of her life. He is a greedy and cruel man who plans to marry her off to an old man in exchange for bride price. One day, Kara Togolok finds Sakyp Jamal crying by the river, singing sadly about her fate. She tells him she is being forced into marriage and feels hopeless. Both are young and powerless, unable to stop the injustice.

Sakyp Jamal's Forced Wedding At the wedding, villagers gather as Sakyp Jamal is prepared to be sent to Tabyldy. She strongly resists, crying and refusing to go. She pleads with her mother and the people, saying she cannot marry an old man and asking why she is being given away like this. Her voice is full of pain and anger, and she says it would be better to die than live as his wife.

Despite her resistance, the adults ignore her wishes. The bride price has already been agreed, and the decision is final. She is forcibly taken out of the house, placed on a horse, and carried away while she cries and struggles. The villagers watch helplessly as she is taken from her home.

Learning and Interrupted Dreams Kara Togolok wants to study, but there is no school in the village. His elder cousin Jeenbay takes him to Nikolay, a Russian teacher, who teaches him the Russian alphabet and language. Kara Togolok studies eagerly and learns quickly. His friend Baryktabas also comes to study, but stays with a relative, Myrkymbay. Soon, Myrkymbay demands money and supplies from Baryktabas's father. Unable to provide this, Baryktabas is forced to stop studying and return home. Kara Togolok continues learning alone, but his education is interrupted by the Central Asian Revolt of 1916.

Uprising and Separation In early August, news spreads that the Kyrgyz people have risen against the Tsar, and Russian troops are coming. Villagers panic and flee to the mountains. Kara Togolok also moves with his village. Hearing that Tabyldy is nearby, he goes to see Sakyp-Jamal. They meet and speak sadly; she says her life is miserable and asks him to take her away. He agrees to think about it, but later his Jeenbay cousin refuses, fearing danger. As chaos grows, everyone struggles to survive. In the end, they are separated again. In the chaos and panic, Tabyldy people fled toward Tekes, while Kara Togolok fled toward Uch-Turpan, in the Xinjiang region, China.

Life in Exile Near Uch-Turpan, two families live in a poor area called Kara-Bak. They lose most of their animals on the journey, and the few that remain die from poisonous grass. With nothing left, both families rent dirty sheds from a rich Uyghur man named Sabitakhun. One family stays in a cowshed, the other in a calf shed. Life is very hard despite constant cleaning and efforts to improve conditions. Tragedy continues when Jeenbay's wife dies, leaving a small child. Later, Kara Togolok's stepmother returns with his brother Abdybek, bringing hope, but soon leaves again, leaving Abdybek with Kara Togolok and causing deep sorrow.

Hunger and Hard Labor After his mother leaves, the family suffers greatly. The little brother cries for her, and everyone feels pain and loss. To survive, they sell their belongings and barely survive the winter. In spring, hunger spreads, and many people become weak. They still live on Sabitakhun's property and must work hard to pay rent. Kara Togolok, Jeenbay, and others do heavy labor, carrying firewood to the market. Sabitakhun grows richer by using the cheap labor of poor refugees, while they struggle daily just to survive.

Fragile Hope at the Bazaar At the bazaar, Kara Togolok sees many suffering people: starving families, beggars, and exiles trying to sell their belongings. While walking through the crowd, he hears exciting news that the Russian Tsar has been overthrown and rebels may be forgiven. People become hopeful and talk about returning home. Kara Togolok feels both sadness and joy.

In this same harsh place, an old Kyrgyz man brings his young granddaughter to the bazaar. He is starving and has no way to survive, so he is forced to sell her. The child is taken by Sabitakhun. Later, Sabitakhun passes her on to another man, Nurakhun, treating her like property in trade.

Joy After Hard Times The narrator returns home with his donkeys and tells his family about the news from the bazaar. He says the Tsar has fallen and there may be peace. Everyone listens carefully, surprised and hopeful. After some years of hunger, exile, and sadness, this news brings happiness. Children and adults gather around him, asking questions. The family begins to believe they may return to their homeland and live freely again.

The Rule of Kazy and Life in Naryn After hard travel, the refugees return to At-Bashy region, Kyrgyzstan, where they find rich but strict rule under a powerful man named Kazy. He controls the region and treats people cruelly. He is a violent and proud man, supported by Russian officers and local helpers. His friends and allies help him stay in power. Because of fear, no one dares to oppose him. Even small disagreement leads to punishment. Kazy continues to exploit the people and strengthen his control. Life for ordinary Kyrgyz remains difficult, as they live under fear, poverty, and injustice while political chaos spreads in the region.

News from New Government In 1917, people gather in Kazy's village to hear news from new government representatives. They announce that the Tsar has fallen and a temporary government now rules Russia. Tynyshpaev explains that all people should be equal and live in peace. Kazy pretends to support these ideas and acts friendly. He even makes peace with his enemy Kolbay to protect his position. Soon after, Kazy is appointed commissioner in Naryn. However, life does not improve for the poor. Exiled Kyrgyz families, including Kara Togolok's people, remain in poverty, sickness, and fear, still treated as refugees and without real justice or hope.

Separation in Exile The family decides to move again from their exile place. They have a young horse and a donkey, but it is hard to travel with two families. They think of going to the fertile Chuy Valley where fruits might grow. However, Seyilkan, mother of Jeenbay refuses to split the group, saying enemies destroy divided people. They agree to go together, but food is a problem. They decide Kara Togolok must stay and work for a year for a rich man in exchange for grain. The family leaves sadly with children and animals, while he stays behind alone, watching them disappear in deep sorrow.

Working for Tokson the Rich Man Kara Togolok stays behind and works for a rich man named Tokson. He takes care of many yaks in the mountains. He helps tie calves, milks the mothers, and guards the animals every day. The work is very hard, and he has no free time. Sometimes he thinks of going to his relatives in Chuy, but he cannot leave. In August, Kara Togolok tries to ask for his pay. Tokson refuses to return the small money he had promised. Feeling helpless and poor, he decides to leave.

Journey to the Bazaar and Escape Kara Togolok goes to the river, hoping to cross and reach his journey. He is stopped by water and has no place to stay. A kind old man helps him cross. In the bazaar, he sees other refugees and poor people. Some are selling goods, others begging for food. He is hungry and tired. At night, caravan drivers invite him to eat bread and tea. He sleeps there. In the morning, more refugees arrive, planning to travel together to Chuy valley.

Search for the Family On the road, Kara Togolok meets a girl named Zulaika and her brother Akmat. They are also returning home from exile in China. Many Kyrgyz families are going back after suffering hunger and sickness. They pass through ruined villages like Kochkor, where houses and shops are destroyed. Life is still very difficult, but people begin to feel hope. Some work for rich landlords, others beg. While searching for his brothers, Kara Togolok learns they are nearby in the Kok-Moynok village. He decides to stay and reunite with them, hoping their family can finally live together again.

Meeting Baryktabas in Kochkor Kara Togolok crosses Kochkor River and reaches an empty settlement. In a small hut, he finds his old friend Baryktabas, who is seriously ill. Baryktabas's parents, Atabek and Aykumush, are with him after returning from China. They explain that they stopped there because of his illness and cannot continue the journey. Baryktabas speaks briefly, telling Kara Togolok about their childhood and asking him to continue to Chuy valley and seek a better future. After the conversation, Kara Togolok says goodbye to the family and continues his journey alone, leaving them behind in the temporary shelter. This meeting marks a painful moment in his journey, as he must continue forward without him.

Relatives Living at Kok-Moynok River Camp Kara Togolok finds his relatives at their old camp near Kok-Moynok river after a long search. They have moved away from their original home and are living in poor conditions. The family survives by hunting small animals and setting traps for birds and foxes. The men go out for hunting, but they often return with little food. There is no proper house, and they prepare for winter with very limited supplies. Kara Togolok learns that they cannot move further to Chu because of cold weather and lack of food. They decide to stay and continue living there.

Journey to Old Station under Yrsaly's Power Kara Togolok travels toward Kok-Moynok and Eski Beket (Old Station) to find food and help for his family. In this region, Yrsaly has become a powerful local figure. He did not gain wealth through fair work, but by taking advantage of the disorder of the time, aligning himself with Russian authorities, seizing livestock, and intimidating Kyrgyz families who did not flee to China. He also relies on armed groups and local connections to strengthen his control. He dominates the surrounding area, and people avoid confronting him. At Eski Beket, Kara Togolok sees soldiers, traders, and displaced families passing through. He carefully asks for work or food. He understands that survival depends on caution and navigating Yrsaly's authority.

Work at Old Station Kara Togolok arrives at Eski Beket (Old Station) and begins working for Anton, a Russian man who employs displaced people. Anton tests him and assigns heavy physical labor such as cutting and splitting wood with an axe and saw. Kara Togolok also carries water, prepares the samovar, and helps with food sold to travelers passing through the station. The work is constant because people keep arriving and leaving. Although the job is hard, it provides basic food. Kara Togolok learns that survival depends on exhausting labor under employers who profit from the situation of refugees.

Kara Togolok Receiving Food at the Soldiers' Kitchen Kara Togolok prepares to leave Anton's place because his family is hungry and waiting. Before leaving, he visits a soldier he knows, who helps him find food. The soldier is angry at Anton for exploiting workers and leads him to the soldiers' kitchen. There, Kara Togolok is given dried bread (sukhariki) collected from soldiers' leftovers and fills his bag. This food is very important for displaced people like him. The soldier tells him to return if needed and offers future help. Kara Togolok leaves with relief, knowing he can bring food back to his starving relatives.

Kara Togolok Returning to His Family Kara Togolok returns to his family after about a week and a half away. They are starving and waiting for him with great worry, fearing he has died. He brings dried bread, and the children happily share it. The family eats together and struggles with constant hunger. They explain that during his absence they tried hunting and trapping animals, but often returned empty-handed. Kara Togolok decides to go back to work at Eski Beket to bring food again. On the way, however, he suffers an accident, and is injured

Anton Dismantles the Homestead While working at Eski Beket, Kara Togolok learns that Anton uses wood from destroyed Kyrgyz refugee homes at Ak-Olong village, with help from Yrsaly's men. One day, Anton brings carts to Kara Togolok's own village site and begins dismantling the homestead. Kara

Togolok protests and asks him to stop, but Anton strikes him with a whip, injuring his face badly. He returns home bleeding and unable to work for a month. His family treats his wounds and worries over him. The incident shows the harsh control of outsiders and the vulnerability of displaced Kyrgyz families.

Escape from Kok-Moynok Village Jeenbay and Jumabay steal a calf from Yrsaly's herd and bring it to their family. They slaughter it and share the meat. Soon, Yrsaly's armed men arrive searching for the stolen animal. Seyilkan orders everyone to flee, and Kara Togolok runs with the children toward the mountains. Gunshots are heard, causing fear, but no one is harmed. The men later realize Jeenbay and Jumabay have confronted the attackers, forcing them to retreat, abandon the meat, and release Seyilkan. The family reunites but understands they cannot stay. Jeenbay decides they must leave the area completely.

Crossing in Fear Everyone agrees to leave Kok-Moynok village. Seyilkan advises crossing the Kochkor River and hiding in the mountains. At night, they pack their belongings on horses and an old donkey. The river is cold and strong, but they manage to cross. Seyilkan falls into the water but is saved with a rope. The family moves carefully, afraid of Yrsaly's men. Later, they hide in a valley and rest. The children fall asleep, but adults stay worried about those left behind. They wait in silence, hoping the others will return safely from the dangerous land.

Yrsaly's Search Yrsaly's men cross Kok-Moynok and search the abandoned settlements. They follow footprints, check empty yurts, and move along the riverbank. The family hides nearby in silence, watching them pass. Jeenbay and others stay concealed, waiting for the search to end. Fear spreads as the men inspect valleys and turn back without finding them. The danger remains close, and no one speaks freely. When night falls, Seyilkan is rescued after her accident in the river, and the group reunites. They understand that Yrsaly will return again, so staying here is no longer possible.

Moving On After escaping detection, the family gathers quietly. Seyilkan decides they must leave the area completely. They pack their belongings onto horses and a donkey, taking only what they can carry. The children are woken and guided forward. No one argues, because everyone understands the danger. They leave the hiding place and move toward the mountains. Behind them remains the land searched by Yrsaly's men.

Semiz-Bel Departure At Semiz-Bel, a mountain pasture in the south of Ak-Olong valley, food is almost gone. Dry bread and meat have already finished, and hunger grows in the remote mountain camp. Far from villages and towns, the family lives in silence and emptiness.

Kara Togolok decides to go down to the Kazakh settlements in the lowlands to find work and bring food back. Seyilkan fears Yrsaly's man will catch him, but he promises to stay careful and speak as if he is alone. The children hold him tightly and ask for bread. His brothers prepare a weak horse for the long road. He says goodbye and rides down from the cold heights, leaving the hungry camp behind.

Kazakh Herders After the 1916 uprising, empty valleys fill with newcomers. Kazakh herders from the Almaty side move through mountain passes and settle in Kok-Moynok and nearby lands. Yrsaly controls Ak-Olong and the eastern valley alone, avoiding open conflict. Kara Togolok rides familiar paths and reaches a camp where smoke rises from white yurts. He joins Kazakh workers and asks for shelter and food. A shepherd helps him cross the river and offers work with horses. Kara Togolok finds temporary safety among strangers and thinks of his starving family in the mountains, where survival becomes harder every day.

Zulaika's Warning In Sarsenbay's camp, (he is Kazakh) Kara Togolok works with horses and waits for a chance to bring food to his family. He hopes to earn trust and gather meat for those starving in Semiz Bel pasture. Zulaika, a Kyrgyz girl now married there, welcomes him kindly and calls him a relative from the same land. One evening she runs in fear and warns him that Yrsaly's men search for him. They believe he is connected to stolen livestock. The household debates his fate. Trust becomes fragile. Kara Togolok realizes he is no longer safe in this place.

River Escape At night, Kara Togolok flees with his horse toward the Kok-Moynok river crossing. The water is deep, cold, and fast. Behind him, Yrsaly's riders approach, driven by suspicion and revenge.

The narrow cliff path makes escape dangerous. One mistake means death. He thinks of his starving brothers and the silent mountain camp. Fear tightens his chest, but he moves forward. In the dark, he crosses the river and reaches the opposite bank. Shadows of pursuers appear behind him. Yrsaly's voice echoes in the night. Kara Togolok rides into uncertainty, leaving safety and danger behind.

Hidden Shelter Kara Togolok reaches an abandoned settlement near the mountains and finds a small hut beside broken old houses. Inside, a girl and a boy live alone in fear and hunger. Their mother works for Yrsaly and is away. Their mother and the children have driven a sheep from Yrsaly's herd and hidden it in the corner of the hut. When the mother returns, they slaughter it and prepare food. She notices Kara Togolok's condition and gives him a share of meat wrapped for his starving relatives.

Kara Togolok Returns Kara Togolok leaves the hut and returns toward the mountain camp carrying meat and fragile hope. He finds children alone, afraid and hungry in the empty pasture. Seyilkan, their mother, says the brothers went to find food and are still missing. Their sister-in-law runs away with the son of Jumabay, a neighbor. Kara Togolok feels sorrow and anger but comforts the children and shares the food he received. They survive by cooking meat in a small shelter. Yet Yrsaly's threat still follows them. He prepares to move again.

Brothers A sound is heard in the camp. Seyilkan tells Kara Togolok to go outside. He goes out. The moon is bright. The sound comes closer. Seyilkan also comes outside. They both look. Two men come from the darkness. They are his brothers. They bring a cow. Seyilkan runs and asks if it is them. They say yes and that they are coming. She hugs them and cries. Kara Togolok watches. Seyilkan says they are all together again. The family is together.

Night Hunt The brothers explain how they planned to reach Kazakh settlers across Kochkor River but could not cross in the dark. They return to Yrsaly's area and hide until morning. At dawn they watch cattle and enter the bushes near the lake. They drive off one cow from the herd and tie it in the forest. At night they wait and later bring it back to the camp. They arrive at dawn after traveling through cold and rocky land. They tell what happened. Seyilkan gives them the saved meat. The cow is slaughtered, and the family cooks and eats together.

Arrival of Salyima Kara Togolok family stays in mountain camp in March with remaining meat and plans to reach Chuy, but they have no transport. Snow is melting and they use water from valleys. A young woman, Salyima, arrives from a highland household where she was a *tokol*, meaning a second or junior wife in a polygamous marriage, with lower status and heavy workload. She escapes forced conditions and asks to stay. Seyilkan accepts her. Salyima joins the family and agrees to marry Jeenbay. Kara Togolok performs marriage ritual. Later they decide to leave the place because her former husband may come and take her back.

Journey to Karagoo Bazaar His family stays behind in Achyk-Tash valley after crossing the Kochkor River with help from a passing *yamshik*, a coachman who drives horses and transports people and goods. They leave because Salyima, a young woman who joined them after escaping her previous forced marriage, may be pursued and taken back by her former husband. At camp, food is almost finished and only soup remains. Brothers earlier took a horse to get supplies. Kara Togolok wants to travel alone to Karagoo bazaar with a horse carrying a cow skin to sell. Before leaving, Seyilkan blesses him and asks him to return safely. The children ask for bread. He continues toward the bazaar to trade the skin for food and supplies.

Captured at the Bazaar At the bazaar, Kara Togolok tries to sell a hide to buy food for his family. He meets his relative Ysrail and asks for help. Ysrail pretends to agree but does not support him. Soon, Yrsaaly's son Julkunbay recognizes him and accuses him of knowing his brothers' location. Kara Togolok is tied up and forced to walk. Despite his pleas, no one helps him. He is taken back to Yrsaaly's place. There, he is interrogated and beaten because he refuses to reveal where his brothers are. He suffers humiliation and fear during his detention.

False Help Ysrail tells Kara Togolok that he will help him and sends him toward the Kyzart mountains. He instructs him to find his friend Karachunak in Azyk village, who can give him a horse. Ysrail warns him to travel secretly and avoid being seen. He also says that if Kara Togolok brings the horse, it will become his own. Trusting these words, Kara Togolok agrees because he urgently needs transport to return to his family. After receiving these directions, he continues his journey alone toward the mountains, following Ysrail's instructions and still hoping to find help.

Lost Horse After crossing the river, Kara Togolok arrives at Ysrail's house by horse. He is very tired and rests there. In the morning, he discovers that his horse is missing. Ysrail claims he only saw his own horse and says Kara Togolok's horse must have run away because it was not tied properly. Kara Togolok searches everywhere but cannot find it. He realizes he has been deceived and feels deep anger and loss after all his suffering. Later, he overhears that the horse was deliberately taken away and hidden, showing Ysrail's betrayal and dishonesty.

Life with Ivan and Change in the City Kara Togolok works for a Russian man named Ivan, taking care of his cattle in exchange for food and clothing. He cannot return home and lives in constant uncertainty. In the bazaar, he hears people talking about a war between White Russians and Bolsheviks, but he does not fully understand it. From a poor Russian worker, Sergey, he learns that Bolsheviks support poor people and oppose the rich.

Later, Ivan becomes seriously ill and dies. His family comes, takes all his property and animals, and leaves. Kara Togolok is left alone without shelter, work, or support.

In the Bazaar Kara Togolok works in the bazaar carrying firewood for a cook to earn food. He receives only leftover rice and suffers from hunger. With nowhere to stay, he returns at night to an old abandoned shed where he sleeps alone. He feels fear in the darkness, thinking about spirits and strange sounds, but has no other place to go. Later, Ivan's dog Trezor appears and stays with him, giving him comfort and protection. The next day, he meets the boy Petya, who asks for the dog. Kara Togolok agrees and gives Trezor away because he has no stable life.

Kara Togolok's Struggle for Survival Kara Togolok lives in a village filled with refugees and poor people. Fearing death and starvation, he returns to work for a cook in the bazaar. He performs hard labor such as carrying firewood and making fire in exchange for small amounts of food. He has no home and often sleeps in unsafe places. One night, he hides inside a warm oven, but villagers mistake him for a dead body and try to remove him. An old man stops them and makes the cook take responsibility for him. Kara Togolok then continues working and surviving in hardship.

Arrival of Soldiers and the Promise of Soviet Power In the village, rumors spread that soldiers were coming from Naryn, causing fear and panic. People thought they might be Bolsheviks, so many ran away and hid. Kara Togolok meets an old man, Borbugul, who is calm and accepts death if it comes. Soon, armed soldiers arrive but do not harm anyone. They only ask for directions and speak peacefully. The soldiers explain that the old government has fallen and the Soviet government has been formed, promising equality and support for workers and poor people. They also distribute flour to the starving refugees, bringing hope and relief to the people.

Kara Togolok Joins the Red Army Kara Togolok asks a soldier for help to reach Tokmok and find his relatives. The soldier requests permission from the commander, and Kara Togolok is allowed to travel with the Red Army. He joins them and rides on a wagon carrying a machine gun. He feels happy and safe with the soldiers. During the journey, a soldier explains the October Revolution, the Soviet government, Lenin, and the fight against the White Army. Kara Togolok learns that he is now among the Bolsheviks. He feels joy and hope, believing he will become part of the Soviet cause.

Journey Through Familiar Lands Kara Togolok travels with the Red Army by wagon through a mountain valley. He feels safe and happy, remembering past struggles on the same road. He recalls his friend Baryktabas who died and thinks of his family, wondering how they are living. As they pass rivers, forests, and villages, memories of childhood and old friends return to his mind. He remembers playing in winter, meeting Sakyp-Jamal, and painful moments from his past. These memories make him emotional.

but also hopeful. While riding with the soldiers, he feels his life has changed and a better future may be coming.

Arrival at the Old Station and Change Kara Togolok and the Red Army arrive at the old Kok-Moynok station. The place is empty because former soldiers have left after hearing about the Soviet government. Kara Togolok meets old man Soodanbek, who explains that soldiers have gone home or fled. He learns that the new Soviet power is replacing the old system and bringing change. The soldiers are friendly, share food, and treat the locals well. Kara Togolok feels hope and support from them. After resting and eating, the Red Army prepares to move again. Kara Togolok continues his journey toward Tokmok with them.

Arrival in Tokmok and Joining the Red Army Kara Togolok arrives in Tokmok during a time of change and confusion. The town is divided, and soldiers move everywhere. He does not know where to go or what will happen to him. A Red Army soldier notices him and speaks kindly. Kara Togolok is given food and reassurance. Slowly, his fear disappears. He begins helping the soldiers with small tasks. They accept him without suspicion. For the first time, he feels safe and included. He starts living among the Red Army soldiers, sharing their food, work, and simple shelter.

Life in the Military Camp Kara Togolok stays in the soldiers' camp in Tokmok. He helps with daily duties like carrying water and taking care of horses. The soldiers treat him well and share their meals with him. He sleeps in a simple tent made of straw. His life becomes more stable than before. He receives clothes from the soldiers and feels proud wearing them. He is no longer hungry or alone. The soldiers trust him, and he slowly becomes part of their group. His earlier fear and hardship begin to fade away.

Change in Status and New Hope Kara Togolok's life changes as he fully joins the Red Army environment. He wears soldier's clothing and moves through the town with confidence. People now treat him with respect instead of ignoring him. He remembers his past life of poverty and fear, but it feels distant. He continues working for the soldiers and tries to be helpful. Although he still has no permanent home, he no longer feels abandoned. Kara Togolok begins to hope for a better future under the protection and support of the Red Army.

Kara Togolok Receives Confiscated Goods Kara Togolok comes to the Red Army camp where confiscated goods from wealthy men are being unloaded. He sees valuable items like carpets, blankets, and clothing taken from arrested nobles. Soldiers and officials record and distribute the goods. Kara Togolok is fascinated and desires simple comforts. With encouragement from fellow soldiers, he takes a carpet and a fur hat for himself. He feels grateful and excited. The officials allow him to take items, treating him kindly. For the first time, he feels a sense of material comfort and belonging among the soldiers.

Kara Togolok Gains Personal Belongings Kara Togolok sees more useful items and asks for a blanket from the official Dudnik. Remembering him as kind, he requests help. Dudnik agrees and allows him to take a warm blanket. Kara Togolok is very happy and runs to his tent. Later, he also receives a leather book bag as a gift. He feels proud and supported by the soldiers. His living conditions improve greatly with warm clothing and bedding. He thanks the soldiers repeatedly and returns to his shelter with joy, feeling more secure and accepted in his new life.

Kara Togolok Joins Political Life Kara Togolok goes with soldiers to a large public meeting in Tokmok. People gather in the square to hear speeches about the new government. He listens about Lenin and the Communist Party and feels inspired. When asked, he says he wants to become a Bolshevik. With encouragement, he joins the Communist Party and feels proud. After that, he follows soldiers to another meeting of the Socialist Revolutionaries. There he hears different political ideas. Kara Togolok observes both sides but stays excited about his new role. He feels he is becoming part of important historical changes.

Kara Togolok Meets His Former Teacher Kara Togolok begins thinking about education and feels a strong desire to study. He remembers an old meeting with a Russian teacher, Rovnyagin, who once stayed in his village and inspired him. Kara Togolok goes to a school in Tokmok to find him. He sees children studying and meets Rovnyagin again. The teacher recognizes him and calls him by his childhood

name. They talk about his difficult life and the changes in the country. Rovnyagin encourages him to study and get an education. Kara Togolok feels inspired but does not start studying immediately.

Kara Togolok at School and Leaving Kara Togolok returns to school wearing new clothes and joins the first-grade class. The children laugh at him because he is much older than them. He feels shy and embarrassed. The teacher, Rovnyagin, sees that he already knows some letters and moves him to the second grade. Kara Togolok tries to study for a while, but the children continue to tease him. He becomes more and more uncomfortable. Because of shame and constant teasing, he stops attending school. Eventually, he leaves the school, despite his strong wish to learn and get an education.

Political Changes in Tokmok Town Kara Togolok attends a large Bolshevik meeting in Tokmok town called the “People’s House.” Leaders speak about Lenin and the Soviet government. Zavalishin strongly criticizes the church and political enemies, and the crowd supports him. Pavlov also speaks against opposition groups, and people demand action. Soon after, several Socialist Revolutionary leaders are arrested. Some are quickly released, while others are wrongly accused. Pavlov is later arrested, and Zavalishin is executed after false accusations. Kara Togolok learns how political struggles lead to arrests and injustice. The event shows the growing power and conflict during the revolution period.

Battle and Return of the Red Army In December, a telegram arrives ordering the Red Army to move to Pishpek city because of an uprising in Ak-Suu region. Commander Dubovitsky and Secretary Dudnik lead the troops. Rumors spread in Tokmok about attacks and danger. Local leaders and soldiers prepare to fight and send an additional unit.

Soon, the Red Army clashes with rebels near Pishpek. Dubovitsky is wounded, but reinforcements arrive and help defeat the rebels. The uprising is suppressed. After the victory, the troops return to Tokmok. New volunteers from Ivanovka also join the Red Army, showing growing support for the Soviet side.

Meeting Tursun at the New Market Kara Togolok, a young soldier, feels lonely in Tokmok town and wanders the streets. At the “new market” he sees starving refugees receiving food and animals from a relief group. There he meets a Kyrgyz woman, Tursun, whom he had seen before. They recognize each other and talk. Tursun shares her painful life story: early orphan hood, forced marriage, hard labor under a Russian family, and constant suffering. Despite hardships, she continues working and helping others. The narrator listens with sympathy and learns about her difficult journey during the turmoil.

Escape During the Uprising During unrest, rumors spread that rebels are attacking stations. Panic breaks out and people prepare to flee. Tursun and her family are forced to leave with soldiers and wagons. The narrator helps them pack and says goodbye with tears. Chaos grows as groups move toward safety, fearing rebel attacks. The narrator also escapes with his husband, traveling to Kemin region. Later they hear news of captured wagons and continued fighting. Tursun’s fate remains uncertain, and Kara Togolok worries about her survival in the conflict.

Preparation in Semiz-Bel and Encounter with Saadabay When the uprising begins, the village relocates to the Semiz-Bel mountain pass in search of safety. People prepare for possible displacement by harvesting grain and gathering supplies. The narrator is sent to Saadabay, a respected and powerful man living in Ak-Olong, known among the settlers for his authority and strength. There, the narrator observes how displaced people are organized in temporary camps and how Saadabay’s household becomes a place of refuge. During this period, a Russian woman named Maria becomes part of Saadabay’s family through a sudden social arrangement. As unrest spreads further, Saadabay departs with armed companions toward Orto-Tokoy station, while fear and uncertainty grow among the villagers.

Armed Clashes and Breakdown at the Station As the conflict escalates, the narrator witnesses armed clashes near the old post station. Wagons carrying weapons and ammunition are seized, creating confusion and competition among different groups. The narrator joins Saadabay and others who arrive at the scene. Rebels and imperial soldiers engage in repeated fighting, and weapons are rapidly taken and redistributed in the chaos. The situation becomes increasingly uncontrollable as gunfire spreads across the area. Eventually, people scatter in all directions—some fleeing toward the lake, others escaping into the

mountains. The region falls into disorder, marking the collapse of safety, authority, and social stability during the uprising.

Brotherly Reunion and Loss Kara Togolok receives his party membership document at the barracks and feels deep joy. Soon after, he reunites with his elder brother Moldaly, who has come searching for him after a long separation. They embrace emotionally and share news of their family's difficult migration during Kara Togolok's absence. Moldaly appears seriously ill, suffering from a chest disease and coughing blood. Despite Kara Togolok's insistence on taking him to a hospital, Moldaly refuses and chooses to return home. He leaves by wagon toward Bystrovka v. Later, Kara Togolok learns with deep sorrow that Moldaly dies on the road before arriving, causing lasting grief.

Kara Togolok Finds Work In late February, Kara Togolok decides to find work to support his family and his uncle Jeenbay. He goes to the bazaar but struggles to find suitable work among many Uzbek, Uyghur, and Dungan workers. He feels proud of his Red Army uniform and refuses low jobs that do not fit his status. Later, he visits an apothecary but does not find work there. Finally, he is advised to see Jainak, a militia officer. Jainak takes him to the militia chief Istomin. After checking his party document, Istomin approves him for service and accepts him into the militia.

New Work, Loss, and Study Opportunity Kara Togolok works as a militia guard in the city, doing patrols and duties. During service, he meets former acquaintances and faces moral choices, including releasing small-time offenders out of sympathy. Later, he is falsely reported by a colleague and loses his job again. After this, he is assigned to work at a road construction department as a guard. While working there, he learns about a scholarship sending two students to Tashkent, including one Kyrgyz. Excited, he applies. With the help of a local organizer, he is accepted because he is a party member and selected for study.

Kara Togolok: Leaving for Tashkent Kara Togolok, decides to go to Tashkent to study. He visits his relatives in Bystrovka before leaving. His uncle Jeenbay and younger brothers are very happy to see him. They support his plan to study, even though the family is poor and struggles for food. One brother begs in the village to survive. Kara Togolok says goodbye to his family and also visits his teacher Rovnyagin, who gives him advice and blessings. With their support and hope, he prepares for the journey. He leaves Bystrovka village determined to study, become educated, and build a better future for himself there.

Study and Early Soviet Life Kara Togolok studies in a six-month Soviet-party course in Tashkent with two Kyrgyz classmates, Jumadyl and Kojokan. They read newspapers, write poems, and discuss new ideas about education and society. He attends meetings and hears speeches from Soviet leaders. Later, their group helps organize a Komsomol youth union in a Kyrgyz-Kazakh education institute. They participate in youth activities and political discussions. Kara Togolok becomes involved in early Soviet youth movements and witnesses the formation of new political and educational structures in the region.

From Course to New Assignments (Kara Togolok as Narrator) Kara Togolok describes arriving in Tashkent during celebrations and joining a labor demonstration with Red Army units. They work together on public tasks like repairing roads and bridges under Frunze's leadership. After completing a six-month Soviet party course, students are sent to different regions. Kara Togolok is assigned to Alma-Ata for Komsomol work. On the way, he passes through Pishpek and Tokmok, learns his brother is in a children's home, and visits friends and mentors. He meets old acquaintances, reflects on changes brought by the revolution, and prepares to begin new duties in youth organization work.

Death of the Uncle Jeenbay Kara Togolok travels through villages on his way to Alma-Ata. He learns that his uncle has died and visits the family, where he shares their grief and comforts his aunt. After finishing his course in Tashkent, he continues his journey. On the road, he faces difficulties and briefly loses his horse after a conflict with a Kazakh youth. Later, he arrives at a settlement and meets his old friend Musulmankul, who now serves as a militia officer. Musulmankul welcomes him, resolves the situation, and introduces him to his wife Sonya and their child. After the reunion, Kara Togolok continues safely toward Alma-Ata.

Kara Togolok's Encounters Kara Togolok studies at a teachers' course, where Galymuratbayev leads the program with support from Furmanov. After completing his studies, he is sent to work in the villages of the region as part of the new revolutionary education system. Soon, political unrest spreads across the area, and he becomes involved in Komsomol and military-related duties. He travels through different parts of Central Asia, witnessing uprisings, changes in power, and the hardships of ordinary people. During his journey, he meets his old acquaintances and hears about their lives, including Saadabay and other villagers who have returned to their homeland after difficult years of exile. He also learns about Maria and the refugees who suffered during the migrations to China in 1916. Kara Togolok later reunites with his friends Musulmankul and Sonya, sharing memories of their struggles and survival. After these encounters, he continues his journey toward Alma-Ata, dedicating himself to public service and youth work in the new society.

Kara Togolok in Naryn and Kochkor Kara Togolok arrives in Naryn and begins working with local leaders to organize youth activities. With comrades, he helps establish the first Komsomol organization in the city. He travels to At-Bashy and other villages, holding meetings and explaining the goals of the new youth movement. He works closely with young people of different nationalities and builds local committees. Later, he continues organizing in Kochkor, where more youth groups are formed. He meets old friends like Bialy Isakeev and discusses political events, including conflicts in Bukhara. After completing his missions, he returns to Naryn, where revolutionary successes are celebrated.

The Tashkent Studies Kara Togolok travels to Tashkent to continue his education. Because he arrives late, he is not admitted to the main institute and instead joins a teacher training course. His friends are already studying there, but his young son Abdybek is left with a family in the old city, which worries him deeply. Later, he manages to bring his son back and enrolls him in a primary school at the institute. He settles in a dormitory and continues his studies. During this time, he meets Kazakh student Ilyas, whose writings about social injustice strongly influence Kara Togolok's own literary thinking.

The Tokmok Military Incident In the early years of the revolution, confusion arose among the Red Army soldiers in Tokmok. Some refused orders to move to Naryn, while others settled in the town, married local women, and lost discipline. Mustafa Yangulov, Eichmans, and Commander Petrov arrived and held a meeting to resolve the situation. At first, the soldiers resisted and argued, but after explanations and discussion, they began to understand the importance of discipline. Eventually, they agreed to follow orders. The regiment moved toward Naryn, while the Tatar brigade entered the city. The conflict was resolved peacefully without bloodshed.

Meeting in Tokmok and New Assignment Mustafa Yangulov arrives in Tokmok and meets Jainak. They continue explaining and checking the land and water reforms among the people. While they are in the city, a man named Kotlyarov comes and criticizes the reforms, demanding that the land be returned. He claims to be a famous craftsman, but his behavior raises suspicion. The Cheka detains him and reveals that he is actually a bandit and enemy agent. Later, Yangulov and Jainak continue their work in other villages. One of the characters is sent to the mountains to work, teach children, and recover in a healthier environment.

Meeting Sakyp Jamal Kara Togolok travels through villages and a summer pasture while preparing to leave for studies. He teaches children, helps villagers, and receives livestock in gratitude, which he exchanges for a horse. On the road, he hears news of friends and past companions. He stops at different places looking for relatives and acquaintances. Many have moved or changed their lives. Finally, he meets Sakyp Jamal in a remote yurt. She tells him about her difficult life, losses, and she is married again by force. They share memories and sadness. Kara Togolok comforts her and promises help in the future. After their emotional meeting, he continues his journey by horse toward his destination.

The Tragic Journey of Sakyp Jamal Kara Togolok arrives in Alma-Ata, worried about Sakyp Jamal, a woman he tries to rescue from a forced marriage. He seeks help from officials and travels back to find her. On the way, he hears about a funeral and learns it is her. Shocked, he goes to her grave and mourns deeply, remembering their childhood and shared struggles. He meets her relatives and learns she

had suffered greatly after being forced into another marriage and later falling ill. Sakyp Jamal had died before he could save her. In the end, he returns to Alma-Ata alone, full of grief and regret.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kara Togolok

Kara Togolok is the central character and narrator of *The Difficult Passage*, an autobiographical novella by Kasymaly Bayalinov. Through his life story, the reader witnesses the hardships of early twentieth century Kyrgyz society, including exile, hunger, injustice, and revolution. Beginning as a vulnerable village boy, Kara Togolok gradually transforms into a conscious Soviet citizen, soldier, and advocate of education. His character represents both an individual journey and the broader awakening of a people during a time of profound social change.

Resilient Kara Togolok's resilience is one of his most defining qualities. From childhood, he faces relentless hardship, including the trauma of the 1916 uprising, exile to China, starvation, and the loss of livestock and shelter. He works in degrading conditions, carries heavy firewood to the bazaar, and survives physical violence, including being struck by Anton. He experiences betrayal, such as Ysrail stealing his horse, and mourns the deaths of loved ones like Moldaly and Sakyp Jamal. Despite hunger, fear, and emotional pain, he refuses to surrender to despair. Each setback strengthens his determination to survive and continue forward.

Responsible Even as a young boy, Kara Togolok carries responsibilities beyond his years. After his stepmother leaves and the family faces starvation, he takes it upon himself to find food and income. At Semiz Bel, when children cling to him crying for bread, he risks traveling alone into dangerous territory to seek work among strangers. He labors for Tokson herding yaks and for Anton splitting wood, enduring exhaustion for the sake of his relatives. He repeatedly returns to Eski Beket to obtain dried bread for his starving family. His actions reveal a deep sense of duty and self-sacrifice.

Compassionate Kara Togolok's compassion shapes many of his choices. He feels deep sorrow for Sakyp Jamal's forced marriage and listens helplessly as she confesses her misery. He sympathizes with starving refugees in the bazaar, especially the old man forced to sell his granddaughter. When he works as a militia guard, he sometimes releases minor offenders out of pity. He grieves sincerely for his dying brother Moldaly and mourns Sakyp Jamal at her grave. His empathy extends beyond his family to all oppressed and suffering people, reinforcing his later commitment to social equality and justice.

Determined to Learn Kara Togolok's hunger for education mirrors his physical hunger during exile. As a child in Kok Moynok, he eagerly learns the alphabet from a Russian teacher despite lacking proper schooling. Even after years of disruption caused by war and poverty, he seeks out his former teacher Rovnyagin in Tokmok. Though embarrassed when younger children laugh at him in school, he still attempts to continue his studies. Later, he attends courses in Tashkent, joins discussions about literature and politics, and participates in organizing youth education.

Ideologically Evolving Kara Togolok's ideological development reflects both personal growth and historical change. Initially, he is simply a refugee struggling to survive under feudal oppression. Encounters with Red Army soldiers expose him to new ideas about equality, Lenin, and Soviet power. He listens carefully at political meetings and gradually embraces Bolshevik ideals. Joining the Communist Party marks a turning point in his life. He becomes active in Komsomol organizations, youth education, and public service. His transformation from powerless villager to politically conscious participant in revolutionary change illustrates his belief that socialism offers justice, opportunity, and dignity for the oppressed.

Parallels: Kara Togolok and Taabaldy Jukeev Pudovkin: A Comparison

Kara Togolok from *The Difficult Passage* by Kasymaly Bayalinov and Taabaldy Jukeev Pudovkin from the novel *Taabaldy Pudovkin*, written by Kasymaly Bekenov are strikingly similar figures in Kyrgyz literature because both represent poor Kyrgyz boys who rise from suffering and oppression into politically

conscious revolutionaries. Their stories are deeply connected to social transformation in Central Asia under Russian imperialism and later Soviet rule.

Both characters begin life in poverty and hardship. Kara Togolok experiences exile, hunger, displacement, and the collapse of his family during the 1916 uprising. Taabaldy, meanwhile, grows up as an orphan and suffers exploitation under wealthy landlords like Egor. Both endure humiliation, hard labor, and hunger while still very young. They work for cruel employers who exploit poor workers without mercy.

Education and political awakening become turning points for both. Kara Togolok eagerly studies with Russian teachers and later joins Soviet political education programs. Taabaldy learns to read from Valya and becomes involved in underground revolutionary circles in Tashkent. Through contact with workers and revolutionaries, both characters develop class consciousness and begin believing in equality and justice.

Another parallel is their transformation into Soviet activists. Kara Togolok joins the Red Army, Kom-somol, and Communist Party, later helping organize youth movements in Kyrgyz villages. Taabaldy becomes a revolutionary organizer, spreads leaflets, survives imprisonment and exile, and eventually serves as a Red Army commander and political commissar.

However, there are also differences. Kara Togolok's story is more autobiographical and emotionally focused on family survival, exile, and personal memory.

Taabaldy's narrative is more overtly revolutionary and political, emphasizing underground activism, imprisonment, strikes, and class struggle. Kara Togolok represents gradual awakening through lived suffering, while Taabaldy embodies organized revolutionary resistance.

Together, both characters symbolize the emergence of a new Kyrgyz Soviet identity from poverty, injustice, and historical upheaval.

Sakyp Jamal

Sakyp Jamal is not only an individual character but also a tragic symbol of oppressed Kyrgyz women under the feudal order. Her life is controlled by men who treat her as property exchanged for bride price. She loses her freedom, happiness, and eventually her life because society denies her the right to choose her own future. Kara Togolok's inability to save her becomes one of the novella's deepest emotional wounds. Her death later in the story symbolizes the destruction of countless women's lives through forced marriage and patriarchal oppression. Through Sakyp Jamal, Bayalynov criticizes the injustice and cruelty of the old social system.

Intelligent Sakyp Jamal is recognized as the smartest girl in the village, skilled in singing, poetry, and thoughtful conversation. Her intelligence is evident in her awareness of her own tragic situation. When she meets Kara Togolok by the river, she articulates her despair with clarity and emotional depth, understanding precisely why her forced marriage is unjust. Her talents suggest she could have become a respected community member or artist under different circumstances. However, her intelligence becomes a source of additional suffering, as she fully comprehends the injustice being inflicted upon her while remaining powerless to resist it.

Victimized Despite her intelligence and beauty, Sakyp Jamal has no control over her own fate. Her stepfather Aydarkan manap, motivated by greed, makes the decision about her marriage without consulting her wishes. The bride price of five hundred som, two hundred sheep, and forty horses transforms her into a commodity to be traded. At her wedding, she strongly resists, crying and pleading with her mother and the gathered villagers, saying it would be better to die than marry the old man. Yet her resistance is ignored. She is forcibly placed on a horse and carried away while she struggles and cries. This complete lack of agency defines her experience as a woman in feudal society.

Vulnerable Sakyp Jamal's emotional depth makes her tragedy particularly moving. When Kara Togolok finds her crying by the river, she sings sadly about her fate, expressing her pain through traditional forms of expression. She confesses her hopelessness to her childhood friend, asking him to take her away and save her. Her vulnerability is not weakness but honesty about the human cost of injustice. She openly expresses her fear, anger, and despair, refusing to accept her fate silently. Her tears at the wedding and her pleas reveal a young woman fully aware of the tragedy unfolding and desperate for escape, yet ultimately trapped by forces beyond her control.

Tragic Sakyp Jamal's story ends in death. After being forcibly married to Tabyldy, her life becomes miserable. Years later, when Kara Togolok finally finds her in a remote yurt, she tells him about her suffering through multiple forced marriages and hardships. She has endured physical and emotional abuse, loss, and illness. By the time Kara Togolok attempts to rescue her, it is too late. He learns of her death and visits her grave, mourning deeply. Her death symbolizes the human cost of feudal patriarchal oppression and becomes a defining moment in Kara Togolok's moral awakening. Her tragic fate haunts him throughout his journey and strengthens his commitment to social justice.

Seyilkan

Seyilkan symbolizes the traditional Kyrgyz values of kinship, collective responsibility, and family solidarity. She believes strongly that divided families become weak and vulnerable, especially during times of social collapse. This belief shapes many important decisions in the novella, including the family's choice to travel and survive together. Her authority comes not from wealth or force, but from respect earned through experience, sacrifice, and care for others. Even younger generations accept her leadership naturally. Through Seyilkan, Bayalinov presents the extended family structure as a vital source of protection and survival, particularly during exile, hunger, and political upheaval.

Resilient Seyilkan represents the resilience of Kyrgyz women and families during historical catastrophe. While major historical events (the 1916 uprising, exile, revolution) dominate the narrative, it is Seyilkan's daily decisions and moral strength that allow the family to survive these upheavals. She embodies the collective strength of ordinary women whose contributions to survival are often unrecognized in official histories focused on male leaders and political movements.

Strong Though operating within a patriarchal society, Seyilkan exercises genuine authority and decision-making power. Unlike Sakyp Jamal, who is silenced and destroyed by patriarchal oppression, Seyilkan finds ways to lead and protect despite systemic constraints. Her authority is recognized and respected by men in the family, suggesting that women's strength can persist even under feudal conditions when they demonstrate wisdom and commitment to collective welfare.

Maternal While Kara Togolok's political and ideological development drives the historical narrative, Seyilkan's emotional presence provides its moral foundation. Her tears when the family reunites, her worry for absent family members, and her protection of vulnerable women like Salyima ground the story in human feeling. Through Seyilkan, Bayalinov demonstrates that survival requires not only practical skills and ideological commitment but also emotional bonds and moral values.

Yrsaly

Yrsaly is a powerful local figure who emerges during the chaos following the 1916 uprising and represents the embodiment of exploitation and oppression at the regional level. Unlike feudal masters of the old order, Yrsaly gains wealth and authority not through tradition but by exploiting the disorder of the time, aligning himself with Russian authorities, seizing livestock from vulnerable refugees, and intimidating displaced Kyrgyz families. He commands armed men, controls territory around Ak-Long and the eastern valley, and uses violence and fear to maintain dominance. His character illustrates how the collapse of old structures creates space for new forms of tyranny and exploitation that prey upon the most vulnerable.

Violent Yrsaly maintains power through calculated brutality and the threat of force. He commands armed men who pursue Kara Togolok's family relentlessly, searching valleys and riversides with guns. When the family steals a calf from his herd to survive starvation, Yrsaly's armed men arrive with weapons, forcing the family to flee into the mountains while gunshots ring out. Yrsaly personally hunts Kara Togolok, chasing him across the Kok-Moynok River at night, his voice echoing in the darkness. His violence is not spontaneous but systematic, designed to terrorize the refugee population into submission. He uses force not merely to punish theft but to consolidate power and discourage resistance.

Parasitic Yrsaly represents a new class of exploiter who emerges from chaos rather than inheriting traditional authority. He did not gain wealth through fair work but by "taking advantage of the disorder of the time, aligning himself with Russian authorities, seizing livestock, and intimidating Kyrgyz families who did not flee to China." He exploits the vulnerability of displaced refugees who have lost everything and depend on him for survival. He controls territory strategically, avoiding open conflict with other powers while dominating the surrounding area through superior force. His parasitic nature is evident in how he feeds upon the suffering of others, growing richer as refugees grow poorer. He represents capitalism in its most predatory form.

Authoritarian Yrsaly exercises near-absolute control over his territory through a combination of armed force, local connections, and strategic alliances with Russian authorities. "People avoid confronting him" because they understand the futility of resistance. His power is not democratic or consensual but imposed through fear. He dictates who can work, what animals can be herded, and what prices will be paid. His control extends into daily life: families cannot move freely, cannot gather food without permission, cannot even own animals without risk of seizure. His authoritarianism creates a climate of constant surveillance and fear, where people must watch their words and movements carefully to avoid attracting his attention and violent retribution.

Cold Unlike impulsive villains, Yrsaly is strategically intelligent and methodical. He does not rage irrationally but pursues his interests with calculation. He carefully maintains alliances with Russian authorities to protect his position, knowing that official backing strengthens his control. He pursues Kara Togolok's family not out of personal anger but because they represent resistance to his authority and a threat to his power. He uses armed searches systematically, checking yurts, following footprints, and inspecting valleys methodically. His coldness makes him more dangerous than a passionate oppressor because his actions are premeditated and purposeful. He views human beings as obstacles to eliminate or resources to exploit, not as individuals deserving compassion or consideration.

THEMES

Family and Kinship: Family and kinship form one of the emotional foundations of *The Difficult Passage*. The novella shows how extended family bonds become a source of survival during times of extreme hardship. Kara Togolok does not grow up in a small nuclear household but within a large traditional Kyrgyz family structure. He lives alongside his elder brother Moldaly, his younger brother Abdybek, and his paternal cousin Jeenbay. Jeenbay's mother Seyilkan acts as the moral center of the group, while Jeenbay's young son Idris represents the fragile future they are trying to protect. The two related families share food, labor, and responsibility, which reflects the traditional Kyrgyz custom of extended families living together.

During exile in China, this unity becomes essential. When food runs out and hunger weakens everyone, they combine their efforts. The men carry firewood to the bazaar, the women struggle to maintain shelter, and Seyilkan makes key decisions about where and when to move. Later, when Yrsaly's armed men threaten them, the family flees together at night, crossing the freezing river and hiding in the mountains. No one is left behind. Even in moments of disagreement, such as decisions about migration or work, unity remains the priority.

The novella shows that survival depends not only on individual strength but on collective support. This tradition of extended family solidarity, vividly portrayed in the narrative, continues to characterize village life in Kyrgyzstan today.

Illustrative moment: Kara Togolok returns to the mountain camp after days away searching for food. The children are weak and frightened, and Seyilkan anxiously watches the path, fearing he may have died. When he finally appears carrying dried bread, the family gathers around him in relief. The children eagerly share the small pieces, and even in hunger, they divide the food carefully so everyone receives something. Soon after, his brothers return with a stolen cow, and together they slaughter it and cook the meat. For a brief night, the reunited family eats together, united by hardship and shared survival.

Education: The Power of Education and Self-Improvement Throughout the novella, Kara Togolok repeatedly seeks opportunities to learn despite poverty, displacement, hunger, and social instability. His strong desire for knowledge reflects both personal ambition and the growing importance of education

in a changing society. As a child in Kok- Moynok village, Kara Togolok dreams of studying, but there is no school available for Kyrgyz children.

His first chance comes when his cousin Jeenbay takes him to a Russian teacher named Nikolay, who teaches him the Russian alphabet and language. Kara Togolok studies eagerly and learns quickly, showing natural curiosity and determination. His friend Baryktabas also joins him, but poverty forces Baryktabas to leave school because his family cannot provide the money and supplies demanded by relatives.

Even after exile and years of hardship, Kara Togolok never abandons his wish to study. Later, after joining the Red Army and becoming involved in Soviet political life, he begins thinking seriously about education again. He reunites with his former teacher Rovnyagin, who encourages him to continue learning. Inspired, Kara Togolok enters school in Tokmok. Although younger students laugh at him because of his age, he continues trying to study. Eventually, embarrassment forces him to leave, but his desire for education remains strong.

A major turning point comes when he receives the opportunity to study in Tashkent. There, he attends Soviet party courses, reads newspapers, participates in discussions, and joins youth organizations. Education gives him confidence, political awareness, and a sense of purpose. He later works in Komsomol organizations and educational programs in different regions. Through his own experiences, Bayalynov presents education as more than simple literacy or schooling. In the autobiographical novella, education becomes a path toward dignity, social mobility, political participation, and personal transformation in the new Soviet era.

Illustrative moment: Kara Togolok reunites with his former teacher Rovnyagin in Tokmok. After years of exile, hunger, and wandering, he visits the school and sees children studying in classrooms. Rovnyagin recognizes him, warmly welcomes him, and encourages him to continue his education. Inspired, Kara Togolok joins the school despite being much older than the other students. Although the younger children laugh at him and make him feel embarrassed, he still tries to study because he believes education can change his life. This moment reflects his deep determination to overcome hardship through learning.

Politics: *The Tragedy of 1916* One of the central themes in *The Difficult Passage* is the tragedy of the 1916 Central Asian uprising and its devastating consequences for the Kyrgyz people. Through Kara Togolok's personal memories, the novella vividly portrays the fear, chaos, displacement, and suffering that followed the revolt against Tsarist Russia. Bayalynov presents these events not as distant history, but as lived human experience filled with pain and loss.

The tragedy begins when news spreads that Kyrgyz people have risen against the Tsar and Russian troops are approaching. Panic quickly overtakes the villages. Families abandon their homes, gather what little they can carry, and flee toward the mountains. Kara Togolok's village is thrown into confusion as people desperately try to survive. During this period, he briefly reunites with Sakyp Jamal, who tearfully tells him about her miserable life and asks him to take her away. However, the chaos of the uprising separates them once again.

The journey into exile is one of the most painful parts of the novella. Thousands of Kyrgyz refugees flee toward China through dangerous mountain passes. Along the way, families lose livestock, possessions, and loved ones. Many animals die from exhaustion or poisonous grass, leaving refugees without food or transport. Near Uch Turpan, Kara Togolok's family is forced to live in dirty sheds rented from the wealthy Uyghur landlord Sabitakhun. Hunger becomes constant. People sell their last belongings, children cry from starvation, and refugees perform exhausting labor simply to survive.

Illustrative moment: At the bazaar in China, Kara Togolok witnesses starving people begging for food and an old Kyrgyz man forced to sell his young granddaughter because he can no longer feed her. The child is treated as property and passed from one wealthy man to another.

Through these scenes, the novella reveals the enormous human cost of the 1916 uprising. Bayalynov portrays exile not only as physical displacement, but as a national catastrophe that destroyed families, dignity, and traditional ways of life.

Change: *Personal and Societal Transition* Through the life of Kara Togolok, the novella traces the transformation of a poor, displaced village boy into an educated and politically active Soviet citizen. At the same time, it portrays the broader historical transition of Kyrgyz society from a feudal order dominated

by manaps, mullahs, and wealthy landowners to the new socialist system that emerged after the Russian Revolution.

At the beginning of the novella, Kara Togolok lives in a traditional Kyrgyz village where power belongs to rich and influential figures such as Aydarkan manap, Yrsaly, and other local authorities. Ordinary people suffer from inequality, forced marriages, exploitation, and fear. Sakyp Jamal's tragic fate clearly reflects this feudal social structure. Although she is intelligent and talented, her stepfather forces her to marry an old man in exchange for bride price. Her wishes and freedom have no value in a society controlled by patriarchal customs and wealth.

Kara Togolok himself begins life in poverty and without education. There is no school in his village, and his first lessons come from a Russian teacher, Nikolay. Even this small opportunity is interrupted by the 1916 uprising and exile. For many years he survives through hard labor, working for wealthy men such as Tokson and Anton, who exploit refugees and poor workers.

A major turning point comes with the fall of the Tsar and the arrival of Soviet power. Kara Togolok joins the Red Army, where he receives food, clothing, and a sense of belonging for the first time. Soldiers explain revolutionary ideas to him, and he becomes inspired by promises of equality and justice. Later, he joins the Communist Party, works in youth organizations, and studies in Tashkent. Education, once impossible for him, becomes central to his new life.

Illustrative moment: Kara Togolok joins the Red Army in Tokmok. After years of exile, hunger, and exploitation, he is finally treated with dignity. The soldiers share food, clothing, and shelter with him and explain the ideas of the October Revolution and equality under Soviet rule. Inspired, Kara Togolok joins the Communist Party and begins participating in political meetings. Soon afterward, he enters school despite being older than the other students. This moment symbolizes his transformation from an uneducated refugee boy into a politically conscious young man and reflects the broader shift of Kyrgyz society from feudal inequality to socialism.

Survival and Resilience: One of the most powerful themes in *The Difficult Passage* is survival and resilience. Through Kara Togolok's eyes, the reader witnesses the extraordinary ability of ordinary Kyrgyz people to endure unimaginable hardship, displacement, and suffering during and after the 1916 uprising.

After fleeing to China, the family's situation becomes desperate. They lose most of their livestock on the journey, and the few animals that survive die after eating poisonous grass. With nothing left, they are forced to live in filthy cowsheds and calf sheds rented from a wealthy Uyghur man named Sabitakhun. The conditions are dehumanizing. Later, when Kara Togolok's stepmother leaves again, the family faces starvation. The younger brother cries constantly for his mother while the rest of the family sells their last belongings to survive the bitter winter. In spring, hunger weakens everyone. To pay rent and feed the family, young Kara Togolok performs backbreaking labor, carrying heavy loads of firewood to the bazaar alongside Jeenbay and other refugees. Meanwhile, Sabitakhun grows rich exploiting their cheap labor.

The theme deepens during their return from exile. In Kok-Moynok, the family lives in extreme poverty, surviving by hunting small animals and setting traps for birds and foxes. When Yrsaly's armed men hunt them for stealing a calf, they flee into the mountains at night, crossing the freezing Kochkor River. Seyilkan falls into the water but is saved with a rope. They hide in fear as armed riders search the valleys. At Semiz Bel pasture, food runs out completely. The children cling to Kara Togolok, begging for bread as he prepares to descend the mountain alone to find work among Kazakh herders.

Despite constant hunger, injury, betrayal, and the death of loved ones, Kara Togolok never gives up. His determination to support his family, his willingness to take any job from herding yaks for Tokson to splitting wood for Anton, and the family's collective strength under Seyilkan's guidance illustrate remarkable human resilience.

Illustrative moment: The family escapes from Yrsaly's men after they are accused of stealing a calf. Realizing they are no longer safe in Kok-Moynok, the family flees at night toward the mountains. They must cross the freezing Kochkor River with children, horses, and an old donkey while armed men search for them nearby. During the crossing, Seyilkan falls into the strong current and is nearly swept away, but the family manages to rescue her with a rope. Exhausted and terrified, they hide silently in a valley while Yrsaly's riders search the abandoned settlements and riverbanks.