

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Feruza Shermatova-Omerani, Ph.D.

BATIYNA (1962)

Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997)

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OVERVIEW

Author

Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997) was a Kyrgyz writer born in Keng-Suu, in present-day Issyk-Kul Region. Because his official birth date was unknown, he later chose May 14 as his birthday through a family tradition involving his daughter selecting a date at random.

He studied at the Agricultural Technical School in Frunze (1928–1931) and later at the Central Asian Veterinary Institute in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. He worked at the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* (1931–1936), served as a consultant for the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1937–1947), and worked as an editor at *Kyrgyz mambas* publishing house (1949–1951).

In the Soviet period, he was labeled a “nationalist writer,” but his earlier Stalin Prize recognition limited political repression against him. He supported objective study of Kyrgyz history, promoted the development of the Kyrgyz language, and openly criticized official shortcomings, leading some scholars to describe him as a Soviet-era Kyrgyz dissident.

Sydykbekov remained a major figure in Kyrgyz literature for nearly seventy years and died in Bishkek on July 19, 1997.

Literary career

He began his literary career as a poet. His first poem, *Who Are These People? (Bular Kimder?)*, was published in the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* on May 1, 1930. Soon afterward, he wrote *The Old Komuz Player (Chal Komuzchu)*, which appeared in the magazine *Chabuul*. His first poetry collection, *Struggle (Kurosh)*, was published in 1933, followed by *Heroes (Baatylar)*, 1936) and *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938). During this period, he also began working actively in prose.

Like many writers of his generation, Sydykbekov’s early works reflected social changes in Kyrgyz society, including the new socialist system, labor, and changing social relations.

In 1937–1938, his novel *Keng-Suu (Keng-Suu)* was published in two volumes, becoming one of the first novels in Kyrgyz literature. In the 1950s, he revised it and republished it as *In the Mountains (Too Arasynda)*, with volumes appearing in 1955 and 1958.

During this period, he also wrote *Poet-Nightingale (Akyn-Bulbul)*, 1938), the essay *Ala-Toodon Je-too* (1939), the poem *News from the Night Watchman (Tun Jarchysynan Kabar)*, 1939), and the verse tale *The Greedy Father (Ach Koz Ata)*, 1940).

His collection of stories *During the War Days (Sogush Kundorundo)*, 1943) reflects wartime unity and patriotism during World War II.

Between 1938 and 1940, he wrote the novel *Temir (Temir)*, published in 1946, depicting the establishment of Soviet power in southern Kyrgyzstan.

His novel *The People of Our Time* (*Bizdin Zamandyn Kishileri*, 1948) marked a major stage in his career. It was first published in *Sovetskii Kirgizstan* (*Ala-Too*) and later in Moscow in Russian. In 1949, it received the Stalin Prize, making him one of the leading Kyrgyz writers.

After the war, he contributed to children's literature with *Mountain Children* (*Too Baldary*, 1953). Later, after *In the Mountains*, he wrote the major novel *Women* (*Zaiyptar*). Its first part, *Batiyna*, was published in 1962, and the complete version, including *Mountain Pass* (*Ashuu*), appeared in 1966.

His later works include *Friends* (*Kurbular*) and *Confession* (*Syr Achuu*, 1977), focusing on youth, and *Yimanbay's Character* (*Yimanbay Peyili*, 1980), which continues a character from *Among the Mountains* (*Too Arasynda*).

In his autobiographical works *The Road* (*Jol*, 1982) and *Over the Mountain Passes* (*Bel-Beleste*, 1996), he reflects on his life and experiences.

Novel

The author wrote *Women* (*Zaiyptar*), a novel rooted in the pre-revolutionary life of the Kyrgyz people. He published the first book, *Batiyna*, in 1962, and released the complete version together with its second part, *The Pass* (*Ashuu*), in 1966. The first part of the novel traces the fates of women, revealing the powerless and unequal condition of Kyrgyz women under the oppressive patriarchal and feudal social order. This essay is based on the Russian translation of the novel by M. Chechakovsky, published in 1972.

Background

The novel is set in a period where a woman's fate was held entirely in the hands of clans and wealthy landlords. In pre-revolutionary Kyrgyz society, powerful landlords dictated social order through a patriarchal system that treated marriage as a financial or political tool.

Women were essentially commodities used to settle debts, bridge clan rivalries, or consolidate wealth. This is exemplified by "snuff-bride" pacts and the *kalym* (bride price), which allowed the rich to exploit the poor, turning young girls like Batiyna into assets of a landlord's estate.

Justice was dictated by customary law (*adat*), which favored lineage and livestock over individual rights. A poor hunter had no standing against a wealthy landlord in tribal courts; thus, women had no protection from abuse or forced marriage.

This feudal structure was only shattered by the 1916 Uprising and the catastrophic "Exodus" to China, which decimated the clans' traditional power.

The subsequent Bolshevik Revolution introduced a radical shift, offering women legal personhood for the first time. By banning forced marriages and promoting literacy, the new Soviet power gave women the right to choose their own fate for the first time.

Batiyna's choice to wear the red headscarf became a powerful symbol of this new era, representing her courage to reclaim her identity and speak with her own voice.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Batiyna - resilient protagonist and revolutionary advocate for women's freedom

Kazak - honest hunter father forced to trade his daughter to settle debts

Abdyrahman (Elder) - grandfather whose "snuff-bride" pact caused the family's suffering

Abdyrahman (Younger) - abusive first husband and son of the landlord Adyke

Adyke - wealthy antagonist who uses corrupt courts to exploit the poor

Alymbay - clumsy second husband and son of Asantay who eventually stabs Batiyna

Asantay - elderly clan leader who takes a teenage girl as his bride

Gulsun - young child bride who dies tragically in childbirth

Abyl - Batiyna's first love representing a life lost to rigid tradition

Yakimenko - Soviet soldier who protects Batiyna and encourages her rebellion

Kachyke - village head who aids Batiyna's literacy and political activism

Kanymbubu - young girl sold for a lambskin debt and saved by Batiyna

Serkebay - powerful elder who masterminds the violent opposition to Batiyna
Salkynay - Adyke's cruel second wife who torments Batiyna in her first home

SYNOPSIS

The story begins with Abdyrahman, an old hunter who once lived among wealthy Kazakh families and later becomes dependent on the landlord Satylgan. They establish a marriage agreement concerning their future grandchildren. After both Abdyrahman and Satylgan die, their sons Kazak and Adyke inherit the consequences of this agreement.

Kazak raises his daughter Batiyna in poverty. Adyke refuses to honor the old agreement, and Kazak is humiliated when he tries to claim it.

Batiyna grows up and is forced into her first marriage through custom and family pressure to Abdyrahman, the son of Adyke. In his household she is humiliated, her dowry is insulted, and she is treated as a servant under control of in-laws. Batiyna escapes from her first marriage and leaves the oppressive household. Kazak is later ordered to pay heavy compensation to Adyke after legal disputes.

Because of this compensation burden, Batiyna agrees to marry Alymbay, a cold, indifferent, and uneducated man. This becomes her second marriage. In Alymbay's household she again lives under restriction and emotional neglect.

Batiyna shares experiences of oppression with other women, including Gulsun, Gulbubu, and Kanymbubu, who suffer forced marriages, abduction, and violence. The women support each other.

Violence escalates, leading to an uprising against tsarist oppression and massacres. A mass flight begins toward China. Batiyna travels with refugees, helping them survive hunger, cold, and death. Refugees reach Central Asian cities and face hardship.

Batiyna meets Abyl again during displacement.

After years of exile, refugees return. With new political power, Batiyna rejects the old order and turns toward education and women's emancipation. She leaves for Moscow to attend a Congress of Women of the East.

SCENES

Abdyrahman's Life

The Hunter's Fate and the Illusion of Protection Abdyrahman, once a skillful hunter, spent his youth among Kazakh rich people, where he was respected for his precision and strength. However, he was exploited and eventually returned to his own people. In old age, he settled near the rich landlord Satylgan, hoping for protection. His son Kazak became a strong hunter like him. When Kazak offered game to the landlord, Satylgan responded with flattering blessings, while quietly benefiting from their dependence, revealing the hidden inequality behind his apparent generosity.

A Marriage Pact between Unequal People Abdyrahman entertained the wealthy man Satylgan with stories while his son Kazak prepared a hunted argali. Impressed by Kazak's skill but motivated by self-interest, Satylgan proposed a marriage agreement between their unborn grandchildren. If Abdyrahman son Kazak's future child were a girl, the bride price would be paid with the hunter's game; if Satylgan's grandchild were a girl, his contribution would be nothing more than a pinch of *nasvai*. Believing the proposal to be an honor, Abdyrahman accepted the oath with gratitude. Convinced that fate had elevated his family's status, he returned home filled with hope, unaware that the unequal agreement already favored the powerful landlord.

A Broken Promise of Kinship Proud of his new relationship with the wealthy man Satylgan, Abdyrahman constantly reminded his family to honor their future in-laws. After both elders died, Kazak trusted that the marriage agreement between their children would still be respected. Years later, he visited Adyke, Satylgan's son, expecting to be welcomed as a relative. Instead, he found a wealthy household where he was treated with cold indifference. Adyke, now the head of the family, barely acknowledged him, despite

the oath sworn by their fathers. The contrast between Kazak's humble life and Adyke's growing wealth revealed that social status had outweighed kinship and honor.

Kazak's Humiliation at His In-Laws' Camp Kazak visited Adyke to remind him of the marriage agreement their fathers had sworn years earlier. Although Seyilkan welcomed him politely, Adyke treated him with cold arrogance and showed little respect for their kinship. Kazak introduced his seven-year-old daughter, Batiyna, as the promised bride and asked to meet his future son-in-law. Adyke mockingly replied that Kazak had already received the bride price and would have to bring his daughter to the groom himself. Humiliated but determined to uphold his father's oath, Kazak left gifts behind and returned home convinced that wealth had replaced honor and justice.

Batiyna's Childhood and Family Life

Batiyna's Poverty and Quiet Dignity Batiyna grew up in a poor hunter's family where hard work, kindness, and honesty mattered more than wealth. Her parents struggled to provide for their children, while her mother worked tirelessly to earn enough for Batiyna's future. Although Batiyna excelled in sewing, singing, and traditional games, her worn clothing made her the target of ridicule from wealthy girls, eventually forcing her to withdraw from social gatherings. Despite the humiliation, she never complained or blamed her parents.

Waiting for a Promise to Be Fulfilled Batiyna grew up learning that dignity, hard work, and kindness mattered more than wealth. Her mother, Tattygul, taught her the skills and virtues expected of a good wife while quietly fearing the hardships awaiting married women. Although Batiyna had long been promised to Adyke's son, no messengers or bride price ever arrived after the deaths of the elders who arranged the match. Meanwhile, Adyke remarried and ignored his obligations. As Batiyna reached marriageable age, her parents became increasingly anxious, knowing they could neither break the engagement nor secure another husband without violating tradition. Eventually, Kazak decided to visit Adyke himself again for the second time.

The Humiliation of Kazak Salkynay, the proud daughter of the powerful manap Karaberk, became Adyke's second wife after Seyilkan's death. Raised like a son, she despised domestic work and looked down on poor families. She regarded Kazak's daughter as unworthy of marrying her stepson and encouraged Adyke to ignore the old betrothal. When Kazak visited to request either the promised bride-price or his daughter's release, Adyke mocked him, claiming that a pinch of snuff given years earlier was sufficient payment. Enraged, he ordered his men to tie Kazak to the yurt frame and brutally whip him while everyone watched in silence.

Marriage Agreement and Family Expectations

The Lion's Tail Adyke inherited the arrogance of his noble ancestors, who believed wealth and power placed them above justice. Like his forefathers, he used violence to dominate the poor while hiding behind tradition and ancestral honor. Kazak, although deeply humiliated, remained an honest hunter who valued dignity over wealth. He and his wife worked tirelessly to support their family, hoping Adyke would eventually honor the marriage agreement. Yet no elder dared challenge the powerful landlord. Only one respected elder persuaded Adyke to untie Kazak. The hunter returned home wounded, realizing that, in their society, justice rarely protected the poor against the rich.

The Clan's Response to Adyke's Abuse After Kazak's humiliation, he questioned God's justice, wondering why the innocent suffered while the powerful remained unpunished. His relatives gathered to discuss Adyke's cruelty. Many argued that the marriage agreement should be canceled because Adyke had violated both custom and honor by refusing the bride-price and beating his future in-law. However, the wise elder Sarala urged caution. He warned that wealthy leaders and judges would always side with Adyke, whose influence and riches outweighed justice. Rather than risking the entire clan's safety, Sarala proposed negotiation, believing careful words offered more hope than open confrontation.

Batiyna Questions Her Engagement From childhood, Batiyna faithfully helped her parents with every household task and earned her father's praise for her diligence. Yet after Kazak returned home beaten by

Adyke, she began questioning the marriage arranged without her consent. She wondered why her future had been discussed in terms of bride-price and livestock rather than her own wishes. Although she never blamed her struggling parents openly, the uncertainty left her withdrawn and sorrowful. When her cousin's joyful engagement filled the village with songs and celebrations, Batiyna stayed away, ashamed of her worn clothes. Even Sayra's cheerful encouragement could not ease her tears or quiet her doubts.

Bridewealth Problem and Forced Engagement

The Groom Arrives without Bridewealth As Batiyna reached marriageable age, her parents struggled to prepare a modest bridal outfit from years of savings and hunted furs. Bound by custom, Kazak reluctantly summoned Adyke to claim the bride, although no bridewealth had ever been paid. When the groom finally arrived, he came without ceremony, gifts, or respect for tradition, reflecting Adyke's contempt for the poor family. Batiyna, watching from inside the yurt, was devastated by her future husband's appearance and the humiliating reception. Kazak's anger and Tattygul's quiet consolation revealed a family forced to submit to unequal customs they deeply resented.

Batiyna Accepts an Unwanted Marriage Hidden outside the yurt, Batiyna secretly observed her groom, Abdyrahman, and realized he was nothing like the husband she had imagined. Overwhelmed by despair, she fled into the mountains, where Sayra comforted her and persuaded her to abandon thoughts of suicide for the sake of her parents. Realizing that her family were also victims of custom rather than its architects, Batiyna resolved to endure her fate while preserving her inner freedom. She accepted the marriage to spare her parents disgrace, refused a public wedding celebration, and prepared to leave despite knowing she would enter an unhappy household.

Batiyna and Abyl's Secret Promise At autumn gatherings, Batiyna briefly escaped her sorrow by singing on the village swings, while Sayra carefully protected her from unwanted attention. Beneath this appearance of ordinary celebration, Batiyna secretly met Abyl, the young man she truly loved. Hidden beside their favorite spring, they pledged never to abandon each other despite her arranged marriage to Abdyrahman. Abyl promised to find a way to free her without bringing disaster upon her family, while Batiyna resolved to endure the marriage only temporarily before escaping. Their farewell transformed despair into determination, binding them together through hope rather than surrender.

The Hunter's Tale and Batiyna's Dream of Freedom Before Batiyna left her parents' home, Kazak told his children a long folktale about the brave hunter Emil, who defeated a family of monstrous demons after one of them threatened his daughter and innocent people. Emil's courage, wisdom, and sacrifice symbolized the struggle against overwhelming evil. After finishing the tale, Kazak compared himself to the legendary hunter, lamenting that he could not free his daughter from the cruel power of Adyke. The story gave Batiyna a spark of hope. That night she dreamed an eagle cast Adyke from the sky, and Abyl joyfully declared that she was finally free and they could marry without fear.

Batiyna's Farewell to Her Family and Abyl On the morning of her departure, Batiyna struggled to accept her forced separation from Abyl. Comforted by Sayra, she visited the spring where they had shared their happiest moments and tearfully sang a farewell song, asking Sayra to tell Abyl she had mourned their parting there. Her family bid her an emotional farewell through traditional *koshok* lament songs, expressing love, grief, and blessings. As Batiyna journeyed toward her husband's home, she unexpectedly met Abyl. Concealing their love, they exchanged only brief words, silently promising faithfulness and hoping they would one day be reunited despite overwhelming obstacles.

Life in Salkynay's Household

Life under Salkynay's Tyranny After Batiyna arrived at Adyke's household, she was welcomed with humiliation instead of honor. Salkynay, the domineering mistress of the family, ignored Kyrgyz wedding traditions, insulted Batiyna's dowry, and publicly degraded her. During the marriage ceremony, Batiyna openly refused to consent, yet the witnesses treated her silence as approval. Her married life soon became one of relentless suffering. Salkynay subjected her to beatings, exhausting labor, hunger, and con-

stant humiliation, while forcing Abdyrahman to discipline his wife. Enduring every hardship in silence, Batiyna realized that, as a poor woman, she seemed trapped with no escape from oppression.

The Call of the Beloved Despite relentless abuse, Batiyna refused to surrender her spirit. Hard labor, beatings, and humiliation only strengthened her determination, while songs of longing for Abyl sustained her through despair. Haunted by dreams and visions of her beloved, she finally resolved to escape, disguising herself as a herdsman and riding into the mountains at night. Guided by hope but slowed by her exhausted horse, she was soon overtaken by Adyke and his men, who intended to punish her brutally for fleeing. At the last moment, Jusup, her father's loyal friend, arrived and intervened, saving Batiyna from certain death.

Batiyna's Escape Attempt

The Failure of Justice Jusup courageously refused to hand Batiyna over to Adyke, declaring that the daughter of his late friend was like his own child and deserved protection. Although he briefly rescued her, Adyke appealed to the influential elder Kobogon Ajy, whose authority outweighed Jusup's. Forced to submit to tribal power, Jusup sorrowfully returned Batiyna, admitting that he could not overcome the injustice of the social order. Back in Adyke's camp, Batiyna was humiliated, cursed, and condemned to a cruel public punishment. Bound to the yurt frame and mercilessly flogged, she endured the violence in silence, becoming a victim of patriarchal authority upheld by custom, power, and social hierarchy.

A Father's Plea After learning that Batiyna had attempted to escape but had been captured, Kazak feared for his daughter's life and asked the respected elder Sarala to intervene on her behalf. Knowing that Adyke would not listen to him, Kazak relied on Sarala's authority and kinship with the powerful Akimkan. Sarala persuaded Akimkan to investigate Adyke's actions and remind him of the customs his family had violated. While the elders discussed justice and family honor, Batiyna continued to suffer. She was brutally beaten, tied to the yurt frame and later to a post in the snow, where she repeatedly lost consciousness under relentless punishment.

Batiyna's Song of Suffering Batiyna lay weak in Kenjekan's yurt, slowly recovering after severe beatings. The old woman cared for her, washed her wounds, and tried to comfort her. Soon, it was learned that Sarala, Jusup, and Akimkan's envoy had arrived at Adyke's village, leading to new tensions. Some of the guests were beaten, and only Akimkan's threat forced Adyke to restrain himself. Hearing that Jusup had been punished because of her, Batiyna broke into tears. Sarala visited her briefly and brought news from her parents, but could not take her away. Still trapped in suffering, she sang a sorrowful song about a woman deprived of love, freedom, and hope.

The Embroidered Clue and Escape After a harsh winter, Batiyna continued exhausting labor under Salkynay's control, hauling heavy felt and wool across the thawing ground. One day, while driving a loaded bull, she met a rider who asked about her origins. Batiyna said she belonged to the Sayak clan from Jungal. The rider then showed her an embroidered amulet and pillow cover. She immediately recognized them as her own childhood work, confirming her identity. He told her to come in the evening to his grey yurt, where Mukambet, her father's younger brother, would be waiting for her. That night, she secretly went there, escaped with him through the mountains, and reached her father Kazak's highland camp. They reunited in tears.

Asantay, Barman and Aynagul

The Conflict of Asantay and Barman Asantay and Barman were powerful clan leaders whose pastoral communities controlled thousands of yurts and vast herds. They repeatedly clashed over pasturelands, livestock, and honor. A raid in which Barman's son was injured turned earlier tensions into open hostility, followed by threats of revenge. Elders tried to restore peace, but neither leader yielded, and fear spread among poorer herders who suffered most from the instability. Eventually, the wise wife Gulgaaky intervened, appealing to shared kinship and condemning bloodshed, which gradually softened both sides. After the conflict cooled, Myrzakan, a clever friend of Asantay proposed a political solution: a marriage alliance between Asantay's family and Barman's house. He suggested Barman's daughter Aynagul as a

bride to unite the rival clans. Asantay, driven by pride and ambition, seriously considered the proposal, opening a path toward fragile reconciliation.

Aynagul and Bolot: The Disputed Abduction During the migration, Aynagul met Bolot, a young man from the Kulbarak clan. He was confident, strong, and different from Ramazan, the man she had been promised to. Aynagul, who had already rejected the arranged marriage, agreed to leave with Bolot, so her departure was by her own will, though others later called it an abduction. While traveling with his companion Sulayman. Aynagul was already betrothed to Ramazan, son of Asantay. Instead of direct force, Bolot and Sulayman planned a secret approach through Kaldan, who was trusted in Barman's camp. They believed Aynagul, unhappy with Ramazan, might agree to leave voluntarily. Kaldan promised to persuade her. Soon, Aynagul was secretly taken away with his help. Although persuasion was involved, the act was publicly regarded as abduction, provoking Asantay's anger and renewed demands for retaliation.

The Threat of War between the Clans From this, a full-scale conflict emerged between the clans of Asantay and Barman, as both sides treated Aynagul's departure as an insult to their collective honor. Armed riders were rapidly gathered from across the pastoral settlements, and what began as a family dispute escalated into a large mobilization of warriors. The plains filled with armed men, horses, and preparations for battle, as each side advanced to defend its reputation and demand retribution. At the same time, elders and mediators attempted to prevent violence, insisting on dialogue and reconciliation. Despite their efforts, tension remained high, and the possibility of bloodshed was imminent.

Return without Battle and Aynagul's Fate Before the two sides could clash, Sulayman brought Aynagul to the elders gathered on the hill. Under pressure, she could not clearly state her own will, and confusion spread among the assembled clans. The situation nearly escalated into armed conflict, but negotiations between Nazarbay, Asantay, and Barman ultimately prevented bloodshed. Asantay claimed his bride, while Bolot's side avoided war. Meanwhile, Gulgaaky organized Aynagul's return with full ritual dignity, preparing her dowry and escorting her in a ceremonial procession. Despite her tears and inner resistance, Aynagul was formally taken back into the marriage arrangement with Asantay's son, as clan honor and custom prevailed over personal choice.

The Wound of Love and Fear Abyl fell into deep emotional and physical illness after learning that Batiyna suffered a lot. His mother, Tatyna, who had already lost six sons, feared for her only surviving child and sought healers and rituals, but nothing helped. Abyl admitted that his sickness was not of the body but of the heart—he loved Batiyna, who had been returned to an unwanted marriage. Although relatives debated custom, bride-price, and possible clan conflict, Abyl remained focused only on saving her. The elders warned that tradition and wealth made her situation dangerous, yet he insisted on acting despite all risks.

Heavy Compensation for Kazak

The Unjust Judgment Kazak had returned home after many days of absence, exhausted and broken by the journey. He had been forced to stand before a large gathering of judges and powerful elders, where his enemy Adyke had accused him of dishonoring the marriage agreement. During the trial, Adyke had spoken confidently, claiming that he had paid a full bride price and that Kazak's daughter had fled unlawfully. The judges had listened more to wealth and status than to truth. Despite Kazak's protests and his memories of tradition and fairness, the ruling had gone against him. He had been ordered to pay a heavy compensation of livestock, an impossible burden for a poor man.

The Family's Sorrow When Kazak had finally returned to his village, he had arrived like a shadow of himself—older, weaker, and deeply humiliated. He had told his family what had happened, how he had lost the case and nearly all hope of justice. The household had fallen into silence as his words settled like a heavy stone. Batiyna had listened from the darkness, realizing that her fate had already been decided by others. The relatives had whispered in fear and pity, understanding that power had once again defeated truth. That night, Batiyna had wept quietly, feeling that her "bird of happiness" had flown far beyond her reach.

Batiyna's Broken Hope Batiyna watched silently as Abyl's envoys arrived at her father's village with gifts of three horses and a camel. She understood immediately that Abyl had come for her, but the offering was too small to satisfy the heavy court demand of forty horses imposed on her family. Her father Kazak, exhausted and fearful of punishment from Adyke and the judges, refused the proposal. At the same time, the wealthy relative Kydyrbay expressed his wish to marry Batiyna into his own family, offering security and status. Torn between love and obligation, Kazak chose safety over affection. As Abyl's envoys left empty-handed, Batiyna realized her chance at happiness had been taken from her again, and she wept in silence.

Batiyna's Second Marriage

Kydyrbay and Batiyna's Fate By autumn, Kazak agreed to the marriage proposal from his distant relative Kydyrbay, hoping to secure his daughter's future and repay the debt to Adyke. Batiyna slowly began to accept her father's decision: her love for Abyl faded, replaced by a sense of duty toward her family. Her mother comforted her, urging her to accept the marriage as fate. When Kydyrbay arrived at the village with his men and fine horses, negotiations were about to begin. For Batiyna, it was a moment of anxiety, as she realized her life was being decided by elders. The riders entered the river, and she saw that her destiny was now drawing near.

"The Bear" Kydyrbay observed Batiyna during the wedding preparations and introduced his younger brother, Alymbay, as the groom. Confident and informal, Kydyrbay treated the visit like family business rather than formal matchmaking. Batiyna immediately felt disappointment: Alymbay appeared slow, clumsy, and indifferent, and she compared him to a "bear." Her heart rejected him at once. During the evening gatherings, Alymbay remained silent and awkward, confirming her fears. Batiyna grew increasingly distressed and begged her mother not to force this marriage. Her mother sympathized, but her father insisted the match could still secure stability. Meanwhile, Kydyrbay calmly argued that Batiyna's wisdom might reform his brother, urging her to accept fate and remain within the family alliance.

Batiyna's Conditional Consent Batiyna, moved by pity for her father, softened her refusal and agreed to Kydyrbay's proposal. She still felt deep doubt about Alymbay, whom she saw as dull and lifeless, but she could no longer speak harshly in front of elders. Kydyrbay responded calmly, admitting his brother's weaknesses yet insisting that a wise woman could transform him. He told a long parable about a woman who healed her husband's illness through patience, guidance, and moral teaching, turning him into a respected leader. Encouraged by this story, Batiyna accepted the marriage conditionally: she would stay for three years and try to "shape" Alymbay. If he did not change, she reserved the right to leave freely. The agreement was sealed, and she was sent to her new home.

Aynagul's Story

Aynagul and the Arrival of Manapbay Aynagul was taken into a wealthy marriage with Ramazan, but her heart remained cold and resentful. Rumors spread through the village, where women harshly judged her for rejecting tradition. Despite her status, she felt trapped and emotionally distant from her husband, whose dullness deepened her despair. She longed for freedom and love, refusing to accept an unwanted fate. Meanwhile, the village of Asantay became lively with spring gatherings and guests. One day, Manapbay, the proud son of Arstanaly, arrived with his companions. His arrival brought prestige and excitement, and Asantay ordered a grand reception, eager to display wealth and honor to strengthen his family's reputation.

Manapbay's Scheme against Aynagul Manapbay, a wealthy and influential young man, visits Barman's village as a respected guest while secretly planning to abduct Aynagul. Impressed by her beauty and dignity, he ignores that she is already married and decides to possess her. Under the appearance of polite hospitality, he carefully studies the situation and prepares a deceptive plan. He instructs his companion Sanjar to pretend a severe toothache and remain behind as an excuse to delay travel. Using custom and trust as cover, Manapbay intends to create an opportunity for Aynagul's secret removal at night. His actions reveal the tension between social order and personal desire.

The Taking of Aynagul Manapbay had visited Baraman's village and had been received with hospitality and honor. During his stay, he had become interested in Aynagul and had decided to take her despite her marriage. With Sanjar's help, he had planned a deception, and Aynagul had been led away from her home. Her disappearance had caused shock among people, and news had spread quickly across surrounding communities. Elders had argued about broken custom and social order. Manapbay had left with confidence, but tension had already begun to rise around his actions and the consequences that would follow him afterward.

Aynagul's Confrontation After she had been taken, Aynagul had been brought into Manapbay's household, where she had felt humiliated and trapped. She had refused to accept her new position and had openly spoken against Manapbay's actions. His mother had demanded that he return her to protect family honor, and Manapbay had begun avoiding her under pressure. Aynagul had later confronted him directly, accusing him of betrayal and broken promises. Her resistance had deepened the conflict inside the household. Manapbay had been left torn between desire, reputation, and family expectations, unable to resolve the situation peacefully.

Gulsun and Batiyna

Vulnerability in Forced Marriages After Atantay's wife had died, he had remarried at the age of eighty, taking Gulsun, the teenage daughter of a shoemaker, into his household. She had still behaved like a child, playing with dolls and spending time with her peers, while no one had dared to question the marriage. Gulsun had lived as a child bride and had felt neither womanhood nor acceptance. Batiyna had treated her with care, and Gulsun had spoken openly about her fear and confusion regarding the old husband. She had also said Batiyna's husband seemed mentally dull and rarely spoke. Both women had shared their pain and vulnerability within unequal marriages.

Batiyna and Alymbay: A Silent Marriage Batiyna dressed Alymbay in a white wool coat and made him a kalpak with a silk tassel, hoping he would look dignified like Abyl. But Alymbay showed no gratitude, only snorted, wore the clothes clumsily, and dragged them as he walked out. The kalpak slipped over his ear, and he almost fell. Batiyna felt disappointed and remembered Abyl, who had been cheerful, gentle, and affectionate like a soft morning wind. At night she could not sleep, thinking about her unhappy life. Alymbay remained silent, answered rudely, and often told her to be quiet.

The Lambskin Debt A poor group of families lived near wealthy clans. Young Asanbay borrowed a lambskin from the moneylender Tilep to make a traditional hat, promising to cut hay in return. After illness prevented him from fulfilling his promise, Tilep demanded an impossible debt of forty sheep. Unable to pay, Asanbay's relatives agreed to settle the debt by giving twelve-year-old Kanymbubu, the daughter of a poor widow, in marriage to Tilep. Her mother pleaded desperately, but the decision stood. Kanymbubu tried to escape, yet she was captured and forced to marry the fifty-year-old moneylender, becoming the price of a single lambskin.

Gulbubu's Story

Serkebay Fell in Love with Gulbubu The wealthy Serkebay set out for Andijan with five hundred fattened wethers to sell at the market. During the journey, he stopped at the camp of Temirkan, a respected tribal leader, where he and his companions exchanged witty remarks with the hosts before receiving generous hospitality. Inside the yurt, Serkebay noticed Temirkan's eldest daughter, Gulbubu, quietly embroidering. Unlike most young women, she remained confidently among the guests. Her beauty, grace, and self-assurance captivated Serkebay immediately. Although he had planned only to trade livestock in Andijan, he secretly asked his companion to discover whether Gulbubu was already promised in marriage.

Gulbubu Became Serkebay's Second Wife Abyke discovered that Gulbubu had long been betrothed, but her fiancé had fallen ill and had not claimed her. Encouraged by Abyke, Serkebay offered five hundred wethers and promised forty horses to persuade her father, Temirkan, to break the earlier engagement. Temirkan accepted the extraordinary bride price and sent Gulbubu with a rich dowry. Although she accepted the marriage, she entered Serkebay's household as his second wife. His first wife, Buken, and

their grown children openly mocked his decision, believing he should have married off his sons before taking a young bride. Serkebay ignored their resentment and remained devoted to Gulbubu.

Serkebay Displayed His Wealth through Gulbubu After marrying Gulbubu, Serkebay rarely left her yurt and devoted himself entirely to his young wife. Her beauty attracted admiration throughout the region, while his first wife, Buken, bitterly opposed the marriage and demanded that he choose between them. Ignoring her protests, Serkebay ordered Gulbubu to replace the married woman's headdress with five maiden braids and a sable-trimmed cap. He celebrated the change with a lavish feast. The unusual gesture reflected not equality but Serkebay's vanity, wealth, and determination to display his privilege and prestige before the entire community.

Arstanaly Defended Manapbay's Crime After Manapbay abducted the promised for marriage Aynagul, her father-in-law Asantay prepared to seek justice. However, the aged Khan Arstanaly, though over one hundred years old, dismissed the complaint with contempt. He declared that Asantay and his entire clan were beneath him, insisting that a ruler's son had every right to take any woman he desired. Although Arstanaly privately admitted that Manapbay had acted rashly, he publicly defended him to protect the prestige of his lineage. He presented his ancestral sword and rifle to Manapbay, ordered the elders to reject Asantay's appeal, and sent armed horsemen to intercept him. Asantay was captured on the road, humiliated, beaten, and forced into the freezing river, demonstrating that political power had replaced justice and tribal law.

Buken's Jealous Plot Buken, Serkebay's first wife, resented the attention and privileges given to the young second wife, Gulbubu. She secretly arranged a trap by placing the herdsman Dubana's clothes inside Serkebay's yurt and then publicly claimed that she had seen him fleeing after spending the night with Gulbubu. The accusation quickly spread throughout the village, and Gulbubu was condemned as an adulteress without being given a chance to defend herself. Dubana, frightened by the accusation, escaped before he could be questioned. Pressured by his relatives and village elders, Serkebay allowed them to punish Gulbubu for the alleged betrayal of his honor.

Public Humiliation of Gulbubu: The children clung to the yurts while young men and women scattered in fear, and even the dogs fell silent as an uneasy atmosphere spread through the village. Under the command of Abyke, the villagers gathered for punishment, and he declared that Gulbubu had no protection and that her bride-price had already been "covered." He ordered that she be beaten, wrapped in a thorny bush, her hair shaved, and her body exposed as an example to others. Gulbubu cried out in confusion, asking what crime she had committed, but the beating continued until she was covered in blood and collapse. She was then humiliated, forced onto a camel, and paraded through the village while made to repeat that adulterous women would face such punishment.

Women's Pain and Shared Solidarity: Batiyna witnessed Gulbubu's humiliation and returned to her yurt in shock, overwhelmed by grief and helplessness. Gulsun comforted her, though her words revealed resignation to injustice. Soon the frightened young bride Kanymbubu arrived, tearful and terrified after seeing Gulbubu paraded and threatened by her husband, Tilep. The women tried to console her, advising her either to seek help from relatives or endure her fate quietly to avoid further violence. Kanymbubu's innocence and fear exposed the vulnerability of women in forced marriages. Batiyna and Gulsun, though bitter, expressed deep awareness of systemic oppression and the absence of justice.

The Marriage of Erkegan Batiyna had seemed to accept her fate and lived with her husband Alymbay, though he remained rough and emotionally distant. She often remembered Abyl, who appeared to her in visions as a symbol of lost happiness. Over time, she grew more patient and less rebellious. She devoted herself to her role as mentor to Erkegan, teaching her domestic skills, etiquette, and marital duties according to tradition. When Erkegan's marriage was arranged, Batiyna guided her through preparations and ceremonies. The farewell was emotional, filled with songs, blessings, and sorrow, as Batiyna quietly accepted the passing of another girl into married life.

Public Humiliation of Batiyna

Batiyna's Encounter with the Bolush Batiyna travelled with confidence to fetch the promised horse for Kydyrbay and arrived at the hospitable yurt of Esen and his wife Jyde. There she was admired for her strength, intelligence, and graceful behavior as a rider. Soon, Bolush Maralbay and his entourage entered, expecting hospitality and obedience. The guests treated Batiyna with flirtatious and disrespectful attention, while Esen tried to maintain harmony. At night, the bolush attempted to enter Batiyna's sleeping space, but she resisted firmly and rejected him with anger and dignity. Embarrassed by her response, he left early the next morning without confronting her again.

The Trial of Honor Batiyna recalled the humiliating night at Esen's yurt when the Bolush tried to dishonor her, and she struck him in self-defense. Soon Maralbay and his men spread false rumors to avenge their shame. The gossip reached her family and threatened the clan's reputation. Determined, Batiyna demanded a public confrontation with the Bolush to prove her innocence. Yet fear and custom silenced Kydyrbay and others. When the Bolush arrived, Batiyna boldly exposed him before the gathered guests, but her voice was restrained by tradition. The visitors left offended. Later, her husband beat her, leaving her alone with unresolved pain afterwards quietly.

The Clan's Judgment Those who had witnessed Batiyna's bold confrontation with the volost governor spoke of her courage with hidden regret. Some said she could have become a leader of their people, while men like Maralbay brought no honor. Yet no one openly defended her. Fearing the governor and tradition, Kydyrbay accepted the "nine penalties," and his respect for Batiyna faded. He blamed her for his losses and cursed himself for allowing her freedom. Furious, he ordered his wife to tell Alymbay to discipline her more strictly. Consumed by anger and shame, he began planning severe punishment for Batiyna.

The Oppression of Batiyna After punishment, Serkebay allowed Gulbubu to visit her parents, but she never returned, causing anger among the village elders. Her absence was seen as a disgrace to the Kara-Saz clan. Rumors spread, and Tazabek and others argued about honor and revenge, blaming Serkebay's weakness and criticizing women's behavior. Kydyrbay became increasingly anxious, fearing his own family's shame. Influenced by elders, he began to believe Batiyna must be controlled strictly. Turumtay also pressured him, claiming Batiyna was disrespectful and dangerous to family honor. As a result, Batiyna lost her former respect. She was watched, restricted, and sometimes beaten. Gradually, she stopped resisting openly and became emotionally numb, realizing no one would defend her.

Batiyna Seeks a Way to Freedom Tilep could not accept that his young wife Kanymbubu often visited Batiyna. Believing Batiyna was a bad influence, he beat his wife and complained to Kydyrbay. After Tilep left, Alymbay again punished Batiyna severely, while Kydyrbay did nothing. Even elder Gulsun begged them to stop the violence, but her pleas were ignored. Batiyna became emotionally broken and isolated. She avoided people, wandered alone, and sang sorrowful songs. Hoping to find a way to escape her marriage, she went to the kind mullah Tagay. However, he told her that her marriage was valid under Sharia law and could not be dissolved without her husband's consent, leaving her in despair.

Unhappy Love of Abyl and Batiyna

Return of Abyl Batiyna had long been unable to see her parents, and life in Kydyrbay's household only deepened her loneliness. One day, unexpectedly, she met Abyl, her first love. Time had changed him: he looked older, worn by hardship, with darkened skin and tired eyes. Yet his gaze still carried the same quiet pain and unspoken feeling for her. Batiyna tried to hide her emotions and behaved formally, as if he were a distant relative. While serving him tea and kumis, she silently longed for freedom and wondered about his life. Their meeting reopened old wounds and unspoken love.

Abyl's Silent Love Abyl arrives as a guest but hides a deep emotional storm beneath his calm appearance. Though he sits quietly among others, his mind is fully occupied with Batiyna. He remembers their forced separation, the pain of losing her, and the long years of silence that followed. Life pushed him into another marriage, and while his wife is kind and caring, his heart never fully left Batiyna. Seeing Batiyna again awakens everything he had buried. He cannot speak openly, so he behaves respectfully like a dis-

tant relative, masking his feelings. At the same time, he silently wishes her peace, even if they can never reunite.

The Song of Abyl and the Silence of Power Guests gathered in Batiyna's yurt, curious about Abyl, the man she once loved. When he sang his sorrowful songs of separation, the women listened with hidden emotion, while men grew uneasy. His friend Sansyzbay openly performed "Abyl's Song," revealing the depth of his unforgotten love for Batiyna. The melody stirred admiration, jealousy, and suspicion among the listeners. Abyl, though outwardly calm, felt his past life exposed. Batiyna remained silent, composed, yet deeply moved. Even Guljan, Abyl's wife, accepted the truth without anger, recognizing the endurance of first love. As Abyl departed, the village was left divided between admiration for his art and fear of the feelings it awakened.

Kanymbubu's Story

The Song of Altynay and Batiyna's Request The fame of Altynay, a master of the *temir-komuz*, jaw harp spread across Kyrgyz lands. Wherever she traveled, people gathered to hear her music, which filled yurts with joy and emotion. Even weary elders were moved by her melodies, and her songs became known throughout the valleys. During her stay in Kydyrbay's village, Batiyna met her and was deeply impressed. Yet beneath her admiration lay sorrow. She secretly asked Altynay for help, telling her about the young girl Kanymbubu, trapped in an unhappy marriage with cruel Tilep. Batiyna begged Altynay to inform the respected relative Naimanbay and seek a way to free the girl according to Sharia law. Altynay listened carefully and agreed to carry the message before continuing her journey.

The Struggle for Kanymbubu's Freedom Throughout the winter, Batiyna and Kanymbubu kept watching the distant mountain path, hoping for rescue. Batiyna tried to comfort the young girl, assuring her that her uncle Naimanbay would surely come. Yet uncertainty and fear slowly weakened their hope as harsh winter conditions made travel nearly impossible. As spring approached, migrating herders filled the valleys, and life slowly revived. Still, Kanymbubu remained trapped in anxiety, waiting for justice, while Batiyna silently feared that help might never arrive.

The Failed Appeal The elders' council, influenced by Tazabek and Kydyrbay, rejects Naymanbay's plea to free Kanymbubu. Despite her clear protest and forced marriage, the "witnesses" distort her words, and the mullah justifies the decision through a selective interpretation of sharia. Naymanbay offers compensation and appeals for mercy, but the assembly prioritizes honor and social reputation over justice. Fear of shame and gossip outweighs compassion. As a result, the decision is final: Kanymbubu must remain with Tilep. Devastated, Naymanbay leaves in anger, while the girl's last hope collapses into silence, sorrow, and irreversible despair under the weight of communal authority.

Lives Broken, Hope Lost Batiyna worked tirelessly and endured hardship, while Kanymbubu remained trapped in a forced marriage. Gulbubu left her husband's house in shame and never returned, disappearing from communal life. Her mother Ziyada died after a long illness and helpless grief when she failed to save her daughter. Later, old Atantay died quietly in the household, marking another loss for the family. Gulsun, already pregnant and emotionally distant, was left widowed and overwhelmed by ritual obligations. Despite repeated appeals, the community refused to free Kanymbubu, and hope collapsed. Batiyna continued supporting others, but each death deepened suffering, injustice, and silence.

Gulsun and Atantay Died Gulsun had been given in marriage to the old Atantay when she was still a girl. She grew up within a world of custom, silence, and submission, yet learned to hide her sorrow behind a gentle smile. When Atantay died of old age, she performed the ritual lament and was mourned as his respected wife. Later, during childbirth, Gulsun suffered long and painfully, and no healer could save her. She died young, after asking forgiveness and blessing her family. Gulsun was buried beside Atantay, and her death marked the third tragedy, completing the quiet chain of three lives lost in one household.

Batiyna's Awakening and Final Struggle

Batiyna's Resistance After Gulsun's death, Batiyna was haunted by dreams in which she chased her across hills, but Gulsun kept disappearing and saying she was dead. In reality, Batiyna grew bolder, giving food and livestock to the poor and openly resisting household authority. At a gathering with guests and a mullah, she challenged Sharia for ignoring women's suffering and declared her rejection of it. She then rode out to meet a fortune teller from Andijan, hoping to learn the truth about women's fate. However, she did not meet him, as he had already left. Returning home, she also resisted her husband's violent attempt to control her.

Batiyna and the Search for Truth Batiyna decided to seek justice and go to the city to meet the great mullahs, hoping they might know the true answer about women's fate. In her village there were no educated people except old pilgrims and a boy, Kachyke, studying in a Russian school. From him she learned about city life, different peoples, and their customs. She did not go to the city and did not meet the fortune-teller from Andijan, although she had hoped to find him. Instead, she reflected deeply on women's suffering and dreamed of a future when Kyrgyz girls would be educated and free.

Encounter between Batiyna and Zuurakan Batiyna met Zuurakan, a young servant who was carrying a heavy load of firewood. Zuurakan explained that she had been gathering fuel on the rocky slopes and that she worked for Buken under harsh conditions. Batiyna spoke kindly to her and encouraged her to value her strength and not let others exploit her. Zuurakan told her about her family and how she had been married into debt and forced into labor. Batiyna warned her about the cruelty of the bay household. The two women parted, but Zuurakan remembered Batiyna's words. Later she was scolded for mentioning her name.

Batiyna's Plan and the Clash with the Authorities Batiyna met Zuurakan and persuaded her to join a plan of escape to the Chuy Valley, where they hoped to find freedom. She promised to prepare horses, food, and disguises, including male clothing for herself and a noble outfit for Zuurakan. Zuurakan agreed but feared pursuit. They worked together briefly and parted with hope and anxiety. On her way back, Batiyna witnessed a government official, Jarban, illegally seizing horses for the authorities. Furious, she confronted him and attacked him on horseback, striking him after a violent struggle. Her rebellion against injustice became more direct and fearless.

Batiyna's Defiance and the Punishment of Jarban Jarban attacked Batiyna, but she refused to retreat and demanded that he release the stolen horse. As other herders arrived, they surrounded him and supported her. Batiyna urged them to defend their honor and stop the official's abuses. Overpowered, Jarban jumped from his horse and begged for mercy, blaming the volost leader for the orders. The herders beat him in anger, while Batiyna mocked his cowardice. She ordered him to leave and warned him against oppressing the people. Humiliated, Jarban fled, and the villagers reaffirmed their resistance to officials who exploited and mistreated them.

Resistance, and the Collapse of Escape Batiyna encouraged Zuurakan to resist and planned an escape to the Chuy Valley with Zuraakan and her husband Tekebay. Before they could leave, a mass uprising against the tsarist (Russian imperial) authorities broke out, and the ails fell into panic. Poorly armed fighters gathered, while families fled through dangerous mountain passes with livestock and belongings. Batiyna took action during the chaos. She rode her grey mare at first, and later a bay stallion seized from the volost agents' horse herd. As the situation worsened, her husband Alymbay disappeared in the confusion. Soon, the escape plan collapsed entirely. Batiyna was swept into the large refugee movement crossing the mountains toward the southern passes, struggling to survive but still determined to find freedom.

The Great Flight During the mass flight after the uprising, Batiyna helped refugees cross dangerous mountain passes toward Chinese Turkestan. She rode through fog and snow, rescuing the lost, including the frozen girl Kanymbubu. The refugees suffered extreme cold, hunger, and death; children, women, and livestock perished along the way. Entire groups scattered and eventually reached Kashgar, Aksu, Turfan, Kulja, and Urumqi, where they were coldly received and often rejected by local elites. Batiyna continued serving others despite exhaustion. Haunting images of frozen children and dead mothers tormented her. In the end, she collapsed, weakened by grief, illness, and endless hardship.

Batiyna among the Refugees and the Rescued Child Batiyna traveled with Kachyke and other refugees in the Kashgar region, where thousands fled from hunger, cold, and violence. To survive, they sold their remaining belongings to buy food and witnessed families breaking apart as children were given away. Batiyna reflected on the destruction of her people and the loss of her homeland. One day, she met Jusup, an old friend of her father, who had lost his family and was exhausted by disease and starvation. He carried a three-month-old baby found beside a dead mother. Deeply moved, Batiyna shared food and offered shelter, continuing to care for the suffering.

Meeting on the Road Home On the green spring road, Batiyna met Abyl, her former youth love, among returning refugees. He was now a widower, exhausted and changed by hardship, leading his two children, Baktygul and Baktyjan, after losing their mother to illness. Their meeting reopened memories of their distant past love, now buried under years of suffering. Abyl spoke with sorrow, while Batiyna listened quietly, moved by his condition. She comforted the children, giving them food and care, but could not stop their journey. Abyl continued with the refugee caravan for safety. They parted again, united briefly by memory and shared loss.

Crossing into Hope At the bridge over the Naryn, the exhausted caravan of Kydyrbay's people, returning from Chinese Turkestan after years of exile and suffering, hesitated in fear, believing armed soldiers might block their passage. Panic spread through the crowd until a Russian-speaking soldier stepped forward and announced a "new power" that had overthrown the old tsar, promising freedom for the oppressed poor. Confused yet attentive, Batiyna questioned him about this freedom and who had granted it. The name "Lenin" passed through the frightened crowd with uncertainty. Though not fully understood, it softened their fear. For the first time, hope emerged as they crossed.

Batiyna's First Step toward Freedom After returning from Chinese Turkestan, Batiyna was unexpectedly reunited with her long-lost husband, Alymbay, who had survived the chaotic flight but returned as a broken man. Although they lived together again, her feelings for him had long since faded, and she quietly longed for a life of freedom. When the new Soviet authorities invited both men and women to a public meeting, Alymbay remained silent, while others insisted that respectable women should stay home. Encouraged only by the Russian soldier Yakimenko, Batiyna ignored public criticism and rode to the gathering, taking her first courageous step toward personal freedom and women's equality.

Defying Social Norms After attending the public meeting, Batiyna became the target of harsh criticism from conservative men, who feared that women's equality would destroy traditional family authority. While many villagers questioned the new Soviet reforms, Batiyna reflected on her own unhappy marriage and the customs that had deprived her of freedom, including her forced separation from her beloved Abyl. She realized that the old marriage traditions had chained women to lives they had never chosen. Strengthened by the meeting, she resolved to embrace the new path offered by Soviet law and devote herself to defending women trapped in forced marriages, polygamy, and lifelong dependence on men.

The Burden of Old Life After Kachyke was elected head of the village committee because of his education and honesty, the village elders quickly sought to influence him. While outwardly accepting Soviet reforms, they urged him to preserve traditional customs, especially male authority over women. They praised limited kindness toward wives but rejected true equality, fearing women's independence would destroy social order. During the gathering in Kydyrbay's yurt, Batiyna silently listened as Serkebay's warnings clearly targeted her growing independence. Even her own household, led by Turumtay, urged her to abandon new ideas. Yet Batiyna remained inwardly committed to the path of freedom and justice for women.

Batiyna's Break with Tradition After another brutal beating by her husband Alymbay, Batiyna realized that neither her marriage nor her family would protect her. She appealed to Kachyke, now head of the village committee, but he remained loyal to patriarchal customs despite his new position. Determined to claim the rights promised by the Soviet government, Batiyna rejected the old order. She removed her traditional turban *elechek* and boldly tied a red headscarf—the symbol of the new era. She enrolled in litera-

cy campaigns, rode fearlessly from village to village, and encouraged women and girls to attend school, becoming a passionate advocate for education, equality, and women's emancipation.

Confronting Patriarchal Resistance While Batiyna and the teacher Sapar traveled through the villages inviting women to literacy classes, they faced fierce resistance from wealthy families. Serkebay and his first wife Buken refused to let Kaliykan, Serkebay's young second wife, and the servant Zuurakan attend school, insisting that women belonged in the household. Batiyna reminded them that the new government required everyone to learn reading and writing and warned that those who prevented women from studying could be punished. Despite opposition from husbands and parents, many young wives, second wives, servants, and daughters secretly embraced the opportunity, seeing education as their first path toward dignity, independence, and a different future.

Escalating Violence against Batiyna As more women joined literacy classes, conservative elders and wealthy men intensified their opposition. They mocked educated women, spread rumors about the young Soviet teacher, and blamed Batiyna for destroying traditional family values. Many husbands beat or threatened wives who attempted to attend school, while Soviet officials punished those who obstructed women's education, even imprisoning Serkebay for refusing to let his second wife study. Humiliated, Serkebay and Tazabek secretly discussed killing Batiyna to stop her campaign. Soon afterward, Batiyna was ambushed by Mekebay and Tekebay while riding alone, but she fiercely fought back with her whip, refusing to surrender or abandon her cause.

Batiyna's Survival and Departure for Moscow After Tazabek incited Mekebay and Tekebay to attack her, Batiyna fought back until Yakimenko intervened and arrested the assailants. Although she identified the village elites as the true instigators, she refused to seek revenge against the attackers. Serkebay then persuaded Alymbay to restore his "honor" by killing his wife. Alymbay stabbed Batiyna with a dagger, seriously wounding her in the chest. She spent about ten days recovering at the healer Maty-Ene's home before the violence resumed. Soon afterward, Kachyke informed her that she had been selected to attend a congress of Eastern women in Moscow convened by Lenin. Seeing this as her chance to escape oppression, Batiyna left the village and set out for a new life.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Batiyna

Batiyna is not merely a character; she is the heartbeat of the Kyrgyz struggle for dignity. Born into the wild, free air of a hunter's camp, her light is nearly extinguished by the heavy shadows of old-world pacts. Traded like livestock to settle the debts of men, she endures forced marriages that attempt to break her spirit. Yet, Batiyna refuses to be a silent ghost in her own life. Her journey from the cruelty of Adyke's yurt to the revolutionary streets of Moscow is a human testament to the power of a single soul rising against the weight of an entire history.

Resilient Batiyna is forged in the biting winds of the steppe and the stinging lash of the whip. Her body bears the scars of a first husband's hate and the near-fatal blade of a second, yet she never breaks. During the 1916 Great Flight, she walks through the jagged, frozen mountains, her feet bleeding and her stomach empty, while death claims thousands around her. She carries the weight of her family's shame and the physical toll of relentless labor, yet she emerges from the snow and the blood with her head held high, proving that her spirit is an unbreakable stone.

Defiant Even when the law, the mullahs, and her own father demand her silence, Batiyna carries a fire of defiance in her chest. She is not a woman who waits for permission to be free; she dares to ride into the night to escape her cage and strikes back at the powerful Bolush when he tries to dishonor her. Her subversion is seen in her eyes when she rejects the "divine fate" preached by those who profit from her pain. When she finally discards her traditional turban for a red headscarf, she isn't just following a new law—she is finally saying "no" to centuries of chains.

Tender Despite the hardness of her life, Batiyna never lets her heart turn to ice. Her compassion is a quiet sanctuary for others who are drowning in the same sea of injustice. She is the one who cradles the dying child-bride Gulsun and the one who risks everything to save little Kanymbubu from the cold. In the starving refugee camps of China, she becomes a mother to the motherless, sharing her last morsel of food with orphans. Her empathy is her greatest strength; she knows that her freedom means nothing if she leaves the weak behind in the shadows.

Unwavering Batiyna possesses a grit that makes her impossible to tame. Once she glimpses the possibility of a world where a woman can read, write, and choose her own path, she moves toward it with the singular focus of a hunter. She ignores the mocking laughter of the village men and the violent threats of the elders, riding through mountain storms to bring books to girls hidden in yurts. Her determination is not fueled by hate, but by a deep, quiet hunger for light. Even as she bleeds from an assassin's wound, her only thought is of the road that leads to Moscow and a future she built with her own hands.

Aynagul

Aynagul represents the woman as a political pawn in the volatile world of Kyrgyz clan rivalries. Unlike Batiyna, who suffers from the hardships of poverty, Aynagul is caught in the crossfire between powerful men like Asantay and Barman. Her story highlights the practice of abduction and the exploitation of women to settle tribal warfare. Aynagul reflects the internal conflict of a woman who possesses high social status but lacks basic personal agency. Her journey is defined by her attempts to navigate a landscape where her beauty and lineage are treated as weapons by the men around her.

Independent Aynagul exhibits a fierce sense of independence that puts her at odds with her family's political ambitions. She rejects the marriage arranged by her father, Barman, refusing to be a silent participant in his alliance with Asantay. When she meets Bolot, she chooses him over the man she was promised to, effectively attempting to rewrite her own destiny. Her decision to leave with Bolot is an act of self-will, even if the society around her labels it an abduction to suit their own honor-bound narratives. She constantly tries to separate her identity from the political agendas of the men who claim her.

Courageous Aynagul possesses a deep-seated courage that allows her to survive abduction, forced returns, and social shaming. When Manapbay deceives her and takes her by force, she does not retreat into submissive silence. She directly confronts him within his own household, accusing him of cowardice and betrayal. Her bravery is most evident when she stands before the gathered clan elders, refusing to play the part of the fragile victim. Even as armed horsemen mobilize for war over her, Aynagul remains steadfast in her own truth, speaking out against the men who treat her presence as a reason for bloodshed.

Dignified Aynagul maintains a profound sense of dignity even when she is being traded between households like a piece of livestock. Despite the humiliation of being returned to an unwanted marriage with Ramazan to prevent a clan war, she carries herself with the grace of her noble upbringing. She refuses to let the harsh judgments of village women or the coldness of her husband break her spirit. Her dignity is her armor; it prevents her from becoming a mere casualty of the patriarchy. She commands respect through her composure, reminding everyone that she is a human being with inherent worth beyond her dowry.

Resentful Aynagul harbors a deep, justified resentment toward the social order that repeatedly sacrifices her happiness for the sake of clan honor. This resentment fuels her emotional distance from her husband, Ramazan, and her coldness toward the traditions that keep her trapped. She is acutely aware that the reconciliation between clans was built upon her suffering. Her internal life is a landscape of frustration, as she watches powerful men like Arstanaly dismiss her rights with contempt. This resentment is not a weakness but a clear-eyed recognition of the injustice she endures, keeping her spirit separate from the world that imprisons her.

Gulsun

Gulsun serves as the tragic shadow of the narrative, representing the stolen childhood of countless Kyrgyz girls under the feudal-patriarchal system. Married to the eighty-year-old patriarch Asantay while she is still a child playing with dolls, she is the ultimate victim of "marriage as transaction." Her presence in the story highlights the predatory nature of old customs where wealth allowed men to buy youth. Gulsun's journey is not one of rebellion like Batiyna's, but one of quiet, heartbreaking endurance. She is the innocent soul whose death in childbirth eventually acts as a catalyst for Batiyna's radical awakening and rejection of the old ways.

Innocent Gulsun is a portrait of pure innocence caught in a web of adult cruelty. Even after being taken into Asantay's household, she continues to play with dolls, seeking the comfort of childhood in a world that demands she be a woman. She does not understand the complexities of clan politics or the dark implications of her marriage; she only knows the fear of the old man she must serve. This innocence makes her suffering even more poignant, as she lacks the tools or the hardness to fight back. She is a lamb among wolves, navigating a terrifying reality with the wide-eyed confusion of a child.

Vulnerable Gulsun embodies the utter vulnerability of women who have no protectors. As the daughter of a poor shoemaker, she was sold into a life of servitude to a man who could be her great-grandfather. In the household of Asantay, she has no voice and no rights; she is a ghost in a rich man's tent. Her vulnerability is most visible in her physical fragility as she faces the demands of womanhood before her body is ready. Without the physical strength of Batiyna or the high social status of Aynagul, Gulsun is completely at the mercy of a tradition that views her life as expendable.

Enduring Despite the nightmare of her marriage, Gulsun shows a quiet, tragic capacity for endurance. She masks her sorrow behind a gentle smile, trying to fulfill the role of a "respected wife" in a house where she is essentially a captive. She does not scream or rail against the sky; instead, she folds her pain into herself, performing ritual laments and domestic tasks with a soft, haunting grace. Her endurance is not a sign of acceptance, but of a spirit trying to survive a situation it cannot change. She remains gentle and kind to those around her, even as her own life is slowly drained away.

Symbolic Gulsun's character is deeply symbolic, representing the "quiet tragedies" that the clan system buried in the earth. Her death during childbirth is the final evidence of the lethal nature of child marriage and the price paid by the weak. She represents the thousands of girls whose names were never recorded but whose lives were sacrificed for the sake of patriarchal vanity. For Batiyna, Gulsun's death is the moment the veil is lifted, proving that the old order is not a source of protection but a source of death. She remains a haunting memory, reminding the survivors that the cost of tradition was often innocent blood.

Kazak

Kazak is the tragic embodiment of the "honest hunter", representing the honorable poor who are systematically crushed by the feudal elite. As the father of Batiyna, he embodies the agonizing conflict between traditional patriarchal duty and genuine paternal love. Though he is a man of physical strength and survival skill, he remains socially invisible in a world where livestock and lineage are the only recognized currencies of justice. His character arc reveals how traditional honor can be weaponized against the vulnerable, turning a proud provider into a broken man forced to sacrifice his daughter to satisfy the debts of the powerful.

Honorable Kazak lives by a strict code of integrity that defines his identity as a hunter and a member of his clan. He believes in the sanctity of a man's word and the weight of ancestral oaths, which is why he initially feels compelled to honor the unequal snuff-bride pact. He tries to instill a sense of dignity in Batiyna, teaching her that hard work and honesty are more valuable than wealth. However, this sense of honor becomes a cage; in a society where the rich manipulate customs for profit, his commitment to his word allows landlords like Adyke to exploit him.

Disenfranchised Despite being a master of the mountains, Kazak is entirely powerless within the social and legal hierarchy of the clans. He possesses no vast herds or political influence, making him

easy prey for the predatory manaps. When he is brutally whipped by Adyke's men, his lack of status means no elder will stand in his defense. In the tribal courts, his testimony is silenced by the bribes and connections of his enemies. He can track a wolf through a blizzard but cannot navigate the corrupt corridors of feudal law, highlighting the total vulnerability of the landless poor in his society.

Despairing The final stages of Kazak's journey are marked by a deep, hollow despair as he watches his daughter's life sacrificed to settle his debts. The psychological toll of being forced to trade Batiyna—first to settle an ancestral oath and later to pay an impossible livestock fine—leaves him a shadow of his former self. He is haunted by his inability to protect his children and the realization that his integrity cannot shield them from the cruelty of the wealthy. This despair is a direct result of a soul-crushing system that forces a loving father to become the architect of his daughter's misery.

Adyke

Adyke stands as the quintessential antagonist of the novel, embodying the callous arrogance of the feudal elite. As the son of Satylgan, he inherits not just wealth but an entrenched belief that his social status places him above the laws of morality and common decency. He serves as the primary architect of the hunter's misery, transforming the ancestral "snuff-bride" oath from a bond of kinship into a weapon of exploitation. Unlike the hunters who rely on skill and labor, Adyke relies on the weight of tradition and the force of his men. His existence highlights the fundamental rot of a society where honor is a commodity and human beings—particularly the poor—are treated as disposable assets to be managed or discarded.

Arrogant Adyke is defined by a deep-seated arrogance that blinds him to the humanity of those beneath him. He treats Kazak—a man who once served his family—with cold indifference, viewing his presence as a nuisance rather than a binding obligation of kinship. He believes his wealth grants him immunity from the social contracts of his ancestors. When he mocks Kazak for bringing his daughter to be married, he does so with the sneering superiority of someone who views the hunter not as an equal but as a servant. This arrogance is his worldview; he assumes his status makes his whims the law, and he expresses this by using violence—like whipping Kazak—as a form of correction rather than negotiation.

Predatory Adyke is a predatory figure who weaponizes tradition to satisfy his greed. He hides behind "ancestral honor" to justify his cruelty, yet he ignores those same traditions whenever they conflict with his interests. He is most dangerous when he turns the legal apparatus of the clan against the poor. When Batiyna escapes his abuse, he doesn't simply accept the loss; he takes Kazak to the tribal court, utilizing his influence with the judges to demand a crushing fine of cattle. He treats marriage not as a union but as a transaction, and when he feels "defrauded," he demands compensation. He understands the rules of the game perfectly and manipulates them to ensure the poor remain in perpetual debt.

Cruel Beneath his veneer of noble status lies a profound and systemic cruelty. Adyke finds satisfaction in the humiliation of others, viewing their suffering as a demonstration of his power. When he orders his men to tie Kazak to the yurt frame and whip him in public, it is not merely a punishment; it is a spectacle intended to terrify the entire community into submission. He feels no remorse for the agony he inflicts, viewing the pain of the hunter's family as a trivial price for maintaining the social hierarchy. His cruelty is the glue that holds his power together—he maintains his "honor" by stripping it from others, remaining completely indifferent to the broken lives he leaves in his wake.

Abyl

Abyl stands as the emotional core of the novel, representing the tragic "lost happiness" of a generation. He is the young man Batiyna truly loves, yet their relationship is severed by the cold machinery of tribal law and the kalym system. Unlike the aggressive and entitled landlords, Abyl embodies a gentler form of Kyrgyz masculinity, one defined by artistic expression and deep feeling. His character serves as a constant, haunting reminder of the human cost of forced marriages. Even as he builds a separate life, his spirit remains tethered to Batiyna, proving that while the clans could trade bodies, they could not govern hearts.

Constant Abyl possesses a heart that refuses to forget. Long after Batiyna is forced into marriages with other men, his devotion remains steady and unwavering. He does not seek to replace her with hollow substitutes; instead, he carries his love like a silent, holy wound. When he eventually meets her again after the Great Flight, his eyes still carry the same quiet pain and unspoken affection from their youth. This constancy makes him a rare figure in a world where relationships are usually fleeting transactions. His faithfulness is his greatest strength, allowing his love to survive even the total collapse of their old world.

Expressive Abyl finds his voice through music and poetry rather than violence or wealth. He is a master of the soul's lament, and his sorrow eventually gives birth to "The Song of Abyl." This mournful melody spreads through the valleys, transforming his private grief into a shared cultural anthem for all those separated by fate. Through his art, he communicates the depth of his loss to the community, making it impossible for the elders to fully ignore the human suffering caused by their traditions. His expressiveness allows the voiceless—both men and women—to feel the weight of a heart broken by the cold demands of the kalym.

Disadvantaged Despite the depth of his character, Abyl remains a victim of his limited economic status. He lacks the vast herds and political influence required to challenge men like Adyke or Kydyrbay. When he tries to rescue Batiyna from her father's debt, his offering of horses is dismissed as insufficient by the corrupt tribal court. He represents the many young men who were "priced out" of their own happiness by a system that favored the elderly rich over the youthful poor. His inability to save Batiyna is not a failure of will, but a symptom of a society where gold carries more weight than love.

THEMES

Patriarchy: Violence and Honor

Male honor is not a private virtue but a social currency maintained through the visible control and punishment of women. When this "honor" is threatened, men use violence to restore their reputation, regardless of the truth. This is most brutally seen in the tragedy of Gulbubu, the second wife of Serkebay. The first wife of Serkebay, Buken, fueled by jealousy, orchestrates a cold-blooded scheme by planting a herdsman's clothes inside Gulbubu's yurt. She then publicly accuses the young second wife of adultery. Without a trial or a chance for Gulbubu to defend herself, the men immediately reclaim their collective honor through blood. Abyke and the village men gather to witness her destruction; she is beaten, wrapped in a thorny bush, and her head is shaved. In a final act of public humiliation, she is paraded through the village on a camel, forced to admit to a crime she did not commit as a warning to all other women.

A similar weaponization of honor occurs when Batiyna defies the powerful Bolush Maralbay. After she strikes him in self-defense to protect her dignity, the Bolush and his entourage do not admit to their own misconduct. Instead, they spread malicious rumors to turn the community against her. Because a woman's word carries no weight against a government official, the gossip is treated as fact. Kydyrbay, fearing the loss of his own social standing and the "nine penalties" (fines) imposed by the governor, turns his anger toward Batiyna. He views her defiance not as courage, but as a stain on his family's name.

Illustrative moment: When Abyke and the village men gather, they do not search for the truth. Instead, they seek to restore Serkebay's reputation. Gulbubu is dragged before the community, while her confusion and protests are ignored. She is beaten and wrapped in a thorny bush that tears her flesh. Her hair, a traditional symbol of beauty and maidenhood, is shaved off, and she is paraded through the village on a camel as a public object of shame.

This scene is a terrifying display of patriarchal power. Children hide, and even the dogs fall silent, showing that the violence is intended to frighten the entire community. By forcing Gulbubu to publicly repeat that she is an adulteress, the men turn her into a warning for other women. It does not matter that the evidence was planted by the jealous Buken. What matters is that the men demonstrate their absolute authority. The violence itself becomes a way of protecting male honor, while the village punishes a woman to prove that its men remain in control.

Gender

1) Women's Discrimination and oppression

Women's oppression is shown through the scenes in which girls are handed from one household to another without being asked. Batiyna's fate begins with an old agreement made before she is born. When she grows up, her father must send her to Adyke's son Abdyrahman, although no real bridewealth has been paid and she loves Abyl. At the wedding, she refuses in her heart, but the witnesses treat her silence as consent. In her husband's house, Salkynay insults her dowry, overworks her, starves her, and has her beaten. When Batiyna escapes, men ride after her, bring her back, tie her to the yurt frame, and whip her before others. Later, the court punishes not her abusers but her father, forcing him to pay live-stock compensation.

Other women suffer in different but equally painful ways. Aynagul is promised to one man, leaves with Bolot, and is then returned after clan elders negotiate to prevent war. Her feelings disappear beneath arguments about honor, bride claims, and clan reputation. Later, Manapbay takes her again through deception, and even then men discuss family shame more than her own will.

Gulsun shows another cruel scene: an eighty-year-old Asantay marries her while she is still almost a child. She plays with dolls, fears her old husband, and speaks to Batiyna with confusion rather than maturity. Her death in childbirth exposes the cost of forcing a child into a wife's role.

Kanymbubu's story is perhaps the starkest. A poor family cannot repay a lambskin debt, so the twelve-year-old girl is given to the old moneylender Tilep. Her mother begs, the girl tries to run away, but she is caught and married off. Through these scenes, women's lives are treated as payment, proof of honor, or clan property.

Illustrative moment: One of the clearest moments of women's oppression occurs when Batiyna tries to escape her first marriage. After being insulted, overworked, beaten, and humiliated in Adyke's camp, she disguises herself and rides into the mountains at night, hoping to return to freedom and to the people who love her. Her escape is not treated as a desperate act of survival. Instead, Adyke and his men pursue her as if she were stolen property. When she is caught, the question is not why she fled or what she suffered, but who has the right to control her.

Even Jusup, who tries to protect her, cannot stand against Adyke's influence and the authority of powerful elders. Batiyna is returned to the abusive household, publicly humiliated, tied to the yurt frame, and beaten. This scene shows that her body, movement, and future are controlled by men: her husband's family, clan elders, and customary law. Her suffering matters less than preserving male honor and household authority.

2) Female solidarity

Female solidarity is presented as a quiet but essential form of survival for women who have no legal protection in a patriarchal society. Because their lives are controlled by husbands, fathers, and clan elders, women find comfort and safety in one another. This bond is shown most clearly through Batiyna, who cares for younger and more vulnerable women such as Gulsun, Kanymbubu, and Zuurakan.

With Gulsun, Batiyna acts as a protective older sister. She listens to the young bride's fears about the eighty-year-old Asantay and offers tenderness that Gulsun cannot find anywhere else. Their relationship is not based on wealth or family status, but on shared suffering. When Gulsun eventually dies in childbirth, her loss is felt most deeply by Batiyna, who recognizes the injustice that killed her.

Another example is Batiyna's constant effort to help Kanymbubu, the twelve-year-old girl married to the old moneylender Tilep because of a lambskin debt. Batiyna and Kanymbubu spend the winter watching for the mountain path, hoping for rescue. Batiyna encourages the girl, telling her that justice may still arrive. Even after her appeals to the elders fail, she remains Kanymbubu's only source of hope. During the "Great Flight" to China, Batiyna saves her from freezing, demonstrating that their solidarity is also a literal struggle for life.

Finally, Batiyna's encounter with the servant Zuurakan shows how empathy can lead to resistance. Batiyna speaks kindly to the overworked girl, warning her about the cruelty of the landlord's household and encouraging her to value her own strength. This connection later leads to their plan for escape. Through these bonds, the novel shows that although women are legally powerless, their emo-

tional and practical support for one another keeps their humanity alive. Their solidarity is a quiet protest against a world that treats them as property.

Illustrative moment: Kanymbubu arrives at Batiyna's yurt, trembling and in tears after witnessing the brutal public punishment of Gulbubu. In this scene, Batiyna and Gulsun do not turn her away; they bring her inside and offer a quiet sanctuary. Kanymbubu is terrified of her husband, Tilep, and the older women use their words to steady her, advising her on how to survive or seek help from her relatives.

This moment shows that the yurt becomes a space where women can drop the mask of obedience and share their true fears. While the men are outside commanding punishments and discussing "honor," the women are inside performing the emotional labor of healing.

Their solidarity is not about public power, but about the private strength needed to keep a frightened girl like Kanymbubu from collapsing under the weight of her fate. Through this shared comfort, they acknowledge that while they cannot change the law, they will not let one another face the cruelty of the village alone.

Marriage:

1) Forced marriage

Forced marriage is one of the central realities shown through Batiyna's life. Her first marriage is not based on affection or consent but on an old pact made by men before she was born. Her grandfather's unequal agreement with Satylgan becomes a burden passed down to Kazak and then to Batiyna. When Adyke's family finally demands the bride, Batiyna must marry Abdyrahman, Adyke's son, although her heart belongs to Abyl. Her parents know the marriage will bring pain, but they are trapped by the oath, custom, and fear of disgrace. The wedding therefore becomes not a celebration of love, but the fulfillment of a debt.

Batiyna's life in her first husband's household proves how little value her consent has. She is mistreated by Salkynay, beaten, starved, and forced into exhausting labor. When she tries to escape, her attempt is judged not as a cry for help but as an offense against her husband's family. The tribal court listens to Adyke's claims and orders Kazak to pay a heavy livestock fine. Batiyna's suffering disappears behind calculations of bride-price, honor, and compensation.

Her second marriage also grows out of debt. Because Kazak cannot pay the fine imposed after Batiyna's escape, he accepts Kydyrbay's proposal and gives her to Alymbay, the son of Asantay. Again, Batiyna's future is negotiated by men. She is asked to accept the marriage for her father's sake, not because she desires it. Although she tries to set conditions, her choice remains limited by poverty and family obligation.

Other women's stories repeat this pattern. Gulsun is married as a teenager to the elderly Asantay, while Kanymbubu is given to Tilep to settle a lambskin debt. Through these scenes, the novel presents marriage as a social transaction in which women's lives are exchanged for honor, livestock, and survival.

Illustrative moment: After Batiyna escapes from her abusive first husband, Abdyrahman, Adyke takes Kazak to a tribal court. The judges side with the wealthy landlord and order Kazak to pay a heavy compensation in livestock. For a poor hunter, this debt is impossible to meet. Batiyna's future is then discussed not as a matter of love or personal choice, but as a way to save her father from ruin.

When Kydyrbay proposes marriage between Batiyna and Alymbay, the arrangement is presented as a practical solution. Batiyna sees Alymbay and immediately feels disappointment and fear; he appears dull, clumsy, and emotionally distant. She begs her mother not to force her into the match, but Kazak sees no other way to escape the debt. Batiyna eventually agrees out of pity for her father, not desire for the groom.

2) Child Marriage

Child marriage is one of the most painful injustices shown in the novel, especially through the fate of Gulsun and Kanymbubu. These girls are not prepared for marriage emotionally, physically, or socially,

yet their lives are handed over to older men because poverty and custom leave them no protection. Their stories reveal how childhood can be erased by decisions made in the name of family survival, debt, or male privilege.

Gulsun's marriage to Asantay is the clearest example. Asantay is already eighty years old when he takes her as his wife. Gulsun is still a teenager, closer to childhood than adulthood. She still plays with dolls and spends time with girls her own age, but society suddenly expects her to behave as a married woman. No one openly challenges Asantay because he is wealthy and powerful. His age and status silence criticism, while Gulsun's fear and confusion remain hidden inside the household. When Batiyna meets her, she sees not a mature wife but a frightened child forced into an adult role.

Kanymbubu's story shows another path into child marriage: debt. She is only twelve when she is given to Tilep, a fifty-year-old moneylender, because of a lambskin debt. Her mother pleads desperately, but the poor widow has little power against men who treat the girl as repayment. Kanymbubu tries to escape, proving that she does not accept the marriage, yet she is captured and returned. Her tears and fear do not change the decision.

Through these girls, the novel shows that child marriage is not simply a private family matter. It is tied to wealth, debt, and social authority. Gulsun and Kanymbubu lose childhood, safety, and freedom before they can understand the world around them. Their suffering makes visible the cruelty of a system that allows powerful men to take young girls and call it marriage.

Illustrative moment: Gulsun is the teenage wife of Asantay, who is already eighty years old. Although she is recognized as a married woman and wears the elechek, the traditional headdress of married women, she remains emotionally a child. Instead of performing household duties, she spends her days and evenings playing with dolls and other children, returning to the house only at night. She confides to Batiyna that she is frightened of Asantay and dreads sharing the night with him. Her behavior reveals the sharp contrast between the social identity imposed upon her and her psychological immaturity.

Gulsun's later death during childbirth exposes the devastating consequences of child marriage. Her childhood is taken from her before she is physically and emotionally prepared for adulthood, marriage, or motherhood. Through Gulsun's story, the novel presents child marriage as a hidden domestic tragedy, exposing the emotional trauma and physical dangers faced by girls whose lives are determined by patriarchal custom rather than their own readiness or choice.

Freedom: Resistance and Awakening

Batiyna's resistance does not appear suddenly; it grows slowly out of years of humiliation, violence, and helpless observation. At first, she endures because she believes obedience may protect her parents from shame. She accepts her first marriage to Abdyrahman, though she loves Abyl, and later agrees to marry Alymbay to save her father from the crushing fine imposed by Adyke's court. In these early moments, her silence is not weakness but survival. She sees that every act of refusal can bring punishment not only to herself, but also to her family.

Her awakening begins when she realizes that her suffering is not individual misfortune, but part of a larger pattern. She watches Gulsun, still almost a child, fear her elderly husband Asantay and later die in childbirth. She sees Kanymbubu given to Tilep to settle a lambskin debt and hears the girl's despair after every failed appeal for freedom. She witnesses Gulbubu's public humiliation after Buken's false accusation. These scenes teach Batiyna that women are not protected by custom; they are sacrificed to it.

Gradually, her compassion turns into defiance. She resists the Bolush when he tries to dishonor her, publicly exposes his wrongdoing, and later confronts Jarban when he seizes horses from poor herders. She encourages Zuurakan to escape and imagines a life beyond clan control. Her questions about religion, law, and justice become sharper as she searches for an answer to women's fate.

After the Exodus and the return from China, the arrival of Soviet power gives Batiyna a language for what she has long felt. She attends the public meeting despite criticism, joins literacy work, and urges women to study. Her private pain becomes a public mission. By challenging forced marriage and female illiteracy, Batiyna transforms from a woman trying to survive oppression into one determined to end it.

Illustrative moment: Batiyna decides to remove her traditional elechek and replace it with a red headscarf. Written from a clear Soviet ideological perspective, the author frames this transition as a radical break from the "darkness" of the past. To the village elders, the elechek is a sacred symbol of a wom-

an's place within the clan and her submission to patriarchal tradition. However, through the lens of the novel's revolutionary message, the heavy, white layers of the elechek are depicted as a physical weight—a symbol of the feudal "chains" that have kept women like Batiyna silent and illiterate.

By donning the red headscarf, Batiyna is not just changing her clothes; she is performing a political act of defiance. The red scarf represents the "New Power," literacy, and the promise of legal equality. When she rides into the village gatherings with her head uncovered by the traditional turban, she causes a scandal. The author uses this moment to show that Batiyna has moved beyond seeking personal safety and has now embraced the role of an activist. To her, the red scarf is a banner of the future, even as the author uses this symbol to emphasize the Soviet rejection of the old, patriarchal social order. This act of "unveiling" her old identity allows her to step into the public sphere as a leader, signaling that her awakening is now complete and irreversible.