

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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ANDREI (1981)
Zuura Sooronbaeva (1924-2012)

References:

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OVERVIEW

Author

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

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



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

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

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

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

Novella This essay is based on the original Kyrgyz version of *Andrei*.

The novella *Andrei* was published in 1981 in Frunze (modern-day Bishkek) by the *Kyrgyzstan Publishing House*. This is a classic of Kyrgyz Soviet literature, written during the *Brezhnev era / Stagnation* but depicting the *Thaw* era (1950s–60s). The *Thaw* was a post-Stalin era of increased cultural freedom, optimism, and social rebuilding across the Soviet Union.

Background The novella is set in Soviet Kyrgyzstan in the years right after World War II. The story begins in a small Kyrgyz village near Przhevalsk (modern-day Karakol) on the shores of Issyk-Kul. Later, the events move to the cities of Frunze (Bishkek), Moscow, and Leningrad (Saint Petersburg). At this time, many Kyrgyz men had died in the war, leaving broken houses and empty gardens behind. Andrei's wife, Maria, is a survivor of the Siege of Leningrad, which adds to the weight of the past.

The story shows the meeting of two cultures: Russian and Kyrgyz. It introduces local traditions like the summer pasture (*jailoo*), the partnership of farming (*ortok*), and the strict rules of raising a child. It also shows the wave of industrialization sweeping through the region, as new factories opened in towns like Przhevalsk and brought modern life to the villages. Along with this came new things like planting potatoes, making jam (*varenye*), and building houses in the Russian style.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Andrei - Russian craftsman and Baktybek's biological father

Oroz - Kyrgyz shepherd and Baktybek's adopted father

Aysalkyn - Oroz's wife who raised Baktybek

Baktybek - Andrei's biological son raised by Oroz

Katya - Andrei's daughter who falls in love with Baktybek

Maria - Andrei's first wife who died giving birth, mother of Baktybek

Nina - Andrei's second wife

SYNOPSIS

After World War II, a Russian man named Andrei moves to a Kyrgyz village and forms a deep, brotherly bond with a local man named Oroz. When Andrei's wife, Maria, dies during childbirth, Andrei honors her dying wish by giving their newborn son, Baktybek, to Oroz and his wife Aysalkyn to be raised as their own. The secret of Baktybek's true parentage is kept for twenty years.

Years later, Baktybek, now a student in Moscow, unknowingly falls in love with Katya—Andrei's daughter from his second marriage. This forbidden romance forces the two fathers to confront their hidden past. Andrei eventually reveals the truth to Katya, who then records the secret in her diary. Baktybek discovers the diary and learns he is Andrei's eldest son and Katya's biological brother. Heartbroken but wise, he chooses to remain a loyal son to the Kyrgyz parents who raised him while honoring his biological roots. The story concludes with Baktybek's wedding to a girl from Issyk-Kul, celebrating a legendary friendship that united two families and two nations.

SCENES

Andrei Arrives and Plants the First Garden

A Stranger in the Village A Russian man named Andrei, around thirty years old, was walking through a village filled with mud houses. The village was close to Przhevalsk (present-day Karakol), a city in the Issyk-Kul Region. He looked carefully at the homes as he passed by. The Second World War had recently ended, and some houses were damaged while many gardens remained untilled. Seeing this, Andrei thought that the owners of those homes, like many young men, had probably never returned from the war. As he walked, he listened to the song of the cuckoo and admired the quiet beauty of the countryside.

Maripa and the Untilled Garden Near one house, Andrei heard a woman warning two girls that the stranger might be a thief. The words hurt him, but he approached the girls kindly and spoke to them in Kyrgyz. Their names were Maripa and her younger sister. When Andrei learned that their father was alive, he felt relieved. He asked why their garden had not been plowed and whether they had given it to an *ortok*, a partner who would cultivate the land and later share the harvest. The girls did not know what that meant. Soon a neighbor arrived and assumed Andrei was searching for land to farm. When she offered her own garden, Andrei replied that if he worked any field, it would be this one. The woman stood speechless with surprise.

Potatoes for a New Beginning When Maripa heard that Andrei wanted to plant potatoes instead of wheat, she became curious. Soon her father, Oroz, returned home and spoke with the visitor. Andrei explained that he had come after hearing about the village and had noticed the neglected garden. At first, he thought the owner might have been one of the many men who never returned from the war. Oroz replied that he had come back only a year earlier and had been busy with livestock and planting fodder. He also lacked the time to cultivate the garden. If a tractor plowed the land, Andrei was welcome to plant potatoes there and make use of the empty field.

Memories of His Native Land As the two men sat together, Andrei shared the story of his life. Born in Kyrgyzstan, he grew up among Kyrgyz people and studied in a Kyrgyz school. After the deaths of his father and mother, his relatives took him to Leningrad, where he worked in a factory and later married. Although he built a new life there, he constantly missed Kyrgyzstan and often spoke about it to his wife. They planned to visit his homeland, but the war began and their hopes were shattered. During the war, his wife endured the terrible blockade of Leningrad. Even afterward, Andrei continued to long for Kyrgyzstan, its people, and his childhood friends.

A Journey Back to the Homeland Andrei explained that before the war, a Kyrgyz friend had written to him, inviting him to visit his homeland. The letter said a street had been named after his father and that flowers were placed on his parents' graves according to Russian custom. After the war, Andrei reread the letter and traveled to Kyrgyzstan with his wife. Their first stop was Naryn, which he considered his ancestral land. However, the visit saddened him, as many families had lost loved ones and many men had never returned from the war.

Arrival in the Region After leaving Naryn, Andrei and his wife came to Frunze. There they saw an announcement about jobs at a factory in Przhevalsk (present-day Karakol), a city in the Ysyk-Kol Region not far from the village where the girls lived. They decided to return from Leningrad, resigned from their jobs, and moved permanently to Kyrgyzstan. Andrei began working as a master technician at the factory while also searching for old friends and acquaintances in the area.

Meeting the Family When Andrei met the girls, he asked about their father. They replied that he was a shepherd who usually lived in the summer pastures and had gone to the local store, so he would return soon. Soon afterward, Oroz arrived at the house. He was surprised by the stranger but listened carefully as Andrei spoke. Oroz was impressed by Andrei's fluent Kyrgyz. Andrei explained that he had grown up speaking the language and considered it as natural as Russian because of his childhood among Kyrgyz people.

Shared Lives and Memories Their conversation became more personal. Andrei said there were few Kyrgyz workers at the factory and hoped more locals would join. Oroz invited him and his wife to visit the summer pasture during the next holiday, but Andrei insisted on plowing the garden before the season ended. Andrei shared that he had no children. Oroz replied that he had four daughters but no sons and spoke about his brothers, all of whom had died in the war. As Oroz left for the pasture, he remained surprised that Andrei chose his garden.

The Promise of the Garden On the mountain pasture, Oroz told his wife that the Russian man had offered to become an *ortok* and plant potatoes in his garden. Oroz felt both surprised and hopeful, believing life might improve. At the factory, Andrei spoke with Petr about the slow, heavy work. Many machines were old and often did not work properly, so much of the work had to be done by hand. On his

day off, he said he had found warmth again among Kyrgyz people, as if the village itself was pulling him back.

Andrei Tells about His Plan Andrei asked Petr if he knew Oroz. Petr said he was a good shepherd. Andrei told him about his plan to plant potatoes in Oroz's land. Petr told him that if he did not have enough seed, he would help. The government had given the land to Andrei, but he chose to give it to the Markov family because their family was large. Because of this, some colleagues did not fully approve of his decision to work on Oroz's land. A woman sharply asked whether he was trying to profit from another man's field. Meanwhile, Dasha, a Factory Worker talked about the work, complaining about young workers leaving their jobs unfinished and about poor discipline in the factory.

Safety at the Workshop Andrei went to the workshop where Dasha had been complaining about the work. The master and the department head were not present, and only young workers were left in charge. They were working without proper safety instructions. In the casting shop, Andrei saw that the young men could be burned by molten metal and became worried about their safety. He told them to stop and wait until the master arrived. But the shop head refused, saying they must continue to fulfill the plan. The old machines often broke down, making the work even more difficult and chaotic. Petr thought that Andrei should become the chief engineer.

The First Harvest and the News of a Baby

Coworkers' Visit Andrei, a part-time student in Leningrad, returned home and had dinner with his wife Maria. Soon after, trusted factory workers Petr, Masha, and Gennady arrived. Maria prepared tea for them. The workers had brought potato seeds gathered by the workers' collective. Andrei offered to pay, but Masha refused, saying it was shared collective support. She explained that other workers would also help in Oroz's garden the next day, showing solidarity and cooperation among the factory workers in their shared project.

Planting the Potatoes So the workers came to Oroz's garden in the morning and planted the potatoes. They said the soil was rich and fertile. Yet they worried that the garden was left open and unprotected. After finishing the planting, Andrei and his colleagues built a fence around the garden to protect it. Petr and Andrei spoke quietly in Kyrgyz as they worked. When Masha asked what they were saying, they explained that the harvest would be shared according to Kyrgyz custom, given to those who needed it most.

Different Voices in the Garden One woman said that the Kyrgyz had learned to grow potatoes, though they still knew little about storing them. Another Russian questioned why they were helping a Kyrgyz family, as if they had no work of their own. An old Russian man thanked Andrei, saying that helping others is a human duty. Some spoke with criticism about the Kyrgyz people, while others said they were simply like everyone else.

Factory Director Meeting The next day, Andrei visited the factory director after returning from Frunze. Andrei asked about his visit. The director said that after his report to the officials that the plant needed technical upgrading, was working slowly, and had outdated machines, they had provided only some machine parts. He explained that the factory could not fully function without proper equipment. Andrei replied that he wanted to check whether those parts could be used to repair the machines and improve the work conditions, making production more efficient again.

Arrival from the Pasture Aysalkyn, Oroz's wife, was returned from the pasture with one of her daughters riding behind her. In the village, women recognized her and spoke about Oroz's work, praising him as a strong shepherd who raised over a hundred lambs from a hundred sheep, with his wife's help. Seeing the heavy bundle on her back, they guessed she had brought food for the men working in the garden. The women also said that the Russians had worked together, fencing Oroz's garden and even planting apple saplings with care and unity.

The Garden and Gratitude When Aysalkyn and her daughter arrived, Andrei and his wife Maria were working in the garden. Aysalkyn said she had visited Andrei's house earlier but had not found him. She

brought kumis, sour cream, and a lamb from the pasture. She was deeply grateful that the garden had been fenced and cared for, yet she hesitated when asked about payment, unsure how to repay such kindness and effort.

Gifts, Refusal, and New House Andrei said he had also planted apple saplings in the garden. He added that Oroz's house should also be rebuilt, with its old walls replaced and made stronger and more comfortable. Maria and Andrei quietly admired Aysalkyn's strength and dignity. He invited her to stay at their home, but she worried about Oroz and the children left in the pasture. She thanked them and insisted on returning. When she offered money for the work, Andrei refused. Touched but uneasy, Aysalkyn still tried to leave some payment, but Andrei gently returned it to her.

Harvest Autumn came, and from Oroz's garden Andrei gathered a rich harvest. It was enough for two households, and the rest they stored carefully in a dug cellar. The villagers spoke with surprise about the abundant potato yield. At that time, many Kyrgyz people had not yet grown potatoes, but the war had taught them its value, like bread that could feed a family in hard times. The garden became a quiet symbol of shared work and unexpected abundance.

The Question of Seeds The neighbor's son spoke to his father about planting potatoes in spring. But where would they find seeds, the father asked. The boy suggested they ask Oroz, since he had a rich harvest and could lend some, promising to return them later. His mother suggested buying them from the market, but the boy said potatoes were expensive there. Rumors spread that the collective might take seeds from Oroz's harvest, and villagers began to gather, unsure how to solve the question of sharing and need.

The Elder's Visit The villagers decided to send an elder to speak with Oroz. Some argued the seeds should be sold, others said they should be given freely. A harsh man even said Oroz and the Russian should leave the village if they refused. The elder refused to take sides and said they should go themselves. Later, he visited Oroz's house. He was surprised by the jam on the table and asked what kind of food it was. When Aysalkyn mentioned a Russian food called jam (varenje), the elder was startled and anxiously asked if it was 'halal' (permissible) food. Oroz explained that Andrei's wife, Maria, made it from wild strawberries, apples, and apricots with sugar. After hearing this, the old man told Aysalkyn that she should learn how to make it.

Andrei's Success in the Village Andrei was a hardworking man and a loyal friend to Oroz. When spring arrived, they distributed potato seeds to the villagers and the collective farm. Soon, the earth turned green, and everyone felt thankful for the new bounty. While the crops flourished in the fields, Andrei gained great respect at the factory, where his leadership pushed the work forward with success. Through his strong hands and kind spirit, the village began to heal. They learned that a seed of friendship could grow into a harvest that feeds an entire town.

The Rebuilt Home and the Makarenko School Andrei taught Oroz how to save money and even insure his home for security. Together, they rebuilt the house and added a sturdy barn and a deep cellar. Oroz's older daughters went to college, while the younger ones attended the Makarenko school in the city where Andrei's wife, Maria, worked. Though neighbors teased Oroz for living like a "Russian man," they soon followed his lead and repaired their own homes. A new way of life blossomed, turning an old, broken village into a place of peace and pride.

Maria Dies and Andrei Gives His Son to Oroz

Andrei's Joyful News People in the village, and Oroz's whole family, respected Andrei greatly because he was an amazing craftsman. One day, Andrei and his wife Maria came to Oroz's house. A neighbor saw Maria and Aysalkyn greeting each other with a kiss and said with surprise, "She is kissing a Russian woman; these people no longer seem to know what is proper and what is not." But inside the house, there was happy news. Andrei said with shining eyes that they were going to have a baby. Maria blushed with shyness, because the doctor had told her she was pregnant. Aysalkyn smiled warmly and said that Maria

would probably give birth to a son. Oroz was so pleased that he gave a young heifer to Andrei as a special gift.

The Friendship of Russians and Kyrgyz Later, a neighbor came to Oroz's house and was astonished to see Andrei slaughtering a sheep while his wife was making *byjy*, a traditional dish. The neighbor, moved by the scene, said, "May the friendship of Russians and Kyrgyz live forever." Andrei answered softly that before his father died, he had told him never to break ties with the Kyrgyz. The same neighbor, who was a brigade leader, asked Andrei how to build such a strong and beautiful house. Andrei humbly said he could show him, but many people hesitated because they thought they lacked the strength. He explained that Oroz's house had been built in the style of the finest homes constructed in Leningrad after the war. The neighbor said he wanted the same kind of house.

Maria's Death Not long after, Oroz and Aisalkyn's daughters returned to the summer pasture with terrible news: Maria had died. The girls said Maria had gone into surgery while giving birth. She had delivered the baby, but when Andrei came out, he was in tears, because his wife had passed away. Oroz and Aisalkyn hurried there, but when they saw the people gathered near Andrei's home, they still could hardly believe it. When Andrei saw them, he broke down, crying bitterly that he too wished he had died. Oroz and Aisalkyn had never before seen a Russian funeral. Maria had been dressed in new clothes, a white headscarf placed on her head, and her body laid in a coffin. Aisalkyn helped with the mourning rites, and she and Oroz stayed there for many days.

A Father's Broken Heart It was time to move to the summer pasture, so Oroz and Aysalkyn asked Andrei for permission to leave. Andrei was lost in deep sorrow, telling Oroz he never imagined raising a child alone, and that he felt cursed by fate. Oroz and Aysalkyn comforted him, saying Maria had been a wonderful woman. They promised that as soon as the doctors released the baby from the hospital, they would bring him home themselves. They urged Andrei to find his strength, promising that once the child was out of the doctors' care, he would never be alone.

A Son Named Baktybek Andrei remembered Maria's last wish: that their child be given to Oroz and Aysalkyn forever. He feared he could not raise the boy alone and asked Oroz to register the child as his own. To honor Maria's spirit, Oroz finally agreed. They held a great feast for the village and named the boy Baktybek. At the celebration, Oroz made a solemn request to his neighbors: "Never tell this boy he is not my blood. Let him grow as my own son, protected by your silence and your kindness forever."

The Bond of Brotherhood The villagers gathered for the feast were moved to tears, seeing the strength of a friendship that surpassed blood. They blessed Andrei and Oroz, calling them true brothers, and thanked Andrei for the many ways he had helped the village thrive. From that day on, Aysalkyn devoted her whole heart to the baby, caring for him with a mother's deepest love. Oroz and Aysalkyn raised the infant as their own, creating a home where the child was sheltered by the kindness of those who had chosen to be his family.

A Secret in the City When Baktybek turned seven, he was sent to live with his uncle in the city of Frunze to begin his schooling. Oroz stayed by his side for a month, secretly hoping to shield the boy from any local gossip about his birth. The years passed like a rushing river, and Baktybek grew tall and wise. He eventually left for Moscow to study at a great institute of engineering. He stepped into his future with pride, unaware of the hidden secret of his past, carrying only the name of the father who raised him.

The Mirror of Memory Baktybek grew into a capable young man, the joy of his parents and his married sisters. He was skillful and strong, and those who saw him whispered that he was the living image of his biological father, Andrei. Aysalkyn lived with a quiet worry, fearing that the truth might one day reach her son's ears. Oroz, too, looked at the boy and saw his old friend's reflection. Though Baktybek was his son in every way that mattered, the boy's face remained a beautiful, painful memory of the brother Oroz missed so dearly.

Andrei Visits Kyrgyzstan

The Long-Distance Call Baktybek was home for his summer vacation. Baktybek brought news that a phone call was waiting for Oroz at the village office. The chairman hurried him along, and when Oroz picked up the receiver, he heard a voice from the past: it was Andrei. He had returned to Kyrgyzstan. Oroz's heart leaped with joy, and he urged his friend to visit their home. Andrei hesitated, saying he was in a rush, but finally promised to come. When Aysalkyn heard the news, she trembled with a sudden chill. "Did he ask about the boy?" she whispered. Oroz shook his head, but her heart remained heavy with fear.

Preparing the Welcome Aysalkyn wept as she baked fresh bread, terrified that Andrei had come to reclaim her son. She laid the table with care, while Oroz sent Baktybek to the mountain pasture to fetch a sheep for the feast. Baktybek helped his parents gladly, knowing Andrei only as his father's close friend and the master builder who had constructed their sturdy home. After Baktybek returned from the mountain with the sheep, Andrei approached the house. Aysalkyn's voice broke through her tears as she called out to the men, "He is here. At long last, Andrei has come back to us."

The Memory Andrei and Oroz fell into each other's arms, their tears washing away the long years of silence. Andrei stared at Baktybek in silent wonder, seeing a strong man where he had once left a tiny infant. "We have grown old, Oroz," he whispered, seeing the years etched on their faces. Inside the house, Andrei found the wooden bed he had carved with his own hands so long ago. It stood in Baktybek's room, a sturdy bridge between their lives. His heart trembled as he touched the wood, realizing his handiwork had cradled the son he gave to his brother.

The Reunion at the Table Andrei sat upon the floor, longing for the familiar taste of Kyrgyz food and the warmth of his old friends. He looked at Oroz and Aysalkyn, surprised to see they looked as young to him as the day he left. As they shared their lives, Andrei spoke of his new family—a wife, a son, and a daughter. Oroz proudly shared that his own daughters had graduated and were working, one even at Andrei's old factory. Then, Andrei looked at Baktybek and whispered softly that the boy carried the beautiful reflection of Maria's face in his own.

A Mother's Plea and a Father's Peace Aysalkyn trembled with fear, begging Andrei never to reveal the secret to her son. But Andrei comforted her with a gentle heart, saying, "Do not worry. I gave him to you myself, and I only wish for him to be a good son to you." When Baktybek returned and sat between the two men, Andrei watched him with quiet pride. He was astonished to learn the boy had graduated in Frunze and was now studying engineering in Moscow.

The Road to Leningrad When Baktybek heard that Andrei lived in Leningrad, he eagerly asked for his address. Aysalkyn's eyes widened with a sudden, sharp fear, but Andrei remained calm. "When you visit, bring your parents," he said kindly. "Your father fought for that city in the war; he should see it once more." Baktybek turned to Oroz and Aysalkyn, his voice full of hope as he asked if they would truly go. In a moment of courage and love, they promised they would. The long journey of their lives was finally leading them toward the light.

The Tear and the Package Early in the morning, while Baktybek slept, Andrei gently stroked his hair. A single tear fell from the man's eye onto the young man's face. When Baktybek woke, Andrei whispered that he was simply moved by their meeting. Before leaving the village, Andrei placed flowers on Maria's grave. Later, in Moscow, Baktybek received a package of apples and meat from his parents. As he tasted the food from home, a mysterious warmth filled his chest. He remembered Uncle Andrei and the tear on his cheek, and he decided to visit him during the November holidays.

Baktybek Meets Katya

The Train to Leningrad Carrying the gifts from his parents, Baktybek and a friend boarded the train from Moscow to Leningrad. As the wheels hummed against the tracks, Baktybek thought of the deep bond between his father, Oroz, and Andrei. He wondered about the hidden meaning of the tear that had fallen on his face that morning in the village. They reached a towering building that touched the sky, and on the twelfth floor, they finally found Andrei's door. It was opened by a young woman—Andrei's daughter. The

long journey had brought the boy back to the man who built his home.

A Feast in the High Apartment Andrei welcomed them with pure joy, his eyes shining at the sight of his friend's son. Baktybek unpacked the meat and apples from the village, and Andrei eagerly suggested they cook a traditional feast of *beshbarmak*. However, Andrei's wife, Nina, watched Baktybek with a cold and unwelcoming gaze. The young man felt her discomfort, but he found comfort in the kindness of Andrei's daughter, who showed him their apartment. Despite the chill from Nina, the connection to the past remained strong, as the scents of the Kyrgyz mountains filled the air in Leningrad.

The Album of Memories Andrei saw his wife Nina's coldness and felt Baktybek's gentle spirit, which reminded him so much of the sensitive Maria. Katya, Andrei's daughter, brought out a family album. Baktybek was stunned to find old photos of himself as a baby in a cradle, along with pictures of Oroz, Aysalkyn, and his sisters. He never expected to find his life story tucked away in a Leningrad apartment. However, when dinner was served, Nina locked herself in her room and refused to come out. The silence at the table felt like a wall, and Baktybek's heart grew heavy with a new kind of sorrow.

Hurt and Silent Baktybek Baktybek decided he could never bring his parents to a home where they were not wanted. While Andrei took him to see the city, Baktybek found Katya to be a kind and golden soul. But when they returned, he discovered a sight that broke his heart. In the trash bin lay the meat and the apples he had carried so carefully from his parents' village. The symbols of his family's love had been thrown away like common waste. Hurt and silent, Baktybek realized he could stay no longer. When his friend arrived at the door, he knew it was time to go.

The Forgotten Bag Baktybek told Katya they might never meet again and walked away into the cold city air. While Nina remained indifferent to the boy's pain, Katya felt a deep sadness, wondering how she could ever see the handsome young man again. Suddenly, she found his forgotten bag and felt a spark of hope—perhaps he would return for it. She waited by the door all evening, while Andrei sat in the shadows, his heart heavy with regret. Both father and daughter watched the quiet hallway, mourning the departure of a son who had left behind more than just a bag.

The Letter of Katya Katya wrote a letter to Baktybek, telling him how Andrei sat in deep sorrow, waiting for his return. She spoke of the bag he left behind and how her father always shared stories of the Kyrgyz land. "You are fair-skinned like us," she wrote, "even if your eyes and hair are dark." She asked him to forgive her mother's cold heart and begged him to stay in touch. Baktybek read her words with wonder. He had already told his parents about Nina's unkindness, yet he couldn't help but wonder if this was how love begins to bloom.

A Surprise in the Winter Winter arrived with the weight of exams. One day, Baktybek returned to his dormitory, a place where students from many nations lived as one. His friends greeted him with excitement, announcing that he had guests. There, standing before him, was Katya, and Andrei had come with her too. Baktybek's heart raced with surprise. Remembering the traditions of his home, he insisted on preparing a fresh meal for his visitors. Katya stepped forward to help him, and soon the room was filled with the music of youth and the scent of a shared future.

At the Dormitory As the students sang songs of their homelands, the door opened and Andrei stepped inside. The master builder and the young student looked at each other, and in an instant, they were locked in a powerful embrace. The cold memory of their last meeting in the Leningrad apartment vanished. In that small, crowded room, the distance between them disappeared. Katya watched them with a smile, knowing that the bridge Andrei had built so many years ago was still standing, stronger than ever, held together by the love of a father and the respect of a son.

The Echo of a Dying Wish Andrei sat in the crowded room, his heart heavy with the past. As the sounds of Kyrgyz songs filled the air, he saw Maria's reflection in Baktybek's face. He remembered the painful day of the surgery and Maria's final, whispered wish: "If I die, give our child to Oroz and Aysalkyn." The memory of that sacrifice brought sudden tears to his eyes, leaving Baktybek confused and surprised. Andrei looked at the young man, seeing not just a student, but the tiny infant he had once surrendered to a

friend's loving arms.

The Song of the Komuz Baktybek took up the *komuz*, and the strings sang of the high mountains. Katya watched him with silent admiration, captivated by the music. Baktybek's mind turned to Nina's coldness, and he learned she was from Kuibyshev, not a survivor of the Leningrad Blockade. He thought to himself that a person who had known true hunger would never throw away the gift of meat and bread. He felt a deep pride in the values taught by his parents, realizing that honor is found in how we treat the soul and the soil alike.

A Promise for the New Year Katya invited Baktybek home, but he gently refused, his heart still guarded. Andrei watched them, happy to see a bond forming between his children. He tried to offer Baktybek money, asking him to forgive Nina, but the young man would not take it. Andrei felt a sting of sadness as they prepared for their morning flight. Before they parted at the hotel, Katya made a final request: "Let's celebrate the New Year together." Baktybek smiled and agreed. In the cold winter air, a new bridge of friendship began to rise toward the coming year.

The Shadow of Maria's Dark Eyes As the seasons turned, Baktybek could think of no one but Katya. To him, she was the wisest and most beautiful girl in the world. Their letters and phone calls grew more frequent, and the friendship Andrei had once hoped for turned into a deep, romantic bond. Andrei watched this with a growing fear. He looked at Baktybek's dark eyes and hair, remembering that Maria's grandmother had been Turkish, giving the boy his striking features. The secret of their shared blood weighed heavily on his soul as he realized the two were walking a dangerous path.

Nina's Plan for the Impossible Marriage Nina informed Andrei that Katya was traveling to Moscow for Baktybek's birthday. Andrei's heart burned with worry, realizing how deep the love between them had grown. To his surprise, Nina suggested they should help Baktybek settle in the city after graduation. "If they love each other, what can we do?" she asked. But Andrei was trapped in a silent nightmare. He never intended for his biological son and his daughter to be more than friends. "She is too young," he argued, his voice trembling with a truth he could not speak. "This marriage can never be."

Katya's Confession Katya arrived home with her hair beautifully styled, asking her father if she looked pretty for Baktybek. When Andrei told her she could not go to Moscow, she was stunned. "Do you hate him?" she asked. Andrei replied that he respected him only as a friend's son. But Katya stood her ground and boldly declared, "I love him." Andrei began to pace the room, his limbs shaking with fear. He remembered the Kyrgyz traditions where a daughter would never speak so openly of love to her father. He stood silent, paralyzed by a secret that threatened to shatter their lives.

The Choice between Life and Love Andrei stood before Katya, his eyes with a fear he could not explain. He threatened to end her life rather than see her with Baktybek, warning her that she would never find happiness with his family. "Choose between life and this love," he demanded. But Katya looked at her father with a steady gaze and replied that a life without Baktybek would be no life at all. Andrei's heart broke as he realized he was losing his daughter to the very man who was already his son. The shadow of his secret hung heavy in the room.

The Marriage Vow Andrei sat in the silence, haunted by a truth he dared not speak. Should he tell them they were brother and sister? He feared his words might drive them to a tragic end or cause them to flee together. While Nina was away, Katya begged him for the truth. "What secret are you hiding?" she asked. "We have already promised to marry." Andrei could only weep, his tears falling as he whispered a lament in Kyrgyz: "How miserable I am, what do I do now?" He felt trapped in a storm, unable to save his children from their own hearts.

Katya's Letter Katya wrote a letter to Baktybek, sharing her father's anger and her fear that his parents would never accept her. In the village, Baktybek read her words with confusion. He believed that if Oroz and Andrei met again, the two old friends could settle everything. Meanwhile, Oroz and Aysalkyn watched their son with pride. Oroz wondered if the boy had finally found a girl to love, but Aysalkyn told him to be

patient, thinking perhaps he had found someone in Moscow. They did not yet know that their son's love was a bridge leading back to the past.

The Photograph of Katya During his vacation, Baktybek showed his parents a photograph of a beautiful girl named Katya. He spoke highly of Andrei but mentioned that Andrei's wife was unkind. When Aysalkyn saw the picture of the two young people standing close together, her heart raced with dread. The secret they had guarded for years now threatened to break. The parents worried day and night: how could they tell the children they were brother and sister? The thought of them marrying was a shadow that darkened their joy, leaving them trapped in a silence they could not break.

A Mother's Silent Anger As Aysalkyn packed food for Baktybek's return to the Moscow city, her mind was troubled. Baktybek noticed her distance and asked what was weighing on her soul. Her anger turned toward Andrei; she could not understand why he had allowed the children to meet. "Why did he let his daughter near our son?" she complained to Oroz. Oroz stood by his old friend, telling his wife not to speak ill of him. Still, the air was thick with worry as they watched their son leave for Moscow, fearing the love that was blooming in his heart.

The Fathers Meet and Andrei Tells Katya the Secret

The Graduation Telegram It was Baktybek's final year of studies, and he sent a telegram asking Oroz to come to Moscow. Oroz traveled with a heavy heart, wondering if the truth about Katya was finally coming to light. Baktybek also reached out to Andrei, but his request sparked a new fire. Instead of asking for his old friend to greet the train, Baktybek asked if Katya could come to meet his father. Andrei was filled with sudden rage, feeling pushed aside by the young man's love for a sister he did not know was his own.

The Meeting in Moscow Andrei flew to Moscow with a heavy heart, searching for Oroz at the airport but missing him in the crowd. When they finally met at the dormitory, Andrei fell into his old friend's arms and wept. Baktybek, unaware of the hidden truth, asked Oroz to speak with Andrei about his wish to marry Katya. In a quiet hotel room, the two fathers faced their shared past. Oroz suggested Baktybek should marry a Kyrgyz girl, but he knew the boy's heart was set. Andrei sat in a shadow of guilt, regretting the day he had ever shared his address.

Oroz's Fear of Losing a Son Fear Andrei and Oroz debated whether to tell Katya the truth. Oroz was paralyzed by fear, whispering, "If my son knows, I will lose him forever." He begged Andrei to only tell Katya if she could guard the secret like a grave. Meanwhile, Andrei scolded Baktybek, who wrongly believed his love was being rejected because he was Kyrgyz. Bitter and heartbroken, Baktybek turned to drink on his birthday, feeling betrayed by his father's silence. He looked at Oroz with resentment, not knowing that his father was fighting a battle to keep his family whole.

A Daughter Learns of a Brother Andrei returned to find Katya pale and thin from her suffering. Fearing he might lose both of his children to their own grief, he realized he could no longer keep the secret locked away. "I will tell you a mystery," he told her, "but you must promise never to tell your mother or Baktybek." Katya gave her word, her heart racing in the quiet room. In the dim light, the father finally revealed the bond of blood that made her love a forbidden tragedy. The truth, born in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan, had finally reached the city of Leningrad.

Andrei Tells the Forbidden Truth Andrei stood before his daughter, his voice trembling with a secret he had kept for twenty years. "I am to blame for everything," he whispered. He told Katya the impossible truth: she and Baktybek were brother and sister. He spoke of Maria's death and his choice to give the baby to Oroz to fulfill her final wish. Katya's heart shattered; she wept for a love built on a lie and insisted that Baktybek must know. But Andrei begged her for silence, fearing the truth would destroy the life his son had found in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan.

A Brother and Sister Forever At dawn, Baktybek arrived, calling Katya his "white pigeon." He begged her to run away with him, but her heart was now locked behind a wall of pain. "We must only be brother

and sister from now on," she said, her eyes turning cold. Baktybek could not understand her sudden change and felt a deep bitterness toward Andrei for standing in their way. In his confusion, he found Katya's notebook and tucked it into his pocket. He left her, unaware that he held the key to the mystery in his hands as he walked into the morning mist.

The Notebook On his flight back to Moscow, Baktybek opened the stolen notebook. He read Katya's private thoughts—her love for him at first sight, their happy New Year's celebration, and her struggle with her father's strict ban. Each word was a testament to a love that had bloomed with pure intention. As the plane soared above the clouds, Baktybek realized that the girl who had asked him to forget her was the same girl who had written of her endless longing. He sat in the high sky, searching the ink for an answer to their sudden, silent sorrow.

The Handwriting on the Page As the plane glided toward Moscow, Baktybek read Katya's diary and felt his identity dissolve. Andrei had confessed everything: "Baktybek is my eldest son, whom I gave to my Kyrgyz brother." He read Katya's shock at learning her brother had been living a different life for twenty years. The weight of these words was so immense that Baktybek sat frozen after the plane touched down. He did not notice the cabin empty. He only moved when the captain spoke, reminding him that the journey was over and he had finally arrived.

The Hidden Roots In the quiet of his room, Baktybek fell into a deep sickness, his mind spinning with the secret of his birth. His friends marveled at the legendary bond between Oroz and Andrei—a friendship so strong it had changed the course of two families. They encouraged him to find refuge in his studies, but the books felt empty. He spent his days on a park bench, lost in the shadows of his own history. He was the firstborn son of a man in Leningrad, raised by the heart of a father in the mountains.

The Two Fathers "I am Andrei's eldest son," he whispered, finally seeing the wall that blocked his love for Katya. He thought of Oroz and Aysalkyn, the parents who had shaped his soul; he feared that knowing the secret might hurt the people who raised him. In the park, he met an old acquaintance, who was a teacher and finally unburdened his heart. He showed the man the diary, the evidence of his shared blood with the girl he loved. At this lonely crossroads, he searched for a way to carry the legacy of two fathers without losing his way.

The Wise Teacher's Counsel Baktybek shared Katya's diary with the wise teacher, who listened with a heavy heart. "The love of the parents who raised you is a great treasure," the teacher said gently. "You belong to them now, and you must never cause them sorrow." He urged Baktybek to honor the legendary friendship between Oroz and Andrei, calling him a child born from the unity of two nations. Baktybek wept with relief, finally understanding why he had been sent to school in Frunze. He left with a peaceful spirit, determined to protect the hearts of those who had called him son.

The Wedding of Two Families Three years passed, and the village gathered for Baktybek's wedding. He had grown into a respectful man, the pride of Oroz and Aysalkyn. His bride was a beautiful girl from the shores of Ysyk-Kol, a choice that brought joy to everyone. Andrei stood beside Oroz, both fathers watching with bright, open faces. Though the long-hidden secret of Baktybek's birth had finally come to light, the community offered only their blessings. "You found the truth on your own," the elders smiled. They prayed for the couple, celebrating a bond that had turned two families into a single, golden legacy.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Andrei

Andrei is a "Russian Kyrgyz," born in the rugged mountains of Naryn, Kyrgyzstan and shaped by the language and traditions of a Kyrgyz school. After being orphaned, he was sent to Leningrad, where he grew into a master of heavy industry. He survived the war years, while his first wife, Maria, endured the brutal Leningrad Blockade. His return to the Ysyk-Kol region is the homecoming of a prodigal son. He does not arrive as a stranger, but as a man bringing modern industrial skills to heal the broken soil and the grieving hearts of his native land.

Multicultural Andrei exists between two worlds, blending his Russian heritage with a soul formed in Kyrgyzstan. Because he was educated in a Kyrgyz school, he speaks the language fluently and understands local customs with a native's intuition. He is not a stranger in the village; he is a man who feels as comfortable eating on a floor mat with Oroz as he does working in a massive Leningrad factory. This dual identity allows him to act as a bridge between nations. He respects the traditions of the mountains while carrying the industrial spirit of the city, making him a unique "Russian Kyrgyz."

Skillful Andrei is a man of practical action who uses his hands to heal and build. His years in the heavy industries of Leningrad made him a master technician who can repair complex factory machines that others find broken. He brings this expertise to the village, replacing crumbling mud walls with a sturdy house built in the "Leningrad style." Whether he is carving a wooden bed for his son or teaching Oroz how to secure his property with insurance, Andrei uses his technical knowledge to create safety. His talent is not for show; it is a tool he uses to serve his community.

Selfless The most defining moment of Andrei's life is his decision to put a child's future above his own happiness. When Maria dies after childbirth, he is left alone with a newborn son. Remembering Maria's dying wish and fearing he cannot provide the stable home a motherless baby needs, he gives the boy to Oroz and Aysalkyn. This act of giving away his eldest son, Baktybek, was a supreme sacrifice. He watches his son grow up from a distance, choosing to remain a "friend" rather than a father to ensure the boy feels secure in the family that raised him.

Sentimental Despite his rugged background in heavy industry and war, Andrei is a man of deep, tender emotions. He is a romantic who spent his years in Leningrad longing for the scent of the Kyrgyz earth and the sound of the cuckoo. His heart is easily moved by the past; he sheds real tears when he strokes the hair of his sleeping son or visits the grave of his first wife. He cherishes memories of his parents and childhood friends, and he allows his emotions to guide his loyalty. His love for Oroz and Baktybek is the quiet, steady force that drives his every action.

Baktybek

Baktybek is the biological son of Andrei and Maria, but he grows up in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan as the beloved son of Oroz and Aysalkyn. His mother died giving him life, and he was surrendered to his father's best friend to ensure he would be raised with a mother's warmth. Growing up, Baktybek has no idea that his blood is Russian; he sees himself as a true son of the village. He is a bright and ambitious young man who eventually leaves the mountains to study engineering in Moscow. His journey is one of discovery, as he uncovers a secret that forces him to choose between two fathers and two nations.

Capable Baktybek is a young man of natural talent and physical strength who excels in everything he touches. Whether he is helping his father Oroz in the village or studying complex engineering at the institute in Moscow, he displays a sharp mind and steady hands. The villagers often whisper that he is the living image of Andrei because he shares the same mechanical intuition and hardworking spirit. He is an "*epchil*" (skillful) youth who navigates the modern world of cities and technology as easily as he handled the mountain pastures. His success in education proves that he carries the hardworking legacy of both of his fathers.

Devoted His love for the parents who raised him is deep, sincere, and unwavering. Even when he is far away in the grand cities of Frunze or Moscow, Baktybek's heart remains tied to the small village house Oroz built. He is the pride of Oroz and Aysalkyn because he never forgets his roots, regularly sending news and returning home during his vacations. When he discovers the shocking secret of his birth, his first thought is not of himself, but of how to protect his parents from pain. He chooses to stay loyal to Oroz and Aysalkyn, proving that the bond of raising a child is stronger than blood.

Agonized Baktybek experiences a profound and silent suffering when he discovers the impossible truth of his identity. On a lonely flight to Moscow, he reads Katya's diary and realizes that the girl he loves is actually his biological sister. This discovery throws his entire world into a storm of confusion and

grief. He falls ill from the weight of this secret, sitting alone in city parks for hours, trying to understand how his life became such a complicated tragedy. He carries the heavy burden of knowing he can never be with Katya, yet he must keep this secret to save his family from shattering.

Noble In the end, Baktybek proves his character through his maturity and his ability to sacrifice his own desires for the common good. After seeking the counsel of a wise teacher, he decides that he will not let the secret of his birth destroy the people who loved him. He chooses a path that brings peace to both Andrei and Oroz. By marrying a girl from Issyk-Kul and remaining a "son of the village," he honors the bridge his fathers built between two cultures. He becomes a man who carries the strength of two heritages with dignity and silent grace.

Oroz

Oroz is a hardworking Kyrgyz shepherd and a veteran of the War living in a small village near Lake Issyk-Kul. Having lost his own brothers in the conflict, he returned home to find a life defined by quiet labor and the joy of his four daughters. He is a man of the earth, deeply tied to the rhythms of the summer pastures and the care of his livestock. He becomes the moral anchor of the novella, a man whose vast heart allows him to bridge the gap between two different nations.

Brotherly Oroz possesses a rare capacity for loyalty that transcends ethnicity and blood. While the village women are suspicious of the Russian stranger, Oroz welcomes Andrei into his home and agrees to become his "ortok" or farming partner. He treats Andrei not as a guest, but as a long-lost sibling, sharing his bread, his table, and his worries. When Andrei builds a new house for him or teaches him how to plant potatoes, Oroz accepts these gifts with a humble and open spirit. This bond is so strong that Oroz eventually sacrifices his own family's privacy to fulfill a promise to his friend.

Compassionate His heart is most visible in the way he steps forward during Andrei's darkest hour. When Andrei's wife dies, Oroz does not just offer sympathy; he offers a home. He and his wife, Aysalkyn, take the newborn Baktybek and raise him as their own son, ensuring the motherless infant never feels the coldness of being an orphan. Oroz provides the boy with a name, a culture, and a deep sense of belonging. He loves Baktybek with such sincerity that for twenty years, the boy never suspects he is adopted. For Oroz, fatherhood is defined by love and daily care, not by biological heritage.

Receptive Despite being a traditional shepherd, Oroz is remarkably open to new ideas and progress. He is the first in his village to listen to Andrei's advice about planting potatoes, an act that eventually feeds the entire community during hard times. He is willing to change his way of life, learning from Andrei how to rebuild his crumbling mud house in the sturdy Leningrad style and how to insure his property for the future. Oroz does not fear the "Russian ways"; instead, he wisely adopts the skills Andrei brings from the city to make a better, more secure life for his daughters and his son.

Protective Oroz is a man of great emotional strength who carries the burden of a dangerous secret to shield his child from pain. He is terrified that if Baktybek learns the truth of his Russian birth, the boy will feel like an outsider in his own village. To prevent this, Oroz makes the villagers swear a sacred oath at a feast never to tell the boy about his past. Even when Andrei returns years later, Oroz's primary fear is the loss of his son's trust. He fights a quiet, agonizing battle to keep his family whole, proving that a father's greatest duty is to guard his child's peace of mind.

Aysalkyn

Aysalkyn is the hardworking wife of Oroz and the compassionate mother who raises Baktybek from infancy. As a mother of four daughters, she welcomes the motherless Russian baby into her heart without hesitation, providing him with the warmth and care he lost when Maria died. She lives a life split between the high mountain pastures (jailoo) and their village home, managing the heavy labor of a shepherd's household. Aysalkyn is the emotional guardian of the family secret, carrying a quiet burden of fear that her beloved son might one day be taken from her.

Nurturing Aysalkyn poured her entire soul into raising Baktybek from the moment Oroz brought the motherless infant home. Even though she already had four daughters to care for, she never treated the boy as an outsider or a "Russian" child. To her, he was simply her son, the boy she stayed up with during the night and cheered for as he grew into a man. She provided the affection that Maria could not give him, nursing him and keeping him warm. Her love is so complete that she often forgets she did not give birth to him herself.

Apprehensive Despite her outward strength, Aysalkyn lives with a quiet, constant fear that the secret of Baktybek's birth will be uncovered. Every time Andrei visits or a stranger asks about the boy's striking dark eyes, her heart skips a beat. She was the one who trembled when Andrei returned to the village after many years, immediately asking Oroz if the man had come to reclaim his son. This anxiety drives her to be fiercely protective. She is a woman haunted by the worry that a single word could shatter the only world her son has ever known.

Industrious She is a woman of the high mountain pastures, a shepherd's wife who knows the value of hard labor. Aysalkyn spends her days milking cows, preparing kumis, and carrying heavy bundles of food from the mountains down to the village. When Andrei helps fence their garden, she shows her gratitude by bringing the best meat and sour cream from their livestock. She is not a woman of many words, but her actions speak of her dedication. Whether she is kneading dough for fresh bread or helping in the potato fields, her hands are never still.

Devout Aysalkyn is deeply rooted in the customs of her people and cares about maintaining the spiritual and social honor of her household. When the village elder questions if the Russian jam Andrei's wife made is "halal," she listens carefully, wanting to ensure her family follows the right path. She keeps the traditions alive in the home, making sure guests are fed and respect is paid to the elderly. Her sense of propriety is what makes her so worried about Baktybek's romance with Katya; she instinctively feels that the connection is wrong and dangerous for her son.

THEMES

Friendship

The theme of the *Friendship of Peoples (Druzhba Narodov)* serves as the moral and structural foundation of the novella Andrei. In the context of Soviet literature after the 1950s, this was more than just a political slogan; it was a vision of a unified society where ethnic differences were bridged by shared labor, common suffering, and mutual respect.

In the story, this brotherhood is not a distant ideal but a lived reality, embodied in the profound connection between Andrei, a Russian craftsman, and Oroz, a Kyrgyz shepherd.

This connection is seen when Andrei and Oroz sit on the floor to share bread or when Andrei speaks Kyrgyz to connect with his neighbors. Their bond is built on the soil itself as they plant potatoes until their hands are covered in the same earth. They do not see each other as representatives of different nations. They see each other as survivors who understand the heavy burden of loss. Andrei carries the trauma of the Leningrad Blockade while Oroz carries the grief of brothers who never returned from the front lines.

This bond goes much deeper than farming. Andrei uses his own hands to build Oroz a sturdy house to give his friend's family a safe place to live. When Andrei's wife dies, he does not look for help in far-away Russia. He turns to his friend Oroz. Giving his newborn son to a Kyrgyz family is the ultimate act of trust. It is a quiet way of saying that he loves Oroz enough to let him raise his child. Oroz accepts this responsibility with a wide heart, loving Baktybek as his own blood and protecting him from the loneliness of being an orphan. Aysalkyn cares for the baby with the same devotion she gives her daughters, never treating him like an outsider. She feeds him from her table and worries about his future as if he were her own flesh.

This friendship survives secrets and years of silence. At the end of the story, when Baktybek marries, both fathers stand side by side. They are no longer a Russian man and a Kyrgyz man but simply two fathers who want their children to have a peaceful life. The story teaches that true friendship is about

sharing the most difficult parts of life like hunger and hope. It is a promise kept over twenty years, proven by the way they raised a son together.

Illustrative moment: After the successful potato harvest, Andrei slaughters a lamb at Oroz's house with the skill of a local. His wife, Maria, joins in by preparing byjy, a traditional dish made by filling sheep intestines with rice and vegetables.

The village brigade leader, who previously viewed the Russian stranger with deep suspicion, watches the scene in silence. He sees Andrei working the meat with his own hands and eventually sitting cross-legged on the floor to eat from the communal bowl. In this moment, the ethnic barrier dissolves. Andrei is no longer a suspicious outsider; he is a man who honors Kyrgyz culture by eating the food his wife has learned to prepare. This act of sharing a meal made of traditional intestines and rice proves that brotherhood is found in the honest labor of the hands and a shared respect for the local way of life.

Economy:

Industrialization

The theme of industrialization of the periphery is a crucial historical backdrop for the novella. During the Second World War, the Soviet government moved hundreds of factories and thousands of workers from the front lines in European Russia to the safety of Central Asia. This massive relocation was meant to keep the war effort alive, but it created a difficult reality for the "periphery" (remote areas like Kyrgyzstan).

These plants were primarily staffed by Russians, Slavs, or people from the Baltic republics. Local Kyrgyz people were rarely found on the factory floor, as most specialized roles were filled by those who had moved with the machinery. This created a divide where the industrial world remained separate from the local agricultural community.

While these plants brought new technology to Central Asia, they were often poorly equipped and struggled with broken, outdated machinery. By the time Andrei arrives at the factory in Przhevalsk, the excitement of the move has faded, and the plant has become a remote, neglected outpost. The work is slow and chaotic because the tools are old and the supply of spare parts is low. The workers are forced to do much of the heavy labor by hand, putting their safety at risk.

Andrei's role in the story is to bridge this gap between the center and the periphery. As a master technician trained in the great industrial city of Leningrad, he brings "advanced" knowledge to this struggling mountain factory.

Andrei is the perfect example of a Soviet worker because he does more than just use machines; he fixes and improves them. By repairing old equipment and teaching young workers how to stay safe, he shows the true goal of progress. He brings the skills and knowledge from big cities like Leningrad to help a remote mountain factory succeed.

Illustrative moment: Andrei enters the factory's casting shop and finds young workers operating dangerous machinery without any supervision. He notices they are working with molten metal without proper safety instructions, risking terrible burns just to fulfill the production plan. The equipment is old and broken, yet the department head insists they continue the work. Andrei immediately steps in and tells the young men to stop. While others only care about the factory's output, Andrei uses his Leningrad training to bring order and safety to the remote plant.

Culture

Cultural Differences

The novella explores the meeting of two distinct worlds: the nomadic heritage of the Kyrgyz and the sedentary traditions of the Russians. These differences are not presented as barriers, but as unique rhythms of life that eventually harmonize through friendship. For Oroz and his family, existence is defined by the mountain pastures (*jailoo*), the movement of livestock, and a diet centered on meat and dairy. To the Kyrgyz, the land is a vast, open space for grazing. For Andrei, however, the land is a garden that must be fenced, tilled, and planted with crops like potatoes, which he calls the "second bread."

These cultural contrasts are most visible in the daily habits of the home. Kyrgyz life happens on the floor, where families gather on mats to share large platters of meat. Russian life centers around the table, featuring a diet rich in vegetables and sweet preserves.

Even death is handled differently. Maria's funeral provides a solemn moment where these two worlds watch one another. The Kyrgyz villagers see, for the first time, a Russian burial where the deceased is dressed in a white headscarf and placed in a wooden coffin. Despite the difference in ritual, Aysalkyn stays for days to help with the mourning rites, showing that grief speaks the same language.

Ultimately, Andrei bridges this gap through his own behavior. Although he is a master builder who could easily sit at a high table, he chooses to sit cross-legged on the floor mat with Oroz.

Illustrative moment: A respected village elder visits Oroz's home and sees a jar of *varenye* (Russian jam) on the table for the first time. The elder is immediately startled by the dark, sweet preserve. Having never seen such food, he asks with great anxiety whether it is "halal" (permissible) for a Kyrgyz man to eat, because he is unfamiliar with Russian food and wants to ensure it does not contain anything forbidden by his Muslim religious and cultural traditions.

Oroz calmly reassures him, explaining that Andrei's wife, Maria, made it using only wild strawberries, apples, and apricots mixed with sugar. Upon hearing that the food is simply the fruit of the earth, the elder's fear turns into curiosity. He tastes the jam and is so impressed by its sweetness and quality that he turns to Aysalkyn and tells her she should learn how to make it herself.

Cultural Concepts

In the novella *Andrei*, cultural traditions help connect a Russian man with a Kyrgyz family. One example is Tergöö, a custom in which women avoid saying the names of their husband's relatives. Because there was a man named *Orusbay* in the village, people could not use the word *Orus* (Russian) and instead called Andrei a *muzhuk*, meaning a Russian peasant. At first, this showed that he was seen as an outsider. Later, Andrei became close to Oroz through *Ortok*, a partnership in which they worked together and shared the harvest from their potato field.

The families became even more connected through a *kerez*, the final wish of a dying person. Before Maria died, she asked Andrei to give their son to Oroz and Aysalkyn. To fulfill her wish, they held a *jentek toi*, a naming celebration. During the feast, the baby was given the name Baktybek, and Oroz officially accepted him as his son.

Traditional food also shows the importance of cultural identity. Maria learned to cook *byjy*, a Kyrgyz dish made from sheep intestines stuffed with rice and vegetables. Years later, when Baktybek was studying in Moscow, he received *kerchöö*, a traditional food made from the fatty skin and meat from a sheep's breast. Eating it reminded him of his home and family.

The *Komuz*, a traditional Kyrgyz musical instrument, also reflects Baktybek's identity. When he plays it, he expresses his deep connection to Kyrgyz culture. Although he was born to Russian parents, he grew up in the Kyrgyz *jailoo* (summer pasture) and felt that Kyrgyz traditions were part of who he was.

Illustrative moment: A powerful illustrative moment occurs during the *jentek toi*, the naming feast for the baby Baktybek. Andrei, though his heart is heavy with the loss of Maria, stands before Oroz and the gathered villagers to fulfill Maria's *kerez*—her final dying wish. He hands his newborn son to Oroz, not as a stranger giving away a child, but as a brother entrusting his most precious life to a kindred soul. Oroz holds the infant high and announces his Kyrgyz name, Baktybek, to the community.

In that moment, the village elder and the neighbors, who once viewed Andrei as a suspicious outsider, offer their heartfelt blessings. Seeing the gravity of the sacrifice, Oroz turns to the crowd and makes a solemn request: he asks everyone never to reveal the boy's true identity or tell him that he was born to a Russian father. He begs the village to let Baktybek grow up as his own blood, sheltered by their collective silence and kindness.

Identity:

Belonging and Identity

For Baktybek, identity is never something he questions. He grows up speaking Kyrgyz, moving between the village and the *jailoo*, and studying with the dream of becoming an engineer. He knows, without a

doubt, that he is the son of Oroz and Aysalkyn. They are the ones who cheer for him at every milestone, who worry over him when he is far from home, and who have loved him since the day he drew his first breath. That certainty is the foundation of who he is.

It all shatters the moment he opens Katya's diary on the flight back to Moscow. The words stare back at him: he is not Oroz's blood, but Andrei's eldest son. Even worse, the girl he has fallen in love with is his biological sister. In an instant, the life he has always known is rewritten. Suddenly, the dark eyes people always said resembled Andrei are no longer a coincidence, and the quiet ache he sometimes felt around his father takes on a new, painful meaning. He finds himself asking who he really is, and whether everything he believed about himself was a lie.

The weight of that question nearly crushes him. Part of him wants to understand the father he never knew, to know the Russian side of himself that had been hidden for so long. But that curiosity is quickly swallowed by guilt and fear. To acknowledge Andrei as his father feels like a betrayal of the people who raised him. How could he call Oroz anything other than "Ata" when it was Oroz who taught him how to be a man? How could he look at Aysalkyn, the woman who nursed him and prayed over him, and tell her he was someone else? The thought of leaving them behind is unbearable.

It is only when he speaks to a wise teacher in the park that he finds peace. The teacher does not tell him to choose between the two men. Instead, he reminds Baktybek of the years of devotion he has already received. He points out that Oroz and Aysalkyn did not raise him out of obligation, but out of a love they chose every single day. That simple truth settles something in Baktybek. He realizes his identity is not something that can be erased by a name on paper. It is written into every memory he has: the mountains he calls home, the Kyrgyz words he thinks in, and the parents who have always been his.

Illustrative moment: By the end, Baktybek does not need to pick a side. He marries a girl from Issyk-Kul, and remains the son Oroz and Aysalkyn raised. He quietly honors Andrei as the man who gave him life, but never lets that truth undo the deeper one he has always known. The novella leaves no doubt: family is not defined by the blood in your veins, but by the people who choose to love you, protect you, and call you their own, day after day. For Baktybek, that has always been Oroz and Aysalkyn.