

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE GIRL WITH THE RED SCARF (1977)

Atif Yılmaz

OVERVIEW

The Girl with the Red Scarf (Selvi Boylu, Al Yazmalım) is one of the cult films of Turkish cinema. Even after more than forty years since its production, it is still watched and loved by subsequent generations. The film questions the concepts of love and affection and is based on the story "The Red Scarf" (1970) by Soviet-Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov. The story of the film, which is remembered in Turkish cinema history and popular culture with the sentence "What was love? Love was labor", is based on the theme that Brecht also addressed in his play "The Caucasian Chalk Circle" (1944). While the relationship between love and labor is questioned within the framework of a love story in the film, this theme is placed in the context of motherhood in Brecht's play.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING

Atif Yılmaz knows his film craft and directing actors very well. Coming from the tradition of Yeşilçam, he is experienced in using camera scales and close-ups of actors that the audience would enjoy. His cinematographic choices successfully convey the tense moments of the film's story. We can say that while *The Girl with the Red Scarf* is an adaptation of a literary work and as such it has to represent the inner voices of the characters, the film's cinematic language turns this into an advantage.

The performances of actors Türkan Şoray, Kadir İnanır and Ahmet Mekin in this film is among their best work. The fact that the film still maintains its relevance is not only due to Atif Yılmaz's successful adaptation of a powerful story into film and Ali Özgentürk's successful screenplay adapted from a literary work, but also due to the success of these actors. In addition, the film's soundtrack, composed by Cahit Berkay, has also become an important part of Turkey's history of popular music.

CHARACTERS

Asya	A young woman living in a village.
İlyas	A truck driver from İstanbul.
Cemşit	A construction foreman older than Asya and İlyas.
Dilek	A corporate officer, a free and single woman.

STORY

Asya, a girl who lives in the village, and İlyas, a truck driver from İstanbul who carries sand for the dam construction, meet on the road and fall in love with each other. While her family plans to marry Asya to someone from the village, she and İlyas elope and get married in a religious ceremony. They have a child. İlyas is punished by the company for towing a broken-down minibus with his truck, and as punishment he is sent to the repair shop. This change makes İlyas unhappy. He starts drinking and distances himself from Asya and their son Samet. Listening to the advice of a neighbor, Asya goes to the company to talk to İlyas's manager. When İlyas learns about this, he hits Asya and starts living with one of the company's officials, Dilek. When Asya learns about this relationship, she takes their child and leaves the house. But she has nowhere to go. Her family does not talk to her because she has married against their wishes. She plans to go to the city and find a job. She accepts the help of Cemşit, whom she meets on the road and notices her helplessness. Cemşit is a trustworthy and loving man. He likes Asya a lot and wants her to stay, but Asya returns home. She learns that İlyas has left the village with Dilek. Cemşit takes Asya and her son Samet back to their home. After a while, they get married officially. Although Asya still loves İlyas, she eventually gets used to Cemşit. One night, Cemşit goes out to help a truck that has had an accident, and without knowing that he is Asya's ex-husband, he brings an injured İlyas to their home. İlyas spends that night at their house. In the following days, he visits frequently, brings gifts for Samet, and tries to convince Asya to come back to him. Then one day Asya, who is still in love with İlyas, gets tired of resisting her feelings and tries to leave with him. During that moment, Samet runs to Cemşit, whom he knows as his father. Asya changes her mind and stays with Cemşit.

PLOT

The dam. A dam is being built near the village. The employees of the contractor company ask Asya's mother to sell her house. The woman kicks them out. Asya opposes her mother's stubborn attitude. The house will be submerged underwater when the dam is completed. The mother knows that Asya's real intention is to migrate to the city, and tells her she needs to forget about this. They argue. As Asya is about to leave in order to take the milk jug, her mother stops her and smears the soot from the bottom of the pot on her face. Her mother thinks that the strange men who come to work at the dam construction site are dangerous for Asya and she wants to get her married as soon as possible. Asya washes her face in the stream and puts on the red scarf she has hidden inside her clothing.

The truck of İlyas. While one of the workers in the transport company, Can, is spraying and joking with the others using a hose, İlyas arrives. Can aims the hose at İlyas' truck, İlyas gets angry and gets in Can's face. The foreman Yakup separates them. The company's officer Dilek calls for İlyas. When they enter the office, they kiss. Although İlyas wants a long-distance job, Dilek assigns him in transporting sand to the dam. The truck belongs to the company, but İlyas complains that his decorated and clean truck will get dirty and damaged on the dam job.

Love at first sight. Filled with sand, İlyas's truck gets stuck in the mud. While Asya passes by the truck, they see each other. Asya tries to get away at once but İlyas calls after her, calling her: "Red scarf!" Asya walks on. İlyas's confident attitude and his manner of speaking leads Asya to think that he's from Istanbul. İlyas frees his truck from the mud and catches up with Asya, trying to convince her to get on the truck. Asya runs away, and İlyas chases after her with his truck. Asya gets tired and stops. İlyas also stops the truck and gets out, inviting Asya to his vehicle. While Asya hesitates, İlyas eagerly awaits her response. Asya gets on the truck. When they approach her house, Asya stops the truck. İlyas convinces her to meet the next day. Asya runs towards her house, dirtying her face and replaces her scarf. İlyas also gets out of the truck and secretly follows her, learning the location of her house.

My heart, never mind. Asya's little brother has heard that someone will come to ask Asya's parents for her hand in marriage. He does not want his sister to get married because he is saddened by the thought of them parting ways. The boy writes the name "My heart, never mind" on his toy truck, the same words written on İlyas' truck.

Reckless. Asya is late to their meeting so İlyas drives around her house in his truck. Asya's mother mistakes İlyas for a dam worker who has come to demolish their house so she starts shouting and throwing stones at the truck. Asya cannot stop laughing while she tries to send İlyas away.

Things get serious. They meet the next day. Asya asks İlyas not to come again and tells him that they will marry her off. When İlyas learns that Asya has never seen her potential husband, he imitates different husbands to entertain her. Just then, his hands accidentally touch Asya's breasts. Their smiles vanish as they become serious. İlyas tells her that he doesn't want to lose her. Asya does not speak her mind, but her inner voice tells her that she has fallen in love with İlyas.

The potential husband. The family of the prospective husband comes to see Asya.

The goodbye. Asya finds a way to meet up with İlyas again. İlyas hides in the back of a truck. Asya talks to the truck and gets İlyas to come out of hiding. While İlyas takes her back to the village in his truck, both of them are lost in thought. İlyas does not have a regular job or home, and his financial means are limited. Asya cannot disobey her family's wishes. The situation seems hopeless. İlyas is angry, and Asya says goodbye to him in tears.

The secret. When İlyas comes to the office, he learns that Dilek has assigned him to a long-distance job and instead of him that Can would go to the dam. If he stays away from there for a long time, he will be far from Asya. He wants to go on working the dam and offers to switch jobs with Can. Both of them are suspicious of İlyas' change of mind. Can goes to the dam to uncover İlyas' secret. Although Dilek tries to prevent İlyas from leaving, she cannot succeed.

Knock on the door. İlyas goes to Asya's house. Asya is surprised to see him when she opens the door, but they both want to run away together. İlyas extends his hand without saying anything, Asya takes his hand and they get on the truck and drive away. Asya's little brother who is playing in front their house sees what transpires.

Let everyone hear it. They drive away from the village. İlyas shouts with joy along the way, "Say welcome to my lover!". Asya joins him as well. They stop by a stream and sit down, hugging each other for a while. It starts to rain, and they spend the night making love in the truck.

The company. In the morning, they go to the company together. İlyas gets off the truck to talk to his manager. All the employees are gathered around the truck, looking at Asya. Asya feels embarrassed. Dilek gets jealous and angry. Can provokes her anger with his words. He has been trying to win over Dilek and take İlyas' place. The manager gives İlyas a week off. Until the wedding, Asya will be a guest at Yakup's house. İlyas invites everyone to his wedding. Can says mockingly, "I will bring Miss Dilek too." Asya suspects the tension at that moment.

The wedding. They get married in a religious ceremony and hold a beautiful wedding feast. Asya's family does not come to the wedding. İlyas has changed the name of his truck to: "The Girl with the Red Scarf".

Beautiful Days. They start living in a nearby village. Asya likes both the village and the house. İlyas occasionally goes far away to transport goods and returns. Asya is pregnant, and İlyas is happy to become a father.

Solidarity. The night when Asya is about to give birth, İlyas is trying to deliver the goods on time despite heavy rain. He gets stopped by the driver of a stranded minibus, who asks for help. İlyas is not very willing at first, but the man insists. The lives of the people in the minibus are in danger. They tie the minibus to the truck and proceed with difficulty. Asya is giving birth at home.

You have a son. Asya and İlyas have a son. İlyas and the minibus driver manage to bring the minibus safely to the village. They meet Can on the way. İlyas goes home and lies down next to Asya and their son. They name the child "Samet".

The punishment. Back at work, İlyas receives congratulations from everyone at the company for the birth of his child. Can tells the manager that İlyas was driving the minibus. As punishment, they take İlyas off of driving duty and assign him to vehicle maintenance. İlyas gets angry and tries to talk to the manager, but Dilek calms him down. She reminds him that he has a child and a wife to think about. İlyas realizes that Can must have reported him.

Unhappy İlyas. İlyas comes home around dawn, drunk. He is silent.

Asya's search for a solution. Asya goes to Ali's house and tells him about the situation. İlyas has been coming home drunk for a month, keeping silent about his troubles, and he has not even been showing interest in his child. Ali's wife tells Asya to go to the company and talk to the manager. Asya hesitates, thinking that İlyas will be angry.

The İlyas inside İlyas. While İlyas is at the repair shop, Dilek comes and in an insinuating way suggests that Asya is with the manager. İlyas goes to the manager's office in anger while Asya has already left and is telling Ali about the manager's words. Realizing that İlyas is angry, Ali tries to stop him but fails. İlyas hits Asya and then goes after Can. Can provokes İlyas, and they start to fight.

Asya learns the truth. İlyas doesn't come home anymore. Asya waits for him all the time. İlyas drinks every night and goes to Dilek's house. Months pass. One day, Can tells Asya that İlyas is staying with Dilek. Asya goes to Dilek's house in the evening. She looks inside through the window. İlyas is there. Dilek notices Asya and closes the curtain. While they eat, Dilek can't hold it inside anymore and tells İlyas that Asya has seen them. She reminds him that he is married and has a child.

Empty home. In the morning İlyas goes back to his house. Asya is not there, she has taken Samet and left. İlyas feels sorry.

Asya on the road. Asya is waiting for a vehicle to hitchhike on the road. A pickup truck stops. The driver says the front seat is full, so she climbs on the back, on the bed of the truck. There is another man already there, who helps her get in. The man, who is called Cemşit, is the same one who was on the minibus that İlyas helped before. When they reach a village, Asya gets off. Cemşit and the others take a break at a bus stop a little further down the road. Asya arrives there on foot but hesitates to go inside. Cemşit notices that she has nowhere to stay and invites her to his home. Asya is afraid but accepts, she has no other option.

Someone trustworthy. Cemşit lights the fireplace and gives the key to his home to Asya. He will stay in a room adjacent to the house. In the morning, Asya hurriedly goes to Cemşit because her child has a fever. Cemşit brings a doctor from the town. The doctor says that the child should stay inside and keep warm for a week, writes a prescription for injections, which Cemşit will administer. Samet recovers quickly. Cemşit buys Samet a toy and Asya a gift from the town. A few days later, Asya wants to leave Cemşit's house. Cemşit sets out to find a vehicle to take them, reluctantly waving to passing cars. Asya

watches him from afar and notices his reluctance. Cemşit tells Asya that he wants them to stay for one more day, and Asya agrees. In the evening, she makes dinner and invites Cemşit to join them. During dinner, Cemşit tells them that his wife and two children died in an earthquake and he has been trying to keep going by focusing on his work.

Asya's return. Asya goes back to her home. When Ali sees her, he comes up to her and tells her that İlyas has left with Dilek. Disappointed, Asya turns back and does not put a foot in her house. Cemşit is waiting a little further away. Asya tells him that she will go to the city to find work and doesn't want to burden him. Cemşit finds her a job at a carpet weaving cooperative.

Cemşit waits. Asya constantly thinks about İlyas while Cemşit waits for the day when Asya will love him. A few years pass, but Asya still keeps watch after trucks with the hope of encountering İlyas.

Samet's Decision. Cemşit sets up a swing for Samet in front of the house. Samet calls Cemşit "father". Asya, affected by Samet seeing Cemşit as his father, decides to marry him. They have an official wedding.

The Accident. One night, while they sing songs to Samet, a man arrives and talks about an accident nearby. Cemşit goes to help. He takes the drunk and slightly injured driver out of the truck and brings him home. The truck driver's name is İlyas. When Asya sees İlyas, she dropped the logs she is holding. İlyas is shocked as well. Cemşit understands the situation but he keeps it to himself. Asya realizes that she still loves İlyas, and İlyas feels the same way. Cemşit cleans İlyas's wound, bandages it. They make a bed for him to sleep. İlyas stays the night.

"Asya, hold my hand again." In the morning, while Cemşit is cutting wood, İlyas asks Asya to forgive him and come back to him, leaving everything else behind. Asya does not respond. İlyas and Cemşit leave to get the truck back. Asya is crying. Asya brings the hot water they need to start the engine back, she has Samet with her. A red scarf is tied to the truck with the words "The Girl with the Red Scarf" written on the front. Seeing all these, Asya is in a great quandary. Samet wants to climb into the truck. İlyas puts Samet in the back of the truck. While Cemşit is busy with the engine, İlyas says to Asya, "Let's take the kid, get on the truck and leave here." Asya has trouble resisting the love she feels. She takes Samet and goes back in the house. While they leave, Samet asks İlyas to bring him the toy gun.

The son of İlyas. The next day, İlyas comes back. Asya sends Samet outside to play. İlyas hugs Samet, gives him the toy gun he brought and takes the child for a ride in the truck. At first, Asya thinks that İlyas has kidnapped her child and panics, but when she sees the truck driving around the house, she relaxes. Meanwhile, Cemşit comes back from work. İlyas leaves. The next day, when he comes back again, Asya does not let Samet go outside. İlyas waits for a while and leaves. At night, neither Cemşit nor Asya can sleep. Cemşit is afraid that Asya will leave him and Asya is afraid of betraying him.

What was love? The next day, İlyas comes back with a toy truck. Samet is on the swing. They hug. When Asya looks out the window, she cannot see Samet. Samet is in the truck with İlyas. The truck moves and gets away. Asya runs after them. Cemşit also sees them and calls out to Samet. Samet wants to get off the truck and starts crying, so İlyas stops the truck. Samet runs to his mother. Cemşit catches up with them too. Asya can no longer withstand her emotions and walks towards İlyas, but when Samet frees himself and runs to Cemşit, Asya goes back as well. İlyas gets on the truck and drives away.

THEMES

"In our world of rampant 'individualization' relationships are mixed blessings. They vacillate between sweet dream and a nightmare, and there is no telling when one turns into the other" (Bauman, 2003: viii)

The main themes of *The Girl with the Red Scarf* can be conceptualized as romantic love, love, and conscience. These three concepts, considered side by side, may seem like they feed each other yet as the film shows, they in fact destroy each other.

Romantic love. Being-in-love, which arises from desire, sexuality, and passion, has been tried to be controlled by societies throughout history due to its destructive, rule-breaking, and transformative nature. The most common and well-known type of this control mechanism is romantic love, which domesticates love and associates it with marriage. This is the idea behind the reasons why romantic films usually end with marriage or a union acceptable within societal norms. The proposition "the happy ending of love is marriage" is actually a statement that declares the death of love and can lead to disasters if both parties

cannot turn their desires and passions into something else and learn to live with it. At this point, the role of concepts such as "love," "conscience," and "effort" is expected to come into play. Another characteristic of love is that it feeds on the curiosity of the unknown. As that unknown becomes known, recognized, and controllable, the sense of curiosity disappears.

Asya's natural beauty and confidence are what attract Ilyas to her; Ilyas's handsomeness and confidence are what attract Asya to him the notion of love-at-first-sight perfectly encapsulates what happens when the two characters meet for the first time. After a few meetings, they run away and get married. Their relationship develops like a fairy tale, but it falls apart when Ilyas faces problems at his job. This is actually just an excuse, Ilyas just chooses independence and freedom; his words to justify his affair with Dilek clearly demonstrates this: "An ignorant peasant girl. She didn't understand my problems. I had a place where I could talk about my troubles, curse freely, and drink myself to sleep. Dilek's house. I was lonely and helpless, so I took refuge in her." Although he still loves Asya, he finds it more attractive to speak and act as he wishes. Yet he has married Asya and they have a child together. This shows that his love for Asya has faded, as he has gained control over a child-rearing and "ignorant peasant girl" who has no other options. His domesticated is defeated by unconventional love. What he has with Dilek is a relationship in which they can live outside of societal norms without any formal or domestic ties. This is what becomes of being-in-love: when Asya Leaves home, Ilyas suddenly remembers his love for her but she is gone. Years pass and when he learns that Asya is with Cemşit, his love is rekindled. For Ilyas, Asya is a love that has been left incomplete, and therefore not entirely over. On the other hand, Asya stays in love with Ilyas for a long while. Even when she faces injustice and violence, she blames herself. Asya has tamed her love so much that she describes those months as "We always waited." In front of Ilyas, there is no longer just the person Asya, whom once he called "My girl with the red scarf". The object of desire has turned from singular Asya to plural, Asya and Samet.

All the while, love is also admiration for the image oneself creates in someone else's mind. It is Asya's love for being "the girl with the red scarf" for someone else. Asya does not know if Ilyas desires her anymore. Ilyas pulling away from her, and "being unattainable, uncontrollable" may be just why Asya goes on staying in love.

Love. "What was love? Love was kindness, love was effort." This famous quote from the film summarizes the main theme of the story. As we see Asya and Ilyas look at each other with desire and longing in the final scene, we want them to be together. But questions that occasionally cross Asya's mind also occur to us: "What about love? What about kindness? What about Cemşit's affection, compassion, and effort?" When Asya thinks about Cemşit, she always thinks of him as a good and trustworthy man. These thoughts have nothing to do with love.

The film clearly emphasizes the value of love and argues that effort is necessary to truly love. Asya's emotions are in turmoil and she gets confused when Ilyas reappears. She eventually succumbs to her feelings, but the film uses Samet to prevent Asya from experiencing her love that has been left incomplete. Samet runs to Cemşit and calls him "daddy." The child chooses the one who puts effort into him. This is how the film takes Asya's right of choice from her. In the construction of gender roles, motherhood is a woman's primary duty.

In this sense, the film is conservative and traditional, yet it reminds us of the beauty and impossibility of love as it ends: after Samet runs to Cemşit and embraces him, Asya walks past Ilyas in tears and joins them. Holding Samet's hands between them, they start walking towards their home, giving the appearance of a family as expected by social norms. Asya turns her head slightly back to look at Ilyas, and Ilyas looks back with tears in his eyes. From this moment on, we see frozen frames of Asya and Ilyas. We hear their thoughts as a voice-over, but these words belong to the time when they first met and fell in love. In a way, time has stopped there, and life and vitality have come to an end.

Conscience. The theme of conscience, which encompasses the concepts of kindness, honesty, fairness, and mercy, emerges in the film in Asya's inner struggles and Dilek's relationship with Ilyas. While Asya still desires Ilyas and wants to be with him, she also questions how she can do this injustice to Cemşit. In the final part of the film, when Ilyas tries to persuade her, Asya's inner voice says, "How can I leave? [Cemşit] spent so much effort for us for so many years. What would Samet do, what would I do?"

When Ilyas begins living with Dilek, Asya goes to Dilek's house to see if this is true. She sees Ilyas through the open curtains, and Dilek also sees Asya but closes the curtains without revealing anything to Ilyas. Shortly afterward, during dinner, Dilek's conscience compels her to tell Ilyas that Asya has seen them, saying "She is your wife, you have a child. I love you too, but..." and implying that he should go to

them. Dilek, who loves İlyas and welcomes him back in every situation, is compelled to say these things by her conscience.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Asya A young woman who lives with her family in a village. It's clear that she hasn't received enough education. Because she's a beautiful woman, her mother wants to marry her off as soon as possible. She constantly keeps Asya under control for fear that she might be with a man before getting married.

Proud. When she sees that İlyas is at Dilek's house, she takes Samet and leaves home.

Prideless. When she is subjected to violence, she cannot show the same pride she demonstrated when she saw that she was being cheated on. İlyas hits Asya for going to the company for him, yet Asya does not leave.

Brave. Despite having no qualifications, education, or economic power, she shows the courage to leave home because she is angry at İlyas and cannot swallow being cheated on. Shortly after meeting İlyas, she shows the courage to run away with him and get married, risking everything.

Emotional. When Asya and İlyas meet again, she is married to Cemşit. However, seeing İlyas upsets her and makes her emotional. In these moments, Asya struggles to think logically or rationally.

İlyas A truck driver from Istanbul. Having lived in a big city allows him to communicate easily with women.

Weak. Instead of standing up for himself in the face of injustice and being patient or seeking justice, he starts drinking and stays at another woman's house without thinking about the woman he loves or his child.

Selfish. Asya is pregnant and about to give birth. Giving the excuse that his wife is giving birth, he does not want to help a bus full of people who are stranded on the road in a cold, stormy, rainy night.

When the company manager learns that he pulled the minibus with his truck and saved it, he is fired from his job. He is angry and his pride is hurt because Asya went to the company to talk to the manager, but mostly because he lacks a sense of responsibility towards Asya and Samet, he decides not to go back home. In the last part of the film, when he meets Asya and Cemşit, he tries to convince Asya to come with him, without thinking about how it will affect Samet and Cemşit.

Seductive. İlyas comes from a big city and easily communicates with women. He can easily seduce them. At the beginning of the film, we see him with Dilek. He kisses her and gropes her breasts at the office. Later, when he sees Asya and is impressed by her beauty, he easily impresses her.

Quarrelsome. When he gets angry with someone, he tries to solve the problem by resorting to physical violence. When he is angry at Asya, he hits her. He also attacks Can, whenever he tries to provoke him with his words or actions.

Cemşit He is a construction worker who is older than Asya and İlyas.

Sensitive. When Cemşit sees Asya with Samet in her arms, he understands her helplessness. He takes them to his home. He behaves in a way that will relieve Asya's anxiety and make her feel safe.

Determined. He is impressed by Asya's beauty but knows that she loves İlyas. Nevertheless, he does his best to make Asya stay with him without overwhelming or pushing her. He is not easily discouraged.

Calm. He loves Asya, and she is now his wife. However, even when İlyas reappears and tries to take Asya away, or when he realizes that Asya still wants İlyas, he manages to remain calm.

Rational. He determines what is good for Asya and Samet, how to act in different situations, and the solutions to problems with a rational approach. Finding a doctor for Samet, rescuing the people inside the minibus and the driver of the crashed truck, setting up a swing for Samet, and finding a job for Asya are some of his rational actions. He even manages to act rational and does not let his emotions get the better of him when he realizes that the driver he rescued from the truck is in fact İlyas, Asya's ex-husband.

Giving. When he starts living with Asya, he notices her emotional turmoil and that she cannot forget about İlyas, but he still waits for the day when she will love him. Although he does not know the outcome, he continues to love Asya and take care of her and Samet.

Dilek A company employee, a free, single woman.

Deceitful. Asya goes to the company to meet with İlyas' manager. While İlyas is at the repair shop, Dilek subtly informs him that Asya is with the manager. She expects İlyas to get angry and for their relationship to be strained.

Has conscience. Asya goes to Dilek's house to verify Can's claims. Dilek sees Asya and closes the curtains without informing İlyas, but later she can't bear it and tells İlyas that Asya has seen them. She reminds him that he is married and has a child.

REFERENCE

Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Cambridge: Polity.



Love at first sight



The first touch seduces Asya



Seductive Ilyas



The night they run away



Company workers and Asya



Happiness



Dilek is worried for İlyas.



It is true that İlyas is cheating.



Asya sees the truth.



Dilek's conscience wins.



After a long while, for the first time Asya waits for Cemşit and not for İlyas.



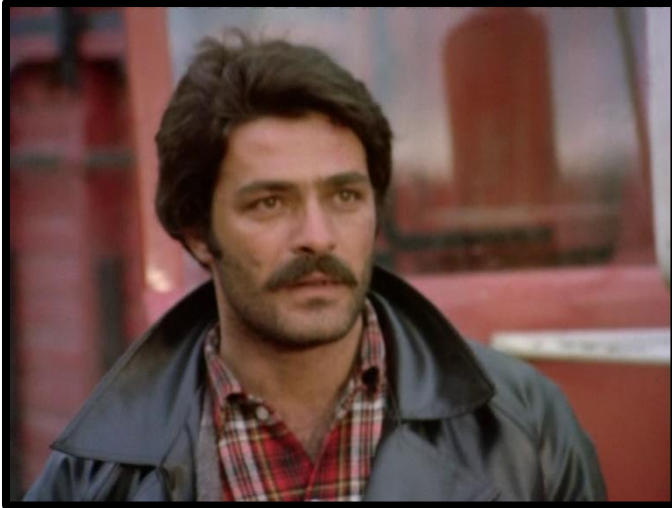
The family



İlyas tries to convince Asya.



Even for one moment, love wins.



İlyas has seduced Asya yet again.



Cemşit is about to lose Asya.



The choice of Samet.



Asya will never love like this again.



The family returns home.



Time stops.

