

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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# Rebuni/Teacher (2014)

Kidist Yilma

## Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

### OVERVIEW

*Auteur* Kidist Yilma is among Ethiopia's most prolific and successful directors. She has directed five features: *Rebuni* (2014), *Meba* (2015), *Keletat* (2016), *Taza* (2017), and *Doka* (2023). She is married to Ethiopian actor Amanuel Habtamu, whom she often casts in her films. The success of Yilma's features, coupled with the blossoming of new Amharic-language TV stations in Ethiopia in the mid-2000 have prompted Yilma to start producing TV content. She is credited as being among the Ethiopian filmmakers who are contributing to the fast-growing Ethiopian cinema.

*Film* *Rebuni* won Ethiopia's most prized award, the Gumma, as well as Best Feature Film and Best Audience Choice awards. Kidist Yilma, won Best Director and Screenplay. The lead actress of the film, Ruta Mengisteab, was awarded Best Female Actress of the year. Yeabsira Tekilu, who played Abule, won Best Promising Child Actor Award.

*Background* *Rebuni* was shot in Ethiopia. The film's title, "Rebuni," is a Hebrew term that means 'teacher' or 'master'. For this film, writer-director Kidist Yilma cast her husband, Amanuel Habtamu, in the role of Leul, and first-time actors Ruta Mangisteab (Adey) and Yeabsira Tekilu (Abule). *Rebuni* was released in 2014.

### SYNOPSIS

Leul, a young Ethiopian businessman, thinks that he has found the perfect land on which to build his new car paint plant. The land is on the outskirts of Addis Ababa and belongs to an old traditional healer, who grows medicinal plants on it to use in his small, traditional clinic. When Leul sends his assistant, Aman, to discuss with the healer the possibility of buying his land, the old man tells Aman that the land no longer belongs to him. He has transferred it to his granddaughter, Adey. However, Adey tells Aman that she will not consider selling the land unless the factory owner himself comes to see her with a proposal explaining the benefits of transforming her land into a factory complex. Leul comes to see Adey but without the proposal she asked for. She remains inflexible that he must produce a proposal. Leul's frequent visits to Adey bring him and the girl closer, and they start developing romantic feelings for each other. Leul's visits also allow him to understand the importance of the land, not only to Adey and her extended family, but also, to the country. He also learns to be less uptight, to enjoy the soothing effects of the setting, and to reconnect with the nature within himself from which a hectic life in the pursuit of profit has alienated him. Above all, as Leul and his wife, Ribka, start drifting apart, Leul loses all interest in purchasing Adey's land. He loses all interest in his business. All he hopes for now is to have a committed life with Adey. However, Leul does not know that Adey, who is suffering from a severe case of leukemia, does not have much time left to live. Adey asks Leul to go back to his wife and reconcile with her. A week later, Adey passes away leaving Leul disconsolate but richer from her teaching about nature, tradition, love, and humility.

### MAIN CHARACTERS

**Adey** (Ruta Mangisteab): The owner of farmland that a businessman wants to buy for his paint factory

**Leul** (Amanuel Habtamu): The business man who wants to Adey's land

**Abule** (Yeabsira Tekilu): Adey's little brother

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

### **ADEY** (Agreeable)

Despite her naïve, cheerful, and sometimes clownish ways, Adey is an intelligent girl. She has been designated to become her family's matriarch, and her grandfather trusts her enough to give her custody of the family farm. She proves to be a perceptive landowner and a formidable teacher in things pertaining to life when Leul comes seeking to buy her farm.

*Intelligent* Adey was underestimated by Leul, who counted on her young age and good-natured demeanor to make a quick deal with her. However, the young woman quickly proved that she was very intelligent, and that she understood the social importance of the land entrusted to her by her grandfather. For Leul, who believed he was taking advantage of her apparent naivety, Adey, on the contrary, became a master, who taught him what being a man in society and in the service of society entailed. She taught him that he must first be rooted in his culture and in perfect harmony with the nature within him. She led Leul to rethink his conception of development and to make the wellbeing of humanity its centrality.

*Cheerful* Despite knowing that she only had a few weeks to live, Adey never lost any of her good humor. She was always cheerful and did not let anyone, especially her younger brother, know of the evil that was gnawing at her. She always found a way to make him smile with her jokes. She entertained the village children by organizing games and competitions for them. Leul was surprised when she told him that she was suffering from Leukemia. Her infectious joy shielded her pain too well.

*Naïve* The first impression Adey projects is that of a naive young woman. Everything for her, even serious subjects, seems to be approached with a good-natured casualness, which leaves her interlocutors thinking that she has little or no control over things. When Adey begins to fall in love with Leul, it is with the trepidation of a child that she welcomes him, not really knowing whether to hug him or give him a kiss on the cheek. Adey's naivety, which exasperates Leul at the beginning, ends up seducing him, as it contrasts with the cunning vigilance of his wife, Ribka.

### **LEUL** (Agreeable)

Leul is a character whose personality changes throughout the film. At first, he comes across as unsympathetic, arrogant and disrespectful. However, his contact with Adey brings about a transformation in him. She guides him through his rediscovery of the nature within him to be a more friendly, less hostile character. He even comes to question his profession and his formerly pronounced aim of accumulating wealth. The disagreeable character at the beginning of the film becomes agreeable at the end.

*Disdainful* When Aman, Leul's assistant, comes to tell Leul that, in order to discuss the sale of her land, Adey insists that he, the factory owner, come to see her in person with a report explaining its usefulness, Leul is shocked. He cannot believe that Adey would have the audacity to demand his presence for a matter that can be resolved with a little money. Leul asks Aman to settle the matter by paying whatever price Adey wants for her land. As for the report, Leul finds Adey's demand completely ridiculous. And when Aman insists that she is serious, Leul asks him to scribble something down if it would please Adey and move the transaction forward. Leul's superiority complex, his disdain for rural dwellers, prevents him from considering their requests. What counts for him are his own needs, not those of others.

*Anxious* Leul has a phobia of germs. At home, as in his office, he always has a tissue in his hand, cleaning surfaces. When he arrives at Adey's house and sees the simple conditions in which she and her family live, Leul becomes nervous, withdraws, and observes everything with suspicion. When Adey reaches out to help herself to the snacks served to them, Leul tells her that her hands haven't been washed, and he hands her the little bottle of disinfectant that never leaves his pocket. Over time, Adey helps Leul to overcome his phobia, to reconnect with nature, to learn to sit on fresh grass and to cross streams with his feet in the water. As a result, he becomes less tense.

*Transformed* The Leul we see at the end of the film is different from the man we met at the beginning. The first Leul was full of himself, unsympathetic, and distrustful. He looked down on Adey and her relatives, grimaced at the sight of their home and living conditions, was convinced that his money could buy him anything, and bullied his assistant, Aman, who was also his friend. The Leul at the end of the film is, instead, a humble man, less angry, more respectful of Adey's family mores, more conscious of ecology. This second Leul has gone through the natural education of which Adey was his teacher and guide. This second Leul is the one who understands that to better serve his community, he first must reconcile with his own nature, from which "progress" and the pursuit of money had distanced him.

## **ABULE**

Little Abule is a mischievous and jealous child. He likes to make jokes, and Leul, with his imperious air, becomes the boy's favorite victim. Abule covers Leul's car with mud, causes him to trip while tying the laces of his two shoes together, and pushes him into a muddy ravine, dirtying his immaculate office clothes. He doesn't really like Leul, and he makes him know it.

*Mischievous* From his first meeting with Leul, Abule feels aversion to the businessman. He complains to his sister that Leul has the disdainful look of the insensitive rich. Abule therefore sets about causing inconvenience to Leul. He smears Leul's car with cow manure, pushes the businessman into a mud ravine, ties the laces of his shoes to make him trip. By putting a little misery in Leul's life, Abule intends to take his revenge on a rich class imbued with a superiority complex.

*Jealous* Abule notices Leul's frequent comings and goings, and he understands that Leul's visits are no longer only business-related. He spies on his sister and catches her making affectionate gestures towards Leul. Abule confronts his sister crying. He complains that Leul is taking her away from him. She tries to console him, but nothing helps. And when Leul returns from a trip and brings him shoes as a present, the boy refuses to take them; and despite his sister's pleas, he refuses to thank Leul for his present. Leul still manages to win Abule's heart towards the end of the film.

## **THEMES**

### **SOCIETY**

*Class* Leul and Adey represent two different social classes. Indeed, when Leul's wife, Ribka, catches him with his head in Adey's lap and suspects them of having a romantic relationship, it is by referring to Adey's lower social class that she intends to have her revenge. Ribka tells Adey that a woman like her, who cannot afford the luxury of properly taking care of her hair, does not deserve a man like Leul. She then turns on her husband, asking him how a man like him, who cannot even bear to wear clothes that are not ironed, can stoop so low as to find himself lying on the grass with an unkept girl like Adey. Indeed, Leul is an affluent businessman who lives in a large house with his wife in one of Addis Ababa's upscale neighborhoods, while Adey lives with her extended family on a farm just outside the city. Yet, what one sees is far from the total reality: Adey's poverty and Leul's wealth are only superficial. Adey is the proud owner of an ancestral land that attracts investors like Leul. Unlike Leul, Adey's priorities are not the frantic pursuit of dividends. The land on which she celebrates traditional rituals with her family, and which brings them together every evening around a common dish, provides her with all the wealth she can dream of. Leul, on the other hand, will only feel fulfilled when he has continually accumulated wealth. Of the two protagonists, it seems that it is Leul, the eternally dissatisfied, the eternally thirsty for wealth, who is poor, and Adey, the satisfied, who is rich. However, in the value grid of the capitalist society that has cast its veil over Ethiopia and denatured man, values are reversed. The unfortunate one who has been alienated from his nature by the "progress" of social life, is elevated to the upper class, while the one who has attained an understanding of the world around her, and lives in perfect symbiosis with it, is demeaned. Adey's struggle to teach Leul the importance of preserving what is natural in him has a political dimension: it implies fighting a political system in which the decision-makers have sided with unbridled capitalism and its values.

*Social development* Leul wants to buy Adey's land to build his new paint factory. He tells her that it is the duty of every Ethiopian to contribute to their country's development, and that her best contribution is to

sell him her land. Adey replies that his arguments are quite enticing, but before she makes the contribution Leul is asking, she wants him to detail in a proposal the pros and cons of building his factory on her land. Leul keeps returning to Adey without the proposal, and she keeps insisting that she cannot give him a definitive answer unless he produces the proposal. While Leul procrastinates on the proposal, his recurrent visits to Adey bring him, little by little closer to the girl, and she takes him through the natural setting of her land. What Adey wants Leul to grasp, as she leads him through colorful open fields, thick forests, and brooks, are the qualitative differences between his conception of development and hers. Without openly criticizing Leul's capitalistic, money-driven approach to development, Adey shows him how the yields of her land are at the service of humans' wellbeing. She shows him the healing plants and roots that thrive on her land, and which can be obtained for free, but which capitalist pharmaceutical companies recondition, package in the West and sell back to Ethiopians at exorbitant costs. One time, as Leul is going on a trip, she asks him to bring her a bottle of natural medicine when he comes back. Leul gives Adey the gift, but she looks at it and throws it away, laughing. As he inquires why, she tells him that this sought-after medicine is processed from a tree called *Shiferaw*, which grows abundantly on her land. Leul did not know that. The progress of social life has alienated him from his natural environment.

*Human development* Leul's encounter with Adey is for him also a moment of developing himself. Adey teaches him to return to his moment of childhood, to learn to be a man by avoiding further denaturation. At one point, as Leul disdainfully hands Adey a tiny bottle of sanitizer for her to disinfect her hands before helping herself with some snacks, Adey dismisses his offer and picks some leaves from a shrub nearby, which she crushes and rubs in her palm. She then tells Leul that it is a powerful natural disinfectant scientifically proven by an Ethiopian researcher to kill the deadliest of germs. As Leul visits Adey more often and gets to understand the importance of the land to the wellbeing of the people who benefit from its yield, he loses interest in buying the land for his factory. He does not even talk about it any longer. When Adey finally tells him that she does not intend to sell him her land, Leul has already reached the conclusion that a factory on that land will be a great ecological disaster. In fact, Leul has even lost interest in his job, as he confides in his friend and assistant, Aman. He also tells his wife that she can have everything, all their assets. Leul realizes that true development is the one that puts humans in touch with nature and develops the natural goodness of humans, not the one that makes humanity a slave of profit.

*Tradition* *Rebuni* is a film that celebrates tradition against the fast takeover of ancestral values by modernity. Leul symbolizes the educated, modern Ethiopian who has moved away from traditional values and closer to Western values, thus losing his true essence. In contrast, Adey, the fledgling matriarch of a traditional, extended family, represents what is still left in Ethiopian values that is resisting the assault of modernism. Leul comes to Adey as an agent of Western, capitalistic enterprise with his profit-driven mentality to buy and transform one of the last pristine lands on the outskirts of the expanding city of Addis Ababa. He comes to her with an arrogant, superior attitude, convinced that she cannot turn down his offer, especially as he asks her to name her price. For him, everything has a price. But Leul is surprised and frustrated at Adey's reticence to sell her land and at her demand that he write her a detailed proposal of how what he intends to do with her land benefits humanity. As Leul keeps returning to Adey, hoping to persuade her, she teaches him about how the land on which she lives with her family is a repository of precious Ethiopian values. The young woman teaches him about mental and emotional groundedness. Leul lives the turbulent life of a workaholic, which affects his family life. His wife feels neglected and wants a divorce. With Adey, Leul learns to turn off his phone and appreciate some moments of tranquility in nature. By so doing, Leul reconnects with his natural sense of freedom and independence and slowly steers away from his previous belief that freedom is only attainable through wealth accumulation. In fact, Leul sees how Adey and her family are happy with so few material things. Adey's and Abule's practical jokes on Leul, though they upset him at first, teach him to have a sense of humor and to not take himself too seriously. Abule pushes him into a muddy ravine and gets his white business shirt dirty. Abule covers Leul's car with cow manure. But Adey also gets Leul to remove his shirt and wash himself in a stream, and she forces her little brother to apologize to Leul. In his contact with Adey, Leul undergoes a metamorphosis. He comes out of his authoritarian and rigid shell and apologizes to Aman, his assistant, for the way he treats him. Leul also apologizes to his wife for not being always present when she needs him, and he decides to leave her all their assets and retire, probably in the company of Adey. At this point, Leul does not know that Adey is dying of a cancer, and that she will die a few weeks later.

*Collectivism vs individualism* Yilma's juxtaposition of scenes of Leul and his wife eating at a restaurant in a *tête à tête*, on one side, and Adey, her brother, her father, her grandmother, and her grandfather sharing a meal around a common plate and feeding each other, on the other side, is telling. It symbolizes the contrast between the individualism of profit-driven city folk and the collectivism of people-caring country folk. Adey and her family live in the last entrenchments of a rural area that the city is about to swallow. Their land is desired by covetous developers like Leul, who want to implant one symbol of capitalism on it: a car paint factory. However, the family resist and make their prized land the last bastion of disappearing collectivist rituals. There, the land yields its precious medicinal plants and roots for the wellbeing of all. There, in Adey's grandfather's clinic, the poor are treated for free with the techniques of traditional medicine. There, Adey is treated by her grandfather and comforted with prayers. There, Adey gathers the schoolchildren of the village and organizes games for them and rewards their effort. There, Adey's extended family share the same compound and eat every meal together, around the same dish. While, in their huge city villa, Leul and his wife are bickering and threatening to separate over money and lack of children, in Adey's family, what belongs to one belongs to all, and it would be unnecessary to fight over the common property, for it belongs to no one in particular. Freed from the stress of unhealthy competition, Adey's family is happy and can only worry about the inevitable, such as death, which snatches away their loved ones. Leul, the impenitent capitalist, who used to think that money was the solution to everything, learns from Adey to detach himself from the ideal of wealth accumulation. He surprises his wife when he tells her that he surrenders to her everything and leaves to start another life. Leul, who does not know that Adey is dying of cancer, is certainly thinking of living an austere life with her, on her land. However, a week before her death, Adey urges Leul to reconcile with his wife, which he does after Adey dies.

*Formal/informal education* *Rebuni* starts like another Ethiopian film, *Diffret* (2014). It is the end of the school year, and students get their report cards from their teachers. They wave them in the air and jump and sing, and then they enthusiastically run home to show their progress to their parents. The children's enthusiasm to share their school results with their parents denotes the importance that both parents and children place in education. Abule is eager to share his report card with his favorite person in the compound. He runs past his father, towards his sister in the field, rolling down and climbing the hills, like a new recruit on an obstacle course. He is proud to show her any little progress he made this year. He is ranked 42 out of 46 students, and for him, it is a huge accomplishment. His sister, Adey, first scoffs and teases him about still being behind, but then hugs him and congratulates him, telling him that she is very proud of him. He tells her that he is proud of himself, too, and promises that he will do even better next year. She then urges him to go show his report card to his grandfather. Adey has dropped out of university because she is dying of cancer. Her little brother, who does not know about her disease, teases her that she has been kicked out of school. She keeps telling him that she is just taking a break and that she will return to her studies the next semester. And she tells him that she will get her degree. They bet on that and on Abule getting his university degree, too. Here, Adey wants to impress on her brother the importance of formal education. Yet, in the fields, Abule has been receiving an education in harmony with his natural development as a child.

*Education as symbiosis* Abule has developed his inner abilities and competencies by watching, experiencing, and doing things in nature. However, this natural education will only make a complete man of Abule if it is coupled with formal education; thus, his relatives' insistence on the importance of formal education. It is the symbiosis of the two educations that will make Abule a citizen grounded in his natural dispositions and at the service of his fellow country men and women. This is not the case with Leul. Leul has received the latter of the two educations. He has become successful in material wealth accumulation. However, his lack of natural education has alienated him from nature, from his inner natural self, and from being a man at the service of society; thus, giving him a crooked notion of development, a development not at the service of humanity but for the destruction of humanity and its environment. *Rebuni* suggests that Leul is still salvageable; he just needs reformation through natural education. In that teaching, Adey becomes Leul's teacher. Leul is germophobe. He will never sit on the grass, shake people's hand, or dip in the same dish as others. He walks around with a bottle of sanitizer in his pocket. In other words, Leul is afraid of nature. Adey teaches him that nature is friendly and not hostile, that it is replete with remedies and not diseases. She teaches him about the plants on her land and their curative virtues. She makes him sit on the grass, lie down and relax. With Adey, Leul learns to put away his cell phone and stop trying to make a business deal at all time. He learns to apologize to his assistant, whom he has been bullying. He learns to apologize to his wife. He becomes less profit-driven. He becomes a man at the service of other men and

women and not just at the service of money. At the end of the film, Leul walks away, holding Adey's hand. They both will have something to teach each other to perfect one another.

**Environment** Leul makes a proposition to Adey that he believes is in the best interests of Ethiopia: he wants to buy her land to build a paint factory. Moreover, Leul, who has the backing of the government, argues that Adey should join in, as this would be her patriotic contribution to the national cause. Before she can sell him her land, Adey wants Leul to show her a proposal that explains how a chemical factory is better than a land that produces medicine. Leul is reluctant to produce that proposal. Therefore, Adey sets about to show him the evidence, through a hands-on approach, that the factory pollutes while the land heals. Therefore, one ought to be preserved and the effects of the other limited. Adey demonstrates to Leul that the things he values, such as moringa pills or sanitizers, which are brought from abroad at high costs, are abundantly available on her land. One only has to preserve and protect the land to make these products sustainable for the wellbeing of the population. It is not just what one finds on Adey's land that makes it so unique. It is also, and above all, how the land makes one feel. The setting of Adey's land is emotionally therapeutic, as Leul will discover. She shows him the beauty of her land and its benefits. It is a place that appeals to the senses and conveys tranquility and peace of mind. In a shaded, restful area, far removed from the agitations and noises of the city, Adey asks Leul to turn off his phone, lie his head in her lap, close his eyes, and forget his worries. Soon, Leul falls asleep, lulled by the birdsongs, the whisper of the breeze in the foliage, and the murmur of the stream in the ravines. Leul falls in love with the land not as an ideal place to build his paint factory but as a pristine repository to be preserved. He is no longer interested in buying it for his factory.

## RELATIONSHIP

**Love** *Rebuni* is part of the Ethiopian romance film trend. The friendship between Adey and Leul transforms over time into a mutual romantic attraction. Adey's childish mannerisms, her jokes, which previously irritated Leul, begin to amuse him. Leul even takes pleasure in seeing Adey sneak into his office unannounced and interrupt a business meeting. The spontaneity of the young woman, the frankness of her feelings, begins to get the better of Leul's rigidity, starts to crack his shell of conventionalism. Under the pretext of coming to discuss the purchase of her land, Leul increases his visits to Adey. They take little walks; she holds his hands to lead him across a brook; they choose a romantic, shaded area in the woods, where he rests his head in her lap and dozes off while she strokes his head. This mutual attraction between Leul and Adey is, nonetheless, not of the order of the classic, passionate love. In fact, what Adey teaches Leul is more to love his wife than to love her. She asks Leul, who is undergoing some marital trouble, to reconcile with his wife. At one point, Leul's wife catches him with his head in Adey's lap, and she derides Adey and her family for being low-class people who do not deserve to be with her husband. Upon Adey's death, after Leul reconciles with his wife, she asks him if he started hating her after he met Adey. Leul tells her that it is, in fact, after meeting Adey, that he learned to love her. He tells her that it is Adey who taught him what love is.

## PSYCHOLOGY

**Quest** *Rebuni* dramatizes the theme of quest in various forms. Dr. Yotor's quest is to find a medicine that will cure his granddaughter. Although he is known to relieve the pains of the sick who are brought to him, Dr. Yotor has been searching in vain for a cure against Adey's leukemia. His inability to come up with a solution drug for Adey fills him with sadness, and it is his granddaughter who comforts him, telling him that she knows he has tried his best, and that he must not see his failure to cure her as a betrayal.

Adey's quest is for love and reconciliation. In the last few days left for her to live, she gradually falls in love with Leul. Knowing that she has little time left to live, Adey tries to make the best of every moment she spends with Leul. Adey's quest for love is cut short, as she dies just a few days after Leul moves forward with a divorce in the hope of being with her.

Leul's initial quest was for land, but over time, he abandons that goal and focuses on his romantic relationship with Adey. With Adey gone, a disconsolate Leul returns to his wife, Ribka, and her persistent quest for an elusive pregnancy. In fact, Ribka has been trying to be pregnant, and she believes that her husband is more in the pursuit of money and fame than having children. She decides that she wants a

divorce. However, when Ribka understands that Leul might be interested in Adey, she changes her mind and decides to reconquer her husband. Ribka gets her wish and become pregnant. Leul reluctantly settles into a family life with Ribka, having lost both the primary object of his quest (Adey's land) and his secondary quest (a love life with Adey). Nevertheless, insofar as Leul and Ribka's reconciliation, which was wished for by Adey, happens, and insofar as the couple are finally able to conceive a child, quest is not necessarily presented by the filmmaker as the pursuit of an elusive, unattainable object of desire. Quest can also be a reachable endeavor.

## SCENES

**Sixty days to live** An old traditional healer, Dr. Yotor, is making medicine with plants from his garden. His granddaughter, Adey, is sick and he hopes to find her a cure before she dies. His wife asks him how much more time their granddaughter has left. No more than sixty days, he replies. The grandmother gasps. Outside, the granddaughter hears their conversation but pretends she did not.





**Dr. Yotor's clinic** Dr. Yotor arrives at his private clinic, where several patients are waiting for him. Dr. Yotor greets his patients and starts examining them.





**A proud pupil** It's the end of the year. The pupils come out of their classrooms waving their report cards. Abule runs proudly to show his report card to his sister, Adey. The proud little brother ranks 44<sup>th</sup> out of 46 students. His sister teases him and tells him that she is very proud of him, but that he will have to convince his grandfather that this is good work.



**There is nothing money can't buy** In town, a team of young entrepreneurs is looking for the ideal land on which to build a car paint factory. In the meeting, one of them tells the others that the land they want belongs to a cultural icon a medicine man, who will not sell it easily. The project manager, Leul, replies that there is nothing money cannot buy, and that they just have to offer Mr. Yotor the amount of money he wants.



### **Adey wants a written proposal**

Two men have come to see the old man about his land. They tell him that they are ready to offer him any price he asks. He replies that the land does not belong to him but to his granddaughter to whom he has bequeathed it. He advises them to talk to Adey. The granddaughter insists that she wants to see the owner of the company himself with a proposal that explains the pros and cons of transforming the land they want into a factory site.



### **The elephant and the mouse**

Leul dismisses Adey's request for a written proposal, and he scoffs when his collaborators tell him that she insists on seeing him personally. Still, though, Leul tells his associates that he will go see Adey the next day but without a proposal. He tells them that he is an elephant, and she is a mere mouse. His assistant, Aman, also reminds him that he is to meet his mother-in-law the following day, about which Leul does not seem enthusiastic.

### **Ribka is not happy**

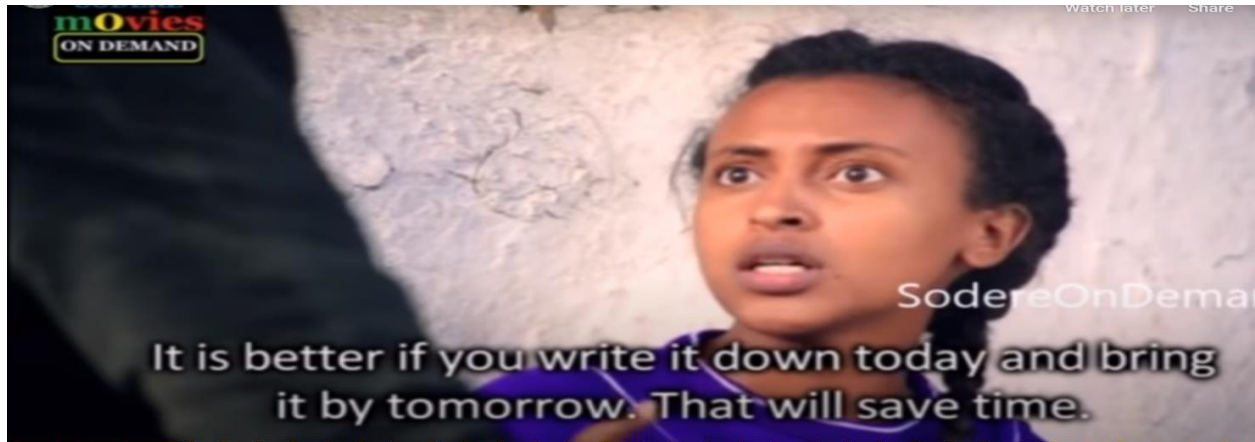
Leul's mother-in-law complains to her daughter, Ribka, that her husband is not often home to fulfill his marital duties. She tells her daughter that it is long past time for her to give her a grandchild. Leul comes home from work late. His wife is furious and tells him that he cares more about his work than having a family. She tells him that she wants a divorce. He gets angry, removes his wedding band and throws it on the bed.



**Adey plays a prank on Leul** Leul comes to visit Adey with Aman. She is excited to see them and plays some pranks on them. She makes them believe that there is a vicious dog after them and makes them run for their lives. Leul is not amused. He asks that they get straight back to business.



**Adey insists on having the proposal** Leul explains to Adey that it is important that each citizen contribute to Ethiopia's development, and that selling her land would be her great contribution to advancing the country. Adey insists that he put it down in a proposal. Leul wants to know if Adey is serious about selling her land. She tells him that it will all depend on what she finds in his proposal. As he leaves, Leul sees that Abule has covered his car with cow manure.





**Appointments are not necessary** In his office, Leul is instructing his assistant to write a quick proposal to satisfy Adey. Adey has come to the office with Abule so that he can apologize to Leul for vandalizing his car. The secretary will not let them in because they do not have an appointment. Aman sees them and asks the secretary to let them through. Adey asks Aman if he and Leul made an appointment when they came to her place. She tells him that people should not need appointments to see each other.



**Abule pranks Leul** Adey tells Leul that her little brother has come to apologize. Leul replies that Abule is just a kid, and his behavior is understandable. Abule resents being called a kid. He pretends to bow and apologize to Leul but, in fact, subtly ties Leul's left and right shoelaces together; then, he follows his sister out of Leul's office with a malicious smile.



**Leul apologizes to his wife** As soon as Adey and her brother leave, Leul calls his wife, Ribka, to apologize and to ask her to meet him at a restaurant that night. As he gets up to leave his office, he stumbles and almost falls. He then realizes Abule's prank. Abule brags to his sister about his prank. As Adey reprimands him, Abule tells her that he learned to play pranks on people by watching her.



**Sharing meals** Leul and Ribka's night at the restaurant starts badly. They are still arguing about work and family. Leul promises his wife that they will try everything and see the best doctors available to have a child. At Adey's, the family has gathered around a single dish, and the grandfather passes on pieces of it as a blessing.





**Leul is angry with Adey** Leul comes to see Adey with his proposal, and she plays another prank on him, warning him to lie low to avoid a charging bull. She laughs that she has never seen rich people bow before her. This time, he is upset and scolds her. He tells her that she lacks good manners.



**Abule is jealous** Adey is showing Leul the land he wants to buy. Leul has an obsession for cleanliness and sanitizes his hands constantly. She takes him to the pasture and he inadvertently steps in cow manure. Abule sees them walking and talking. He is upset that his sister seems to like Leul. He fears that Leul might want to take his sister away from him. She consoles him that this is not the case.



**Leul is impatient** Leul and Aman come to see Dr. Yotor in the hope of having a quick resolution to the land sale. He promises them to talk to his granddaughter and see why she is taking so long to make up her mind. He tells them that the decision is for her to make, that he will not try to influence her. Dr. Yotor leaves his guests, and his granddaughter joins them.



**Leul is disgusted** Adey dips in the basket of snacks, and Leul grabs her hand and gives her a small bottle of hand sanitizer. She scoffs, walks a few steps away, and picks some leaves, which she rubs on her hands. She tells Leul that according to a local scientist, these leaves are effective sanitizers. Then she picks up her grandfather's leftover drink and finishes it while Leul is watching her with disgust. Leul hands her a cell phone so that they can easily reach each other. She tells him that she does not need one. She is always available if he wants to come talk to her.



**Adey dances for Leul** Leul comes to see Adey. She jokes that he did not have an appointment. She rambles and bites her nails and spits them on the ground. He tells her that she is infecting her mouth with germs from her dirty hand. She tells him that he is uptight and decides to sing and dance for him. He starts to laugh.



**Abule pushes Leul in the mud** Again, Leul comes to see Adey, dressed in his white business shirt. Her brother, Abule, lures him to a hilly and muddy part of the land. Abule pushes Leul down the hill, in the mud, and they both get dirty. Adey comes running to Leul and slides and falls down the hill with her brother and into Leul's arms. They go to the river to clean up.



**Leul is glad to see Adey** Adey walks unannounced into Leul's board meeting. She asks Leul why she has not seen him for two days and wants to know if he is upset about being pushed in the mud. She tells Aman to come and try a new drink they have created. Leul finds the whole situation amusing. He is visibly happy to see Adey.





**Adey inadvertently hears Leul's problems** Leul is discussing his wife's infertility problem with Aman. He is upset and is shouting that he has done everything he could and now is powerless. He is not aware that Adey is waiting for him in his office and can hear everything he is saying. He comes in and sees her. She apologizes and leaves.



**Adey takes Leul to a pottery shop** Leul drives Adey home. She tells him that she wants to show him a special place on the land. He replies that he is not in the mood for that. She refuses to get out of the car until he comes and sees the place. She takes him to a pottery shop to play with clay. He is not comfortable. She tells him that the clay is from the land he wants to buy for his paint factory.

**Leul thinks of Adey** Leul is in bed with his wife, Ribka. He cannot close his eyes. He is haunted by images of Adey and keeps thinking about her.



**Abule wants to be like his grandfather**

Abule wants to follow in his grandfather's footsteps but is worried that he is not doing well at school. His grandfather consoles him and tells him that now that he has decided to follow him, he will work at it and will be successful.



**Adey's land is rich**

Leul is back from a trip and has come to see Adey. He brings her some gifts and a bottle of moringa pills (a medicine rich in vitamins and minerals) she asked for. She throws the bottle away and he wants to know why. She tells him that the contents of the bottle are plentiful on her land. She just wanted him to realize how much the plants grown on her land are sold for in the outside world.





**Leul spends romantic time with Adey** Leul asks Adey if she has been crying. She tells him that her grandmother has leukemia, and her grandfather is still struggling to find her a cure. She notes that he, too, looks tired. He tells her that he has not been able to sleep well. She asks him to turn off his cell phone and rest his head in her lap. Leul dozes off as Adey strokes his head. Adey has Leul try some street food and drink, despite his obsession with cleanliness. He is disgusted, but he overcomes his fear and enjoys it.



**Leul is distracted** Leul has been forgetting to show up for business meetings. His wife, Ribka, is also pestering him about his lack of commitment to their marriage. Leul takes his frustration out on Adey and accuses her of making him incompetent. He blames her for making him lose money every day he is with her. She breaks down tears and tells him that she thought their friendship mattered more than business.



**Ribka wants a divorce** Leul's wife and mother-in-law are waiting for him. His wife shows him proof that she filed for divorce. He asks his mother-in-law to leave him alone with Ribka. Leul's mother-in-law sees Adey and Abule and asks them to leave the premises. Leul comes back to Adey and Abule but cannot find them. He goes out looking for them in the night.



**Ribka insults Adey** Ribka comes looking for Leul, and she finds him resting his head in Adey's lap. She gets upset and insults Adey and her relatives, calling them dirty peasants and threatening to do them harm if they do not keep their daughter off her husband.





**Adey is in love** Adey confides in her grandfather that she is in love with Leul. Dr. Yotor is dejected and will not eat. He has not been able to find a cure for his granddaughter, and time is running. She tries to console him.



**Adey decides not to sell her land** Leul comes to visit Adey. She tells him that his wife was right to get upset at her because she is the one who overstepped her grounds. She asks Leul to apologize to his wife and support her in what she is going through. She also tells him that she has wanted him back on her land several times to show him the natural resources of this land, and that he should understand that she cannot sell it to him.





**The kiss** Adey tells Leul that she will be taking her mother for a seven-day trip to the holy water site, and that they will see each other when she returns. It starts to rain. Leul asks to leave, but Adey begs him to stay a bit longer. They take shelter under her blanket. The rain stops. Adey kisses Leul on the cheek. He kisses her on the forehead, and they bid good bye to each other.



**Leul misses Adey** Leul apologizes to his wife. He decides to leave her all their assets and retire. She begs him to stay, but he tells her that he needs time to think. He often goes and sits on Adey's land, hoping to see her. He speaks often of Adey and the lessons she taught him



**Mourners at Adey's compound**

It is the day Adey told Leul she will be returning from the holy water site. He decides to drive to Adey's place early to see her. Leul arrives early and sees a procession of people headed to the house. He tells himself that Adey's grandmother has passed away. Leul follows the mourners to the compound.



**Adey is dead**

Leul is surprised to see that Adey's grandmother and old relatives are all in the compound crying. He cannot see Adey among them. Leul starts to panic. He heads to the mortuary hut and is restrained by one of Adey's relatives. He forces his way through and sees a corpse resting on a catafalque. Leul lifts the shroud from the dead person's face and recognizes Adey. Leul cries inconsolably, shaking Adey and begging her to wake up. He is taken out of the hut.



**Ribka pregnant** Ribka is now pregnant. Leul and Ribka go to Adey's gravesite to lay some flowers. Leul reads a letter Adey wrote to him before her death. In her letter, Adey tells him that he and his wife will be granted the children they wish for. She asks him to stay honest and to be a big brother to Abule. Ribka thanks Adey for her kind words.



**The big brother** Leul reconciles with Ribka. She is expecting a child. Leul and Ribka go to Adey's grave to lay some flowers. Ribka again thanks Adey for what she did for her. Ribka asks Leul if he hated her after he met Adey. Leul replies that actually he learned to love when he met Adey. The film ends with Leul holding Abule's hand.



## QUESTIONS

1. How do you explain the title of the film (*Rebuni*), which means 'master' or 'teacher'?
2. What do you think of Adey's method for showing Leul the value of her land? What effects does it have?
3. What qualities does Leul acquire in his contact with Adey? In what ways do these qualities affect his life?
4. What do you think of the end of the film? How would you end the film if you were given its directorial role?
5. What is the biggest message you got from this film?