

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE ASTER FLOWERS / ASTRA GÜLÜ (1971)

Zuura Sooronbaeva (1924-2012)

Reference:

Zuura Sooronbaeva. (2014). *Collected works in 7 volumes* (Vol. 2, including the novella *The Aster Flowers*). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: Uluu Toolor. 264 pp.

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* (*Örttüü Tang*). Her play *Broken Shrine* (*Sinğan Mazar*) was translated into Kazakh under the title *Illness* (*Illet*) 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.

Personal Life and Unfulfilled Love Many of the emotional and tragic themes in Sooronbaeva's works were inspired by real-life experiences. Like many of her characters, she also experienced unfulfilled love. Throughout her life, she loved one man, a young man named Sharip. The two shared deep feelings, but their hopes of building a life together were shattered when World War II began and Sharip left for the front. As a result, their dream of being together never came true. Although Sooronbaeva later married twice, she never found the happiness she longed for. She met Sharip again only in the final years of her life. Much of her later years were devoted to her only son, as well as her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Novella The novella *The Aster Flowers (Astra Güli)*, was published in 1971 and became an extraordinary success, quickly turning into one of the most widely read works of its time. In 1979, it was translated into Russian under the title *Autumn Flowers (Osenние Tsvety)*. Sooronbaeva later stated that this work established her reputation as a writer.

Background The novella is set in a rural Kyrgyz village during the Soviet period, where traditional customs remain powerful despite social change. One of the central cultural elements in the background is arranged and forced marriage. In this society, parents and elders often decide a young woman's future, believing they know what is best for family honor and stability. A daughter is expected to obey her father's word without question. Marriage is not only a personal matter but also a family decision tied to reputation, duty, and social respect. Love is considered secondary to responsibility and tradition. Community opinion plays a strong role, and gossip can influence important choices. Refusing a family decision may be seen as shameful or dishonorable. Although education and modern ideas exist, especially in the city, traditional authority remains dominant in the village. This cultural conflict between personal love and arranged marriage forms the social background of the story and shapes Gulhan's fate.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Gulhan – young woman, protagonist
Sulayman – surgeon, Gulhan's first love
Sapar – agronomist, Gulhan's husband
Jakyp – Gulhan's father
Gulhan's Mother – Jakyp's wife
Shaarkan – Gulhan's aunt
Sagaly – Gulhan's uncle
Salkyn – Sapar's mother
Saliman – Gulhan's roommate, later Sulayman's wife
Ajar – Gulhan's friend
Amanbek – Ajar's brother

SYNOPSIS

Gulhan grows up as the cherished daughter of two families in a Kyrgyz village. Determined to build her future through education, she leaves for Frunze to study at the university. While she is away, Sapar, the son of Salkyn, returns to the village after completing his studies in Tashkent, winning everyone's respect with his hard work and integrity. However, misunderstandings and village gossip soon entangle Gulhan in an emotional conflict involving Sapar and her friend Ajar. Gulhan falls seriously ill and is saved by a young surgeon named Sulayman. During her quiet and fragile recovery in the hospital, the Aster flowers sent by Sulayman become the first symbol of a blossoming love between them. Their affection grows, and they decide to marry. However, Gulhan's traditional family rejects the match. Deceiving her with news of her father's illness, they trick her into returning home and force her into a marriage with Sapar. In a moment of desperation, she sends Sulayman a false telegram announcing her death to sever their bond completely. Believing she is lost forever, Sulayman eventually marries another woman. Though her heart remains distant, Gulhan lives a life of duty with Sapar, who proves to be a kind and devoted husband. Years later, tragedy strikes when Sapar is shot, and Gulhan unexpectedly reunites with Sulayman at the hospital. This encounter rekindles their unspoken love, but they both realize their lives have taken irreversible paths. In

their final meeting, the Aster flowers reappear as a symbol of their past love and enduring memories. Gulhan returns home carrying a love that, though it can never be lived, will remain alive in her heart forever.

SCENES

Childhood, and Education

Gulhan's Story Gulhan grows up between two homes. She is the only daughter in her parents' house, and her father's brother and his wife are also childless, so she is loved deeply by both families. She is cherished like a rare foal, raised with care and quiet pride. Her father is a shepherd, a strong and honest man whose words are firm like stone. In the village, people trust his judgment without question. Gulhan admires his strength and tries never to disappoint him. As she grows into a young woman, suitors begin to come, but her family turns them away. Her father believes in education above all. When she finishes school, Gulhan leaves for Frunze and enters the institute (university), carrying hope and a quiet longing into her new life.

Longing and Study Days pass like beads on a string, joining one after another. Gulhan studies in peace, but her heart often turns to her distant parents. She misses them deeply. She remembers her mother's face and thinks of her father twice as much. She longs to hug him, to touch his beard, to rest her head on his knee as she once did.

Her father was always the one who woke her with a kiss on her forehead. Now she worries about his illness and wonders if he will live to see her success. In rare free moments, she rushes home, and seeing her parents safe becomes her greatest joy. Gulhan does not know love yet. While others speak of romance, she feels far away from it. Her only dream is to study and build her future.

A Letter from the Village Gulhan receives many letters from her village. One day, her friend Ajar writes a long letter about life in the kolkhoz. She shares that she is healthy and working well, then tells her news about Sapar, who has returned after finishing his studies at a university. He now works as an agronomist and has become a striking young man, tall and fair, with deep black eyes that draw people in like a magnet. Ajar writes with excitement and admits she feels she may have fallen in love with him. She asks Gulhan for advice and wonders if she has found someone in the city. She also asks her to share her own news honestly.

Memories of Sapar The letter reminds Gulhan of Salkyn, a woman who once suffered greatly during the war. Her husband left for the front, and she was left alone with their only son, Sapar. She named him after his father's departure, a symbol of hope and loss.

Salkyn endured life with strength, raising her son with all her love. Gulhan remembers how Sapar grew up, studied, and later left for an agricultural institute in Tashkent. As a child, Gulhan sometimes saw him visiting the village, kind and thoughtful, always with his mother by his side.

Now Sapar is grown, and Gulhan silently wishes he will find a good life and bring happiness to his mother after all she has endured.

Ajar's Burning Heart Ajar writes again to Gulhan, her words full of restless love for Sapar. She asks what she should do, as her feelings grow stronger each day. He remains calm and distant, treating her only as a friend, while she suffers in silence, unable to sleep. She describes his hard work in the fields and his leadership among the youth, where he speaks confidently and earns respect. Yet in personal moments, he stays emotionally far away from her. Ajar also mentions something important: Sapar has asked about Gulhan and wanted her address. Ajar, however, did not give it. She ends the letter seeking advice and comfort.

Love Triangle Begins

Ajar's Hurt Letter Gulhan receives a third letter and feels shocked. Ajar writes without greeting, her words sharp with hurt. She says she is deeply offended and feels betrayed. She trusted Gulhan with all her secrets, but now believes Gulhan may have acted against her feelings. Ajar speaks again about Sapar, mixing love with pain. She accuses Gulhan of hiding her own feelings for Sapar, or perhaps even mocking her

hopes. In her emotional confusion, she says that Sapar will likely marry Gulhan anyway and wishes her happiness. The letter ends coldly, leaving friendship strained and hearts unsettled.

Gulhan in the Village Gulhan writes many explanations, but Ajar stops replying. Their friendship breaks like a torn thread, leaving only silence between them. Now in her third year of study, Gulhan returns home after the first semester for winter vacation. The house feels unusually warm, almost too gentle, and she senses something hidden beneath it. Even familiar neighbors seem changed. Among them, Salkyn's gaze troubles her deeply, and Gulhan avoids her eyes. Salkyn speaks proudly of her son Sapar, who has returned and begun working in the village. The women around them talk about marriage and future brides, hinting at his fate. Gulhan's heart grows uneasy, as if something unseen is slowly closing in.

A Dance of Silent Tension Gulhan leaves the house still thinking of Ajar. Her paternal aunt Shaarkan speaks harshly about her, calling her reckless and shameful for loving Sapar. But Gulhan does not believe it and quietly defends Ajar, knowing she is not as people describe her. In the evening, Gulhan attends the village club where a debate is held about the morality of young people. After the lecture, a dance begins. There, Gulhan sees Sapar up close for the first time. He asks her to dance, and she agrees. As they move with the music, everything feels light, yet her heart trembles with an unknown unease. Then she notices Ajar watching them. Her face is filled with jealousy and pain. When someone invites Ajar to dance, she pushes him away, unable to hide her emotions.

A Walk Home Sapar walks beside Gulhan after the dance. He speaks warmly, offering to escort her home. She wonders why Ajar loves Sapar, and why Sapar does not return that love. She questions if Sapar may already love someone else. Their conversation flows gently, full of subtle tension. He once searched for her in the city, but she says she did not hear about it. He asks if she enjoyed the evening. She answers carefully, keeping distance. At her doorstep, Sapar offers to accompany her inside, but Gulhan politely refuses.

Night of Unspoken Questions Gulhan wishes Sapar good night, and he replies gently. Outside, Gulhan's uncle recognizes them and warmly invites them inside. The house welcomes Sapar like a long-lost son. His presence fills the room with quiet excitement, and everyone gathers around him. Her aunt Shaarkan says that she has seen Ajar next to their house. A question about Ajar suddenly breaks the warmth. Gulhan notices Sapar's face turn pale, as if something hidden has surfaced. That night, sleep refuses to come. Gulhan's thoughts wander between Ajar and Sapar. Why did Sapar avoid Ajar? Why did Ajar come to their home? Confusion and unease fill her heart like a restless storm.

Ajar's Truth on the Road After breakfast, Gulhan goes to Ajar's house but meets her on the road instead. Ajar is driving a cart, dressed like a strong worker, distant and serious. They sit side by side in silence before Gulhan finally asks why she stopped writing. Ajar responds with pain and pride. She says people speak of Gulhan and Sapar, and she believes there is something between them. Gulhan denies it firmly, saying it is only gossip. Ajar admits her love for Sapar but says his mother's wishes control him. Gulhan explains she is not in love with him. Hearing this, Ajar suddenly feels relieved and joyful, embracing Gulhan with gratitude.

The Aunt Invites Gulhan Shaarkan, the wife of Gulhan's paternal uncle, invites her to stay the night. Gulhan arrives and feels the warmth of home and quiet comfort. The room is filled with the smell of food, while soft steam rises from the samovar. She believes this is the right moment to speak openly. Her aunt gently jokes about her growing up and asks if she has a boyfriend. Gulhan laughs and denies it. Slowly, the conversation turns serious. Gulhan carefully speaks about love, revealing Ajar's feelings for Sapar. Her aunt reacts with anger and disbelief, sharply questioning whether Sapar could ever truly love Ajar in return.

Arranged Marriage Shaarkan tells Gulhan that before Sapar, his mother must be spoken to first. She insists Ajar is a good girl, but quickly laughs and says Sapar already loves Gulhan. Gulhan is shocked. She firmly denies any marriage and says she will never marry Sapar. She also declares she has no feelings for him and has already promised Ajar. Shaarkan reacts with anger and disbelief, arguing that Gulhan is disrespecting the family and its hopes. Shaarkan speaks of Sapar as the future support of the family and

warns Gulhan about the consequences of refusing. But Gulhan stands up with resolve, saying she will leave.

An Unexpected Evening Shaarkan asks Gulhan to stay the night, and Gulhan notices how eagerly she prepares for Sapar's arrival. Her thoughts are still troubled by Ajar when Sapar finally enters the house, calm, slightly distant, and composed. He greets Gulhan politely, and they sit together in quiet conversation, careful with every word. Shaarkan watches them with excitement, joking about their future as if destiny has already been written. The mood shifts when others arrive with urgent village matters. Talk of work and responsibility fills the room, breaking the fragile silence between Gulhan and Sapar. In the crowded moment, Gulhan feels confusion, tension, and a quiet pull she cannot yet understand.

Fire and Departure A cry of fire breaks the night, and the village falls into chaos. People rush outside, shouting in fear. A haystack near the cowshed is burning, and everyone runs to save the animals and stop the flames. In the confusion, Sapar turns to Gulhan and briefly holds her hand. He apologizes for not being able to speak freely and says their destinies feel bound together. Then he disappears into the crowd. The next day, Gulhan leaves for Frunze. Her mother gently suggests that Sapar may be her fate and that she should marry him. Gulhan stays silent, carrying heavy thoughts as the road stretches ahead like an unanswered question.

Letters from Home Gulhan arrives in Frunze and receives several letters from home. Her mother writes about her father's worries and village gossip concerning Sapar and Ajar. Gulhan does not answer any of them. Even Sapar's heartfelt letter, she tears and throws into the stove. One letter stands out. Her mother tells stories of the village, Ajar's anger, and the growing pressure for Gulhan to accept Sapar for the family's honor. Gulhan feels torn between duty and silence. She thinks of Sapar's quiet presence and wonders if love can exist where her heart feels no light or warmth.

Gulhan Thinks The letters weigh heavily on Gulhan's heart. She begins to question everything: her promise to Ajar, her family's expectations, and Sapar's place in her life. Ajar's fierce behavior and the village rumors deepen the tension. Gulhan feels pushed toward a decision she did not choose freely. She imagines Sapar's calm face, but behind it she senses distance and uncertainty. There is no clear path ahead, only pressure and responsibility. In her quiet room, Gulhan realizes she must choose, even if her heart is still empty, searching for a feeling that has not yet been born.

Sapar's Letters and after Surgery Gulhan reads Sapar's long letters, full of devotion to her family. He speaks of loving her father as his own, of honoring her home, and finding light in their household. His words are gentle, full of gratitude and promise. Yet Gulhan wonders why such love did not go to Ajar instead. She compares love to a fleeting trace in water, something that disappears without leaving a mark. Around her, memories of other suitors and friendships pass like shadows, leaving her uncertain about her own feelings. Soon after, Gulhan falls seriously ill and is taken to hospital. She wakes weak, confused, and frightened after surgery, realizing how fragile life is when pain suddenly takes control of the body and silence replaces thought.

Sulayman Enters Gulhan's Life

Night of Awakening In the deep night, Gulhan slowly regains consciousness. Cold instruments, a drip in her arm, and the weight of medicine remind her she is in a hospital after surgery. Confused and frightened, she tries to understand what illness brought her to this state. A young surgeon enters, he is Sulayman Bakirovich. Kyrgyz people use Russian patronymics like "Bakirovich," meaning "son of Bakir," because of the historical influence of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, where this naming system was adopted in official and formal contexts. He speaks briefly with the nurse, they discuss her condition and praise the success of the operation, though he himself remains modest, saying it is still too early for conclusions. Gulhan hears his name and feels a quiet warmth. This unknown doctor has saved her life.

Hospital Morning Light Gulhan remembers how she once respected teachers and doctors, but now she feels medicine is greater than teaching. She learns that Sulayman Bakirovich is the one who saved her life

with a difficult operation. The nurse explains she had a dangerous intestinal condition and survived only through timely surgery.

At dawn, the hospital slowly wakes. Patients groan softly, nurses move quickly, and life continues in quiet struggle. Gulhan feels both weak and grateful, realizing how close she came to death. The memory of the young surgeon stays with her like a soft, uncertain light.

The Surgeon's Visit Three doctors in white coats enter Gulhan's room. One is an older physician with glasses, the others are young and confident. Gulhan cannot at first tell which one performed her surgery, though something in her heart already knows. The examination begins at her bed. One of the young doctors, Sulayman Bakirovich, meets her gaze and greets her softly. Gulhan suddenly feels shy, her face warming as she realizes it is him. The senior doctor praises the successful operation and the young surgeon's skill. They discuss her recovery, confirming that her condition is now stable. Before leaving, Sulayman gently fixes her blanket and gives her a brief, quiet look.

The Aster Flowers A nurse brings Gulhan a bouquet of aster flowers in many colors: white, red, pink, blue, and green. She says it is a gift from Sulayman. Gulhan is surprised and quietly touched. The nurse smiles and says such flowers may come from someone who cares deeply. From that moment, Gulhan feels a hidden change in her heart. She begins to wait for him, to listen for his presence, and to feel uneasy when he is absent. She does not fully understand what she feels, only that it grows stronger each day. She watches the flowers bloom in their vase, linking their quiet beauty to him, as if his warmth lives inside their colors.

First Steps after Surgery After her operation, Gulhan tries to stand for the first time. Her body is weak and pain sharpens at every movement. She carefully lowers her feet to the floor, struggling to hold herself. At that moment, Sulayman enters and supports her gently. Smiling, he guides her step by step, turning her fear into quiet courage. She leans on him, half-ashamed, half-relieved, while the room fills with soft laughter. Slowly she manages a few steps, then returns to the bed exhausted but proud, feeling she has crossed from helplessness into recovery.

Growing Closeness As days pass in the hospital, Gulhan begins to change inside. Sulayman visits often, speaking gently, bringing small gifts, and checking her recovery with care. His presence becomes a quiet comfort she starts to wait for. When he is gone, she feels a strange emptiness, as if something warm has left the room. She thinks of him more than she admits, even confusing concern with something deeper. Between medicine, recovery, and silence, an unspoken bond forms. It is soft, uncertain, but growing, like a feeling she cannot yet name but cannot ignore either.

Leaving the Hospital The next day Gulhan prepares to leave the hospital. Yet her heart feels heavy because Sulayman is nowhere to be seen. She longs to see him one last time, even for a brief farewell. The thought of leaving without him makes her restless, her emotions tangled and painful. She waits, watching every sound, hoping he will appear, but he does not come. Even Maria Ivanovna, the nurse is absent. Time moves slowly, each hour stretching endlessly. When departure finally arrives, she steps out like someone leaving something precious behind, tears rising quietly, as if she is losing more than just a place.

Sapar visits Gulhan Gulhan arrives at her dormitory with friends when she notices a "Volga" car parked outside. It belongs to her home village. Before she can think further, Urkalyi, a familiar classmate from school, greets her warmly. Their playful conversation quickly turns strange when he hints that she already knows the passengers inside. Confused, Gulhan denies everything, but Urkalyi smiles and says she understands her feelings. At that moment, Gulhan sees Sapar approaching with others, including respected villagers. Shock and emotion rise in her chest as past memories collide with the present, leaving her standing frozen between surprise and recognition.

Gulhan Worries Gulhan is overwhelmed when Sapar arrives with guests from the village. Her heart beats fast, her face burns, and she stands frozen, unable to control her emotions. Around her, laughter and greetings flow naturally, but inside she is in turmoil. When Sapar casually takes the rose from her hand, it feels strangely intimate. She is invited to dinner and later to a concert, but her thoughts remain elsewhere. On

the way, she briefly thinks she sees Sulayman in the city crowd, and her mood collapses. Confusion and longing mix within her, making even joy feel heavy and uncertain.

Between Two Hearts Sapar notices Gulhan's unease and gently decides to take her dormitory, leaving the others behind. In the car, Gulhan feels torn between two worlds: Sulayman, who has disappeared, and Sapar, who sits close beside her. Her thoughts drift painfully as she realizes love is not as simple as she imagined. Sapar tries to speak, but she avoids him, confused and emotionally exhausted. When they reach the hostel, she leaves him without giving a clear answer. Sapar stays behind, silent and uncertain. Gulhan enters alone, carrying a heavy heart, aware that something important between them has been left unresolved.

Sulayman Appears As exams begin, Gulhan's mind is restless despite her studies. While others celebrate their results, she drifts in thoughts of Sulayman, Sapar, and unanswered feelings. Even success brings her little joy, as her heart is elsewhere. Back in her room, memories of Aster flowers and book which Sulayman gave, and quiet emotions surround her. She wonders if Sulayman ever thinks of her. Suddenly, the door opens and Saliman, her roommate announces a visitor. To her shock, Sulayman stands there in person. Gulhan freezes, unable to believe it. After days of longing and uncertainty, the one she kept imagining has finally appeared before her again.

Gulhan is Happy Sulayman comes into the room and greets Gulhan, congratulating her on passing her first exam. He brings a bouquet of Asters. Gulhan stands up quickly and takes the flowers. Saliman is also in the room and prepares tea on the table. Sulayman notices the books on the table and looks at Gulhan as if she is still studying. He gently touches her face and tells her he came late. They talk about going to a cinema called "Rossiya" to watch a film. Saliman agrees to join them. They leave the room together and go out into the city.

Sulayman's Plans and Explanation While walking after the cinema, Saliman goes ahead, and Sulayman walks with Gulhan. He tells her he did not come earlier because he received a telegram from home and had to travel to Badakhshan region of Tajikistan. He also explains he is studying residency in medicine and preparing for exams and specialization. He says medical students do not get a diploma immediately and must work and pass practical exams in hospitals. He explains his duties and training in detail. He says he came to find her before but could not. Now he says he will soon finish his training and hopes to meet her again and talk freely.

Confession in the Field After exams, Gulhan and Sulayman walk out of the city into open fields. They walk without a car, holding hands. Sulayman stops near the trees and tells Gulhan directly that he loves her. He places his hands on her shoulders and asks her to look at him. Gulhan lowers her eyes, then nods quietly. Sulayman hugs her and kisses her for the first time. He then asks her to marry him that day and take her home. Gulhan says it is too early and asks to finish her studies first. Sulayman insists but finally agrees to wait.

They Agree To Marry Sulayman continues talking about marriage, saying he will work and his mother will help them. He repeats that he has already promised his family to marry after graduation. Gulhan still asks to wait until she finishes her studies. Sulayman jokes but says he will carry her away if she refuses. After a short pause, Gulhan agrees to his proposal. They shake hands to confirm. Gulhan decides not to go to home village. Her classmates, including Saliman, leave the dormitory to visit their families before the wedding. Gulhan stays behind, while preparations for her marriage with Sulayman begin.

First Meeting at Sulayman's Home When Gulhan and Sulayman arrive at the apartment, his mother comes out to meet them. Sulayman's friend Markash jokes and introduces Gulhan as his bride. The mother smiles, hugs Gulhan, and kisses her on the face. Gulhan feels shy and looks at Sulayman, noticing he did not tell his mother she was coming. Sulayman admits he brought her without warning. His mother immediately sets the table, prepares food, and tells Gulhan to sit and eat. She speaks kindly and treats Gulhan warmly. The atmosphere becomes calm as they all sit together and eat in the apartment.

Wedding Card and Farewell Markash brings a wedding invitation card showing Gulhan and Sulayman's photos. The card also has pictures of the institute and hospital. Suleiman's mother looks at it for a long time, smiling. She blesses them and kisses both Gulhan and Sulayman, wishing them happiness. Gulhan listens quietly while the adults talk about the wedding. After some time, Sulayman takes Gulhan back to the dormitory. They arrive late in the evening. He walks her to the entrance and then turns back to leave. Gulhan stands at the gate watching him go, while he walks away down the street alone.

Family Rejects Sulayman

Sudden Telegram Gulhan and Sulayman plan to meet at his apartment the next day at one o'clock. They have already sent a wedding invitation and a telegram of asking permission to marry to Gulhan's parents. No reply has come back. At the dormitory entrance, the caretaker gives Gulhan a telegram. It says her father is seriously ill. Gulhan learns that her relatives have been looking for her. She becomes confused and thinks her father may have died. She quickly packs and prepares to leave. Her uncle arrives with his wife in a car to take her. Without seeing Sulayman again, she leaves with her relatives immediately.

The Letter and the Family Plan When Gulhan and Sulayman sent a letter asking permission from their parents, her mother reads the letter first and then gives it to her father. The father reads that Sulayman is from Badakhshan. He becomes angry and says, "No one from Kyrgyzstan? They brought someone from Tajikistan?" He twists his mustache and speaks sharply. He calls his brother Sagala and his wife Shaarkan and gives orders. He tells them to say he is sick and send a telegram so Gulhan will be brought back. He says to bring her from the city immediately. The family agrees and prepares everything without telling Gulhan.

Shaarkan Tricks Sapar Shaarkan goes out and sees Sapar walking outside after lunch. She stops him and says, "Someone asked me to greet you and kiss your cheek." Sapar becomes curious. He asks, "Who said that?" Shaarkan replies, "We spoke with Gulhan last night. She kept asking about you." Sapar believes her words. He thinks Gulhan loves him and becomes happy. He does not know it is a lie. His feelings grow stronger. Shaarkan's words make him think Gulhan is waiting for him. He walks away believing everything is real.

Father Meets Sapar and Gives Permission In the evening, Gulhan's father calls Sapar to his house. Sapar comes and sits near him. The father speaks about his illness. He talks about the past and says he has no strength left. He says Gulhan must be settled quickly and asks Sapar to take responsibility for her. He tells him to protect her and not let her suffer. Sapar listens carefully and agrees. He bows his head and says yes. The father is satisfied and thanks him. He says, "Prepare everything." Sapar accepts the plan without hesitation.

Departure Gulhan's uncle and aunt arrive at the dormitory and find her. They tell her to come with them at once. Gulhan does not meet Sulayman again. She leaves without going to his apartment. There is no time to explain or wait for answers. She gets into the car with her relatives. The wedding plans stop suddenly. The telegram about her father changes everything. She looks back at the dormitory as they drive away. Sulayman is not there. Gulhan travels with her uncle and aunt, leaving the city and all wedding preparations behind without saying goodbye to Sulayman.

Return to the Village The car stops near the kolkhoz to add water. Gulhan sees the fields and notices a man who looks like Sapar shouting at a tractor driver. The man complains about crooked plowing. Sapar climbs onto the tractor and drives it away. Gulhan travels on with her uncle. In the village, they pass quiet streets and reach the house. Gulhan runs inside and finds her father sitting on the bed with a coat over his shoulders. He looks thin and weak. She hugs him, kisses his face, and cries. Her father asks about her health and speaks gently to her.

Family's Decision Gulhan asks her aunt why they sent the telegram about her father being sick. She learns the family did not reply to her wedding invitation on purpose. They wanted her to come back to the village. Her aunt admits they used the father's illness as a reason to bring her home. She says the family

did not agree with Gulhan marrying Sulayman. That is why they did not answer the invitation and called her back instead. Gulhan cries and says she was waiting for Suleiman at one o'clock.

Gulhan Wants To Escape Gulhan argues with her aunt and mother, refusing to marry Sapar and saying she loves Sulayman. Her aunt tries to stop her, but Gulhan pushes her away and runs outside. Her mother follows and pulls her back, but Gulhan breaks free and shouts that she will not marry Sapar. At night she escapes from the house and runs toward the highway. She falls into a ditch, hurts her leg, and struggles through the field. A truck's light appears on the road. The driver stops. Gulhan asks for a ride to the bus station. The driver first refuses, then agrees.

At the Bus Station Gulhan arrives at the bus station when the buses have already stopped. The square is quiet. A few passengers sleep with their heads on suitcases. She sits alone and waits for morning. She feels tired and empty. She has no money left and gives her jacket to the driver for the fare. Inside the car there are three passengers, and they wait for one more person. The clock passes seven. While she sits there, Gulhan suddenly sees her mother and aunt walking quickly toward the car.

Her Mother Arrives Gulhan's mother comes to the car and grabs her hand. "Come home!" she cries. "You are breaking my heart!" Her voice is loud, and people gather around them. Her aunt also pulls her arm. Gulhan steps out of the car. Her mother says, "You will bring shame to us." People around them start talking. Some say she has run away from home. Her mother's face turns pale. "Do you hear what they are saying?" she asks. Gulhan says nothing. Her mother holds her hand and leads her away from the station.

At Home with Her Father At home, Gulhan's father lies on the bed with a walking stick beside him. He calls her closer. "Why are you hurting your mother?" he asks. Gulhan kneels in front of him. Her mother stands nearby. The father says she must not choose Sulayman. He says: "If you go against my word, you are not my daughter." Her mother holds his arm and helps him sit. He asks her again for her answer. Gulhan says she will leave if they insist on Sapar, but she will not stay in that marriage.

Imposed Marriage

Forced Decision at Home Gulhan sits at home, thinking of Sulayman, but her family decides everything without her. They fear she will run away, so they change their plan quickly. They send her aunt Shaarkan to Sapar and tell her to arrange a wedding registration the same day. Gulhan is brought back to the village without being told. At ten o'clock, her relatives take her to Sapar's house. Inside, Sapar walks back and forth, waiting. He greets her and looks at her closely. Gulhan stays silent, remembering her father's words and the pressure of the family's decision.

Lies and Pressure Shaarkan speaks loudly and tells Sapar that Gulhan agreed to everything on the phone. She says Gulhan came because she loves him. Gulhan realizes Shaarkan is lying, but she cannot speak. Sapar believes her. He becomes happy and thinks Gulhan truly loves him. Meanwhile, Gulhan remembers Sulayman and her father's pain. The family also talks with Sapar's mother. She agrees quickly and says she accepts Gulhan as a bride. Plans for the wedding begin without delay. Shaarkan and the others continue to push the idea forward, saying everything is settled and ready.

Involuntary Marriage Ceremony Gulhan is taken from home with Sapar and several relatives. They do not go to Sapar's house first. Instead, they walk directly to the village council office. People there are already waiting and greet them. Inside the office, a man asks Sapar if he loves Gulhan. Sapar answers yes and says he would not come if he did not love her. The woman beside Gulhan speaks for her and answers instead. Gulhan stays silent. The registration is completed. Sapar is now her legal husband. Gulhan leaves the office and asks to go to the telegraph office.

The Telegram to Sulayman Gulhan writes a short telegram at the telegraph office. She tells Sapar to send it. The message says Gulhan has died suddenly and is already buried. Sapar reads it and becomes angry, asking why she wrote such words. Gulhan insists and tells him to send it. Sapar refuses at first, then finally sends it. After that, Sapar and Gulhan return and continue wedding celebrations for a week. Guests come

to their house every day. During the celebration, Gulhan asks about Ajar. Someone says Ajar has left the village and gone to her sister in another town.

Letter From Frunze About Sulayman Gulhan reads a letter sent by her friend in Frunze. The letter says that after the telegram about Gulhan's "death," Sulayman and his family were shocked. They cried and gathered relatives. They planned to visit Gulhan's village to give condolences. Sulayman stays at home in grief. At the same time, Gulhan's classmates take the telegram to the institute. Teachers contact the village council and confirm that Gulhan is married to Sappar. A false explanation is given in Gulhan's name, saying she left Sulayman and chose Sappar. People believe this version and stop Sulayman from going to her.

False Story and Sulayman's Marriage Gulhan reads that someone spoke in her place at the institute and told a different story. In that story, she is said to have left Sulayman willingly and married Sappar. This false message changes how people understand her situation. Sulayman believes she is either gone or has turned away from him. His family tries to calm him and manage the situation. Later, Suleiman is informed that Gulhan has chosen another life. With no real contact and no clear truth, Suleiman eventually marries Saliman, the roommate of Gulhan. Gulhan learns all this from the letter and reacts with anger and shock.

Married Life with Sappar – Duty without Love

Mother's Words and Home Life Gulhan sees her mother crying and speaking about Sappar. The mother says many girls accept marriage quickly, but Gulhan is stubborn. She tells Gulhan that Sappar is a good husband and that such a man is hard to find. She asks Gulhan to respect her mother-in-law and stop refusing him. The father is sick at home. The mother tells Gulhan to come to their house with Sappar and eat together. Gulhan thinks about Suleiman and feels pain inside. She also watches Sappar changing, becoming quiet and drinking sometimes.

Daily Life With Sappar's Family Gulhan lives in Sappar's house. She rarely goes out. Sappar works in the fields and comes home late. His mother wakes early, milks the cow, makes butter, and cleans the house. She cooks meals and treats Gulhan kindly, even when Gulhan wakes up late. Neighbors talk about Gulhan and say she works too little. Sappar's mother defends her and tells them not to speak badly. She says Gulhan is a good girl. Gulhan hears this and feels surprised. For the first time, she feels sympathy for her mother-in-law and watches her daily hard work.

Gulhan and Sappar Return Home Gulhan waits at home with Sappar's mother. She worries about her father and asks when Sappar will come. His mother speaks about farm work and the busy season. She says Sappar works in the fields and comes home late. Gulhan hears an argument outside and runs to the yard. Sappar arrives on horseback. Gulhan asks why he is late. He hugs her and asks if she really waited for him. Gulhan tells him to go with her to her father. That evening, Sappar and Gulhan go to the village. Gulhan's father is very sick in bed.

Father's Last Advice Gulhan's father lies weak in bed. He looks at Gulhan and Sappar. He calls Sappar and confirms his name. He tells them to stay together and live in peace. He asks Gulhan to respect Sappar's mother. He speaks about his life, his work, and his age. He says life is short and people must be honest and kind. He asks them not to fight and to work hard. He takes his wife's hand and thanks her. He blesses Gulhan and Sappar. He says goodbye to everyone and kisses them. Gulhan stands near him and watches him speak his last words.

After the Father's Death After her father dies, Sappar does not leave Gulhan's side. He goes with the body, then returns home silent and thin, his face drained of color. People say he is deeply shaken and call him a faithful son-in-law. Gulhan is sent back home after the seventh day. At home, Sappar and his mother treat her kindly, preparing food and caring for her. One morning Sappar tries to hug her and asks her to say she loves him. Gulhan resists, speaks coldly, and feels trapped by his strong love and her own sorrow.

Mother-in-law Falls Ill and Morning Work One morning Gulhan sees her mother-in-law feeling weak and breathing heavily in the house. The woman lies down, unable to do her usual work. Gulhan gives her water, adjusts her pillow, and checks her forehead. After some time, the woman says she feels a little better and

tells Gulhan not to stay home. Gulhan prepares to go to the fields, though she worries about leaving her alone. She leaves early with other workers, stepping out into the cold morning air. The village is still quiet, with smoke rising from chimneys and people moving slowly toward their daily work.

Poppy Field Work and Return Home At the poppy field Gulhan joins the workers and begins cutting the plants. At first her hands move slowly, but soon she works faster like others. People around her notice her effort and talk while working. She carries her filled containers to the collection point where Sapar is weighing the harvest. He sees her work and calls her name, surprised and pleased. After finishing, Gulhan returns home tired. Her mother-in-law is waiting at the door, still resting but more stable. Gulhan asks how she feels, and the woman thanks her for helping and tells her to rest after work.

Gulhan's New Life, Work, and Memory Gulhan starts working outside after her mother-in-law and Sapar encourage her. She feels fresh air, hears songs, and works among many people in the fields. She slowly becomes closer to her mother-in-law, helping her at home and treating her with care. Their relationship grows warm, like mother and daughter. Sapar also becomes happier and respects her more. One day, Gulhan sees a neighbor's garden full of flowers and feels a sudden pain in her heart. The memory of Sulayman returns strongly. Later, Sapar brings her a bouquet of Aster flowers, and Gulhan accepts it with quiet mixed feelings.

Winter Passing and a Life between Two Memories Winter comes and the collective farm achieves first place in the district. Gulhan studies externally at the institute and hears news that Sulayman works as a chief doctor in Osh city. Life continues with Sapar, who still loves her and tries to be close, asking for warmth and affection. Gulhan stays distant in her heart, unable to return the same love. She sometimes forgets herself and, in quiet moments, imagines Sulayman instead of Sapar, holding onto memories that never leave her inner life.

Sapar's New Work Gulhan starts working as a teacher at the village school. Every morning she goes to school, teaches children, and returns home in the evening. At home, she cooks meals, cleans the house, and helps her mother-in-law Salkyn with daily work. Sapar spends most of his time working for the kolkhoz. He suggests using empty land outside the village for planting fodder grass and grain. At first, several men laugh at his idea and say nothing can grow there. Sapar does not give up. He speaks at meetings, explains the plan, and convinces the villagers to support him. The land is plowed, seeds are planted, and the crops begin growing well. Herders and workers praise Sapar for his effort. He often returns home late at night, tired from work. Gulhan understands how hard he works and quietly takes care of the household.

The Fodder Team Sapar visits the herders and gathers them together for a meeting. He explains that the new fodder fields must be protected and harvested carefully. He says the kolkhoz needs a special team to watch the crops, cut the grass on time, and prevent waste. The herders listen closely and agree with him. They choose Kadybek, an older and respected herder, to lead the team. The group decides that everyone will help protect the land. They also agree that if someone damages the crops or lets animals destroy the fields, that person must pay for the loss. After the meeting, the men return to their work in the pastures. News about the new fodder team spreads quickly through the village. People begin trusting Sapar more and support his plans.

Amanbek's Loss and Conflict A livestock inspection takes place in the village. During the count, inspectors discover that thirty-two sheep are missing from Amanbek's herd. Amanbek becomes frightened and upset. Before the inspectors leave, he tries to invite them into his house for food and drink. He hopes they will overlook the missing animals. Sapar tells him not to waste time preparing food and says he must first replace the missing sheep because the animals belong to the kolkhoz. Amanbek becomes angry after hearing these words. He accuses Sapar of humiliating him in front of everyone and says Sapar wants revenge because of old problems connected to his sister Ajar. Amanbek shouts and threatens him. Sapar also becomes angry, but he controls himself and does not start a fight. After the inspection ends, the kolkhoz removes Amanbek from his job as a shepherd.

Sapar's Memories and Change After the argument with Amanbek, Sapar begins thinking about the past. He remembers Ajar and the painful events connected to her. Years earlier, Ajar secretly loved him, but

Sapar never returned her feelings. He remembers visiting her house once and realizing that she cared deeply for him. Later, when problems and gossip spread through the village, Ajar suffered greatly. Sapar feels sorry when he remembers her tears and shame, yet he knows his feelings for her never became love. As he thinks about these memories, he realizes how much his life has changed. Meanwhile, Amanbek continues growing bitterer. He spends time with people who dislike Sapar and speaks angrily about him. The atmosphere in the village becomes tense, but Sapar stays quiet and continues focusing on his work and responsibilities.

Amanbek's Drunken Fight After losing his job, Amanbek goes to the former agronomist Abdyrazak's house. The two men sit together and drink alcohol late into the night. Amanbek complains that Sapar caused his dismissal after the livestock inspection. Abdyrazak encourages his anger and says Sapar treated him unfairly. Amanbek drinks more and more and begins shouting about his sister Ajar and the shame he believes Sapar brought to their family. Abdyrazak's wife overhears the conversation and argues with them. She says Sapar is a decent man and tells Amanbek to stop spreading lies. Abdyrazak becomes furious at his wife and shouts at her to leave the house. Crying, she walks out. Amanbek continues drinking heavily. Later, he takes a gun and leaves home in anger.

Violence, Crisis, and Fate's Return

The Shooting in the Field Sapar spends the day in the fields where workers harvest green fodder crops. Trucks move back and forth while machines cut and collect the grass. Sapar walks beside the workers and checks the harvest. He talks with tractor drivers and measures the crops growing in the fields. Suddenly, a gunshot breaks the noise of the machines. People freeze in shock. Someone screams that Sapar has been shot. Sapar bends forward and presses both hands against his chest. Blood begins spreading across his shirt. He slowly falls toward the ground. Workers throw down their tools and run toward him. Some shout for help while others stop the trucks and gather around him. The peaceful field turns into confusion and panic within seconds.

The Race to the Hospital The workers quickly lift Sapar into a large ZIL truck filled with freshly cut grass. Blood continues soaking through his clothes while several men hold him carefully so he does not fall. Some people cry loudly, while others shout at the driver to move faster. Sapar opens his eyes and weakly tells them not to stop the work in the field because of him. The workers refuse to leave him alone and say the harvest can wait. The truck speeds down the rough road toward the city hospital. The driver ignores bumps and holes in the road and drives as fast as possible. More trucks filled with workers follow behind them. Everyone fears Sapar may die before reaching the hospital.

Salkyn Learns the Truth When people first tell Salkyn that Sapar has been taken to the hospital with appendicitis, she does not become too worried. She believes doctors can easily remove an appendix. Gulhan offers to go to the hospital, but Salkyn tells her to stay home because guests are expected at the house. Salkyn travels alone to the hospital. When she arrives, she sees many cars parked outside and a large crowd gathered near the entrance. Her heart suddenly fills with fear. Officials tell her that Sapar's appendix burst on the road and that doctors plan to send him to Frunze for treatment. Salkyn rushes inside and sees Sapar lying pale and motionless on a stretcher. She cries out and collapses beside him. Sapar quietly asks whether they removed the bullet, but Salkyn thinks he is asking about the appendix. He smiles weakly after realizing she still does not know he has been shot.

The Doctor Prepares for Surgery Before the operation, the doctor tells the nurses that nobody can enter, even though party officials and Sapar's mother wait outside. He carefully washes his hands, puts on a mask and cap, and enters the operating room. Sapar lies weakly on the table. The doctor tells him the surgery will be done without anesthesia. Sapar worries he cannot bear the pain because he has already suffered knife wounds before. The doctor promises to do everything possible to save him. Outside, the kolkhoz chairman speaks about Sapar with tears in his eyes, saying he is hardworking, kind, and has grown up without a father after the war.

The News about Sapar Gulhan prepares the children and waits at home after Salkyn leaves for the hospital. Soon Salkyn runs back crying and asks what happened to Sapar. They hear from a neighbor's son

that police have arrested Amanbek for shooting Sapar. Salkyn and Gulhan hurry outside with the children. Villagers stand near the road and speak angrily about the shooting. Everyone says Sapar is badly wounded. Salkyn cries and asks if her son is alive. Later, Gulhan and Salkyn travel to the city, but doctors have already taken Sapar to Frunze. Back at home, Gulhan thinks about Sapar's kindness and fears he may die.

Memories on the Road Gulhan wakes up suddenly when the phone rings repeatedly. It is a call from Frunze. Her mother-in-law says that Sapar is alive and safe and tells her not to worry. As Gulhan travels to see Sapar with her mother, she cannot stop thinking about Sulayman. Since Sapar stays in the same hospital where she once receives treatment, old memories return to her mind. During the journey, she wonders if Sulayman might work there. His words about loving the air of Frunze echo in her ears, making her heart tremble. She tries to convince herself that she will never see him again because he surely hates her now. Still, she remembers his deep sorrow after hearing the false news of her death and how desperately he tries to find her afterward.

Hospital Meeting and Old Feelings Gulhan enters Sapar's hospital room after getting permission. A nurse is speaking on the phone and says Sapar is awake and recovering after surgery. Gulhan stands silently, shocked and emotional after hearing that Sulayman is one of the doctors helping Sapar. Her hands shake, and she struggles to control her tears. Inside the room, Sapar takes her hand and tells her not to cry. He says the doctors saved his life and praises the surgeon who removed the bullet. Gulhan listens quietly with tears in her eyes. As she leaves the room with the children and her mother-in-law, she suddenly sees Sulayman in the hospital corridor. They stop and stare at each other in silence. Gulhan begins crying and asks him to forgive her. Old feelings and memories return at once.

Silent Goodbye Gulhan's mother-in-law and children stay at the hospital while Sulayman examines Sapar and checks his condition carefully. He speaks kindly to the family and gently plays with the children. Gulhan watches him quietly and remembers the past. Her mother-in-law notices the strange silence between Gulhan and Sulayman and becomes uncomfortable. Sulayman looks at Gulhan with sadness, as if remembering the life they once dreamed about together. Gulhan avoids his eyes because she cannot hide her emotions for long. Later, Sulayman offers to drive them home after visiting hours end. Gulhan agrees because she wants to spend a little more time near him, even though both understand their lives now belong to different paths.

Final Meeting of Gulhan and Sulayman

Night Walk and Memories After leaving the hospital, Gulhan and Sulayman walk slowly through the quiet streets at night. The city becomes calmer, and only a few people remain outside. Sulayman stays silent for a long time, thinking deeply. Gulhan also stays quiet and thinks about Sapar and her children waiting at home. They begin speaking softly about the past and the changes in their lives. Sulayman says life separates people without warning and that some wounds never fully disappear. Gulhan listens carefully and feels pain in her heart. She realizes that both of them still carry memories of their lost love. Even though they walk side by side, they understand that their future together is uncertain and probably impossible.

Love, Pain, and Aster Flowers During their walk, Gulhan and Sulayman stop near a garden filled with Aster flowers. The flowers remind them of earlier days when Gulhan first connected the flowers with Sulayman and her memories of him. They stand quietly beside the garden and speak about the meaning of the flowers. Sulayman says each flower reminds him of someone important in Gulhan's life: Sapar, the children, Gulhan herself, and finally him. Gulhan becomes emotional after hearing these words and struggles to hold back tears. Sulayman also becomes deeply moved and asks her not to disappear completely from his life. They promise they will not forget each other, even if they cannot stay together. The moment is quiet, painful, and full of unspoken love.

Farewell and Emotional Return Late at night, Gulhan returns home carrying the Aster flowers. Her mother waits for her and worries about Sapar, the children, and Gulhan's emotional state. Gulhan feels exhausted and guilty because she believes her choices have caused pain to many people. She sits quietly with the flowers in her hands and remembers her conversation with Sulayman. The flowers remind her of love, separation, regret, and the life she once hoped for. She thinks about Sapar lying in the

hospital and about Sulayman walking away into the night. Gulhan understands that life must continue, yet she also knows that the memory of her first love will always remain in her heart.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Gulhan

Gulhan is the protagonist, a young Kyrgyz woman caught between modern education and traditional customs. Raised with respect for her father, she leaves to study in Frunze, seeking independence. However, pressure forces her back home, trapping her in a forced marriage with Sapar instead of uniting with her true love, Sulayman. She embodies the silent struggle of women bound by duty. Her internal conflict shows how personal happiness yields to family honor. Her journey reflects the heavy cost of obedience in a society where individual choice is secondary to collective reputation.

Obedient Gulhan's obedience defines her tragic path. When relatives claim her father is ill, she leaves school without contacting Sulayman. This reaction shows deep respect for parental authority. She abandons her engagement because family command demands it. Later, she accepts the arranged marriage to Sapar because refusing defies her father's wish. Her compliance highlights the heavy weight of filial duty. She prioritizes family peace over personal truth, demonstrating how tradition silences individual voices. Her silence during the forced registration confirms she values obedience over her own happiness, choosing duty despite her heart belonging elsewhere.

Loyal Gulhan remains faithful to Sapar despite loving Sulayman. After the forced wedding, she shares responsibility for daily life. When Sapar is shot, she stays by his side, supporting his recovery instead of seeking freedom. She cares for his mother, Salkyn, helping with chores during the crisis. This loyalty stems from her understanding of marital vows. Even though her heart yearns for another man, she honors her role as a wife, protecting Sapar's dignity. She ensures his mother feels supported during the most difficult moments. She does not abandon them despite her own pain.

Resilient Gulhan demonstrates resilience through physical labor and emotional endurance. After surgery, she works in poppy fields despite weakness. She teaches school children while managing household duties and caring for her injured husband. Her ability to function despite hidden sorrow shows inner strength. She adapts to life as a farmer's wife even though she dreamed of independence. Every day requires her to suppress memories of Sulayman to maintain stability. She refuses to break under pressure, instead finding purpose in service. This persistence allows her to survive the psychological burden of living a lie. She sustains herself through sheer willpower.

Guilty Gulhan carries deep guilt for sending a false death telegram to Sulayman. She instructs Sapar to send it, believing it protects him from hope. However, this act destroys reconciliation and forces him to marry another. She knows the truth hurts less, yet she causes him lasting grief. Living with the secret burdens her conscience daily. When she learns he mourned her, the weight increases. Although done out of mercy, the lie isolates her permanently from her past love. This guilt defines her internal loneliness, reminding her constantly of the life she chose to end.

Empathetic Gulhan develops empathy toward Sapar's mother, Salkyn, who treats her kindly despite the forced marriage. Initially distant, Gulhan begins helping with farm work and household care voluntarily. She notices Salkyn's hard labor and sickness, offering water and rest. As they share domestic burdens, a bond forms like mother and daughter. Gulhan also grows to understand Sapar's devotion after his shooting. She recognizes his kindness and effort to make her happy. This capacity for connection softens her heart, allowing her to find value in her present life. Her empathy bridges the gap between obligation and genuine human affection.

Sulayman

Sulayman Bakirovich is a skilled young surgeon who saves Gulhan's life during a critical operation. He represents modernity, education, and sincere romantic love within the novella. Unlike the village customs that bind Gulhan, Sulayman encourages personal choice and emotional honesty. Their relationship blossoms quietly in the hospital through care and conversation rather than arranged obligation. He gifts her flowers and confesses his feelings openly. Even after believing she died and marrying someone else, he retains dignity and kindness. His presence highlights the contrast between societal pressure and genuine connection.

Dedicated Sulayman demonstrates immense dedication to his profession as a doctor. During Gulhan's surgery, he works tirelessly to save her life, remaining modest about his skill despite praise from senior staff. He explains his rigorous residency training and commitment to continuing education in Frunze. Even while busy with exams and practical duties, he makes time to visit Gulhan regularly. His focus on healing reflects a serious commitment to service. He prioritizes patient welfare over personal comfort. This professionalism earns respect from colleagues and trust from patients. It defines his identity separate from the village gossip surrounding him.

Romantic Sulayman expresses love through thoughtful gestures rather than grand declarations. He brings Gulhan colorful aster flowers, linking their beauty to his growing feelings. During walks, he holds her hand and listens to her thoughts with deep attention. After their engagement, he jokes playfully about carrying her away if she refuses marriage. These moments show a tender side that contrasts with his clinical demeanor. He values shared experiences like going to the cinema and walking in fields. His romance is built on mutual understanding and quiet intimacy rather than forced social bonds.

Patient Sulayman demonstrates remarkable patience throughout their courtship. When Gulhan hesitates due to finishing studies, he agrees to wait instead of demanding immediate results. He understands her academic goals and supports her educational path alongside their relationship. During her recovery, he helps her take first steps without rushing her movement. Even when separated by distance and misunderstanding, he maintains his care. He does not pressure her or react angrily to obstacles. This steadiness creates a safe space for Gulhan to open up emotionally, showing he respects her pace in life matters.

Compassionate Upon reuniting with Gulhan after years of separation, Sulayman shows deep compassion. Instead of anger over her false death telegram or forced marriage, he speaks kindly to her husband and mother-in-law. He plays gently with her children and examines Sapar's wounds with professional grace. He acknowledges the pain of their lost life together without creating conflict. Even in silence, his gaze conveys understanding rather than resentment. He offers to drive them home, prioritizing their comfort over his own grief. This forgiveness highlights his mature character and capacity for empathy despite personal loss.

Sapar

Sapar is an agronomist who returns to the village after studying at Tashkent University. He quickly earns respect through hard work and leadership in the kolkhoz. Though he once kept Ajar at a distance, he chooses Gulhan as his wife when urged by family pressure and his own growing affection. Unlike Sulayman's modern romance, Sapar expresses love through steady service and loyalty. He accepts Gulhan without questioning her silence or past. Even when wounded, he thinks of the harvest before himself. His character represents traditional masculine duty and unconditional devotion within the village framework.

Hardworking Sapar transforms unused village land into productive fodder fields despite ridicule. When neighbors laugh at planting grass on empty ground, he refuses to give up and convinces villagers to support the plan. He leads the harvesting team personally, measuring crops and ensuring no waste occurs during collection. His dedication improves the kolkhoz ranking and earns trust from workers who initially doubted his vision. He often returns home late at night exhausted from labor yet never complains about the

effort required. This persistence shows he values communal growth over personal comfort. His work ethic defines how he serves the community and manages responsibility.

Devoted Sapar remains loving toward Gulhan even though she stays emotionally distant. He greets her warmly after returning from late work and asks if she truly waited for him with hope. He brings her bouquets of aster flowers trying to bridge the gap between their cold reality and warm affection. When she resists his attempts at intimacy he does not force her but continues caring for her daily needs. After his shooting he worries about the harvest while lying in pain rather than seeking pity from those around him. His love is patient and forgiving accepting her silence without bitterness or demanding explanation for her hidden heart.

Principled Sapar demonstrates strong moral integrity during the livestock inspection with Amanbek. When inspectors find thirty-two missing sheep he insists they must be replaced because the animals belong to the kolkhoz public property. He refuses to accept food or drink as a bribe to overlook the theft despite knowing it angers the shepherd. He prioritizes honesty and law over personal friendships or avoiding conflict within the village hierarchy. Even when accused of revenge for Ajar he controls his anger and maintains dignity throughout the confrontation. His refusal to bend the rules shows he values justice and collective ownership above individual convenience or social harmony.

Selfless During the attack where Amanbek shoots him Sapar thinks about his work before his life. Workers lift him into a truck while blood soaks through his shirt and he weakly tells them not to stop harvesting for his sake. He understands the crop timing matters more than his personal injury and urges everyone to continue collecting grass. Even at the hospital he smiles weakly asking if they removed the bullet while worrying about medical costs and time. This sacrifice highlights his capacity to place community welfare above physical safety or personal pain showing deep maturity and care for others needs.

Jakyp

Jakyp is Gulhan's father and the dominant patriarchal force in the novella. A respected shepherd whose words carry weight like stone, he embodies traditional authority and rural values. While he initially supports Gulhan's education, his loyalty shifts decisively toward family honor and ethnic identity. He actively manipulates circumstances to prevent Gulhan's union with the outsider Sulayman. Through deception and emotional pressure, he ensures she marries Sapar instead. Even on his deathbed, he reinforces the union rather than validating her choice. His actions demonstrate how paternal power can override personal desire, creating the central tragedy of forced compliance within the narrative structure.

Authoritative Jakyp exerts absolute control over his household and demands unquestioning obedience. When Gulhan considers Sulayman, he declares firmly that anyone against his word ceases to be his daughter. He summons brothers and relatives to enforce his decision without negotiation. This dominance leaves Gulhan with no legal or social option but submission. His presence alone intimidates the family into silence during critical meetings. He views disobedience as a threat to his status as head of the household. Consequently, every major life event follows his command rather than his daughter's wishes, establishing him as the obstacle to freedom.

Traditional Jakyp prioritizes cultural heritage and community reputation over modern romantic ideals. He rejects Sulayman specifically because he hails from Tajikistan, asking pointedly why someone from outside Kyrgyzstan would marry his child. This preference reflects deep-seated nationalist sentiments common in his generation. He believes stability comes from within the tribe rather than through external connections. For him, marriage secures alliances and maintains purity of lineage. Education serves practical purposes but does not grant autonomy to ignore custom. His rigid worldview ensures that family duty remains superior to individual affection throughout the entire process.

Deceptive To regain control, Jakyp orchestrates a deliberate lie about his health. He instructs his brother Sagaly and Shaarkan to send a false telegram claiming he is seriously ill. This manipulation exploits Gulhan's filial piety and urgency to rescue him. He knows she cannot withstand guilt and uses this weakness to lure her back. By hiding the true nature of the visit until arrival, he traps her in the village physically

and emotionally. This breach of trust highlights his willingness to sacrifice truth for the sake of enforcing tradition upon his unsuspecting child.

Protective Despite his harsh methods, Jakyp genuinely desires security for Gulhan. At his deathbed, he calls both spouses together to bless their union before passing away. He asks them to live peacefully and work hard together, hoping to stabilize her future without him. He emphasizes honesty and kindness, revealing that his strictness stemmed from concern rather than malice. Though his means were coercive, his end goal was ensuring she would not suffer alone. His final instructions seek to bind the marriage permanently through moral obligation and parental blessing before his death.

THEMES

Personal Desire versus Family Duty: From the beginning, Gulhan cherishes her father, striving never to disappoint him despite her education in Frunze where she seeks independence. This deep devotion becomes her undoing when a false telegram suddenly claims he is dying. Overwhelmed by guilt, she immediately abandons her wedding plans with Sulayman, packing her belongings quickly without contacting him to prioritize her filial obligation over romantic happiness. Upon returning home, the conflict intensifies drastically when her father lies in bed and declares that defying his word makes her no longer his daughter. Kneeling before him in silence, she chooses submission, proving that parental authority holds more power than individual passion within their rigid society. This sacrifice culminates at the village council office during the forced marriage ceremony. Standing silently beside Sapar, she allows another woman to answer legal questions meant for her, effectively surrendering her voice to satisfy family expectations completely.

In the years following, duty maintains outward stability while desire haunts her interior life daily. She fulfills wifely obligations faithfully, caring for Sapar after his shooting and supporting his mother through illness without complaint. Yet, in quiet moments, memories of the surgeon resurface strongly when she sees aster flowers or hears distant news of him. Flowers gifted long ago remind her painfully of the path not taken. Even when reuniting with Sulayman at the hospital after Sapar survives, she cannot cross back into his world because her commitments to Sapar remain unbreakable due to loyalty. She sleeps alone while working hard, maintaining peace but suffering inwardly. Ultimately, the story illustrates that traditional structures demand women suppress personal joy for collective honor constantly. Gulhan finds dignity in her endurance, yet the cost is a lifetime of carrying the secret grief of a love buried by obedience forever. Her silence protects the family reputation while isolating her true self permanently from the man who once promised her a different future entirely.

Illustrative moment: Gulhan tells her mother that she does not love Sapar and refuses to marry him. Her mother becomes furious and shouts, "Will you throw away your parents for a stranger from far away?"

At home, Gulhan falls at her father's feet, crying and holding his legs. She begs him to save her and not force her into marriage. Her old father slowly walks toward her with a stick in his shaking hand. Tears fill his eyes. He lifts her from the floor and says, "Before I die, let me see you settled in a safe home. If you refuse Sapar, you will break your father's heart."

Gulhan cries loudly. Her father's hands shake, sweat covers his forehead, and he nearly falls to the ground. Her mother rushes to hold him. He whispers that his own daughter's words are killing him. Seeing her father trembling and weak, Gulhan finally gives up. Through tears, she agrees to marry Sapar but says she will never love him and will leave one day. Afterward, she cries alone, thinking about Sulayman.

Regional Division and Social Boundaries: Before Kyrgyzstan gained independence, marriage between northern and southern Kyrgyz families was often a sensitive matter. Many parents preferred their children to marry within their own region. This was not only about tradition but also about differences in lifestyle.

Northern Kyrgyz communities remained closely connected to nomadic heritage and had stronger interaction with Soviet Russian culture. As a result, Russian language and urban customs were more common there.

Southern Kyrgyz communities, meanwhile, were more closely tied to traditional Muslim values and to settled Uzbek, Uighur, and Tajik cultures, alongside Soviet influence.

Language also created distance. Some northern Kyrgyz criticized the southern Kyrgyz dialect because it contained older Turkic, Uzbek, Chagatai, and Tajik elements. To them, it sounded unfamiliar or less purely Kyrgyz.

Geography made the separation even deeper. Traveling between north and south required crossing mountain passes higher than 3,500 meters, and bus journeys could last twelve to fifteen hours. Distance made family connections and marriage arrangements more complicated.

Kyrgyz people also live outside Kyrgyzstan, in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, China's Kyzyl Suu region, Tajikistan's Badakhshan region, the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan, Van province in Turkey, as well as in Russia and the United States.

Today, globalization, education, and migration have reduced these divisions. Marriages between north and south are common, and international marriages are possible. However, in some villages families still prefer regional matches and continue to observe the tradition of avoiding marriage within seven generations.

Illustrative moment: Gulhan's father refuses Sulayman not simply because he is from another country, but because he is from the Murgab region of Badakhshan, culturally closer to southern Kyrgyz traditions.

For a northern Kyrgyz father, this represents unfamiliar customs, dialect, and social environment. Even though the region is geographically near southern Kyrgyzstan, it still feels like "far land" to him.

For him, this is not simply a marriage between two young people. It feels like losing his only daughter to distant lands. He fears that she will move far away, beyond mountains and borders, and that he may never see her again.

In his generation, distance meant real separation. Travel was difficult, communication limited, and cross-regional marriages were rare. A daughter who married far away was often considered "lost" to her parents' household. His refusal reflects emotional attachment, regional caution, and traditional thinking about belonging. The father is not purely cruel. He is afraid. He wants to keep his daughter close, within familiar land, language, and culture. But his protection becomes control.

The Role of Relatives in Marriage: Sisters-in-Law In traditional Kyrgyz culture, especially in villages, young people did not openly date or confess love directly to each other. Romantic relationships followed strict social codes. Love was expressed indirectly, through glances, symbolic gestures, or intermediaries. Open dating could damage a girl's reputation and bring shame to her family. This is reflected in the proverb "Kyzga kyrk üydön tyiuu," meaning "Forty houses forbid the girl," or "Forty houses watch over the girl's behavior." The phrase symbolizes how an entire clan or tribe monitors and protects a girl's honor.

Because of these norms, sisters-in-law known as *jenges* (*yenges*) often played a key role in organizing meetings between young men and women. They acted as cultural mediators, protecting reputation while allowing controlled interaction.

In the novella, Shaarkan fulfills this traditional role. As the wife of Sagaly, Jakyp's brother, she arranges a meeting between Gulhan and Sapar at home. This becomes their first meaningful conversation. However, Gulhan does not realize that the meeting has been deliberately organized. What appears accidental is actually planned according to custom.

Through Shaarkan's involvement, the story shows how marriage decisions are rarely private matters. They are shaped by extended family networks, social expectations, and silent cultural rules. Love is not spontaneous but supervised. In this way, tradition quietly directs Gulhan's fate long before she understands it.

Illustrative moment: Shaarkan invites Gulhan to stay overnight at her house. The evening feels ordinary at first. The samovar steams, food is prepared carefully, and the atmosphere seems warm and casual. Gulhan believes she is simply visiting her aunt. She does not suspect that the situation has been deliberately arranged.

Shaarkan moves about the house with unusual excitement, glancing toward the door and listening for footsteps. When Sapar arrives, his entrance does not feel accidental. He is welcomed warmly, almost ceremoniously. The elders observe closely, joking about the future and speaking in hints rather than direct statements. Gulhan suddenly senses that she has become the center of silent expectations.

This moment reflects the traditional role of the jenge, the sister-in-law who organizes meetings between young people without openly declaring it. Gulhan is unaware that her “first conversation” with Sapar is culturally structured as a step toward marriage.

Symbols: *The Aster Flowers* The aster flowers serve as one of the most powerful symbols in the novella, representing love, memory, and emotional continuity. They first appear in the hospital when Sulayman sends Gulhan a bouquet after her surgery. At that fragile moment—when she has just survived a life-threatening illness—the flowers symbolize new life and awakening. They are not simply a gift but a quiet confession of care. Gulhan begins to associate the soft colors of the asters with Sulayman’s presence, warmth, and the purity of her first true love.

Later, when she is forced into marriage with Sapar, the meaning of the asters becomes more complex. Sapar also brings her a bouquet of aster flowers, hoping to please her. Outwardly, she accepts them, but inwardly the flowers reopen old memories. The same symbol now carries two emotional worlds: one of chosen love and one of imposed duty. This contrast shows how objects can hold layered meanings shaped by personal experience.

Illustrative moment: Gulhan’s final meeting with Sulayman near a garden filled with asters. Standing beside the flowers, they speak about life, separation, and irreversible decisions. Sulayman quietly connects each flower to someone in her life, her children, Sapar, herself, and finally him. In that moment, the asters become a symbol of enduring love that survives even when it cannot be fulfilled.

By the end, when Gulhan returns home carrying the flowers, they represent silent memory. Love may not shape her destiny, but it remains alive in her heart, preserved like the asters’ delicate petals.