

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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TWO MORE LINES ABOUT OUR LIVES / EKI SAP OMUR (1978)

Kazat Akmatov (1941–2015)

Reference: Kazat Akmatov (1978). *Eki sap omur* [Two more lines about our lives]. Ruhesh. <https://ruhesh.kg/ky/category/show/news/759/kazat-akmatov-eki-sap-omur>

OVERVIEW

Author

Kazat Akmatov was born on December 23, 1941, in the village of Bosteri, Ysyk-Kol Province, Kyrgyzstan. He passed away on September 14, 2015, after a prolonged illness.

He graduated in 1966 from the Higher Komsomol School under the Central Committee of the Komsomol in Moscow and in 1967 from the Department of Kyrgyz Language and Literature at Kyrgyz State University. Akmatov began his professional career in 1954 as a laborer at the Horse Breeding State Enterprise in the Ysyk-Kol District. From the 1960s, he engaged in Komsomol activities. In 1972, he joined the editorial staff of the *Kyrgyzstan* publishing house as an editor and later served as deputy chief editor. Between 1974 and 1983, he held various positions within the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan. From 1983 to 1986, he served as senior editor at the State Television and Radio Committee of Kyrgyzstan. Between 1986 and 1990, he was Secretary of the Board of the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan. In 1990, he became one of the founders and the first chairman of the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement, a driving force in the formation of the country's modern political system and an important influence in the rise to power of A. Akaev. From 1990 to 1995, he served as a member of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic.

His first collection of stories, *Young Man (Boz Ulan)*, was published in 1974. He is also the author of novels, stories, and collections including *Sacred Homeland (Yiyk yurt)*, *Time (Mezgil)*, *Munabiya (Munabiya)*, and *The Years That Turned Around the Sun (Kundu aylangan jyldar)*. Several of his works were adapted for the stage, including the plays *Ajyrashuu (Ajyrashuu)*, *Munabiya (Munabiya)*, co-written with J. Kulmambetov, and *Accident (Avariya)*. In 2013, his work *Thirteen Steps towards the Fate of Erika Klaus (Zabytaya zastava, ili trinadtsat shagov Eriki Klaus)*, originally published in Russian, appeared in English in London. His final novel, *Arhat (Arhat, 2006)*, received the Toktogul State Prize of Kyrgyzstan for literature. Notably, the film *Munabiya (Munabiya)* was adapted from his novella for Kyrgyz cinema.

Kazat Akmatov received the Jubilee Medal *Manas-1000*, the Toktogul State Prize of Kyrgyzstan, and the All-Union Nikolai Ostrovsky Literary Prize. He is recognized as a People's Writer of Kyrgyzstan and is considered one of the founders of Kyrgyz democracy.

Novella

The novella *Two More Lines about Our Lives (Eki Sap Omur)* combines romanticism and lyricism in a delicate literary fusion. The work first appeared in Kyrgyz in the journal *Ala-Too* in 1978. Publishers subsequently released a Russian translation in Moscow, and it was published in *Roman-Gazeta*, the most popular and widely circulated literary journal in Russia. Founded by Maxim Gorky in 1927, this periodical distributed fiction from across the USSR and the world to Russian-language readers. The novella later received the All-Union Nikolai Ostrovsky Prize. These achievements confirmed that a new talented prose writer had emerged in Kyrgyz literature, following the tradition of Chyngyz Aitmatov.

Background

The story unfolds against the background of Soviet rural life, when collective farms were weakening under economic stagnation and bureaucratic control. Officially, socialism promised equality, honesty, and

collective responsibility. In reality, daily life in the kolkhoz shows a different picture. Building materials disappear, reports are falsified, leaders protect themselves, and ordinary workers are blamed. Small acts of corruption such as missing timber, deducted wages, manipulated documents, and abuse of authority by investigators reveal a system where people survive through deception rather than honesty.

The planned merger of the kolkhoz into a sovkhoz reflects larger problems across the Soviet Union. Farms fall into debt, but local officials try to hide failure instead of solving it. Public meetings become performances where truth struggles against fear and personal interest. Young people like Asek still believe in justice and fairness, but they must face hypocrisy inside the system.

Through village conflicts and personal struggles, the story shows how corruption slowly destroys trust. It is not a sudden collapse, but a gradual moral decline that weakens the entire system.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Asek Ismanov - leader of the youth construction brigade, strong, emotional, honest, courageous, believes in justice, openly challenges corruption

Narrator Askerov - one of the five friends, thoughtful and observant, tells the story, reflects on events and friendship

Seyit - lyric poet of the group, sensitive and romantic, writes poems, marries Bermet

Mukhtar - practical and outspoken, later becomes brigade leader, often argues, loyal to his friends

Nurmat - calm and good natured, related to Karypjan, leaves for military service

Bermet - Seyit's wife, strong and determined, defends her love, joins the brigade

Karypjan - construction foreman, corrupt and manipulative, represents dishonesty in the system

Beyshe - former official, heavy drinker, speaks boldly at the assembly, criticizes leadership

Bekkul - engineer at the sovkhoz, strict, punctual, technical specialist

Aydygulov - district Komsomol secretary, helps solve Seyit's legal problem

SYNOPSIS

After finishing school, five village boys are forced to postpone their dreams of university and complete two years of manual labor. They form a youth construction brigade at their kolkhoz under the passionate leadership of Asek. While building a sheep shed, they struggle with shortages, idleness, and conflicts with the arrogant foreman Karypjan. In desperation, they secretly dismantle an abandoned cowshed for materials, an act that leads to punishment, humiliation, and growing resentment.

As the kolkhoz faces economic collapse and merger with a sovkhoz, corruption is exposed. Asek boldly speaks at a tense general assembly, defending truth and supporting the merger as the only realistic future. Karypjan is later arrested for theft, while Asek rises to become a foreman.

Meanwhile, personal lives shift. Nurmat leaves for the army. Seyit elopes with Bermet, sparking a legal battle fueled by pride and authority. With Asek's help, justice prevails. Bermet ultimately joins the brigade, restoring the group to five members.

SCENES

Building the Sheep Shed

Two Years Before Their Dreams Asek is furiously cursing because the water suddenly runs out while four young workers are helping build a new structure. In anger, he rushes to the horse, Tulpar, and forces him to move. Tulpar is a slow, calm horse that pulls a small one-horse cart used for carrying water and building materials. It is the only transport the five-member youth brigade has. The boys have just completed the tenth grade—the full course of compulsory Soviet secondary schooling, after which they would normally hope to enter university. Instead, they learn that they must first complete two years of manual labor. Their dreams of higher education suddenly feel distant, so they join a youth construction brigade at the collective farm and begin to accept the hard reality of working life.

After School, Their Paths Separate At that meeting, the twenty-three students in their class split into two Komsomol construction brigades. Now only four boys remain under Asek's leadership. The girls' lives change quickly: three study in Frunze, two train as seamstresses, four marry, and one is in the hospital with tuberculosis, though doctors say she will recover. Later the boys learn that the required two years of labor do not apply to girls, and they feel bitter. The village becomes empty and dull without them. Worse, some girls who fail to enter school soon marry. One of them is the narrator's sweetheart, and her marriage leaves him heartbroken for many months.

Building the Sheep Shed The boys are building a sheep shed, on a bare hill near the village. The chairman says they will get a reward if they finish the roof in two months. But even after four months, the shed is still not finished. The walls are up, but there is no roof and no plaster. The boys and Asek argue almost every day. At first Asek shouts at them, but later they also start blaming him. The real problem is that the collective farm has no wood, boards, poles, or slate for the roof. So the work stops. A small house for the shepherd nearby is also still unfinished.

Quarrels on the Building Site Asek angrily attacks Nurmat because he is related to Karypjan, the construction foreman, who likes to boast that he could be chairman of the collective farm. Asek says that if Karypjan were any good, they would have finished not one but two sheep sheds that summer. The workers often argue about who is to blame. Some think Karypjan is not guilty, because the collective farm truly has no building materials. But Asek insists that a real foreman should find timber and boards somewhere. Karypjan refuses to stop the project, fearing inspection from higher officials, so the boys must keep pretending to work.

Idle Days and a Poet As the work stalls, the boys slowly get used to endless arguments and idleness. Most of them are bored and miserable, but Seyit does not mind. He writes poems, so they call him "the lyric poet." The longer the delay, the more his talent seems to grow. He sits all day in the shade of willow trees behind the sheep shed, wrapped in his coat, writing about sorrow, lost hope, and distant love. The others wait for his poems, then gather in their grass hut, play cards, and sleep. When they wake, they either read Seyit's new verses or run to Tulpar, hurrying back so they will not miss the evening film.

Looking for Asek Asek goes to restore the water supply while the others plaster the south wall of the sheep shed with mud. He has assigned himself the hardest job: mixing the mud well and filling their buckets. Water is scarce because irrigation workers keep diverting the small stream. Usually Asek quickly brings the water back, but this time he is gone too long. The boys grow worried and think he may be arguing with the irrigators. They climb down and go searching through the dry valley. Everything is strangely quiet. Then Mukhtar whistles, and Tulpar the horse lifts his head nearby. At last they hear Asek's voice, he is simply sitting behind the old cowshed.

Asek's Risky Idea As they walk back, ashamed for searching needlessly, Asek calls them over. He has suddenly thought of a new plan, one that will later bring trouble to everyone, though they do not know it yet. The boys are excited and praise him as a genius. At once they run for shovels, picks, forks, and axes, then begin tearing down the roof of an abandoned old cow shed. Only a broken lean-to remains, but some of its

wooden posts and beams are still sound. They need this wood for the sheep shed. In a cloud of dust, they work wildly while Asek shouts warnings and orders from the middle of the chaos.

An Injury at the Ruined Shed In the middle of the work, the narrator steps on a rotten beam. It breaks, and he falls through the roof. One leg hangs down through the hole, and at first everyone laughs. Then they see the injury: a sharp splinter has torn a strip of flesh from his upper thigh, and blood runs down his leg. Because of the accident, the day's work slows, and they cannot carry the wood to the new sheep shed. Still, the others keep tearing down the old cattle shed until evening. At last they stop and take the wounded boy home on Tulpar's cart, while Asek urges the horse to move faster.

A Secret Plan Since spring, Asek has never called his horse by the noble name Tulpar; he only insults him as lazy and useless. Yet the horse has good qualities: when pulling the cart down a steep slope into the stony stream crossing, he moves carefully and slows the load, saving them from accidents. Asek never appreciates this. That evening, as they near the village, Asek makes the boys promise to tell no one that they have torn down the old cattle shed. They want to surprise the chairman and especially Karypjan by suddenly finishing the sheep shed roof. They return home cheerful, proud, and full of hope, unaware that trouble lies ahead.

The Shepherd's Wife Starts a Fight The trouble begins when the narrator returns to work after a week at home healing. A shepherd's wife rides up and angrily confronts the boys. Fierce and sharp-tongued, she demands that they rebuild the old cattle shed they tore down, or she will make them pay. Asek, unusually calm at first, tries to explain that the old shed was unsafe and that the new sheep shed can be used instead. But she refuses, saying the new place is cold, stony, and unfit for animals. When Asek suggests covering the ground with manure, she becomes even angrier, turns her horse, and rides off toward the village office to complain.

Back to Work They sit in silence after the angry woman leaves, unsure what to do. The new cattle shed they are building is almost finished and meant to be the best in the kolkhoz, but her words disturb them. Asek, who leads the work, looks tired and upset. No one speaks. They wonder if the leaders will support them or believe the woman's complaint.

Suddenly, water flows into the pit they dug for clay. This breaks the silence. Asek quickly gives orders, and they all begin working again. Digging, carrying, and shaping the mud, they regain energy. By evening, they finish their task and return to the village late, exhausted but satisfied.

Waiting for Judgment The next week feels strange and tense for him and the others. They work from morning until evening, constantly watching the road, expecting someone to arrive. They are sure the angry woman has reported them to the office, yet neither the brigade leader nor the farm head appears. He believes the chairman himself may come to decide whether their act of breaking the cattle shed was right or wrong. The uncertainty weakens their spirit. At last, Mukhtar urges Asek to go to the office and ask if the kolkhoz even needs the shed. Asek finally agrees and leaves. Meanwhile, they continue working, hoping to finish in two days.

The Riders Approach After dressing, Asek walks straight across the autumn fields toward the village office. The others continue mixing mud when Mukhtar suddenly shouts that the angry woman is returning with a man on horseback. They stop working at once. Seyit slips away as usual. The group quickly discusses what to say if they are ordered to rebuild the shed roof. Asek insists they should not agree easily and prepares to argue, especially if it is Karypjan. The riders approach slowly, but the man's identity remains unclear. Tension rises as they wait, ready to defend their decision depending on who arrives.

An Unexpected Reaction At last, he recognizes the rider, it is Karypjan. The man chats lazily with the woman as they approach, making the workers wait in anger and suspense. When Karypjan finally sees them, he greets them casually. The woman stares coldly but says nothing. To their surprise, Karypjan does not demand that they rebuild the shed. He simply tells them to leave it as it is. They are stunned by his indifference. As he rides away, however, he turns back and loudly warns Asek that his wages will be cut for destroying the cowshed. Then he laughs, satisfied, while the woman rides beside him.

Silent Anger Asek does not react. Usually quick-tempered, he now stands pale and silent. The others also feel crushed by anger and humiliation. For a moment, everything seems frozen, the sun, the lake, the mountains, even the birds. Slowly, they begin to move again, spitting and pretending nothing has happened, yet none of them knows what to say or do. They remember how the woman had gone to complain, expecting punishment. Now it seems the cowshed was only an interruption to Karypjan's pleasant ride and private talk. Soon, Karypjan and the woman disappear into thick bushes and remain there for a long time.

The Poem Seyit suddenly arrives, eager to recite his completed poem "The Dodgeball Game." The others, still angry and dejected, reluctantly agree to listen. Seyit recites his work, which tells of a girl chasing a boy during a game. The boy intentionally lets the ball pass, hoping it represents the girl's red apple of love meant for him. The poem is simple and romantic. Normally, they would joke about such verses, but today no one laughs or comments. Only Asek nods slightly in approval. The others remain silent, their spirits too broken by Karypjan's mockery to appreciate the poem's gentle message about love and hope.

Winter Night The winter comes, and the collective's work is finished. They have no desire to work anymore. They walk around the office and shop. Asek reports to Karypjan the next day, but does not want to return to the cowshed. At night, Asek stays at home, staring at the ruins of the cowshed. He misses the woman, but he misses it more that he misses the night when they worked together. He feels alone. Later, he becomes the district party organizer and meets the collective's leaders, especially Karypjan. The past comes back to him. Finally, he stops asking "What happened?" and realizes he is alone. He misses the old days. The group misses him, too. The story ends with him alone.

The Hidden Truth Emerges The real reason for all the conflict becomes clear: the kolkhoz is being merged with a nearby sovkhaz. Sensing this change, some activists, including Karypjan, quietly begin falsifying documents and records during autumn. The chief accountant joins them, helping create false reports about the farm and brigades. A letter is even sent to higher authorities, allegedly signed by "old activists," claiming the people oppose the merger. The letter is kept secret until summer, when it is revealed during a meeting. The activists have written it to protect themselves, hoping to shift blame onto the people if the merger proceeds. Their betrayal is now exposed.

Voices on the Merger People argue about the planned merger with the sovkhaz. One man dismisses it, saying a sovkhaz strips away private livestock and leaves barely any land. He questions why anyone would support such a loss. Another responds that the sovkhaz is not as bad as feared. He argues that managing livestock brings constant hardship and expense. He prefers the sovkhaz system where everything is organized and calculated fairly. He warns against resisting the merger, claiming the sovkhaz offers stability and eliminates the suffering of individual farming. He insists there is no free life in a sovkhaz, but at least the burden is shared equally. The debate reflects deep uncertainty about the coming changes.

Inventory and Chaos Summer arrives with growing turmoil. A large team from the district comes to organize an inventory of collective and private livestock, equipment, carts, horses, and even the smallest items of the kolkhoz. They meticulously document everything. The village descends into chaos and anxiety. People constantly hear complaints: "This is missing, that is short. The shepherd lost lambs, the cowherd lost cows, the crops in the field are failing." Everyone grows increasingly frustrated. Hair stands on end as they listen to endless reports of shortages and losses. The inventory process reveals widespread problems and incompetence, creating panic and despair among the kolkhoz members about what the merger will bring.

The Missing Boards One day, a big problem begins. People say, "Karypjan has lost a cubic meter of pine boards." This news becomes more important than all other issues. Everyone starts talking about it. When Asek hears this, he leaves his house. Later, five of them meet and go to the horse yard. This is where the kolkhoz keeps its wood and tools near the sawmill. They look around carefully. There are wooden structures, but they cannot find the missing boards. Even without proof, people still blame Karypjan. It feels unfair. Asek joins the search, showing that there may be deeper problems between him and Karypjan.

At the Sawmill When they arrive at the sawmill, officials, Karypjan, and another brigade leader are already there. As they get closer, Karypjan becomes nervous and pulls Asek aside. The others wait, feeling tense. Suddenly, Asek shouts in anger. He says he will not stay silent and accuses Karypjan of being guilty.

Everyone runs toward them. Asek angrily asks where the kolkhoz boards are. He reminds Karypjan that he once refused to give even one board for the cowshed. Now, he says, Karypjan is trying to blame him with lies. In anger, Asek grabs Karypjan by the collar. Their hidden conflict finally turns into an open fight.

The Fight and Arrest Asek and Karypjan struggle violently. Officials rush in to separate them, but Asek's fist reaches Karypjan before they can stop him. The crowd pulls them apart. The five friends surround Asek while others hold Karypjan in the middle. The two district officials stand like referees, watching from a distance.

Karypjan shouts insults, his face flushed with anger and shame. He refuses to accept blame, instead desperately trying to shift responsibility onto Asek with false accusations. His schemes have failed, leaving him desperate and humiliated. In his final attempt, he makes a dangerous gamble, perhaps hoping Asek will back down. But the next day, Karypjan is taken to the police station. His deception has finally caught up with him.

The Accounting That evening, they go to settle their wages. A yellow-faced woman sits at the accounting desk, checking their records. She pulls out the construction report and searches for Asek's name. Nurmat asks about Asek's wages. The woman examines the ledger and announces: "Ismanov Asek earned three hundred ninety days this year, but twenty days have been deducted, leaving three hundred seventy." They are shocked. "Why deducted?" The accountant replies coldly, "Ask your brigade leader. Days were deducted because you demolished the cowshed." She refuses to explain further, leaving them frustrated about this unexpected punishment for their work.

Assembly

The Grand Assembly The next day, they cannot find Karypjan—he has disappeared. The year's most significant event becomes the annual kolkhoz assembly, held on a Sunday in the club. The hall fills instantly with excited villagers, reminiscent of when actors once performed the play "Aichurok."

An old bearded man keeps interrupting: "Listen, you should pay attention. Let's see what happens with the sovkhov merger."

The five friends sit in the back corner, uncomfortable and tense. Only Seyit remains calm; the others stand rigidly together. The assembly begins late. The crowd buzzes with tension and whispers. Finally, a large man named Beyshe jumps up, shouting loudly: "We won't join the sovkhov! We refuse!"

The Outburst The crowd laughs at Beyshe's outburst. Beyshe is a former official who became an alcoholic, lost his position, and now works as a guard for the first brigade. His voice is loud and rough, impossible to ignore when he speaks. The villagers find his passion amusing. As Beyshe raises his fist again, the party secretary suddenly appears from the backstage door. His face is pale and drawn, showing signs of stress. He bends forward, struggling to begin the assembly. The crowd remains restless, shouting from different corners, unable to settle. The atmosphere grows chaotic and tense. The secretary tries to restore order, but the assembly descends into confusion and noise.

The Assembly Begins This is his first time at a grand kolkhoz assembly. The youth meetings pale in comparison. The real drama starts with the election of the presidium. People immediately object: "Why elect him? He's already failed!" Several names are crossed off the list on the spot. The party secretary struggles to maintain order, tapping his water glass repeatedly, shouting over the noise for a long time before the crowd finally quiets. Seizing the moment, he calls out: "Comrades!" He proposes additional members for the presidium: "I recommend Asek Ismanov from the youth brigade, Kanikeev, director of the neighboring sovkhov, and comrade Jetimishov, secretary of the district party committee."

Unexpected Honor In the confusion, the narrator hardly notices what is happening. The four friends huddle together, feeling separate from the crowd. When Asek's name is called for the presidium, all of them blush deeply. His heart races with emotion and shock. The narrator tugs at Asek's sleeve, unsure what to do. For the first time, he truly understands the weight of being elected to the presidium. As Asek rises and walks forward with head held high, the five friends follow together, holding hands, moving as one unit. In that moment, their struggles over the cowshed, their doubts and unanswered questions, suddenly feel validated. Their unexpected election feels like recognition and redemption.

The Report After the vote, Asek takes his seat on the presidium. His friends watch him with pride, unable to look away. He sits differently now, embodying their collective hope and vindication.

The chairman's report follows, filled with financial details. The conclusion is stark: the kolkhoz must merge with the sovkhoz. The district's poorest collective, deeply in debt and unable to operate independently, has no other choice. No one had told them this truth before. Now, hearing it directly from the chairman, the reality becomes undeniable.

The chairman admits that hiding failures no longer works. The kolkhoz must accept its fate. However, he concludes, a person cannot escape their own mistakes through deception. One must face consequences with courage and dignity.

The Debate The chairman sits silently after his report, shoulders slumped, never glancing at the crowd. The real drama begins during the second discussion period. People argue loudly, some speaking truth while others lie, creating confusion. Several eloquent speakers dominate the proceedings, and the moderators give them unlimited time. Everyone with knowledge or opinions raises their hands to speak. Even Beyshe, still drunk, keeps interrupting, growing more agitated as others speak.

"Give me a turn! I'm a person too! Why are you silencing me like this?!" he shouts, his face reddening with anger and frustration at being overlooked in the heated debate.

Beyshe Speaks During the third discussion period, Beyshe finally gets his turn. But many people have already left the club, exhausted from the long debate. Even Nurmat grows restless. However, they cannot leave—Asek is on the presidium. When given a chance to speak, Asek says he will. The three friends feel proud. This is the first time they call him "*bayke*" (brother) instead of just "Asek." He has become their respected leader. When Asek approaches to speak, they eagerly ask what he will say. He hesitates, unable to find words. A cigarette trembles between his lips. They encourage him: "Go ahead, Asek. Tell them everything." Yet none of them knows what he will say. They hope that once at the podium, the right words will come to him naturally.

Beyshe's Speech The district party secretary checks his watch as Beyshe rambles on. Finally, the party organizer interrupts, but Beyshe continues defiantly, checking his own watch. He argues passionately: "Our kolkhoz was once three successful collectives. Why did merging them create failure? The people, land, and livestock are the same. The problem is leadership. Poor management ruins everything."

The organizer cuts him off for exceeding his time. Beyshe stumbles down, adjusting his hat dramatically, and the crowd laughs despite themselves. Some older men acknowledge: "He spoke crudely, but he's right."

The debate continues. Two farm heads speak cautiously, suggesting the sovkhoz has advantages: better breeding stock, government support, and stable wages. However, they hint that if the kolkhoz received quality livestock and equipment, it could improve without merging.

Asek Rises As evening falls, the club grows crowded and tense. Asek still hasn't spoken. Nurmat keeps asking anxiously whether he will speak. "He will," replies the narrator confidently, though his own patience wears thin. Mukhtar insists firmly: "He will speak." Finally, the party organizer nods at Asek, signaling his turn. After another speaker finishes, Asek walks to the podium. The crowd stirs, seeming ready to applaud, but instead falls silent, waiting. Asek pauses, lost in thought, then slowly raises his head. "Comrades," he begins.

Defending Beyshe's Arguments A man unaccustomed to public speaking trembles visibly. His voice wavers as he repeats "Comrades" twice, struggling to begin. The narrator fears the crowd will laugh at his nervousness, but instead they listen quietly, moved by his struggle. Their warm, patient attention gives him courage. Asek steadies himself and begins speaking naturally, his words flowing clearly and powerfully. He speaks eloquently, expressing everything they hoped he would say. His language is sincere and heartfelt. However, midway through, Asek surprises them by defending Beyshe's drunken arguments as the most truthful.

Asek's Conclusion Asek praises Beyshe's honesty while condemning corrupt leaders like Karypjan, whose case is now in court. He acknowledges the sovkhoz's years of free aid—seeds, fodder, fertilizer—

that the kolkhoz could never repay. The kolkhoz's economy is collapsing, and merger is the only solution. He appeals to Kanikeev, the sovkhos director, recognizing his burden in supporting their struggling collective. Asek ends with gratitude to the kolkhoz leadership and party officials, though his sarcastic *barakelde*, good job, stings with irony. The crowd erupts in approval, shouting agreement. "Yes, you spoke truth! That blessing was deserved!" The applause roars through the hall, long and thunderous, as Asek's powerful words validate their impossible choice.

Asek becomes Leader

Spring and Aftermath Spring arrives, warming the village. Asek becomes a foreman at the sovkhos division. Karypjan's wife, hearing of his promotion, curses him bitterly, blaming him for her husband's imprisonment. She threatens revenge if Karypjan ever returns. That evening, Asek invites the five friends to his home to celebrate his young daughter's birthday. They sit together discussing many things.

Plans for the Future As they leave Asek's home after drinking, he asks if they will work on construction again that summer. Nurmat seems uncertain, as he will soon enter military service. The three others have different plans. Mukhtar will transfer to the mechanization department, and the narrator considers becoming a driver. Only Seyit has no specific plans, saying he will follow wherever they go. They tease Seyit about his lack of ambition. "What if we scatter in different directions?" they laugh. Seyit replies confidently: "I'll follow you anywhere. Mountains are good for writing poetry." Mukhtar dismisses his idea, joking that Seyit should write serious prose instead of unpublished poems.

Reunion and New Roles Their plans scatter in four directions. Unable to answer Asek's question immediately, they postpone the decision. After deliberation that week, they decide to rejoin the construction brigade for one more summer before pursuing other paths. Nurmat agrees to work with them before military service, saying: "It's better to work together than wait nervously." Military service looms ahead, and those who have served warn that the first months are harsh. But for now, all four rejoin construction, with Mukhtar becoming their new brigade leader. Mukhtar lacks Asek's authority and experience.

The Mechanized Station When the sovkhos absorbed the kolkhoz, they sold off poor horses, including Tulpar, to elderly farmers who could no longer work. Though it was necessary, the friends mourn losing their faithful horse to an uncertain fate. A truck transports them daily to work at a mechanized livestock treatment station. They build it beside the only large tree near the village, mixing concrete under the summer heat. A cement mixer runs constantly as trucks deliver sand, boards, and cement. Asek oversees their work, ensuring accuracy and quality. "Check the measurements carefully, boys. Pay special attention, Bekkul," he reminds them. Bekkul, a stocky middle-aged man with a wheezing chest, completes their team of five.

Bekkul, the Engineer Though Mukhtar is the brigade leader, Bekkul serves as their engineer. His word is law. None of them can read blueprints, use levels, or measure angles. They only know how to operate the concrete mixer, measure sand and cement ratios, and smooth finished concrete surfaces. Bekkul is an enigmatic character. He arrives punctually at eight each morning on his blue motorcycle from the sovkhos center. By six o'clock, regardless of work progress, he leaves. He constantly checks his watch, acting professorial despite his simple role. He is not a villager but commutes daily from the sovkhos headquarters. His detached demeanor and precise timing puzzle the friends, but they accept his authority without question.

First Wages The mechanized station requires strict blueprints and calculations, unlike the kolkhoz's informal methods. Technicians will later install cleaning machinery for sheep. Any errors must be corrected using plans, not improvisation. Working for the sovkhos demands accountability. They realize how Karypjan could be caught stealing under such oversight. The kolkhoz operated more loosely. After completing concrete work and animal pens, they receive their first monthly wages in crisp new notes. Joy overwhelms them. The cashier treats them kindly. The narrator's mother carefully preserves the bills, later trading them for corn at the market, their first earned money bringing pride to the family.

The Cowshed Again After finishing the station, Bekkul leaves. The four friends remain. Asek assigns them new work. "Find one of this year's school graduates and add him to your team. Then go rebuild the roof of

the cowshed at Boz-Tumshuk that you demolished last year," he orders. They hesitate. Rebuilding what they destroyed feels strange. Asek's patience snaps: "Dedicate that 'Golden Palace' to Karypjan's memory and burn it if you want! Last year's work is done. Now it needs a slate roof. Mukhtar, go get a cart from the yard. Or we'll all go together," he says, taking charge and leading them forward toward their unfinished task.

Burganak Horse Mukhtar hesitates about using the cart, worried about caring for the horse. Asek insists they need it for hauling materials. He leads them to a dignified old horse named Burganak, with a brass plate reading "Don breed, born 1947, Burganak." The narrator's heart stops. This is the legendary Burganak, once a famous stallion from the state stud farm where Asek worked as a jockey. The horse had raced a speeding car but was deliberately crippled when it won. The factory director wept for his ruined horse. The friends cannot refuse. They harness Burganak to their cart, resigned to his tragic fate. If Tulpar still roams freely, at least Burganak serves purpose in his decline.

Sending Nurmat to Army That week, while working with Burganak, an unexpected event occurs. The narrator and Seyit get a day off to accompany Nurmat to the district military office for conscription. Young men gather with their families outside the recruitment center. A captain processes paperwork. Suddenly, Seyit disappears, lured away by a girl in a blue dress into the bushes. The captain orders the recruits to board a truck in fifteen minutes. The narrator searches for Seyit but finds only Nurmat. An accordion player leads a farewell song. Families weep.

Seyit Returns Late Seyit is still missing, so Nurmat and he run through the orchard calling his name. Nurmat grows worried, but he tries to calm him. Soon, they see Seyit coming from deeper in the garden, pulling a girl by the hand. She looks upset, wiping her tears. This makes him angry. He feels it is wrong, especially as Nurmat is about to leave for the army. When they meet, he starts arguing with Seyit. Seyit is also tense and out of breath. He quickly apologizes to Nurmat and suggests they all leave together, asking him to arrange a ride for them.

Ride to Rybachye (Balykchy) The narrator asks the captain for permission to ride with Nurmat to Rybachye, since their village lies on the way. At first, the captain refuses, irritated. "Am I supposed to stop at every village shop?" he snaps. Nurmat insists, introducing Seyit as his brother, Bermet as his sister, and the narrator as his elder brother. Half-joking but serious, he warns he will disappear if they are not allowed aboard. The other recruits laugh and support the request. Finally, the captain sighs and relents. "Fine, get in. But no trouble," he orders. They climb into the covered truck, sharing Nurmat's final journey home.

Bermet: A New Member

Seyit's Elopement They get off near their village at dusk. That night, Seyit suddenly marries Bermet. The narrator acts as best man, but trouble follows. Soon an investigator's report accuses Seyit of drunkenly abducting Bermet with the narrator's help. To defend themselves, they explain: Bermet finds Seyit at the military office and begs him to take her away immediately. She fears harassment from local troublemakers. Seyit and Bermet have loved each other since eighth grade and kept in touch by letters after her family moved. He still keeps her letters as proof. They insist it is love, not kidnapping. They fight desperately to clear their names.

Bermet's Statement In her written statement, Bermet explains that her parents filed the complaint. Since childhood, they planned for her to study physics and mathematics and become a teacher like her uncle. She disliked those subjects and barely passed them. After finishing school, she avoided university and trained as a seamstress instead. When she returned home, her parents refused to let her work and insisted she would reapply to university. They opposed her relationship with Seyit, threatening to separate them. Frustrated, she urged Seyit to marry sooner, but he hesitated. Finally, she used an excuse about village boys bothering her, boarded the soldiers' truck, and left willingly with Seyit.

The Investigator's Accusation An investigator angrily accuses them of kidnapping and ruining a young girl's life. He claims they forced her into marriage and demands to see her letters. The group stands in silence as Seyit brings a bundle of letters. Suddenly, Bermet steps forward, grabs them, and refuses to let the investigator read them. She insists she already gave her statement and says the letters are private. The

investigator mocks her, saying she is only defending her husband. Bermet firmly tells him to leave and says no one invited him. The others support her, and the investigator leaves, frustrated and angry.

In the Dark Room After the investigator leaves, Seyit's mother begins to cry. She worries about her son and fears he may go to prison. She blames his friends and says they should not play with the law. No one can calm her. Bermet also starts crying, and Seyit quietly breaks down. He sits in silence, feeling deep anger and pain after the unfair treatment. Darkness fills the room, but no one turns on the light. They all feel ashamed and helpless. In that moment, they prefer the darkness, because light is for people who feel free and unafraid, not for those carrying pain and humiliation.

Seeking Help That night, the narrator stays at Seyit's house. The three of them worry until dawn, trying to find a way to fight the investigation. The narrator suggests taking Bermet's love letters to the police chief and demanding justice, imagining the investigator being scolded for dishonoring true love. But Bermet refuses to show her private letters to anyone. With no better plan, they tell everything to Asek the next morning. They think he has become calmer as a foreman, but he reacts fiercely. "I will go to the district party committee today. That mustached investigator has done enough harm," he says angrily. As a party candidate member, Asek decides to defend them.

Help from the Komsomol They work distracted, pushing young Rahman hard to prove himself. Rebuilding the cowshed they once built feels painful, yet they follow Asek's new plan: brick walls, slate roof, and rooms for the shepherd. Soon Aydygulov, the district Komsomol secretary, arrives. After talking and taking notes, he asks about Seyit and learns the truth. He seems concerned but supportive. He records their brigade members, even absent Nurmat. Before leaving, he takes Seyit with him to settle the case. "Don't worry, it will be fine," he assures them. His visit brings hope that justice—and protection—will come through official support.

Uncertain Days Aydygulov leaves with Seyit, having come on Asek's request. Rumors say the mustached investigator seeks arrest warrants, so the friends remain anxious. Each day they walk across green fields to rebuild the cowshed in the cool valley of Boz-Tumshuk, returning at dusk along the river. Life grows quieter. Seyit now reads his poems only to Bermet. Nurmat is gone to the army, and they still lack a fourth worker, unable to find someone suitable. One evening Asek scolds them for being too selective. They invite him to discuss it, but he refuses, busy preparing for travel, urging them to choose any strong village youth.

New Worries Asek leaves for Osh with other specialists to exchange experience, so he cannot join their evening meeting. The four friends gather at Seyit's house to discuss Bermet's future. There is no suitable job for her in the village. She trained as a seamstress, but no tailoring position exists. She lacks qualifications for other work, so her only option may be general field labor with the women's brigade. Meanwhile, the investigator who accused them receives a severe party reprimand. Angry, he now seeks revenge against Bermet's father. The friends are dismayed, realizing that even adults in authority can behave unfairly and irresponsibly.

Bermet's Decision Seyit's mother refuses the friends' plan for Bermet to work. She insists her daughter-in-law can stay home, safe from gossip and hardship. She fears village women will mock her and bring trouble. The friends remain silent, unwilling to argue with her. As tension fills the room, Bermet speaks calmly. She asks why they worry so much about her job. Work is work, she says. If they need a fifth member in their brigade, she can join them. Her simple proposal surprises everyone. While Seyit's mother watches angrily, Bermet shows quiet determination, ready to stand beside her husband and friends despite opposition.

A New Member After Bermet suggests joining their brigade, silence fills the room. The friends feel sudden relief. All eyes turn to Seyit's mother, whose approval matters most. She softens, admitting that working beside her husband may be safest after all, though she still worries about gossip. Agreement reached, they laugh at themselves for not thinking of it sooner. Just then, late at night, someone calls from outside. It is Asek, hair still wet, breathing hard, having rushed over before his trip. "Have you decided?" he asks urgently at the gate. They smile, ready to share the good news about their newest brigade member.

Five Again They hesitate, unsure if Asek will approve Bermet joining the brigade. When they tell him, he worries the work is too hard. Bermet answers firmly that she is strong enough and will try. The next day they see Asek off. He embraces them warmly and runs toward the bus, smiling brightly before it leaves. They silently wish him success, hoping he will return wiser and stronger. With Bermet now part of the team, they feel whole again—five members once more. Each morning they walk together across green fields toward the mountains, working side by side, united by friendship, hope, and shared purpose.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Asek

Asek is the central moral figure of the story and the true leader of the youth brigade. From the beginning, he carries not only physical responsibility for construction work but also emotional responsibility for his friends. He lives in a system where dishonesty is common and silence is safer than truth. However, Asek cannot accept injustice quietly. He believes that dignity and honesty are more important than personal comfort or safety.

As he faces shortages, humiliation, and corruption, he slowly matures. At first, he reacts emotionally, with anger and pride. Over time, he learns to control his temper and think more strategically. His speech at the grand assembly shows his growth and inner strength. He no longer speaks only with anger but with understanding of the larger social and economic reality. He recognizes that the kolkhoz is collapsing and that painful change is unavoidable. This awareness transforms him from a hot tempered youth into a responsible and realistic leader who understands sacrifice.

Brave Asek's courage feels natural and honest. He cannot stay quiet when he sees something wrong. When Karypjan cheats or lies, Asek speaks directly, even though he knows it may cause trouble for him. He does not hide behind others or pretend not to notice injustice. At the big assembly, he stands in front of everyone and says what many are afraid to say. He knows people may criticize him, but he still chooses to speak the truth. His bravery comes from his heart. He simply believes that staying silent is worse than facing punishment.

Principled Asek has clear ideas about right and wrong. He believes work should be fair and leaders should think about people, not about themselves. Even when others accept corruption as normal, he cannot do the same. He does not flatter officials or try to gain benefits by keeping quiet. When he speaks about merging with the sovkhos, he does not lie just to please anyone. He says what he truly thinks. For Asek, honesty is not just a rule. It is part of who he is. His principles help him stay strong in difficult times.

Impulsive Asek is emotional and sometimes acts too quickly. When he becomes frustrated about the lack of materials, he decides to tear down the old cowshed without thinking about the consequences. He believes he is doing the right thing, but he does not stop to consider what might happen later. His anger also leads him into a fight with Karypjan. These moments show that he is still young and learning. At the same time, they show his strong feelings and his refusal to accept unfairness quietly.

Seyit

Seyit brings softness and emotion into the group of hardworking young men. While others argue about construction, politics, or corruption, he often sits quietly and writes poetry. He sees the world differently. He notices small feelings, quiet sadness, and moments of beauty. In difficult times, when the others feel angry or disappointed, Seyit turns to words and love. His poems are not just a hobby. They are his way of surviving and understanding life. Through him, the story shows that strength can also be gentle and emotional.

Romantic Seyit believes in love in a pure and simple way. For him, love is not just words or dreams. It is something real that gives meaning to life. When Bermet asks him to take her away, he does not stop to calculate risks or worry about what people will say. He trusts his feelings and follows his heart. Even when their marriage brings legal problems and public criticism, he does not regret his choice. He is ready to face difficulties if it means being with the person he loves. For Seyit, love is stronger than fear.

Sensitive Seyit feels emotions very deeply. He is easily hurt by harsh words or injustice, and he takes things to heart. At the same time, he notices small details others ignore, like the quiet beauty of nature or the sadness in someone's eyes. Instead of hiding his feelings, he puts them into poetry. Writing helps him understand himself and the world around him. His sensitivity makes him gentle, thoughtful, and human, even when life is hard.

Loyal Seyit does not abandon people when trouble comes. When accusations are made and adults threaten him, he does not blame Bermet or his friends. He stays with them and accepts responsibility. Even if he feels fear inside, he does not show weakness in front of others. His loyalty is quiet but strong. He stands by those he loves, proving that true devotion is shown in actions, not only in words.

Mukhtar

Mukhtar is the steady and practical member of the group. While Asek often acts with strong emotions and big ideas, Mukhtar thinks more calmly and focuses on what can actually be done. He does not like long arguments about justice or politics. For him, the most important thing is to finish the work and move forward. His realistic way of thinking helps balance the group and keeps them grounded during difficult times.

Practical Mukhtar thinks in simple and clear ways. When others get carried away by emotions or big speeches, he brings the conversation back to reality. He asks practical questions such as how to finish the roof, where to find materials, or how to save time. He understands that anger alone will not solve problems. Instead of blaming others for too long, he looks for small steps that can move the work forward. Even when he disagrees with Asek's risky ideas, his concern comes from wanting to avoid unnecessary trouble. His practicality makes him reliable in moments of confusion.

Outspoken Mukhtar does not hide his opinions. If he thinks something is wrong or unrealistic, he says it directly. His words can sound rough, but they are honest. He is not afraid to argue with Asek, even though Asek is the leader. This honesty shows confidence and courage. At the same time, his straightforward manner keeps the group balanced. He speaks what others may hesitate to say, helping prevent misunderstandings and silent resentment within the team.

Dependable No matter how difficult the situation becomes, Mukhtar stays. He does not abandon the brigade when work slows down or when conflicts grow. When Nurmat leaves for the army and leadership shifts, Mukhtar accepts responsibility and continues the work. He may complain or argue, but he always shows up and does his part. His loyalty is practical rather than emotional, yet it is strong. In the end, his steady presence helps hold the group together.

Karypjan

Karypjan represents the darker side of authority in the story. As a construction foreman, he has power, influence, and responsibility. However, instead of using his position to improve conditions or support young workers, he focuses mainly on protecting himself. He speaks with confidence and often behaves as if he is an important and capable leader. Yet behind this confident appearance, there is insecurity and dishonesty. He is more concerned about how things look on paper than how they actually are. Through his character, the story shows how bureaucracy can encourage selfish behavior and moral weakness.

Manipulative Karypjan knows how to play the system better than anyone else. He understands that paperwork and reports often matter more than real work. When things go wrong, he does not look for solutions; he looks for scapegoats. He tries to force Asek to sign false documents to hide the fact that materials are missing. This manipulation is not just about avoiding punishment. It is about destroying others to protect his own image. He turns the boys' hard work into a tool for his own defense, creating confusion and fear to keep them silent.

Self-interested For Karypjan, the most important thing in the world is his own position. He does not truly care about the success of the collective farm or the well being of the young workers. All his decisions are guided by one question: will this benefit me? He is afraid of inspections from the district, so he pretends

that everything is fine even when the work is stalled. He refuses to provide materials for the roof because keeping them for himself feels safer. He cares only about maintaining his authority, not about being fair or helpful.

Cowardly Karypjan may shout and threaten people, but this is only an act to hide his inner weakness. He acts brave when he has power over others, but as soon as someone stronger like Asek stands up to him, he loses his confidence. When his corruption is revealed in front of everyone, he does not have the courage to admit his guilt. Instead, he tries to run away or rely on the police to protect him. He cannot face the consequences of his actions. His bravery is fake; it disappears the moment he is in real danger.

THEMES

Ethics: Corruption and Stagnation The story shows corruption as one of the main problems of the Soviet system during the period of stagnation. At that time, the economy was weak, collective farms were in debt, and production was low. Instead of solving these problems honestly, many officials tried to hide them. They falsified reports, blamed workers, and protected their own positions. Corruption became common in everyday life.

In theory, socialism promised equality, justice, and collective responsibility. In reality, many leaders cared more about their personal status than about the people. Fear of inspections and punishment made officials lie instead of admit mistakes. Workers suffered while those in power avoided responsibility. This created distrust and disappointment, especially among young people like Asek, who believed in fairness.

Stagnation was not only about economic slowdown. It was also about moral decline. When dishonesty becomes normal, people stop believing in the system. They lose respect for authority and feel hopeless. Over time, this weakens the foundation of the state. The story suggests that such everyday corruption and lack of accountability were important reasons why the Soviet Union eventually collapsed.

Illustrative moment: Karypjan tries to force Asek to sign false documents about the missing timber. Instead of admitting that the boards have disappeared, Karypjan attempts to shift responsibility onto Asek and the young brigade. He pressures Asek privately, hoping he will agree to sign the report and take the blame.

This moment clearly shows how corruption works in the system. The problem is not only that materials are missing. The real issue is that an official tries to hide the truth and protect himself. Rather than solving the shortage, Karypjan chooses deception. He values his position more than honesty.

Asek refuses to sign, and this leads to open conflict between them. This scene is important because it shows the clash between integrity and corruption. It also reveals how the system encourages lying to survive. The moment is small in scale, but it represents a larger problem within the stagnating Soviet system.

Freedom: Control of Individual Lives In the Soviet system, the control of individual lives was a central feature of daily reality. The state played a dominant role in shaping a person's education, career, residence, and even personal decisions. Young people often could not freely choose whether to continue their studies or where to work. In the story, the boys are required to complete two years of manual labor before pursuing higher education. This shows how personal dreams were often postponed or limited by state policy.

Beyond work and education, private life was also influenced by authority. Marriage, reputation, and family decisions could become matters of public discussion or even legal intervention. Seyit and Bermet's relationship becomes a case for investigation, showing how love itself could fall under scrutiny. Fear of officials, inspectors, and party representatives shaped people's behavior. Many learned to be cautious, to speak carefully, and to avoid attracting attention.

Such control limited freedom and individuality. People often felt that their futures were decided not by their own wishes but by bureaucratic rules. This constant supervision created anxiety and discouraged open expression. Over time, this lack of personal freedom weakened trust in the system and increased frustration, especially among the younger generation.

Illustrative moment: The young men learn that they cannot enter university immediately after finishing tenth grade. Instead, they are required to complete two years of manual labor before they can even apply for higher education. This rule is not a suggestion but a compulsory state policy. Their dreams of studying and

building professional careers are suddenly postponed, not because of personal choice or ability, but because of a bureaucratic decision made by authorities far above them.

This moment shows how the Soviet system regulated the lives of ordinary people. The state determined the timing and direction of their paths. Even their desire for education and self improvement was controlled by external forces. The boys do not protest openly, but their disappointment is clear. They feel their hopes slipping away, replaced by heavy physical labor and uncertainty. This experience reflects a broader reality in which personal aspirations were often secondary to the needs and rules of the system.

Marriage: *Bride Kidnapping*

Bride kidnapping appears as an important theme in the story, even though the situation between Seyit and Bermet is not a real abduction. The two young people love each other and have communicated through letters since school. When Bermet feels trapped by her parents' pressure and unwanted plans for her future, she asks Seyit to take her away. They leave together by their own choice and get married. For them, it is an act of love and freedom.

However, Bermet's parents refuse to accept the marriage. Instead of recognizing her decision, they file a legal complaint and accuse Seyit of bride kidnapping. The investigator treats the case seriously, ignoring the fact that Bermet went willingly. Her personal feelings and her own statement are not respected. The law and tradition combine to turn a love story into a criminal accusation.

This situation shows the conflict between personal freedom and social or family control. In Kyrgyz society, bride kidnapping was a known custom, sometimes forced and sometimes symbolic. Here, the story uses it to reveal how easily love can be misunderstood or punished when parents and authorities refuse to accept young people's choices.

Through this theme, the narrative criticizes both old traditions and the rigid system. It shows that even in matters of the heart, individuals had to fight for the right to decide their own lives.

In modern Kyrgyzstan, bride kidnapping against a woman's will is recognized as a serious crime. The law punishes it strictly, and society increasingly views it as a violation of human rights and personal freedom. Women today have stronger legal protection and more support to refuse forced marriage. The story, written in an earlier time, helps modern readers understand how attitudes have changed and why protecting personal choice in love and marriage remains important.

Illustrative moment: The investigator arrives at Seyit's house and accuses him of kidnapping Bermet while drunk. He treats the marriage as a serious crime, ignoring the fact that Bermet left willingly and loves Seyit. He demands to read her private letters as evidence, trying to prove guilt instead of truth.

Bermet steps forward, takes the letters from Seyit's hands, and refuses to give them to the investigator. She firmly tells him that she already gave her statement and that the letters are personal. The investigator mocks her, saying she is only defending her husband. The atmosphere in the room becomes tense and humiliating.

This moment shows how a personal and loving decision is turned into a legal accusation. It illustrates the conflict between individual freedom and the pressure of family and authority.

Youth: *the Search for Identity*

The title *Two More Lines about Our Lives* (*Eki Sap Omur*) carries a deeper and more specific meaning. The "two more lines" refer to the two compulsory years of manual labor the young men must complete in the kolkhoz before they can continue their education. These two years become an important turning point in their collective lives and shared identity.

At first, their biographies are simple and nearly identical. They write about school, Komsomol membership, and parents' names. Nothing makes them stand out as individuals. Everyone lived the same way, followed the same rules, and had the same dreams. But when they are forced to work together in the kolkhoz, which later merges into a sovkhoz, their lives begin to change. Those two years are not just time passed or wasted. They are years filled with struggle, friendship, disappointment, love, conflict, and personal growth experienced together.

During this period, they face corruption, injustice, responsibility, and difficult moral choices as a group. They see how the system really works and begin to understand their place within it. They experience both hardship and small victories side by side. These shared real life experiences add "two more lines" to their collective story, making it more personal, deeper, and meaningful.

The theme shows that identity is shaped not only by formal education or official achievements, but by lived experience. The two years of labor transform the boys into young men together, giving substance

to their biographies and individuality to their lives. They are no longer just names on a page. They have a story worth telling, one they lived and wrote together.

Illustrative moment: When the friends receive their first monthly wages from the sovkhos after completing the mechanized livestock station, the cashier hands them crisp new banknotes. They are overwhelmed with joy and pride. They carefully keep those bills flat and unfolded, treasuring them as symbols of their real work. The narrator's mother preserves the bills in their original condition before eventually using them to buy corn at the market.

This moment shows how the two years of labor have added meaningful substance to their lives. Before, their biographies contained only school records and Komsomol membership cards, things given to them by the system. Now they hold money they earned themselves through honest, difficult work.

They are no longer just students waiting to continue education. They have become workers who contribute, struggle, and earn. The sweat, the conflicts, the concrete they mixed, and the friendships they deepened, all of these experiences are the "two more lines" being written into their life stories.

Economy: Kolkhoz vs Sovkhos - Two Systems of Rural Life The difference between kolkhoz (collective farm) and sovkhos (state farm) is an important theme in the story.

A kolkhoz (collective farm) was theoretically owned by its members. Farmers worked together and shared profits or losses. They were responsible for debts and had some control over their work. However, management was often informal, and workers received payment based on workdays, which was frequently delayed or given in goods rather than money. Kolkhoz members could also keep small private plots and livestock.

A sovkhos (state farm) was owned and controlled by the government. Workers were employees who received regular monthly wages. The state provided better equipment, resources, and support. If the sovkhos failed, the government covered the losses. Accounting was strict and formal, following official rules and oversight.

In the story, the kolkhoz is collapsing under debt and mismanagement. The planned merger into the sovkhos creates fear and hope. Some people worry about losing independence and private livestock. Others see it as relief from constant struggle and uncertainty. The debate at the assembly shows this tension clearly.

The theme reflects a larger Soviet reality: the shift from collective ideals to state control. It also shows how economic failure forced difficult choices. For young workers like Asek and his friends, the merger changes their working conditions, bringing stricter rules but also more stability and fairness.

Illustrative moment: In the kolkhoz, the boys work for months without proper materials. Asek begs Karypjan for boards and poles to finish the sheep shed roof, but nothing arrives. The work stalls. They sit idle under willow trees, playing cards and waiting. Karypjan does nothing to help because he fears inspections more than failure. The kolkhoz is in debt, disorganized, and controlled by people who protect themselves rather than solve problems.

Later, after the merger into the sovkhos, everything changes. When they build the mechanized livestock station, they receive blueprints, concrete, sand, and boards delivered by truck. Bekkul, their engineer, arrives each morning on his motorcycle and checks their measurements. Work follows strict rules and schedules. Most importantly, at the end of the month, they receive their first real wages in crisp new notes. The narrator's mother carefully saves the money before trading it for corn at the market.

Politics in Rural Kyrgyzstan: The scenes of the novella reveal a rural political system shaped by Soviet structures, bureaucracy, and informal power networks. Officially, the kolkhoz operates through collective decision-making, general assemblies, and elected leadership. In reality, however, authority is unevenly distributed. Power often belongs not to those with moral strength or competence, but to those who control paperwork, access to resources, and connections to higher authorities.

The general assembly illustrates this contradiction clearly. The meeting appears democratic, with speeches and voting, yet fear, self-interest, and manipulation shape the outcomes. Leaders worry about inspections and reports more than about real production or workers' well-being. The merger of the kolkhoz into the sovkhos exposes systemic weakness: debt, falsified records, and hidden corruption.

Within this system, Asek and Karypjan represent two different political types.

Asek embodies idealistic leadership. He believes in justice, responsibility, and transparency. He speaks openly at the assembly, acknowledges the kolkhoz's failure, and supports the merger not for personal gain but for collective survival. His authority comes from moral courage and loyalty to his peers. Even when impulsive, his actions aim at fairness rather than advantage.

Karypjan, in contrast, represents pragmatic but devious survival politics. He protects his position, manipulates reports, pressures others to sign false documents, and shifts blame to avoid accountability. His leadership is defensive and opportunistic. He embodies a system where appearance matters more than truth.

The rural political system thus appears divided between ethical commitment and bureaucratic self-preservation. Through Asek and Karypjan, the novella suggests that the crisis of Soviet rural life is not only economic but moral: a struggle between integrity and corruption within a rigid administrative structure.

Illustrative moment: The meeting is meant to represent collective decision-making, yet it quickly turns into tension, shouting, and confusion. People argue about the merger with the sovkhoz. Some fear losing independence and private livestock, while others hope for stability and state support.

Before the meeting, Karypjan is noticeably absent. He does not stand before the community to explain himself, even though accusations and suspicions surround him. His silence contrasts sharply with Asek's presence. Asek is elected to the presidium and speaks openly. He does not hide the economic crisis of the kolkhoz. Instead, he admits that the farm is deeply in debt and cannot survive alone.

This scene reveals two forms of political behavior. Karypjan represents avoidance, secrecy, and self-protection. Asek represents responsibility, transparency, and moral courage.

The assembly appears democratic, but the atmosphere shows that fear, reputation, and personal interest shape decisions as much as public debate.