

Chapter 3: Visitors to the High Plateau

"In no other country in the world can one see people on the road who bear the mark of death, like trees marked for felling."

This chapter introduces a second set of characters into the story: Diana and Bessian, a young couple on their honeymoon. Bessian is a scholar whose writing focuses on the High Plateau, although he is not from this area. Throughout the chapter he speaks at length to his young wife, telling her about the age-old customs, including the blood feud, of the mountain people. As the couple spot men wearing the black armbands of the *gjaks*, he says, rather grandly, that they have passed into a place governed by the laws of the dead.

As they travel towards Orosh and a meeting with the Prince, they come across a boundary dispute and Bessian is delighted to get the chance to witness how this is dealt with in ritual fashion. The story takes a personal turn when the couple encounter Gjorg on the road and he gives them brief directions to the castle. For a brief time, the destinies of the killer and the honeymooners intersect.

Knowledge Check

Try to answer these questions from memory:

1. What is the surname of Bessian and Diana?

- (a) Vorpsi.
- (b) Ukacierra.
- (c) Binak.
- (d) Kryeqyqe.

2. Why are Bessian and Diana traveling on the High Plateau?

- (a) They are lost
- (b) It is their honeymoon
- (c) They are just passing through
- (d) They are visiting a relative

3. What is the name of the writer who publicised their trip in the newspaper?

- (a) Steven Henry
- (b) Adrian Guma
- (c) Karol Werner
- (d) Kazil Bocht

4. What does Bessian call the lands under the sway of the *kanun*?

- (a) Lands of bone
- (b) Lost lands
- (c) Ancient kingdom
- (d) Shadow lands

5. What are *murane*?

- (a) Black armbands
- (b) Piles of stones
- (c) Waystations
- (d) Castles

6. Where is Bessian and Diana's destination?

- (a) The village of Brezhtoft.
- (b) The city of Tirana.
- (c) The Castle of Orosh.
- (d) The Tower of Refuge.

7. Where does the boundary dispute take place?

- (a) Eagle's Height.
- (b) Wolf's Pass.
- (c) Hunter's Meadow.
- (d) Snake Mountain.

8. Who is mediating the boundary dispute?

- (a) The prince of Orosh.
- (b) Bessian.
- (c) Ali Binak.
- (d) Gjorg.

9. Who does Bessian compare Gjorg to?

- (a) Macbeth.
- (b) Hamlet.
- (c) Othello.
- (d) Antonio.

10. What does Diana think of the 'Steward of the Blood'?

- (a) Repulsive
- (b) Impressive.
- (c) Repugnant.
- (d) Admirable.

Understanding and Interpretation

1. Describe the relationship between Bessian and Diana. Does it seem warm? What kind of a couple are they? Can you sense any tension between them?
2. As Bessian and Diana travel across the High Plateau, how do their reactions to the mountain scenery and inhabitants compare and contrast?
3. In what ways does this chapter suggest that, to Bessian, the world is almost like a theatrical show? What is the significance of this implication?
4. What contribution does the boundary dispute make to your understanding of the High Plateau and the systems that operate there?
5. How does Kadare create a connection between Diana and Gjorg – and how does he suggest this connection lingers after they part?
6. How does this chapter end? What is the situation between Bessian and Diana? What features of Kadare's writing stand out at the end of this chapter?

Important Character: *Diana as a symbol of women's treatment*

Chapter 3 introduces the two new main characters into the story of Broken April: Diana and Bessian. From their very first interaction, the reader can sense the tension between them: Bessian's statements are often longwinded and didactic. He speaks in long paragraphs that dominate the page; whereas Diana chooses her words carefully, which makes Bessian seem egotistical and showy by comparison. Their interactions and observations of each other are likewise revealing of an imbalanced dynamic: Bessian puts his arm on Diana in the carriage, and she feels: "*His hand had never felt so heavy to her.*"

Diana's character gives Kadare the means to comment on women's position in Albanian society. For example, early on in their trip, Diana remembers when their honeymoon was announced in a small section of a newspaper: "*Sensation: The writer, Bessian Vorpsi, and his young bride are spending their honeymoon on the Northern Plateau!*" The reader might notice how only Bessian is mentioned by name – even in the more modern city the husband is held in higher regard. Now, on the High Plateau, Diana's status as a woman is even more noticeable as men are taken aback by her beauty.

Activity

Collect examples of the interactions between Diana and Bessian, as well as between Diana and other men she encounters during her journey. What do these moments reveal about the status, role and treatment of women in society?

<i>"Sensation: the writer Bessian Vorpsi and his young bride are spending their honeymoon on the Northern Plateau!" (p62)</i>	When news of their trip is reported in the newspaper, Bessian is referred to by name while Diana is identified only by her status as Bessian's wife, revealing a gender bias in the way the news is written and who is deemed to be important to the stories.

Discussion Point: *Bessian's point of view*

"Yes, now I can say that we are well within death's kingdom..."

A talkative and pretentious writer, Bessian Vorpsi has made a career of writing about the Kanun. His fascination with the High Plateau and the people who live there inspires him to take his wife to the Northern regions for their honeymoon. Bessian's knowledge of the Kanun gives the reader more exposition and stories about the culture of the High Plateau as Bessian talks endlessly to Diana. By making his character so talkative, Kadare is able to provide rich details about the world of the *rrafsh*, as well as setting up the antagonism between him and Diana.

Discuss your reaction to Bessian's character and note your ideas. You might talk about the way his character is presented; where his knowledge comes from and how complete it is; how he interacts with Diana; what aspects of his character he keeps hidden if he can. Note your ideas about Bessian here:

Novel Study: *Symbolism*

"The murane, as they are called, always look sad."



In literature, symbols are items, objects, people, places, names, sounds, and even ideas that stand for things other than themselves. A symbol is a concrete referent for an abstract idea. *Broken April* is a highly symbolic novel. For example, in chapter 3, great attention is drawn to the stones of the High Plateau. Bessian and Diana witness a traditional boundary ritual in which stones play an important role. Ali Binak also draws attention to the *murane* (burial cairns) that dot the landscape. Previously, Kadare described the generations of gravestones

belonging to the Berisha and Kryeqyqe families. It is clear that 'stones,' while standing for themselves, also stand for ideas greater than themselves, such as shame, death, the legacy of violence, the history of the *kanun*, and so on.

Quotation Study

Provide a short commentary for three quotations taken from Chapter 3. An example is provided:

0. “‘The Accursed Mountains,’ he said softly, with a slight tremor in his voice, as if he were greeting a vision that he had been expecting for a very long time. He felt that the name, with its solemnity, had made an impression on his wife, and he took a certain satisfaction in it.”

This passage reveals the subtle imbalance of Bessian and Diana’s relationship. Firstly, they travel across a literal ‘Accursed’ mountain, foreshadowing that their relationship might fall under a curse. Secondly, Bessian’s pride and ego are suggested as he senses the impression the landscape makes on his wife. He ‘takes satisfaction’ from her quietness, as if he has suitably impressed her. The scenery is just as grand ‘as he had been expecting’, so his years of study and decision to bring her here on their honeymoon have been validated - yet the ‘tremor’ in his voice betrays his hidden weakness and insecurity.

1. “Leaning against him, her eyes closing now and then with the jolting of the carriage, as if to ward off the sadness that the barren scene aroused in her, she thought in a fragmentary way about the days when they were first acquainted and the early weeks of their engagement. The chestnut trees lining the boulevard, café doors, the glitter of rings as they embraced, park benches strewn with autumn leaves, and dozens of other such memories—all those things she poured out upon the endless waste, in the hope that those images might in some sort people the void. But the wasteland did not change. Its wet nakedness was ready to engulf in a moment not just her own store of happiness but perhaps the heaped-up joy of whole generations.”
2. “‘I’m not making fun of you,’ he said with the same playful air. ‘I have the very same feeling. The guest, the bessa, and vengeance are like the machinery of classical tragedy, and once you are caught up in the mechanism, you must face the possibility of tragedy. But despite all that, Diana, we have nothing to fear. In the morning, we’ll take off our crowns and be relieved of their weight until the night.’”
3. “Diana turned the other way on her bed, perhaps for the hundredth time. Her thoughts had begun to get mixed up in her mind while she and Bessian were still in the guest room. Despite her efforts to listen with attention to everything that was said, in that room her mind had started leaping from bough to bough. Now, as she listened to the noises of the cattle below she began to feel the fearful approach of sleep put to flight at once by the sudden creaking of a floorboard or by a sudden cramp. At one point she groaned, ‘Why did you bring me here?’ and was surprised by her own cry.”