

## Chapter 4: *The Steward of the Blood*

*"It doesn't matter that you haven't killed anyone. Your work is of such a nature that you have been stricken with blood-sickness."*

It's now the end of March and April skies are dawning. Mark Ukacierra prowls the hallways of the Castle of Orosh restlessly. Coming from a dinner with the Prince and his invited guests, Mark is uneasy. The woman – who the reader knows is Diana Vorpsi – has unsettled him; he is frightened by the self-control in her eyes and her sure opposition to his values. Unlike Gjorg, Mark is no mere pawn caught up in the kanun's machinery of death – he's a true believer; second only to the Prince, Mark's title is Steward of the Blood and he's responsible for administering the kanun's tenets across the whole of the High Plateau.

As he enters the castle archives, Mark scans the ancient books and records lining the shelves. He consults the Blood Book, repository of every feud, killing, and blood debt still owed. Throughout 400 years, the number of killings has risen and fallen – but has never fallen so low as it has reached today. This thought kindles Mark's anger, already smouldering from recent criticism by his Prince, who has threatened to replace Mark with a more educated man.

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### Knowledge Check

*Try to answer these questions from memory:*

**1. Apart from Old Albanian, which language are the castle's ancient books written in?**

- (a) Latin
- (b) Greek
- (c) French
- (d) Jamaican

**2. The key Mark carries around his neck is what colour?**

- (a) Silver
- (b) Grey
- (c) Yellow
- (d) Rainbow

**3. Which foreign power is NOT mentioned as having occupied Albania?**

- (a) Serbia
- (b) Turkey
- (c) Austria
- (d) Denmark

**4. How does Mark describe Diana?**

- (a) Demon
- (b) Siren
- (c) Witch
- (d) Gorgon

**5. The Blood Book records 1639 as the year with the lowest number of killings in the seventeenth century: how many?**

- (a) 327
- (b) 516
- (c) 722
- (d) 911

**6. What does the word *gjakhups* describe?**

- (a) A period when one is not obliged to kill
- (b) A disgraced man who runs away from a feud
- (c) The ancient graveyard ruins
- (d) A sound Mark makes when he's angry

**7. What does the word 'fallow' describe?**

- (a) An unplanted field
- (b) An ancient mill
- (c) A type of church
- (d) A friendly priest

**8. Which of these is NOT a road that Mark recalls travelling upon?**

- (a) The Road of the Black Drin River
- (b) The Bad Road
- (c) The Road of the Cross
- (d) East Kun Cheng Lake Road

**9. An Albanian folk instrument with a long neck and single string is called a... what?**

- (a) Sitar
- (b) Lyre
- (c) Lahoute
- (d) Erhu

**10. How long has it been since Mark last experienced his mystery illness?**

- (a) Seven days
- (b) Seven weeks
- (c) Seven months
- (d) Seven years

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## Understanding and Interpretation

1. How does this chapter add to your understanding of the kanun in different ways?
2. Mark is quick to anger and easily offended. What are some of the things that upset Mark? Can you categorise his opinions in any way?
3. Mark meditates on the landscape of the High Plateau – can you explain how the landscape is significant to Mark?
4. While the Prince of Orosh never appears in the chapter, nevertheless the reader is given an impression of him through Mark's thoughts and recollections. What clues exist as to the character of the Prince and some of his ideas? How does he relate to Mark?
5. What does the reader discover about Mark at the end of the chapter? Is it possible to sympathise with such a repugnant character?

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## Important Theme: *The Seeds of Social Change*

*“All of the great plateau was divided into two parts – the part that engendered death and the part that did not.”*

The story of Broken April is dark and violent – but Kadare plants seeds of hope for the future of the High Plateau. Hidden amongst Mark’s fanatical thoughts of whipping up the people into a frenzy of bloodshed are clues that other realities are possible. Even Mark, the most devout of believers, knows that parts of the *rrafsh* choose not to participate in the culture of revenge killing. The Prince has spoken of a ‘softening’ of the kanun, and Mark fears this diluted version spreading to his violent part of the world. He acknowledges that, throughout the long bloody history of the kanun, there have been periods of ‘famine’ when people almost abandoned the tenets of revenge altogether. In the present time, families across the plateau are conditioned to follow the rules of the *bessa* and feuding – but they have the agency to stop the cycle of violence.

### Activity

Search through chapter 4 (and elsewhere if you can) to find clues that, while social change is difficult and slow, it is nevertheless possible. Don’t forget to consider Mark’s thoughts about the Prince and his recent dissatisfaction with the Steward of the Blood, and Diana’s role in the chapter and story so far:



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## Novel Study: *Indirect Characterisation*

*“Mark Ukacierra... passed right by the terror stricken man without saying a word to him, not even turning his head.”*

Much of the interest of a novel depends on the characters whose lives we enter and whose worlds we learn about. The reader often regards them as people who share characteristics with ourselves and with others. The closer a character is to us, the more we **empathize**. The more alien a character seems the more we tend to **disapprove**. (One important aim of literature is to help people empathize with characters who are different by demonstrating how people share similar, fundamental, universal traits).

Mark is a character with whom you might find it hard to empathize! Described by Diana as ‘repulsive’, he certainly comes across as a fanatical figure, zealous in his devout belief in the kanun. As a student of literature, it is important that you come to recognise the ways in which characters are presented by writers, in order to fully understand them and their role in the story. Sometimes, an author might use **direct characterisation** and simply *tells* you what a character is like. An example of direct characterisation can be found in chapter 4, when Kadare describes Mark as ‘first cousin to the Prince... the steward of the blood.’ This information is straightforwardly presented.

However, you may have heard the creative writing advice to ‘show not tell’. Far more common is **indirect characterisation**, by which the author *shows* us the character living his or her life and the reader makes inferences based on what they see or hear. There are six broad methods of indirect characterisation that you can learn and remember with the acronym STEALS:

- **S**peech – we can learn a lot about a character from **dialogue** and what they say to others.
- **T**houghts – the ‘inner life’ of a character can be revealed through thoughts and feelings, (particularly in a *first person* or *third person subjective* narrative).
- **E**ffect on others – how others **react** to a character can be revealing.
- **A**ctions – how the character behaves in certain situations influences our view of them.
- **L**ooks – the character’s **appearance** includes skin colour, facial expression, body language, clothing and accoutrements, shape and size, scars and marks, physical disabilities and so on.
- **S**ymbolism – authors use **imagery** and **symbols** to help establish characters. For example, a character can be associated with a particular object, element, sign, material or even sound or smell. The presentation of a character in association with fire, for example, might make one believe the character is warm, passionate, angry or dangerous. Ice would create different associations. The repeated use of a symbol develops it into a character’s **motif**.

### Activity

Conduct a STEALS analysis of Mark’s character. How is he presented by Kadare? What methods does he use? Create a visual profile, poster, table, or presentation of Mark’s character and the way he is characterised by the writer.

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## Quotation Study

*Provide a short commentary for three quotations taken from Chapter 4. An example is provided:*

0. "Again he drew near the windows, and standing there, his eyes staring in the direction of the high peaks, he felt his brain empty itself of his heavy thought. But, as usual, the emptiness was temporary. Slowly, his mind filled itself again with a cloudy grey mass. Something more than mist and less than thought. Something in between, troubling, enormous, incomplete."

*This passage reveals how difficult it is for Mark to think in new ways. Over dinner with Diana, he was forced to accept life is possible outside the kanun. However, this thought is 'heavy', suggesting this knowledge is difficult for him to bear. The image of a 'cloudy grey mass' represents unclear thoughts about the future that Mark is unable – or unwilling – to visualise, an idea supported by the vague words 'something' and 'incomplete'. By contrast, when he looks at the mountains where the kanun still dictates the rules of life, his mind 'empties itself' of these troubling thoughts. It is easier for him to live according to the Code than to think for himself.*

1. "It was not the first time that his mind had frozen in that way, faced with the riddle of the High Plateau. That part of the world was the only permissible one, normal and reasonable. The other part of the world, "down there," was a marshy hollow in the earth that gave off foul vapors and the atmosphere of degeneracy."
2. "He tried to put aside his troubled thoughts, bent down to the lowest shelf of the bookcase, and pulling open the heavy door, took out a thick, leather-bound ledger. This was the *Blood Book*. For some time he leafed through the stout pages filled with dense script in double column. His eyes took in nothing, merely skimming coldly over those thousands of names, whose syllables were as alike as pebbles on an ancient beach."
3. "The picture was always the same: one field being worked here, another lying fallow there. The clods in the tilled fields struck Mark as something shameful. And the vapor that rose from them, and its smell, and its quasi-feminine softness made him sick. But the neighbouring fallow fields that sometimes looked like wrinkles and sometimes like clenched jaws nearly moved him to tears."