

ORHAN PAMUK'S SNOW IS A PAINFUL STORY OF UNREQUITED LOVE

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Abstract:

Snow is considered as a masterpiece literary work written by Orhan Pamuk. Orhan Pamuk is one of the distinguished postmodern writers from Turkey. He was conferred with the prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006. Besides Snow, he is also best known for his novels My Name Is Red, Museum of Innocence, Black Book and The White Castle. Apart from Nobel Prize in Literature, he has been honored with several other awards for his outstanding literary production and has also received critical acclaim. Independent calls him as one of the World's finest living writers. Published originally in Turkish as car in 2002, it was translated into English by Maureen Freely in 2004. The New York Times had listed Snow as one of its Ten Best Books of 2014. The story is set in the border city of Turkey Kars and is narrated by a character named Orhan who introduces himself as a close friend of the main protagonist Ka. This Orhan also enters the story after the demise of the protagonist and takes the story to its final conclusion. The story has many important themes such as east west conflict, multiculturalism, identity crisis, religious extremism, and fanaticism of liberals as well. Among these, unrequited love is also one of the significant themes of the story. The present paper is aimed at discussing the quest of love of its characters and their failure to fulfill their longing to spend their lives happily with their beloved.

Keywords: Love, Happy Life, Emotions, Marriage, Loneliness

Snow traces the journey Ka, a poet by profession who has returned to Turkey after being an exile in Germany for 12 long years. He has sought political asylum in Germany. He returns to Istanbul to perform the last rites of his dear departed mother. But this is not his only motive behind returning to Turkey. He also intends to find a Turkish girl for marriage. The story of the novel takes place in the city of Kars which is described as the poorest and the most neglected corner of Turkey. Ka visited Kars on the pretext of covering municipality election that is slated to take place in the city and also to research the spat of suicide that is spreading among the young girls of the city prohibited from wearing headscarf. Initially, he is reluctant to visit Kars but when informed by his journalist friend that one of their college friends Ipek is living there with her father and sister and is now separated from her husband Muhtar, he readily agrees to go there on this journalistic mission. This journalistic mission is the pretext though. In reality, he senses the opportunity to woo Ipek for whom he has always harboured deep feelings. The narrator states, "....., his heart revealed a thing or two that his mind refused to accept: first, that in returning to Istanbul from Frankfurt for the first time in twelve years, Ka's purpose was not simply to attend his mother's funeral but also to find a Turkish girl to make his wife; second, it was because he secretly hoped that this girl might be Ipek that he had travelled all the way from Istanbul to Kars." (P. 23) He leaves Istanbul for Kars with a glimmer of hope in his heart of marrying Ipek, completely unaware of what the future has in store for him. He doesn't know that he will have to face many difficulties in Kars and his quest for love



will finally end in his untimely and tragedy death. Ka's bus journey from Erzurum to Kars symbolically hints at the difficulties he might have to face in Kars.

The city of Kars is scheduled to have Municipal Elections amidst tension between various groups. Muhtar the ex-husband of the central female protagonist Ipek is contesting this election. The city is witnessing great tension because of the decision of the authority not to allow the girls wearing headscarves to enter the educational institute. The girls are torn between the pressure from the family and the authorities to give up the headscarves and their faith. In the opinion of the people supporting these girls, particularly the people belonging to the fundamentalist group believes that the girls committing suicides in the city are doing this to preserve their honor and to protest the dictate of the authorities. Because of this issue of suicide, the city has suddenly come in the spotlight. Kadife, the younger sister of Ipek, has become the face of the protest of these headscarf girls who are protesting against the local authorities asking them to remove their headscarves if they wish to enter education institute. This situation led to the killing of the director of educational institution by a member of a fanatic Islamic group. The city is witnessing the struggle between the Fundamentalist taking side of the girls and the liberals who are on the side of the authorities. This political and cultural tension culminates in the usurping of power by a group led by the actor Sunay Zaim who is in the city to perform his play along with his wife. Due to consistent snowfall in the border city of Kars, the city is cut off from the rest of the world for three days. This Sunay Zaim is a frustrated individual who arrives on the same bus that has taken Ka to Kars from Erzurum. It takes Ka some time to figure out who the person is as he is seeing him after a long time. He hardly has any idea then that this person and his misdeeds are going to change his life forever and ever.

Ka is received warmly by Ipek and her father Marxist leaning father. But he is viewed suspiciously by others in the city as he is coming from West after a long time to Turkey. He is taken for a spy of the west. They are suspicious of his motives and feel that he is on some kind of a secret mission and will defame and debase the locals and their customs in his writing. Kars is described as a forlorn and neglected place full of unemployed men idling their time away in coffee houses and on streets. Ka gets agitated by these disturbing scenes which bespoke of loneliness and unhappiness. The narrator observes, "It wasn't the poverty or the helplessness that disturbed him: it was what he would see time and again during the days to come; in the empty windows of the photography shops, in the frozen windows of the crowded tea houses where the city's unemployed passed the time playing cards, and in the city's empty, snow covered squares. These sights spoke of a strange and powerful loneliness." (P.10) This somehow resembles to the state of Ka in Frankfurt as he has been leading the same life there.

Ka who is on a personal mission of wooing his love interest Ipek, marrying her and taking her to Frankfurt with him has no political agenda whatsoever. But unfortunately, he gets embroiled in a political mess from which he couldn't free himself. In Frankfurt he has been living a lonely loveless life. He has got nothing else to do. If not for the love of Ipek and his desire to marry her, he wouldn't have cared anything at all about Kars or its people. That is why when his friend tells him about Ipek's divorce, the flame of old love gets rekindled and with the motive of winning her love, he travels to the city. He has always known that Muhtar has never been a suitable match for the beautiful Ipek and senses her separation from her husband as the best opportunity to court her and have a happy and blissful life with her. When he meets her, he is mesmerized by her ethereal beauty. She is looking even more beautiful than she was in her college days. He strongly wants to have her as his wife at any cost. Ipek has



already been told by their friend about the visit of Ka to Kars. Somewhere deep down, she is probably aware of his feelings for her and the real reason behind his visit to Kars. In their first meeting itself, Ka at once tells her that he is in love with her and wants to marry her. Though she gets close to him, she doesn't want to promise him anything instantly. She is probably having so many things going through her mind. She tells Ka that her ex husband Muhtar also wants her back in his life and is ready to accept her back as his wife. He has sought her forgiveness for ill treating her and regrets mishandling her. But now he wants to mend his mistakes and promises to be a better husband and treat her with respect and love. When Ka goes to meet Muhtar after the shooting of the Director of the education institute of which he and Ipek has been the eye witnesses, Muhtar requests him to take his message to Ipek that he is really sorry for his past mistakes and unseemly behavior. Though Ka promises Muhtar to convey his message to Ipek, it is never going to be easy for him to deliver this message of reconciliation to her as he himself is deeply in love with the same girl and intends to marry her. He wants to win away her affection and probably can't stand any competition. He is dreaming of turning his unhappy and forlorn life around by having beautiful Ipek as his wife. This is his only opportunity to have a good life after leading a miserable life in Frankfurt for twelve long years. Despite this threat, he delivers Muhtar's message to Ipek who tells him in return that Muhtar has already expressed his feelings to her and hints that she has no plans of returning back to him. On the contrary, she comes close to Ka, becomes intimate and encourages his hope. She shows affection and deep concern for him. Though she doesn't assure him right away or make any commitment to him of marriage as she doesn't want to leave her old father and her younger sister. Still she shows genuine interest in Ka's proposal. We are led to believe that she is reluctant to accept his proposal of marriage as she doesn't want to leave her old father and nothing else. The question of returning to her old husband is out of place though he has assured her that he would be a different man from his old self. Then what is it that is holding her back from accepting Ka's marriage proposal or even downrightly rejecting it for that matter. At the fag end of the story, there comes a surprise revelation that not only shakes Ka but us readers as well that she has been having a relationship with Blue who is the leader of the extremist group and a wanted terrorist, who used to visit her home on request of her husband. She got attracted to Blue because of his soft spoken mannerisms and concern shown by him towards her. She doesn't let Ka know about her relationship with Blue and when he goes to meet him warns him not to mention anything about his feeling for her or his plan to marry her. This is in fact an indication of the fact that she wants to hide from Blue as well her plans to enter into relationship with Ka. She probably feels that Blue could not take it and in a fit of anger might tell Ka about his relationship with Ipek and might kill Ka's enthusiasm, dampens his spirit and affect his feeling towards her. She hasn't been altogether wrong. Jealousy is one of the biggest threats to human relationship. It has the power of destroying the relationships. Ipek's younger sister wants Ka to marry her sister and encourages him to propose her and take her to Germany with him. Initially it appears to be a genuine love of a sister for the happiness of her elder sister. But it turns out that presently she is in a relationship with Blue and probably doesn't want her sister around as she might have felt threatened by the presence of her beautiful sister in the city. Though we witness some tense and heated moments between Blue and Kadife, she wants to settle down with him. But her dream of having a happy life with Blue is not going to materialize and would never see the light of the day. Her love story remains incomplete and her dreams are shattered with the killing of Blue.



Most of the characters in the novel have to lead their lives with broken hearts as their love couldn't reach its final destination due to the turmoil created in the city by the tussle between extremists and the perpetrators of the coup that begins on the stage and is live telecast. Except Fazil, every other character in the novel that has been in love and has dreamt of spending their lives happily with their partners meets with disappointment. It happens to the main protagonist Ka, the female protagonist Ipek, her sister Kadife and Necip as well. Muhtar has got the girl but he couldn't hold on to her and eventually he also meets the same fate of having to lead a love less life. Both the sisters fail to realize that they were in a relationship with a manipulator. Blue has his ways with women. Kadife has agreed to act in a play of Sunay Zaim only to free Blue from their clutches. Despite his message to her that he is safe and she shouldn't act in the play, she sticks to the promise made and asserts her individuality for which she has been popular among religious high school boys. At the time of his death, Blue was with another girl in his hideout. He was not at all a trustworthy guy and both the sisters failed to understand this. Both Kadife's and Ipek's love life has been volatile. Ipek's marriage couldn't last long and not even her relationship with Blue. It would have been interesting to see if Kadife could have had a happy life with Blue considering his attitude. But his killing left the hopes of Kadife shattered who finally marries a religious high school student Fazil who has been a follower of Blue and a close friend of Necipe who was the first one to express his feelings towards her.

Fazil is one of the two religious high school students who have been deeply in love with Kadife who is their leader's mistress. The other one is Necip. Both of them are younger to Kadife. This love of theirs towards Kadife is a reason for unhappiness in their lives. Necip in particular is infatuated by Kadife. He is captivated by her courage and her beauty as well. Both the boys are love struck and lovelorn. The matter is further worsened by their faith. Their souls are tormented and reason behind this torment is the past life of their love interest and the faith of her father who is a non believer and hence not fit to have any kind of relationship. This fact is tormenting them that they have fallen for a girl who was once a non believer herself. Their attraction towards her is interfering with their religious beliefs. Despite this they couldn't hold themselves back from having emotions for Kadife. For them the only way to get rid of this torment is through conveying their feelings to her and get free from it. To this end in mind, they befriend Ka and seek his help who is close to Kadife and has access to her. Necip and Ka has taken liking for each other in a short period of time and hence Ka accepts his request to deliver his letter to Kadife. Necip hands over a letter to Ka in which he has poured his heart out. But before it could be delivered and he could know her response the boy gets killed in the coup perpetrated by Sunay Zaim and his accomplices to scare the religious extremists living in the city. He didn't even have the fate to know that his letter has been delivered and his emotions have finally reached her. Necip is the unluckiest of the characters who couldn't even get the opportunity to express his emotions in person and is met with an untimely death.

As far as Ka's love life is concerned, everything has been going fine with him till the point he comes to know about Ipek's relationship with Blue. Ipek has made up her mind to marry him and leave for Germany along with him. And this is what he has been wanted since his arrival in Turkey. Moreover he is about to marry a girl he has always liked. All the unhappiness and loneliness of his life is about to disappear. But destiny has some other plans. May be love was not written in his destiny. That is why he becomes weak in a testing situation. The imbecility of his heart destroys the possibility of his future happiness. Though Ipek assures him that she has no feelings for Blue now and she wants to marry him and wants to spend the



rest of her life with him and in the course of time she will also learn to love him. Her assurances couldn't satisfy him. He gets jealous of Blue who has been in relationship with both the sisters who speak highly of him. His heart succumbs to the strong feeling of jealousy. He might have considered himself insufficient. He might have felt threatened by Blue and in a moment of rage he lets out the details about the hideout of Blue to Z Demirkol who has instigated him and stirred his feelings by telling him about Ipek's relationship with Ipek. Z Demirkol then raided the place with his men and killed Blue on the spot. More than for herself Ipek was unhappy for her sister and couldn't forgive Ka for this betrayal and hence, refuses to leave with him for Germany and chooses to stay with her father and sister. Though not clear that it is Ka who is responsible for Blue's murder, Ipek is sure that it is him and hence Ka has to leave for Germany alone. He was almost there. He was about to marry the girl of his dreams, but due to the feeling of jealousy he destroyed everything and hence his story became the story of unrequited love. His quest for love and a happy life ends in a disaster. He returns to Germany and to his old life of loneliness and destitute.

Amidst the cultural and political tension, many characters of the novel long for a happy love life. They want to marry the person with whom they have fallen in love. But the destiny has been unkind to them. Their quest for love remains a quest and is never fulfilled. The only character who succeeds in marrying the person of his dream is Fazil, but that to accidentally. He was not the first choice of his love interest. The biggest tragedy is that of the main male protagonist Ka who losses the opportunity to take the girl of his dream with him. It has almost happened. But at the last moment his heart betrays him and in return his destiny betrays him and hence, his story ends as an unending quest for love.

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