

Bygone Days / O'tkan kunlar (1925)

Abdullah Qodiriy (1894-1938)

OVERVIEW

Author Abdullah Qodiriy was an influential Uzbek poet, playwright, novelist, and journalist. A key figure in twentieth-century Uzbek literature, he is regarded as the founder of the first Uzbek novel and credited with introducing realism to the genre, which profoundly influenced other Central Asian writers. His early writing was shaped by the Jadid movement, a late-nineteenth-century intellectual and political reform effort among the Muslim populations of the Russian Empire. His short story *Uloqda* (1913) is a prime example of the realistic short story genre. The novel *Bygone Days* (1925), the first successful experiment in this genre, earned him widespread recognition. Later works, including *Scorpion from the Altar* (1929) and *Obid Ketmon* (1934), followed. He also demonstrated a unique satirical style in his short stories and excelled in journalism, known for his courage, sharpness of pen, and unwavering truthfulness. His works often criticized the Soviet regime and expressed deep regret for his country's past, which had been unable to resist Russian colonialism. Tragically, he was executed during the Great Terror under Joseph Stalin's regime.

Novel *Bygone Days* tells the love story of a young merchant from the capital, Tashkent, and a beauty from provincial Margilan. At first glance, the narrative captivates readers with its rich storyline, filled with excitement, including themes of love, separation, intrigue, crime, and a love triangle. The author began work on the novel in 1919. According to researchers, it was completed in a remarkably short time in 1920, but various obstacles delayed its publication for five years. Finally, in 1925, the first part of the novel was published in book form, followed by the second part in 1926. The critical reception of the novel can be divided into three distinct periods. The attitude and evaluation by critics varied significantly depending on the era.

Historical Background The author addresses serious issues related to the recent past, particularly on the eve of the Russian invasion. In the introduction to his novel, the author expresses his responsibility to introduce readers, who are accustomed to traditional forms, to new literary phenomena that reveal the harsh realities of life. He characterizes the era depicted in the novel – the period of the *khanate* (a territory ruled by a *khan*, a Turkic title) – as one of the darkest and most disturbing in history, as it marks the conquest of Turkestan by the Russian Empire.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

<i>Otabek</i>	A young merchant from Tashkent
<i>Kumush</i>	Otabek's first wife and a merchant's daughter
<i>Zainab</i>	Otabek's second wife
<i>Hamid</i>	A wealthy man from Margilan
<i>Yusufbek Hajji</i>	Adviser to the Tashkent Khan, Azizbek
<i>Uzbek Oyim</i>	Otabek's mother

SYNOPSIS

The novel begins in the winter of 1847, when Otabek, the son of Yusufbek Hajji, a young merchant, arrives in Margilan from Tashkent and stays at a *caravanserai* (inn). The local wealthy invite him to dinner, where he meets influential people, including Mirzakarim Qutidor and the envious Hamid. During their conversation, Otabek's progressive views earn the admiration of most – except for Hamid. Otabek falls in love with Mirzakarim's daughter, Kumush. His servant, Hasanali, along with Ziyoy Shohichi, asks for her hand in marriage. Mirzakarim agrees but insists that Kumush remain with her parents, as she is their only daughter.

Although Kumush is initially unhappy about marrying a stranger, she soon realizes that Otabek is the man she loves. Meanwhile, Hamid, who also wished to marry Kumush, becomes jealous of Otabek and falsely accuses him and Mirzakarim of plotting against the *Khan* (a Turkic title for a king) of Kokand. This leads to their arrest and death sentence. Kumush delivers a letter from Yusufbek Hajji condemning Azizbek, which saves them from the gallows. They are later released when news reaches them of an uprising led by Otabek's father, Yusufbek Hajji, who was Azizbek's adviser.

The lovers are reunited, but Otabek's mother insists on his marriage in Tashkent. Although Otabek resists, tradition forces him to marry Zainab, even though he still loves Kumush. Meanwhile, Hamid forges a letter from Otabek declaring his intention to divorce Kumush. Devastated, Kumush believes that her husband has betrayed her. In a fit of rage, Mirzakarim sends Otabek away when he visits Kumush.

Confused and grief-stricken, Otabek meets Usta Alim, a local weaver, and continues to visit Margilan, staying with him. One day, Otabek overhears a conversation in a neighboring house, where a hired killer resides, revealing Hamid's plot to kidnap Kumush. Otabek confronts Hamid and the criminals, defeating them. Upon learning the truth, Mirzakarim regrets his actions and brings Kumush to Tashkent.

However, Zainab becomes increasingly jealous, and when Kumush gives birth, she poisons her. Kumush dies, and Otabek drives Zainab away. Grief-stricken, he leaves for Margilan with Kumush's parents. Overwhelmed with guilt, Zainab falls into madness. Otabek later dies in the Battle of Alma-Ata during the Russian invasion.

SCENES

VOLUME ONE

A Matter of Marriage and Mind In the winter of 1847, the events unfold in a candlelit hotel room in Margilan. Otabek, the son of Yusufbek Hajji, a Tashkent adviser, sits deep in thought. Two wealthy locals, Rakhmat and Hamid, visit him. They discuss marriage, revealing differing views: Otabek values mutual love, while Hamid advocates controlling wives through force. Rakhmat invites Otabek to dinner at the request of his father, Ziyo Shohichi.

Otabek's Vision and the Silence of Tradition Later, Otabek visits Ziyo Shohichi, where he meets influential locals – Mirzakarim Qutidor and Akram Hajji. He shares his admiration for European administration, hoping to bring similar progress to his homeland. However, his ideas fail to engage them. Otabek discusses Turkestan's backwardness, blaming the disunity among *khans* and criticizing the cruelty of Azizbek, the ruler of Tashkent. While the others are intrigued by the young merchant's fresh perspectives, Hamid listens with growing dissatisfaction and envy.

Otabek in Love His servant, Hasanali, notices a change in him: Otabek often becomes lost in thought, seems absent-minded, and one night, talks in his sleep about a beautiful stranger. Knowing his master better than anyone else and loving him like a son, Hasanali realizes that Otabek is in love. The next morning at breakfast, he notices that Otabek appears troubled and is hiding something. When Hasanali gently asks about it, Otabek denies having any secrets and simply complains about the weather. Sensing the truth, Hasanali assumes Otabek has fallen in love and advises him to forget it if it's causing him pain. Otabek remains silent.

Mysterious Ditch In Mirzakarim Qutidor's house, he, his wife Oftob Oyim, and his mother-in-law Oyisha are having breakfast. Meanwhile, Kumush, a beautiful 17-year-old girl, wakes up. She joins her parents for breakfast, and they discuss her condition, as she has a cold. Her grandmother mentions that Kumush has been delirious in her sleep, speaking strangely. The girl quickly glances at her grandmother, as if fearing something. After breakfast, she heads to the ditch that flows through their yard, staring thoughtfully into the water for a long time, as if it conceals a secret. She washes her face in the cool water and returns home, feeling relieved.

If Only I Had This Kind of Son-in-law That day, Otabek visits Mirzakarim's house, but Kumush, following Muslim customs, remains unaware of his arrival, as women are not allowed in the presence of strange men. Only a maid is present to serve the guests. She praises the handsome young visitor and jokingly suggests that Kumush would be an ideal match for him. Unimpressed, Kumush responds that the maid should marry him herself and retreats to her bedroom. Later, Oftob Oyim humorously recounts the maid's words, and Qutidor laughs, admitting that she spoke the truth – he does indeed dream of such a match for his daughter.

Inter-Clan conflict Over Tashkent In Tashkent, Azizbek rebels against Kokand. Musulmanqul sends Normuhammad with 5,000 warriors to restore order. Otabek receives a letter from Yusufbek Hajji, warning that Azizbek is inciting conflict between the Qorachopons and the Qipchaqs (Uzbek clans), exploiting old grievances for personal gain. He has hanged tax officials sent from Kokand and portrays himself as a "merciful" khan threatened by the Qipchaq *beks* (a Turkic title for a local leader or chieftain). Fearing the consequences of Azizbek's actions, Yusufbek urges Otabek to stay away from Tashkent, while Otabek is troubled by the looming prospect of ethnic conflict. The war between Kokand and Margilan results in over 1,500 deaths, but Tashkent remains unconquered.

Otabek's engagement to Kumush Otabek, deeply saddened by this event, also yearns for the girl who captivated him. Concerned, Hasanali and Ziyo Shohichi visit Mirzakarim Qutidor to propose to Otabek's

daughter Kumush. Qutidor is delighted but consults with his wife, who agrees on the condition that Kumush is not taken to Tashkent. The morning after, Hasanali shares the unexpected news of Otabek's engagement to Mirzakarim Qutidor's daughter. Overwhelmed with happiness, Otabek can hardly believe it. Meanwhile, Kumush learns of the engagement and is deeply worried, having never seen the groom and unsure of his identity. According to custom, a girl is never consulted about such matters, and she feels this weight acutely. Overcome with emotion, Kumush cries bitterly and heads to the ditch, a place that holds secrets, as if bidding farewell to someone dear.

Wedding At uncle Kumush's house, the girls are getting ready for a hen party. However, Kumush is very sad. Her friends try to cheer her up: one starts playing the *dutar*, another the *childrma* (national musical instruments), and soon the girls start dancing. Two of them sing a poignant song, *I'm crying*, about a girl separated from her lover. Kumush cries bitterly, surprising the others, who remark that they want a groom like hers. The girls joke and dance merrily, hoping to cheer her up, but Kumush can only smile sadly in response. The wedding unfolds, and Otabek arrives, dapper and surrounded by friends. A feast begins for him and his guests. Finally, Otabek enters the room where the bride stands with her back to him. He reaches for her hand, but Kumush asks him not to touch her. Otabek, feeling uncertain, asks why she won't look at him. She forces herself to turn and gaze at him, feeling both amazed and excited. Stepping closer, she asks, "Are you the one?" Otabek replies, "Yes, I am the one." The two lovers bask in the joy of their union.

Unexpected Happiness It turns out that Kumush and Otabek had met before. Once, Otabek wants to wash before prayer and is directed to the courtyard where the ditch flows, the outer courtyard of Mirzakarim Qutidor. There, he encounters a girl who has stepped out for her own errands. Their eyes meet; she smiles and quickly turns away, running off. In that fleeting moment, a spark of love ignites between the two young souls.

Hamid's Jealousy and Slander Hamid is furious upon hearing about Otabek's marriage to Kumush, as he desires her for himself, despite already having two wives. Consumed with envy, he plots to eliminate Otabek and informs the *qurboshi* (local police chief), slandering Otabek by distorting a conversation at Ziyo Shohichi's. Hamid claims Otabek seeks to incite a rebellion against Kokand's Khan. When pressed for details, Hamid falters, because Ziyo Shohichi and Rahmat, who met Otabek, are his relatives. But the sight of gold coins sways Qurboshi, who begins writing down the information.

Jail Qurboshi informs Uttaboy Qushbegi of Hamid's denunciation, which seems plausible given the Tashkent-Kokand conflict. As a result, Otabek and Mirzakarim Qutidor are arrested. During interrogation, Otabek denies the accusations, stating that he and his father, Yusufbek Hajji, don't support the Qorachopons or Qipchaqs, whose leaders act out of personal interest. Yusufbek is disappointed in his khan. Moved by Otabek's words, Qushbegi decides to wait for further developments.

Seeking Help from Tashkent Kumush and her mother, Oftob Oyim, cling to the hope of salvation, but no one can help them. While Hasanali was in *caravanserai*, he avoided arrest, but soon Qurboshi's men begin searching for him. Determined, Hasanali decides to go to Tashkent to seek help from Yusufbek Hajji.

Tashkent under Siege The horrors of war are laid bare on this day, when the attack on Kokand is unsuccessful. The road between the gates and the fortress is strewn with the bodies of the killed with their heads torn off, in only foot wraps. The defenders of Tashkent look with joy at this terrible sacrilege, they boast how they killed and took expensive clothes from their victims. Under the fortress, the picture is even more terrible: a hill consisting of about 300-400 severed heads.

Azizbek Azizbek, the *khan* of Tashkent, rides in splendid attire, a silver saber at his side. Behind him follow the commander-in-chief – armed with a sword and pistol – and a pleasant-looking man with a graying beard, resembling a mullah, who is unarmed. As Azizbek surveys the fallen bodies, he celebrates victory by presenting luxurious *chapans* (traditional robes) to senior warriors and distributing gold coins to others. While the crowd revels in their triumph, the *mullah*-like man feels deeply troubled. Suddenly, a loud knock at the gate startles Azizbek's horse, igniting his anger. It is Hasanali, who, trembling, greets the Khan nervously.

Yusufbek Hajji Yusufbek Hajji, a mullah-like man, reveals Hasanali is his ward. Azizbek, angry at Hasanali for startling his horse, considers execution but refrains because Yusufbek is his adviser. After Yusufbek asks to leave, Azizbek invites him to breakfast. Hasanali later shares troubling events about Otabek, which deeply concerns Yusufbek.

Hamid's Intrigue Hamid seeks Qurboshi's help regarding his relatives, Rahmat and Ziyo Shohichi, who were arrested for allegedly hosting a meeting where Otabek called for an uprising against the Qipchaqs. Accused of complicity, they face severe consequences. Qurboshi, accustomed to receiving gifts from Hamid, expects a bribe, which Hamid provides. They agree to claim that Rahmat and Ziyo Shohichi did not support Otabek's call for rebellion, citing respect for a guest. Hamid is determined to eliminate Otabek and

promises Qurboshi more money. As they plot to condemn two innocent people, Qurboshi's conscience stirs, but his greed prevails.

Otabek and Mirzakarim are released Otabek and Mirzakarim Qutidor are sentenced to death and led to the gallows. Just before the execution, a woman in a burqa approaches Qushbegi, pleading for him to stop the sentence. She claims to have evidence that can exonerate the condemned men. After reading the letter she provides, Qushbegi pauses and orders Otabek and Mirzakarim returned to custody. The woman, Kumush, reveals that she found a letter from Yusufbek Hajji condemning Azizbek's actions against the Kokand khan. This letter becomes the key evidence that saves both men. Qushbegi admires Kumush's quick thinking and courage. Otabek and Mirzakarim are released on bail.

Increased Taxes The Kokand commander, discouraged by heavy losses, retreats, leaving 1,500 victims. In Tashkent, Azizbek celebrates, believing himself invincible. However, he has one major concern: his treasury is depleted by military expenses. To replenish it, he plans to increase taxes on the people. Meanwhile, the people of Tashkent are suffering. Having endured a brutal 70-day siege, the peasants have lost their land and crops, the merchants have stopped trading, and the artisans are out of work. Poverty has taken root throughout the city. Despite the dire circumstances, Azizbek orders Yusufbek Hajji to collect 32 coins from each household, as the treasury has been depleted by the war, with funds squandered on rewards and sustaining the soldiers. Though troubled by the cruelty of the tax and its effects on the people, Yusufbek complies, fearing Azizbek's wrath. Consumed by inner turmoil, he struggles to reconcile his conscience with the task at hand.

Revolution Yusufbek Hajji goes to a crowded square where people commonly gather and announces Azizbek's order to collect a tax of 32 coins, condemning it as unjust to the very people who have shown him so much kindness. The news of the tax stirs great discontent among the crowd. Yusufbek Hajji is a respected figure, loved and trusted by the people. He calls upon them to rise up against Azizbek. The angered crowd begins erecting barricades in the streets and arming themselves, and a skirmish breaks out with the khan's guards. Realizing the barricades need reinforcements, Yusufbek Hajji sends a messenger to the Kokand commander-in-chief, Normuhammad, who has not yet returned to the city. Meanwhile, Commander Raimbek Dodkho is killed in a shootout, breaking the morale of the khan's soldiers, who begin to flee. Azizbek, overcome with fear, begs the people for forgiveness, but they refuse to listen. He retreats to the *khan's* residence, hiding in fear.

The Fall of Azizbek Normuhammad eventually returns with his soldiers and Azizbek is captured. Grateful for Yusufbek Hajji's role in the uprising, Normuhammad agrees to help him. Yusufbek Hajji pleads for assistance in saving his son, Otabek, whose life is in danger. Normuhammad sends a letter to the Kokand *khan*, vouching for Yusufbek Hajji's bravery in defeating Azizbek. At the insistence of the people, Azizbek is tied by his legs to a horse and dragged through the streets.

False Accusation again The scene shifts to the *Khan's* house where young *Khan* Khudayar sits on his throne. To his left, Musulmanqul, a middle-aged man with a flattened nose and narrow eyes, reads complaints. Though his official rank is unclear, Musulmanqul, Khudayar's father-in-law, wields significant power, effectively governing the state. He discovers an anonymous letter accusing Uttaboy Qushbegi of accepting bribes to release dangerous criminals Otabek and Mirzakarim, agents of the rival Azizkhan. The writer, a "poor man," claims delivering the truth is his honor and seeks no reward, remaining nameless. Enraged, Musulmanqul orders the immediate summons of Qushbegi and Otabek. Uttaboy Qushbegi arrives at the *khan's* residence with Otabek. He enters first, followed by Otabek, who, never having met Musulmanqul, greets the *khan*. This displeases Musulmanqul, who asks Otabek who he is. When Otabek introduces himself, Musulmanqul sarcastically calls him the son of Azizbek's servant. Otabek, frustrated by the false accusation, boldly confirms he is indeed his son, though Qushbegi may introduce them differently. He asserts that in their hearts, both men are clear before their consciences. Musulmanqul's anger shifts to admiration, but he still believes Otabek guilty and orders the executioner to carry out the sentence.

The Letter of Fate Just then, a messenger arrives unexpectedly from Tashkent with a letter, forcing Musulmanqul to pause his order. Otabek, feeling everything has lost its meaning, leans against the wall, only desiring to look into his beloved's eyes before he dies. The messenger enters and rushes to Otabek - it's Hasanali. Musulmanqul, following proper etiquette, reads the letter from Normuhammad, reporting a victory and praising Yusufbek's great merits. Musulmanqul's expression changes as he reads, smiling. The threat to Otabek vanishes. Musulmanqul halts the execution and gifts Otabek an expensive *chapan* (robe). The young Khan smiles, seemingly congratulating Otabek for being saved by his father-in-law.

The Aspirations of Parents After Azizbek is expelled from Tashkent, Normuhammad of Kokand takes his place. Yusufbek Hajji remains as an adviser, and the new khan follows his counsel. Life in Tashkent gradually becomes calmer and more stable. Otabek's mother, the imperious and arrogant yet open and superficial Uzbek Oyim, is furious with her son for marrying without his parents' permission. His frequent visits to his wife in Margilan only serve to irritate her further. She convinces her husband to arrange a marriage for their son in Tashkent, believing that if Otabek marries again, he will forget his first wife and settle down permanently in Tashkent.

Otabek Strongly Opposes his mother's wishes, but when his father reminds him that he is their only son, carrying all their hopes and dreams, he is torn. His mother envisions a bride for him and dreams of grandchildren. Eastern tradition dictates that a son must care for his parents. Without Otabek's consent, his mother, an Uzbek Oyim, goes to seek the hand of a noble girl in the city and convinces the girl's parents that her son will marry their daughter. Feeling no other choice, Otabek reluctantly agrees to comply, but warns his mother that he will remain cold and indifferent, like a lifeless statue, to his second wife.

Informing Kumush Otabek heads to Margilan, troubled by how Kumush will deliver the "news." He envies the swallow, free to live as it pleases with its lover. Upon arriving and seeing Kumush's smile, Otabek decides to stay with her. Kumush is overjoyed. However, soon after, Mirzakarim Qudor receives a letter from Yusufbek Hajji, explaining that Otabek must marry a girl from Tashkent. Persuaded by custom, Otabek agrees reluctantly. Saddened, he tries to distract himself with a book, fearing Kumush's reproaches. Kumush, red-eyed from crying, quietly sits opposite him, telling him she believes in him. Then, she asks, "Will you not forget me?"

After the Wedding In the days following his second marriage, the servants prepare breakfast, and the Uzbek Oyim hopes the newlyweds will eat together. However, Otabek refuses to join his wife, unable to bear her presence. The Uzbek Oyim stays behind to invite the bride. Zainab, a 17-year-old of average beauty, enters and serves tea, rising as is customary for a bride. Otabek coldly tells her she is not obligated to show such respect. His words upset his mother, deepening her concerns about his coldness toward his daughter-in-law.

The Hindu Jodugar (sorcerer) Otabek's mother is concerned by his distance from his new wife, Zainab. He hurries to see Kumush, but Uzbek Oyim stops him, reminding him to visit his sick father-in-law, whose recovery he anxiously awaits. Believing Otabek is under Kumush's spell, Uzbek Oyim suspects the help of a powerful Indian sorcerer. Having failed with *Domla's* (prayer healer) prayers, she turns to Hasanali, asking when he will visit Margilan to undo the spell, offering a reward. Hasanali laughs, explaining that Otabek loves Kumush. When asked which wife is more beautiful, he hesitates but says Kumush, enraging Uzbek Oyim, who feels both furious and despairing.

A Letter of Accusation Otabek receives a strange letter from Kumush. In it, she accuses him of betrayal, calling him dishonest, shameless, and a liar. She reproaches him for breaking his promises, claiming he has found a new lover and abandoned her. Otabek is confused and doesn't understand what has happened. He assumes she is upset about his lateness.

Treachery Kumush eagerly prepares for Otabek's arrival, styling her hair, wearing a dress she knows he likes, and adorning herself with elegant earrings. She gazes at her reflection, convinced she is more beautiful than her rival. Soon, an unfamiliar, unattractive woman arrives, handing Kumush a letter. The woman explains that her son, often traveling to Tashkent, asked her to deliver the letter, but she brought it herself due to exhaustion. Kumush reads the letter, which shatters her: Otabek no longer loves her, is happy with his new wife, and has given her talaq. Devastated, Kumush collapses in despair.

Burning With Fever On a scorching summer day, a young man named Sodiq returns from Tashkent and enters his old, dilapidated house, where signs of poverty and desolation are evident. His mother, the same woman who delivered the letter to Kumush, greets him warmly and informs him that Hamid has visited several times inquiring about him. Shortly after, Hamid arrives and asks if Sodiq delivered the letter to Yusufbek's house. Sodiq confirms and adds that he also brought a reply. Hamid reads Otabek's response, which suggests that Kumush is ill and that her letter, written in a feverish delirium, is unfounded. Otabek reassures her of his love and promises to visit soon.

The Deception Unravels However, it is revealed that the divorce letter Kumush believed was from Otabek was, in fact, written by Hamid on Otabek's behalf. Now, Hamid is anxious about Otabek's impending arrival in Margilan, fearing that the truth will be exposed. He asks Sodiq to kill Otabek when he arrives in Margilan, offering a large reward, to which Sodiq agrees.

Qutidor Expels Otabek On Hamid's orders, Sodiq waits near Mirzakarim Qutidor's house to kill Otabek. As he waits, a group of his friends approaches. Sodiq considers hiding, but they spot him and, laughing, drag him to a nearby wedding. As they ride, Sodiq spots Otabek on horseback but can't escape the crowd. Meanwhile, Otabek dismounts and notices his father-in-law leaving for evening prayers. He hurries over and extends his hand in greeting. However, Mirzakarim, still furious over the forged talaq letter, believes Otabek has humiliated his daughter. In anger, he pushes Otabek away and drives him off.

Happiness and Unhappiness Hurt and tormented, Otabek wanders the alleys of Margilan, reflecting on the cruel treatment he's endured. A local weaver, noticing he's an outsider, invites him into his home. With little choice, Otabek accepts. The weaver, Usta Alim, offers him dinner and wine. Although Otabek has never drunk before, he accepts, finding solace in the wine that dulls his pain. Sensing his grief, Usta Alim shares his own story of love lost – how he married a girl he adored, how happy they were when she became pregnant, and tragically, how she died in childbirth. Their shared sorrow brings them closer.

One Who Cannot Forget Otabek returns to Tashkent earlier than usual, and Uzbek Oyim is pleased, believing it is the result of the Jewish *domla's* prayers. However, she soon notices that Otabek no longer sleeps in the bedroom but instead in the living room. Worried, she scolds him for neglecting his wife, Zainab, accusing him of being cold toward her. Otabek firmly replies that he had warned her and is now ready to divorce. Uzbek Oyim, not wanting to provoke him further, remains silent. Hasanali grows concerned when Otabek starts drinking heavily, returning home late and often drunk. Realizing something is wrong, he tries to ask, but Otabek avoids answering, only saying he plans to go to Margilan soon.

The Grip of Suffering Six months after Kumush's divorce, the news spreads in Margilan, attracting suitors. She rejects every one, causing concern for her parents. Hamid sends matchmakers three times, all turned away. Mirzakarim Qutidor approves of Komilbek, a noble suitor, but Kumush, traumatized by her previous marriage, refuses to remarry. Komilbek's family continually inquires about the wedding date. Frustrated, Mirzakarim pressures his wife to persuade their daughter, displaying anger he hasn't shown before. Torn between love for her daughter and fear of her husband's wrath, Kumush's mother is heartbroken. Eventually, Kumush agrees, but only if the wedding is delayed until autumn.

Melody of the Novel Otabek spent nearly five months in the Okmachit area on a business trip. Upon his return, he visited a drinking establishment every evening to numb the pain of separation. One night, he asked a musician to play a specific melody. When the musician inquired, Otabek requested, "The Melody of Separation, The Melody of Exile." The musician, unfamiliar with the tune, asked where he had heard it. Otabek replied, "In Margilan." The musician then played the famous song. As the music filled the air, Otabek was overcome with emotion, recalling his happy days with Kumush. He continued his visit to Margilan, feeling an unexplainable urge. Stopping at Usta Alim's house, he listened to his love story with pleasure.

Horrific News and a Terrible Night It is Otabek's seventh visit to Margilan, nearly 19 months since his breakup with Kumush. While walking, his feet unknowingly lead him to the street where she lives. He contemplates visiting her but recalls how rudely Mirzakarim Qutidor had expelled him the last time and hesitates. As he approaches her house, he notices two men leaving the gate. Curious, he follows them and overhears their conversation. The men are matchmakers sent by Komilbek to set a wedding date for Kumush. Stunned and heartbroken, Otabek is overwhelmed by grief and ends up spending the entire night at the Khuzha Maoz cemetery.

An Unsmiling Happiness Otabek visits Usta Alim in the morning. Usta Farfi comes to congratulate Usta Alim on his new workshop. Over tea, Usta Alim tells him that he once worked with Hamid and witnessed him harassing his young son-in-law, Sayfi. Enraged, Usta Alim broke off relations with him. Usta Farfi also tells him about Hamid's malicious actions, which he learned about from a quarreling friend. They discuss Otabek's marriage to Kumush, unaware that he is sitting before them under a different name. Usta Farfi tells how Hamid's jealousy of Otabek and his unsuccessful pursuit of Kumush led to Otabek's suffering.

On the Trail of the Enemy At that moment, Sayfi brings news of Komilbek's murder, just before the wedding. Otabek is unsure whether to feel relieved or sad about this news, but he senses that more trouble is coming. He bids farewell to Usta Alim but secretly stays behind. Later that night, Otabek sneaks into Sodiq's yard. While hiding, he overhears a conversation between Hamid and two hired killers discussing their plan to kidnap Kumush. They also reveal that they are responsible for Komilbek's murder.

Monday Night On Monday evening, two mercenaries, Sodiq and Mutal, arrive at Mirzakarim Qutidor's house with the intention of entering Kumush's room through the hole they dug to abduct her. Otabek arrives early and waits for them. He first kills Mutal, then hides in the hole, waiting for Sodiq. When Sodiq arrives, a short fight ensues between the two, during which Otabek stabs Sodiq in the chest. At that moment, Hamid appears. Otabek grabs his hand, which holds the knife. A brief conversation follows, during which Otabek asks Hamid if he believes he has the right to commit such vile acts. Hamid brazenly replies that he does.

He pulls his hand from Otabek's grip and attempts to attack, but Otabek is faster, quickly immobilizing him with his knife.

Introducing Himself Otabek visits Usta Alim, confesses the truth about himself and apologizes. Usta Alim admires his courage and agrees to deliver two letters – one to Mirzakarim Quoridor and one to Kumush – after Otabek leaves for Tashkent. Usta Alim delivers the letters to Mirzakarim's house and after reading them, the family is shocked by the revelation. Kumush is torn between conflicting feelings – both joy and sadness over Otabek's suffering and her own. After discussing this, Mirzakarim Quoridor decides to take Kumush to Tashkent to meet Otabek. Although Mirzakarim's wife is reluctant, fearing conflict, she agrees but insists on accompanying Kumush.

VOLUME THREE

Tyranny Ends Musulmanqul's heavy taxes and executions of Qorachopon *beks* stir public unrest. Though supported by the Qipchaqs and religious leaders, some mullahs turn against him. Khudayarkhon seizes the moment, offering gifts and promises of power in exchange for support. They denounce Musulmanqul for defying Islamic Sharia, launching a propaganda campaign. Tashkent *Khan* Normukhammad allies with Khudayarkhon, and together, they plot Musulmanqul's overthrow. When Musulmanqul marches on Tashkent, part of his army deserts, and he is forced to flee. Uttabay Qushbegi, the governor of Mariglan, replaces him.

Protest Against the Qipchaq Purge About 20 days after Musulmanqul flees, the Tashkent *beks* grow dissatisfied. Despite his departure, the Qipchaq *beks* still hold all the key positions, as both the Tashkent and Margilan rulers are Qipchaqs. The Tashkent *beks* believe they need to eliminate the Qipchaqs to gain freedom. All the *beks* support this plan, except Yusufbek Hajji. He opposes it, arguing that the Qipchaqs aren't to blame for the troubles; the fault lies with a few *beks* pursuing personal gain. He warns that the Russian Empire is preparing to invade and urges them to unite against the real enemy, but no one listens, and he leaves in despair.

The Massacre of the Qipchaqs Otabek eagerly awaits news from Kumush, his mind filled with doubts and pain. Will she come to Tashkent, or does she believe that Otabek only sought revenge on his enemy and then left? To clear his mind, he leaves the city and spends time with a friend, finding peace in the beauty of nature. Otabek comes back from outside the city and witnesses a terrible sight: near the gate, three bodies lie on the ground with their heads cut off. From the gatekeeper, he learns that the extermination of the Qipchaq took place today. As he enters the town, the scene becomes even more horrifying: lifeless bodies of innocent people lay scattered everywhere. Otabek is horrified by what he sees.

A Father's Regret During breakfast, Otabek accuses his father, Yusufbek Hajji, of failing to prevent the extermination of the Qipchaqs, despite being the *Khan's* adviser. Yusufbek defends himself, explaining that the *beks* deceived him. They supposedly called off the massacre, but secretly contacted Khudoyarkhan, who approved it. Shocked, Yusufbek turns to Qushbegi, who admits he couldn't challenge the *beks*. With tears in his eyes, he says he would give his life if asked. Yusufbek regrets not warning the Qipchaqs in time and bitterly warns that Russia will exploit their division, condemning future generations to live under foreign rule.

Otabek confesses the Murders After breakfast, Yusufbek Hajji turns asks Otabek what he was doing in Margilan, having received a letter from Mirzakarim Qutidor detailing how Otabek had saved the honor of Mirzakarim's family. Otabek confesses that he killed three people and holds his parents responsible. He explains that their forced arrangement of his second marriage gave his enemies the opportunity to commit vile acts, which caused him immense pain. Filled with regret, Yusufbek asks for forgiveness. He then shares the good news: he has received a letter from Mirzakarim Qutidor, and soon his family – along with Kumush – will arrive in Tashkent.

The Letter Yusufbek Hajji hands Kumush's letter to Otabek, his heart pounding with emotion. Kumush apologizes and expresses her tender thoughts, eagerly anticipating their upcoming meeting. She also mentions, half-jokingly, her fear of his second wife, worried that she might scold her or make cutting remarks about her, as if to remind her of her place. Otabek feels a mix of happiness and apprehension, knowing that a new chapter of his life awaits – one in which everything will be different.

Zainab's Sorrow Yusufbek informs Uzbek Oyim about the upcoming visit of Kumush and her parents. Initially angry at her daughter-in-law from Margilan, accusing her of cursing her and exploiting her son's wealth, Uzbek Oyim's attitude changes as she imagines how the city will admire Kumush's beauty. Upon learning of Kumush's arrival from her father- and mother-in-law, Zainab is deeply upset. Otabek notices her sadness and asks about her conversation with his parents. Zainab accuses him of being happy about his first wife's arrival and being enchanted by her. To avoid conflict, Otabek denies this, but Zainab, crying, confesses her love, leaving him stunned.

Meeting of in-Laws Kumush and her parents arrive in Tashkent. Uzbek Oyim invites the guests, including Zainab's family. Kumush enters, flushed with embarrassment, her dark eyes sparkling with a shy smile. The women are immediately captivated by her beauty. Uzbek Oyim embraces Kumush, kisses her, and, for reasons unknown, begins to cry. Zainab, pale and clearly unsettled, offers a strained smile as she greets her rival. Meanwhile, Yusufbek Hajji greets Kumush with a wide smile, expressing his delight at having such a beautiful bride from Margilan join the family.

Hajji Renounces Worldly Affairs Yusufbek Hajji invites distinguished guests to honor Mirzakarim Qutidor's arrival. During their conversation, they discuss the extermination of the Qipchaqs. With a heavy heart, Yusufbek expresses sorrow over the atrocities committed to satisfy a few officials' desires for wealth, power, and positions. He laments his inability to oppose such injustice. Yusufbek dreams of leaders genuinely committed to the prosperity of the state and the people but acknowledges that such leaders are rare, losing hope for change under the current regime.

Reunion: Hasanali's Trick Otabek is filled with joy and anticipation for the upcoming meeting but doesn't know how to act after two years of separation. Following tradition, newlyweds must conceal their emotions in front of their parents. Sensing Otabek's nervousness, Hasanali arranges a brief, private meeting in his room. He tells Otabek he will call for Kumush. When Hasanali leaves, Kumush unexpectedly appears. Everything inside Otabek turns upside down at the sight of her. The lovers embrace silently, savoring every precious moment of their long-awaited reunion.

Kumush's Word Game In the evening, after the guests leave, Otabek enters to be alone with Kumush. Zainab arrives with tea, Otabek declines, but Kumush invites her to sit. The three of them engage in conversation, and Kumush, half-jokingly, recounts the entire story of their two-year separation, presenting it as if it happened to a friend – an explanation that Zainab readily believes. Otabek listens intently, his heart racing, fearing that Zainab might somehow recognize him. Yet, at the same time, he is once again struck by the realization that Kumush is not only more beautiful but also far smarter than Zainab.

Rivalry of the Two Wives Uzbek Oyim and Oftob Oyim go out to visit, leaving Kumush and Zainab alone at home. Kumush soon notices that Zainab is avoiding her, and she accuses her of insincerity. She points out that when she is alone with Otabek, Zainab immediately comes to her, but when Kumush is alone, she keeps her distance. Zainab cannot respond to this fair accusation. Instead, driven by envy, she lies, claiming that Otabek confessed he cannot live without her. This falsehood stirs jealousy in Kumush's heart.

Kumush's parents leave for Margilan Kumush's parents are preparing to return to Margilan, but Kumush has decided to stay with Otabek in Tashkent. Everyone, except her mother, supports her choice. Oftob Oyim is anxious about leaving her only daughter with a rival and tries to persuade her to come along, but Kumush remains firm. Overcome with sadness, Oftob Oyim begins to cry. Kumush tries to console her, but she too is filled with emotion at the thought of the separation. Then, Kumush reveals she is pregnant. Oftob Oyim's tears give way to joy as she finds comfort in dreams of her future grandchild. The next morning, Kumush's parents leave for Margilan.

Whispers of Jealousy and Revenge Zainab, upset and nervous, confides in her older sister Khushroi Bibi about her troubled marriage. She bursts into tears, tormented by jealousy, believing Otabek loves Kumush. Khushroi Bibi blames Zainab for her own misfortunes, sharing her experience of driving out her husband's first wife and taking control of his wealthy household. Khushroi tells Zainab that, if she were in her position, she would do whatever it takes to eliminate her rival. Zainab, pale and silent, begins to understand the implication. She thanks her sister, now knowing what she must do.

The pregnancy Kumush's due date is approaching, and the Uzbek Oyim is busy preparing for the upcoming birthing ceremonies. She is excited, but Otabek is worried, haunted by the story of Usta Alim, whose wife died during childbirth. Kumush writes a letter to her mother, describing the quarrels with Zainab, which have worsened since her pregnancy was revealed. Otabek, fed up with the constant conflicts, tells them that he will divorce both of them. It was clear he meant Zainab. Offended, Zainab left for her parents' house, but soon returned, quiet and submissive. Meanwhile, Kumush is filled with fear as the month of her due date approaches.

The Boy's Birth Kumush gives birth, and everyone is waiting. Otabek is away on business. When he returns, he hears the good news: Kumush has given birth to a boy. Otabek wants to see her, but his mother advises him to wait until tomorrow, as tradition forbids entering the house with a newborn in the evening. Otabek goes to Zainab. She seems distracted, her thoughts elsewhere. She tells him that Kumush suffered during labor, which worries Otabek. Later, Otabek sleeps with Zainab and has disturbing dreams filled with ominous visions of an impending disaster.

Divorce Otabek enters Kumush's room, and she smiles at him. Uzbek Oyim shows him their son, and Otabek feels a mix of happiness and embarrassment. He asks about Kumush's condition, and Uzbek Oyim

mentions that Zainab will make milk porridge. Later, Otabek returns to find Kumush ill, vomiting, and pale. Seeing her so weak and exhausted, Otabek's heart sinks. The doctor examines her, then asks for the remains of her meal. He claims she has been poisoned. Stunned, Otabek realizes who could be to blame – Zainab. Enraged, he orders Zainab to eat the poisoned dish, throwing it at her. In a fit of fury, he says “talaq” three times, divorcing her.

Kumush dies Kumush is in agony. Yusufbek Hajji enters the room, sits down next to her, straightens her hair and gently presses his hand on her forehead. Kumush, recognizing him, tries to get up, but Yusufbek gently persuades her to stay where she is. Tears flow from Kumush's eyes, and Yusufbek, unable to hold back his own, cries with her. Kumush vomits again, this time blood. Growing weaker, she whispers, “Mama... Papa... my Bek.” She presses her cheek to her husband's, closes her eyes as if ashamed, and dies.

After the Funeral On the third day after Kumush's funeral, her grief-stricken parents arrive. While the people await Zainab's punishment, she loses her sanity. A doctor confirms her madness, and the execution is postponed. In the meantime, Zainab wanders the streets in chains, no longer concealed by her burqa. In those days, such a public display was considered an immense disgrace for a woman. On the twentieth day after the mourning rites, Mirzakarim and Oftob Oyim, with Kumush's child in the cart, prepare to leave. Without a word to his parents standing nearby, Otabek climbs into the carriage with them. Without a glance back, he set off for Margilan.

Epilogue A year later, Otabek arrives in Tashkent, distant and cold to his parents, as though he were a stranger. He visits Kumush's grave, sitting there for a long time, his heart heavy with longing as bitter tears fall. A woman in tattered clothes approaches from behind and whispers, “I am Kumush.” It is the mad Zainab. Otabek recoils and drives her away. The next day, he returns to Margilan. One year later, Yusufbek Hajji receives news of Otabek's death in a battle with the Russians near Alma-Ata.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

OTABEK

Honest Honesty is Otabek's defining trait, and it often leads him into difficult situations. He cannot bring himself to abandon his second wife, Zainab, despite their strained relationship, because he feels guilty for her unhappiness. Unlike many men of his time who control their wives with cruelty, Otabek – though distant and cold toward Zainab – still refuses to allow her to be mistreated. After Zainab's confession, he delays the divorce, a decision that ultimately sets in motion a chain of tragic events.

Romantic Otabek is a romantic, capable of profound and consuming love. His affection for Kumush is imbued with poetry and purity, bordering on idealization. When he learns of Hamid's plot to abduct her, his first instinct is to alert the authorities. However, as the writer emphasizes, consumed by his romantic ideals, he decides instead to confront the threat on his own, determined to protect her – even if it means sacrificing his life to defend her honor. After Kumush's death, life loses all meaning for him, and in death, he finds the peace he could not attain in life.

Progressive-Liberal Otabek has a progressive outlook on life. Disillusioned with outdated systems of government, he imagines a European-style order, led by honest people united by a common vision of creating a developed, prosperous country with fair and honest officials. He is against traditional views on family, the role of women and parental authority, although he himself cannot resist them.

Compassionate Otabek cannot bear injustice. He is deeply troubled by the suffering of ordinary people and feels a strong sense of responsibility for their troubles. He is horrified by the massacre of the Qipchaqs, tormented by the deaths of innocent lives. His inability to resist such evil haunts him.

Courage Although Otabek is often compelled to act against his own desires due to his conscience and kindness – especially when it comes to his loved ones – he can show great bravery when necessary. He boldly tells the khan that his conscience is clear and that he is prepared to die defending the truth. He also courageously faces three criminals alone to protect Kumush.

KUMUSH

Pure-Hearted Kumush is beautiful not only on the outside but also on the inside. Her feelings for Otabek are genuine and sincere. Her sincerity is evident when, despite her inner turmoil, she selflessly supports his marriage to Zainab, understanding his situation. This gesture surprises Otabek, who exclaims, “Your soul is like an angel's.” Even when faced with a rival, Kumush makes an effort to be friendly, which stands in stark contrast to Zainab's approach.

Cheerful Although life brings Kumush many challenges, she retains her love for life and her cheerful spirit. In her relationship with Otabek, she is full of subtle humor and playful charm, which only enhances her allure. In conversations with Zainab, she often outshines her with her sharp sense of humor and keen insight.

Brave Although Kumush appears outwardly full of charm, femininity, and tenderness, she is also capable of great bravery. When Otabek and Mirzakarim Qutidor were awaiting execution, she risks everything to save them by traveling to *orda* in Kokand. This act of courage was exceptionally rare in 19th-century Turkestan, where women's opportunities were severely limited.

Insightful Kumush is capable of assessing a situation and its consequences. She decides to stay in Tashkent, knowing that if she leaves, Otabek will not grant Zainab a divorce. With her sincere and open nature, she skillfully builds relationships with those around her, easily winning their sympathy. However, to her misfortune, it is precisely because of her sincerity that she fails to recognize that people are also capable of cruelty.

ZAINAB

Passive-aggressive Outwardly, Zainab appears submissive, obedient, and indecisive. However, beneath the surface, she can harbor grievances and dissatisfaction for a long time, only to suddenly reveal them. She loves Otabek and accepts his coldness toward her, knowing he loves Kumush. She is content with his mere presence. But when she learns of Kumush's arrival, Zainab confesses her love to Otabek and reproaches him for his detachment, putting him in a difficult position.

Jealous Although jealousy is a natural emotion in everyone, for Zainab, it transforms into something darker – hatred fueled by her secretive nature. She is consumed with envy over Kumush and Otabek's happiness, unable to accept her own sense of defeat. Rather than asking for a divorce, she chooses to remain with Otabek, tortured by the thought of Kumush finding happiness after her departure.

Dependent Zainab struggles to make decisions or express her opinions independently; others always make those decisions for her. First, it was her parents, then her mother-in-law and father-in-law. When she loses their support, she is at a loss and doesn't know how to proceed. Her final refuge is her manipulative sister, who persuades her to act maliciously. Zainab blindly follows this advice, without considering the consequences.

Cowardly Zainab lacks the courage and resolve to face danger, challenges, or difficult situations. She operates covertly and often ineffectively. After poisoning Kumush, she is horrified by her reckless actions. Unable to bear the weight of her crime, she becomes consumed by fear and guilt, eventually driving her to madness.

YUSUFBEK HAJJI

Fair-minded Yusufbek Hajji is one of the most striking figures in the novel. Despite his high position, he remains steadfast in his commitment to justice throughout his service. In the most difficult moments, he acts with integrity, doing everything he can to resist evil. Unlike other officials who focus solely on their own well-being, Yusufbek Hajji sees and feels the pain of the people. He bitterly regrets his inability to prevent the destruction of the Qipchaqs.

Wise Yusufbek Hajji embodies the highest ideals of Eastern wisdom. He dreams of an honest and just ruler who genuinely cares for his people. Yusufbek Hajji is also able to accurately assess the political situation in the country. He warns of the grave consequences of ethnic discord within the state and deeply regrets the anticipated future under Russian control.

Capable Yusufbek Hajji knows how to control the situation and manage people. When Azizbek orders him to collect taxes from the people, Yusufbek first tries to explain to the khan that this will be unfair to those who are already suffering after the recent blockade from the war with Kokand. Realizing that his efforts are futile, he calls on the people to rebel against the rule of Azizbek.

Weak Despite his strong principles, leadership, political influence, and respect among the people, Yusufbek Hajji sometimes shows vulnerability in personal relationships. He cannot resist his wife's impulsive decision to pressure Otabek into marrying for a second time, which ultimately draws him into the troubles that befall his son.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Gender At first glance, the theme of gender may not seem particularly prominent, as there are no overt gender conflicts in the relationships of the main characters. However, a deeper analysis reveals significant issues related to the role of women in 19th-century Uzbek society. A woman's place is seen as being in the home, as the keeper of the hearth. Her primary duties are to bear children and serve her husband and his family. Women from the wealthy class may enjoy certain privileges, but in matters of marriage, all women face severely limited rights. Girls have no say in choosing their husbands; their parents make the decision for them. In the novel, women are often forced to submit to the will of men, left with no recourse but to shed bitter tears, as the author notes.

Illustrative Moment: Kumush Bibi wakes up, surprised to hear talk of the wedding. Kumush is getting married! The author reflects, "Who is getting married?" "Kumush." "Does she like the groom? Should we worry about her opinion?" "No. Tradition says Kumush must marry the man her parents choose." Heartbroken, Kumush cries. She heads to the mysterious ditch, seeking solace, lost in thoughts of the stranger she loves. This scene happens before the chapter "Unexpected Happiness," when Kumush doesn't know she'll marry Otabek. The chapter's title is significant – Kumush is fortunate, as many girls in her position face unfulfilled dreams and bitterness.

POLITICS

Leadership The country is gripped by backwardness, with an outdated and crumbling administrative system. The ruling elite remains indifferent, as they continue to benefit from the current system. They pay no heed to the fact that the country is falling behind, and if this trend continues, it will remain in the shadow of more developed nations, becoming prey to their dominance.

Illustrative Moment: After a trip to Semipalatinsk, Otabek is inspired by the modern European system of governance and is eager to share his ideas with the authorities. He dreams that the *khan* will see the value in his proposals, issue a decree to implement the new order, and within a month, transform the country into one that could rival Russia. But this is nothing more than a fantasy. No one listens. Those who do are skeptical, dismissing him with disdain: "Do you really think these *beks* and *khans* will take you seriously? This country is like a cemetery, where everyone is in eternal sleep."

Internal conflicts In the novel, the author highlights internal conflict, particularly localism, as a key factor contributing to the socio-political crisis. After Normukhammad becomes the ruler of Tashkent, the economic situation improves and stabilizes. However, local officials in Tashkent are dissatisfied because Normukhammad is of Qipchaq descent, and they seek to reclaim control. To achieve this, they devise a plan not only to remove him from power but also to completely eradicate the Qipchaq people. They send a letter to the Khan of Kokand, requesting permission to carry out a massacre. The Khan agrees, seeing it as an opportunity to eliminate his powerful father-in-law, Musulmankul, a Qipchaq who holds significant influence over him. The result is a horrific bloodbath – an indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people.

Illustrative Moment: Muahhmad Rajab *qurboshi* (local police chief) calls a meeting with the Tashkent *beks*. After the feast, they begin discussing the rule of the Qipchaqs. One of the *beks* angrily complains, "All the leadership positions have fallen into the hands of the Qipchaqs. In reality, they should belong to us – the Tashkent *beks*. How much longer must we obey them? The time has come to wipe them out completely. The other *beks* support him, agreeing that the best way to rid themselves of the Qipchaqs is through mass extermination. Only Yusufbek Hajji opposes this. "We drove out Musulmankul and made peace with the Qipchaqs," he argues. "Why reopen old grievances? What is the point of destroying innocent people? In response, the *beks* ask, "Where is the guarantee that Musulmankul won't seize power again?" Yusufbek Hajji bitterly says, "The fault lies not with the Qipchaqs, but with the *beks* who are driven by their own personal ambitions. Brothers, the Russians are already at our gates, waiting for exactly this – internal strife that will lead to discord and make it easier for them to conquer our land. Can you imagine what awaits us?" After these words, he breaks down in tears and leaves the meeting. But none of the *beks* take Yusufbek Hajji's warnings seriously. They dismiss him as an old man out of his mind, laughing at his words.

JUSTICE

Inter-klan Violence In the novel, violence is depicted as an accepted part of life in 19th-century Uzbek society, particularly during times of war. Rulers frequently engage in brutal power struggles, where killing is rewarded, and symbols such as a minaret made from the heads of fallen soldiers serve to demonstrate a leader's dominance. Ambitious rulers and *beks* play ruthless political games to seize control of the government, often at the expense of innocent lives. The massacre of the Kipchaks horrifies characters like Otabek and Yusufbek, but such voices of conscience are rare. Violence also permeates everyday life –

Zainab's sister, Khushrui, brutally forces her *kundosh* (co-wife) out of the house, beating and threatening her without hesitation. Influenced by Khushrui's philosophy of seizing what she believes is rightfully hers, a jealous Zainab ultimately poisons Kumush.

Illustrative Moment: The fifty-first day of the siege of Tashkent: the Kokand troops have been defeated. The soldiers withdrew to their shelters, preparing for the next attack. Between the two gates of the fortress, roughly 500 paces apart, lie decapitated human bodies, with all clothing torn away except for their trousers. Above this open cemetery, from the walls of the fortress, the Tashkent warriors gaze down joyfully at the horrific scene. Between the two gates, contrasting realities unfold: beneath the fortress, blood-soaked decapitated bodies lie, while atop the fortress, people rejoice in victory. The so-called "heroes" shout to one another, boasting of how they killed the Kokand warriors and stripped the expensive clothes from their victims.

RELATIONSHIPS

Parent-son relationship In the novel, the author delves into the dynamics of Eastern family relationships, where the father, in particular, holds a dominant position. Otabek challenges traditional Eastern customs around marriage, where unions are typically arranged by parents, and children have little say in their partners. These customs often dictate that sons remain with their parents, while the bride serves the husband's family. In this system, a child's wishes are secondary to their parents' desires, and disobedience is seen as a violation of moral and cultural norms, disrespecting elders. Otabek, the protagonist in *Bygone Days*, defies these traditions by marrying for love, only to find himself increasingly alienated. While his father, Yusufbek Hajji, is initially understanding, the relentless pressure from his mother, Uzbek Oyim, who upholds these customs, takes its toll. She views Otabek's disobedience as unjustifiable. Under Sharia law, which allows polygamy, his parents arrange for him to marry a second wife, seeking to fulfill both personal desires: to find a bride that pleases his mother and to have the new wife live with them. As a dutiful son, Otabek complies, despite the emotional turmoil it causes, triggering a tragic series of events that leads to a devastating downfall for his family.

Illustrative Moment: After a month-long visit to Margilan, Otabek returns to Tashkent and meets his parents. His father, Yusufbek Hajji, informs him that they have made a decision about his future, without his involvement. Otabek, understanding immediately, responds sarcastically, "Smart people make smart choices." His mother then announces they have arranged for him to marry a noble's daughter. Otabek protests, reminding them he is already married. His mother accuses him of disrespect, questioning how he can consider his Margilan wife his real wife. Otabek argues, "Then who is she?" His father intervenes, explaining their only son must fulfill his duty. The new bride must live with them, as his mother longs for a daughter-in-law. Otabek agrees to fulfill their wishes but expresses sympathy for the girl. He declares he will be "cold as a statue" before her, leaving his parents stunned and his mother dismissing his words.

Love Although the novel addresses urgent socio-political issues of its time, most readers are primarily drawn to the central love story. Even today, Otabek and Kumush are regarded as the embodiment of true love. Qodiriy infuses a romantic tone into his realistic characters, whose emotions captivate with their purity and sincerity. The inclusion of a love triangle adds a grounded, more realistic dimension to the traditional portrayal of love. The author skillfully portrays the suffering of the unloved Zainab, evoking sympathy for a character who is both a homewrecker and a victim of unrequited love.

Illustrative Moment: Otabek is in Margilan and wants to stay there, but his parents insist that he return to Tashkent to marry Zainab. His father-in-law receives a letter from Otabek's father. In keeping with the customs of the time, he supports the idea of a second marriage and urges Otabek to submit to his parents' wishes. Deeply troubled, Otabek admits that he cannot bring himself to break the news to Kumush and asks her parents to speak with her instead. His soul feels heavy, and in an attempt to escape his thoughts, he immerses himself in reading – so much so that he doesn't notice Kumush silently enter the room and sit across from him. When he looks up and sees her tear-streaked face, he gently asks if he has made her cry. Filled with guilt, he blames himself for not being able to go against his parents' wishes. But Kumush quickly assures him that she agrees. Otabek, surprised, asks, "Is this really true?" Kumush replies that she believes in him. Moved, Otabek exclaims, "Your soul is like an angel's," to which Kumush responds, "And so is yours." In that moment, it feels as if their hearts fully understand and exchange with one another.

Marriage The theme of marriage is a central element of the novel. In the 19th century, polygamy was common in Uzbek society, especially among the wealthy, and was justified by Sharia law. In the novel, several characters follow this tradition – Hamid, who has two wives, and Zainab's sister Khushroi, who is the second wife of a wealthy man. Both families are marked by power dynamics and authoritarian structures. Otabek also takes a second wife, but unlike the others, he does so unwillingly and under pressure. Abdullah Qodiriy was one of the first writers to explore the moral and psychological consequences of polygamy, emphasizing that true equality between wives is impossible. He vividly depicts the outcomes

of this practice, including jealousy, conflict, revenge, and even crime.

Illustrative Moment: In the first episode of the novel, Otabek discusses marriage with Rahmat and Hamid. Rahmat explains that marriage is a delicate matter, noting that if a wife is well-suited to her husband, it becomes a natural and harmonious relationship – but if she is not, it poses a significant challenge. Otabek agrees, adding that a husband must also be suitable for his wife. Rahmat also reflects on marriages arranged by parents, expressing regret that the wife chosen for him by his parents is not the one he had dreamed of. Hamid objects, arguing that complaining about an unsuitable wife is unmanly. He suggests that if a man doesn't like his wife, he should marry another, and if he doesn't like the second one, he can marry a third. Rahmat sarcastically responds, "You have two wives, and there are quarrels every day in your house." Hamid replies, "With a rod, you can live happily even with a hundred wives."

Sexuality: Objectification In the novel, women are presented as objects of aesthetic and carnal pleasure. For the romantic Otabek, in accordance with Eastern traditions, the beloved is a symbol of something ideal, winning her favor brings him greater spiritual satisfaction. On the contrary, for Hamid, a woman is just an object for satisfying his desires. He has two wives, but he is looking for a beautiful replacement. In the wealthy class, the value of a woman is often measured by her beauty. Hamid has not truly seen Kumush; perhaps he caught a brief glimpse of her (though this is not mentioned in the novel). He has only heard of her beauty and longs to possess this "precious" object for his own pleasure. At the same time, the desires and will of women are ignored. Polygamy, accepted as the norm in 19th century society, primarily serves to satisfy the desires of men, which often leads to severe and painful consequences. In polygamous families, women compete for dominance in the sexual sphere, and when they are displaced, their suffering is deep. For example, for Zainab, sex is not a desire, but an assertion of her superiority. Her jealousy intensifies when she learns of Kumush's pregnancy. In contrast, for several male characters, sex serves as a driving force. For example, all of Hamid's malicious actions are aimed at eliminating his sexual rival and possessing the sexual object, i.e., Kumush. Similarly, in the Tashkent Khan's quest for power, sexual desires become intertwined. This is evident when the author describes the jubilant Khan's inner thoughts after his victory over the Kokand troops: first, he desires to commission a magnificent throne and acquire a new, beautiful concubine, whose beauty will be renowned throughout Bukhara and Turkestan.

Illustrative Moment: Yusufbek Hajji and Uzbek Oyim summon Zainab and inform her of Kumush's upcoming visit. Otabek notices her sadness and, feeling uneasy, asks why her parents called her. She replies that he already knows and asks if he's happy to reunite with his first love. Otabek denies it, but Zainab's words confuse him. She claims he married her only at her parents' request, while he married Kumush out of love. Her eyes fill with tears. Otabek tries to refute her, but Zainab counters, noting his emotional distance for two years. When he returns from Margilan, he doesn't even enter her bedroom. Otabek struggles to explain, unable to admit he doesn't desire her. Instead, he lies, claiming a low sex drive. Zainab hesitates but desperately says she doesn't need his physical desire – she needs his love. Tears fill her eyes as she embraces him, begging him to love her.

APPEARANCE

Deception In the novel, the antagonists frequently resort to lies to achieve their goals. Hamid's main weapon against Otabek is deception. He spreads slander, claiming that Otabek was sent by Yusufbek Hajji to provoke unrest among the Margilan people against the Kipchaks. He even forges a letter from Otabek to Kumush, falsely stating that he wants a divorce. Zainab also deceives Kumush, falsely claiming that Otabek admitted he could not live without her. Both Hamid and Zainab resort to dishonesty, driven by feelings of powerlessness and jealousy. The author highlights the darker side of human nature – for people like Hamid, deception is not merely a tactic, but a way of life that he defends until his final breath. Zainab lies because she feels powerless in the face of the truth; for her, deception is a means of preserving the reputation and status of a beloved wife that she so desperately craves.

Illustrative Moment: When Kumush comes to Tashkent, Zainab's life changes. Although nothing has changed in her relationship with Otabek – who remains cold toward her – Zainab begins to lay claim to his love. Meanwhile, her distance from Kumush steadily increases. One day, Kumush and Zainab are alone at home. Bored, Kumush approaches Zainab, who is busy with embroidery. She asks why Zainab is avoiding her, but Zainab denies it. Kumush points out that when her husband is present, Zainab visits her room, but when he is not, she doesn't. Zainab, almost involuntarily, replies that there is nothing to worry about. Kumush presses further, asking, "Are you saying you have nothing to worry about because your husband loves you?" Realizing her mistake, Zainab quickly backtracks, making up a lie: "Otabek probably confessed to you too, didn't he?" Kumush denies it, but Zainab continues, claiming that he confessed to her and said he couldn't live without her. Kumush is left feeling defeated.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the main theme of the novel?
2. Several episodes in the novel depict the horrors of civil war that are not directly tied to the main character. What role do these scenes play in the overall narrative?
3. Why did the author choose the title *Bygone Days* for the novel?
4. Before Kumush is poisoned, Otabek dreams that he is in a flower garden when enemies, including his own parents, suddenly appear. He waves a knife, causing them to flee. Then, a cow appears and tramples the flowers. Otabek attacks the cow, which transforms into a witch. What do you think this dream symbolizes?
5. Who do you believe is the main culprit behind the tragedy that befalls Otabek?