



## Sleep, Pale Sister

By Joanne Harris  
ISBN: 9780060787110

### Introduction

Henry Chester, a wealthy, domineering, and puritanical Victorian artist, is in search of the perfect model -- and he finds her in nine-year-old Effie. Henry takes Effie under his wing -- all in an effort to protect her from the outside world. Eight years later, when he marries her, he thinks he has found the ideal wife. But Henry hides dark secrets, and as Effie begins to discover the depths of her husband's hypocrisy, she is drawn into a dangerous world of corruption, blackmail, and revenge.

With the ethereal beauty of a pre-Raphaelite painting, **Sleep, Pale Sister** preceded Joanne Harris's worldwide acclaim, and evocatively reveals the author's cornucopia of talents.

### Discussion Questions

1. **Sleep, Pale Sister** is written in the first person from a variety of characters' perspectives. How does this affect the way you experience the story -- does it give the story more nuance and insight?
2. What kind of man do you think Henry Chester is from the prologue? How does your opinion of him change?
3. For what sins does Henry hope to find redemption through Effie? What does Effie do that contaminates Henry's opinion of her?
4. Mose claims that he loved Effie as much as he ever loved a woman. Is he capable of truly loving another human being? How is he a good influence on Effie? In what ways does he fail her?
5. With the introduction of Fanny, Effie's life changes dramatically. What are the most profound changes?
6. Scheherazade is the story of a young woman who tries to stave off the nightly threat of execution by telling a story so enticing that her would-be-executioner husband postpones her death until the succeeding night. "Scheherazade" is also the name of Henry's only successful painting and the name that Fanny uses when she impersonates a gypsy. How does the structure and content of **Sleep, Pale Sister** mirror the story of Scheherazade?
7. What role does the occult play in **Sleep, Pale Sister**? What do we learn about Effie when she experiences out-of-body episodes?
8. Effie changes from an obedient, docile wife to a strong-willed, passionate woman. In chapter 25, she declares, "It was the first time I had admitted as much to myself: in a quiet way I declared war on Henry that day, a war filled with hate and cunning." Does she win that war?
9. Fanny is initially motivated by revenge against Henry for the death of her daughter. As she gets to know Effie, how does her motivation change? How does your opinion of Fanny change throughout **Sleep, Pale Sister**?
10. The "pale sister" of **Sleep, Pale Sister** is drawn from a poem of the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti called My Sister's Sleep, written in 1847. It idealizes a dead, beautiful sister, who lies on her bed in the moonlight on Christmas Eve while around her, people are celebrating. How does the poem relate to the story of Sleep, Pale Sister?

### About the Author

Joanne Harris is the bestselling author of five critically-acclaimed novels and a cookbook/memoir, **My French Kitchen**. She lives in England.