My Name is Red

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ORHAN PAMUK

Orhan Pamuk grew up in an affluent, Westernized district of Istanbul called Nisantasi. When he was young, he dreamed of becoming a professional artist. He studied at the American Robert College and Istanbul Technical University, but dropped out of his architecture program there in order to enroll in the journalism program at Istanbul University. At 23, he decided to become a novelist, and moved in with his parents in order to focus on his writing. His first book, *Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, was published seven years later in 1982, and received critical acclaim. Since then, he has published 19 books in total, most of which have been translated into English (as well as many other languages). Pamuk's novels often explore the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures epitomized in the city of Istanbul. He is a vocal critic of the Turkish government, speaking out against restrictions on freedom of expression and against the state's treatment of Kurds. In 2006 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He currently holds the position of Robert Yik-Fong Tam Professor of the Humanities at Columbia University.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The book is set during the heyday of the Ottoman Empire, a Sunni Muslim empire that existed from 1300-1922 and extended through Southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Between 1370-1526, the Timurid Dynasty ruled Persia and Central Asia and fostered a vibrant revival of intellectual and creative activity, including miniature painting. At the time *My Name is Red* takes place in 1591, the leader of the Ottoman Empire was Sultan Murat III, who is a character in the novel. Murat was a particularly enthusiastic patron of miniature painting, and he commissioned several books to be painted by painters employed by the Ottoman court. When Murat died in 1595, he was succeeded by his son, Mehmed III.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Pamuk's work (*My Name is Red* in particular) is often compared to the work of the Italian author Umberto Eco. Eco's novels *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum* similarly weave complex historical and philosophical themes into fictional narratives. Pamuk's use of intertextuality (inserting references and snippets of other texts into the novel) is reminiscent of postmodern writers such as Jorge Luis Borges. Pamuk's imaginative use of different narrative voices seems to take direct inspiration from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the sinister, philosophically resonant plot evokes the work of Franz Kafka. Pamuk himself has admitted that *My Name is Red* was influenced by the historical fiction of Italo Calvino, Thomas Mann, and—most of all—Marguerite Yourcenar, whose novel *The Memoirs of Hadrian* is widely considered to be one of the finest examples of historical fiction written in the 20th century.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *My Name is Red* (Turkish: *Benim Adım Kırmızı*)
- **When Written:** 1990-92, 1994-98
- **Where Written:** Istanbul, Turkey
- **When Published:** 1998 (English translation 2001)
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Turkish fiction
- **Genre:** Historical thriller
- **Setting:** Istanbul, Ottoman Empire, 1591
- **Climax:** When Black forces the needle into Olive's eyes and Olive confesses that he is the murderer.
- **Antagonist:** The murderer / Hasan / The Hoja of Erzurum
- **Point of View:** 12 different first-person narrators

EXTRA CREDIT

Positive thinking. Despite the prominence of murder and death in the narrative, Pamuk calls *My Name is Red* "my most colorful and optimistic novel."

Miniature painting on display. Nowadays, collections of Ottoman illuminated manuscripts can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Library in London, and the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul.

PLOT SUMMARY

Elegant has been murdered, and his corpse lies undiscovered at the bottom of a well. Speaking from the afterlife, he hopes that his body is found soon and that the murderer is captured. Meanwhile, Black has returned to Istanbul after 12 years away. Before he left, Black fell in love with his cousin, Shekure, and he has now been summoned home by Shekure's father (and Black's uncle) Enishte. Enishte wants Black to work on a secret **book** commissioned by the Sultan and illustrated by the three master miniaturists, Butterfly, Stork, and Olive.

The murderer reflects on his difficulty coming to terms with the fact that he has taken someone's life. He has started frequenting a **coffeehouse** where a storyteller entertains the audience by impersonating different characters; the murderer

laughs at the storyteller's impression of a dog, and he admits that he killed Elegant because Elegant was threatening to tell everyone about the secret book.

Enishte originally sent Black away after learning that he had fallen in love with Shekure, but he is now pleased with the way that Black has matured during his time in exile. He tells Black about a trip he took to Venice, during which he was astonished (and frightened) by the new realist style of European painting. Enishte introduces Black to Shekure's six-year-old son Orhan, who then overhears Enishte telling Black about the death of Elegant, whom people suspect was murdered. As Black leaves Enishte's house, Esther, a Jewish clothier, gives him a letter from Shekure. Riding away on his horse, Black catches a glimpse of Shekure at her window. Shekure admires Black's handsomeness, but feels conflicted, as she is still technically married to a soldier who never returned from war. Shekure previously lived with her husband's father and his brother, Hasan, but left when Hasan tried to rape her.

The next chapter is narrated by an illustration of a tree, who declares that it is lonely because it fell out of the book of which it was supposed to be a part. Meanwhile, Black goes to see Master Osman, the Head Illuminator, and he is given a tour of the Royal Workshop. Osman is suspicious of Black, as Enishte is Osman's archrival. Black then makes individual visits to Butterfly, Stork, and Olive, who each tell Black three different parables about style and signature.

Black gives Esther a letter for Shekure, but before bringing it to Shekure, Esther shows it to Hasan, who writes his own letter. After receiving both letters, Shekure confesses that she is confused about whom to marry. Enishte goes to Elegant's funeral, where Butterfly tells him that he believes Olive and Stork are behind Elegant's death. The murderer admits that he put on a big show of grief at the funeral and that he does feel a genuine sense of torment about killing Elegant.

The storyteller's next narrative is told from the perspective of a gold counterfeit coin, who argues that the people of Istanbul are all obsessed with money. Enishte explains to Black that the final illustration in the secret book will be a portrait of the Sultan, although Enishte is having trouble finishing it. The murderer sees Black leaving Enishte's house and realizes that Black intends to marry Shekure, which fills the murderer with furious jealousy.

After Esther shows Hasan more letters between Black and Shekure, Hasan writes his own letter to Shekure, threatening to force her to return to his father's house. Shekure and Black meet at a house that formerly belonged to a Jewish man who was hanged. They kiss and begin to have sex, but Shekure insists that they stop and she makes Black agree to a list of demands in preparation for their marriage.

While Shekure and Black are out, the murderer goes to Enishte's house and they have a long conversation about art, religion, sin, and the secret book. Eventually, the murderer tells Enishte that it was he who murdered Elegant. They continue their discussion, but it becomes clear to both of them that the murderer intends to kill Enishte. The murderer smashes a Mongolian inkpot over Enishte's head, and Enishte cries out in agony before dying. His soul is carried to the heavens in the palm of the Angel Azrael.

Shekure walks home in the **snow**, discovers Enishte's dead body, and hides the body while pretending to her two sons that Enishte is merely sick. At the coffeehouse, the storyteller speaks from the perspective of the color red, reflecting on the impossibility of explaining color to someone who has never seen it.

In the morning, Shekure meets Black and makes a plan to legally authorize her widowhood so that they can marry. Black bribes an imam to issue the certificate of widowhood and arranges for the imam to officiate their marriage. The wedding takes place around Enishte's body, with Shekure and Black managing to convince the imam and guests that Enishte is alive and providing his consent from his deathbed. That night, Hasan comes to Enishte's house and threatens to force Shekure to come back to his father's house. In the morning, Shekure tells the children that Enishte has just died; her eldest son, Shevket, doesn't believe her, claiming that he knows Enishte died the previous night.

Black goes to the palace to bring news of Enishte's death to the Sultan, who is deeply saddened. Black explains that the murderer stole the final illustration for the book, adding that Enishte believed that Elegant was murdered by one of the three master miniaturists and that Enishte's and Elegant's murderer is likely the same person.

Enishte is pleased by his funeral, which he witnesses from the afterlife. He explains that after dying he experienced a dazzling array of vivid colors, a collapse of time and space into a single plane, and a conversation in which Allah reassured him about his use of the European style, stating: "East and West belong to me." After Enishte's funeral, Esther visits Elegant's widow, Kabilye, who shows her a drawing of horses that was found on Elegant's dead body. Kabilye insists that Elegant did not create the drawing himself.

Black is summoned to the palace, where his head is put in a vice. However, just as the torture begins Master Osman interrupts and explains that the Sultan has given them three days in which to figure out who killed Enishte. Black and Osman discuss the particular characteristics of each of the miniaturists, and Osman states that he believes Stork is the murderer. One of the palace officials shows them the horse illustration found on Elegant's dead body, and they resolve to hold a pretend horse-drawing competition in order to figure out which miniaturist drew the horses, and thus which one is the murderer.

Olive, Butterfly, and Stork each draw horses for the

competition, and the murderer asks the reader if they were able to identify him through his drawing. He then describes going to the coffeehouse, where he tells two stories. As he is about to tell a third, he is cut off by the storyteller, who impersonates Satan and claims that evil and free will are important parts of the world and that Allah does not care about minor sins.

Having reached a dead end with the competition, Black goes to the palace, where Master Osman obtains the Sultan's permission to look through the Royal Treasury for clues that will lead to the murderer. Black and Osman spend hours searching through the books in the treasury and having occasional conversations about the history and future of the miniaturist tradition. Eventually, Black falls asleep, and Master Osman happens upon the needle that Bihzad used both to paint and, eventually, to **blind** himself. Osman pierces his own eyes with the same needle, and his vision begins to slip away.

When Black is awake again, he and Osman discuss the identity of the murderer; Osman insists that it is Stork. Black goes home in a joyful mood, but he finds that Shekure and the boys are not there. He learns that they are at Hasan's house and he brings a gang of men from the neighborhood to help him take Shekure back. After some confusion, Hasan's father permits Shekure and the children to leave. At this moment, the Erzurumis descend on the coffeehouse; Black sends Shekure home and promises to join her soon.

At the coffeehouse, the storyteller tells of his desire to be a woman and he sings a poem about conflicted identity. When the Erzurumis raid the coffeehouse, they kill the storyteller, and Black and Butterfly go to Butterfly's house. Black interrogates Butterfly and Butterfly pins him to the ground in an aggressive, erotic gesture. Butterfly says he believes Stork is the murderer, and he and Black set off for Stork's house.

Once there, Stork tells them that Olive drew the horse illustration found on Enishte's dead body. He adds that Olive will be at the abandoned dervish lodge, which is indeed where they find him. Olive denies drawing the horses. Stork and Black search for the book's final illustration but find nothing. Olive begins to cry, and it is now clear to everyone present that he is the murderer. He suggests that the miniaturists must now kill Master Osman, and Black puts a knife to Olive's throat, demanding to know the location of the final illustration. There is a scuffle during which the murderer is blinded. He confesses to both murders and tells the others that there is only once chance to escape the death of the miniaturist tradition—move to India, where the Sultan of Hindustan is gathering the best miniaturists for his royal workshop.

Olive attempts to kill Black but he misses, and then he runs away through the streets of Istanbul and encounters Hasan, who—mistaking Olive for one of Black's allies—cuts off his head.

In the final chapter, Shekure tells of the fates of the characters after the main narrative ends. She explains that she told the story to Orhan and showed him the letters she exchanged with Hasan and Black, warning the reader that Orhan may not tell the exact truth but that this is in service of creating "a delightful and convincing story."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Elegant – Elegant is a gilder who, at the time the novel begins, has just been murdered. For 25 years he has worked alongside the three master miniaturists (Olive, Butterfly, and Stork), but they have always remained suspicious of one another. Elegant is more religious than the others, and just before his death he became a follower of a conservative religious leader, the Hoja of Erzurum. At the same time, he is also very greedy; he agreed to do the gilding for Enishte's **book,** even though he thought it was blasphemous, because Enishte promised to pay handsomely for it. The search for Elegant's murderer propels the plot of the book.

The Murderer – The murderer is the anonymous killer of both Elegant and Enishte. Throughout the novel, the murderer's identity is kept a secret, and only at the very end (spoiler alert!) does the reader discover that it's Olive. However, the narrative voice of the murderer and Olive's voice never merge into one, as early on in the novel Olive insists on separating his identity as a normal man and miniaturist from his identity as a murderer. The murderer's motives are mysterious and somewhat contradictory. He kills Elegant out of fear that Elegant will tell everyone he knows about the secret book, and then Enishte out of resentment over the **book** as well as jealousy of Enishte's favoritism of Black. The murderer is arrogant and often boasts about the fact that nobody knows who he is. At the same time, he is also tormented by loneliness and self-hatred.

Sultan Murat III – Sultan Murat III is the ruler of the Ottoman Empire at the time the book is set. Of all the Ottoman Sultans, he is the most enthusiastic about miniaturist painting, and he commissions many books during his reign. The Sultan also commissions Enishte to oversee the creation of a secret **book** to celebrate the thousand-year anniversary of the Hegira, the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina, and to show off the splendor of the Ottoman Empire. Defying religious teaching, the Sultan requests that the book's illustrations be created in the European style, which forces the miniaturists to choose between obeying Islamic law and the wishes of the Sultan (who is both a religious and political leader). The Sultan is described as being incredibly handsome, with a commanding presence. He dies four years after the book ends.

Nesrut, Hoja of Erzurum – The Hoja of Erzurum is a fanatical preacher who denounces everything from **coffee** to musical instruments to tolerance of Christians, and he blames all of the Ottoman Empire's problems on these (often minor) sins. His followers are known as "Erzurumis." The storyteller, miniaturists, and other patrons of the coffeehouse mock the hoja, calling him "cross-eyed" and accusing him of preferring young boys to his wife. Toward the end of the novel, the Erzurumis raid the coffeehouse, destroy its contents, and kill the storyteller.

Black – Black is the handsome, though hapless and naïve, hero of the story. He is 36 years old at the time the novel is set. Before the novel begins, Black's uncle Enishte had forced him to leave Istanbul because he fell in love with Enishte's daughter Shekure. During Black's twelve years in exile, his love for Shekure remains as strong as ever, and he returns to Istanbul at the beginning of the book determined to win her hand in marriage. Enishte charges Black with writing the story for the secret **book**, but Black struggles with writer's block. When Enishte dies, Black and Shekure marry, but Shekure asks Black to find her father's murderer and finish the book before they consummate their marriage. As a result, Black urgently searches for the murderer and ultimately succeeds in identifying him. After the main narrative ends, Black lives for 26 more years, but is never able to shake his melancholy disposition, even though he has achieved what he always wanted by marrying Shekure.

Shekure – Shekure is the 24-year-old heroine of the story. Everyone who has seen her thinks that she is the most beautiful woman in the world. Her cousin Black falls in love with her when she is 12, and when her father Enishte banishes Black as a result, Shekure marries a handsome soldier and has two sons with him, Shevket and Orhan. However, before long Shekure's husband disappears in battle, leaving Shekure in a limbo between being married and widowed. For a while she lives with her brother-in-law Hasan and his father, but she goes back to live with Enishte when Hasan attempts to rape her. Shekure and Enishte have an extremely close relationship, and Shekure is devastated when Enishte is murdered. Shekure often gives off the outward appearance of being helpless and obedient, but, in fact, she is quite determined, self-assured, and competent. She adores her two sons, and—although she loves Black, as well—she admits that motherhood is what brings her the most happiness.

Enishte – Enishte is Shekure's father and Black's uncle. The word "Enishte" actually means uncle, but Enishte is called this by everyone, not just Black. Enishte adores books and illustration, and, in his younger years, he was sent on diplomatic missions to Europe, where he became fascinated with the European style of painting. The Sultan puts Enishte in charge of the creation of the secret **book**, which Enishte can handle because he is one of the more liberal-minded characters in the book; he believes that the European style is not blasphemous and he does not fear death or the judgment of Allah. He is the enemy of Master Osman, who is jealous of Enishte's close relationship with the Sultan and disapproves of his embrace of the European style. Enishte is killed in his own home by the murderer, and he continues his narrative from the afterlife, where he is greeted warmly by the angel Azrael and even has a conversation with Allah Himself.

The Storyteller – The Storyteller is a local man who, at night, entertains the patrons of the **coffeehouse** by impersonating different people, animals, and things. His impersonations include the dog, the tree, the coin, Death, the horse, Satan, the color red, and the two dervishes. Toward the end of the novel, the storyteller also tells a tale about his conflicted feelings towards his own gender identity. The storyteller is disdainful of religious zealots and he mocks the Hoja of Erzurum, whose followers ultimately kill the storyteller during their raid of the coffeehouse.

The Dog – The dog is one of the characters the storyteller impersonates at the **coffeehouse**. He speaks resentfully about how dogs are treated in Istanbul and the fact that some people think that dogs are dirty and sacrilegious. He points out that dogs, like all creatures, were created by Allah and that a dog appears in the Koran. In this sense, he represents the liberal attitude of the storyteller and the patrons of the coffeehouse.

Master Osman – Master Osman is the Head Illuminator of the royal workshop and the most senior and respected master miniaturist. He is a fierce defender of the traditional style of miniaturist painting and he dreads the encroachment of European influence. He hates Enishte and disapproves of the secret **book**. Butterfly, Stork, and Olive all profess to love him, despite the fact that he physically and sexually abused them during their apprenticeship. While Osman and Black are searching for clues about the murderer's identity in the Royal Treasury, Osman uses the needle of the great master Bihzad to **blind** himself, just as Bihzad himself did 80 years earlier. He dies two years after going blind.

The Soldier – The soldier is Shekure's first husband, who is never named and never takes an active role in the narrative. He is the brother of Hasan and the father of Shevket and Orhan. He is described as handsome and brave, but he disappears in battle and is never heard from again. Hasan and his father claim that the soldier is still alive, but, as he never returns to Istanbul, he is widely presumed to be dead, leading Shekure to eventually be granted the legal status of widowhood.

Orhan – Orhan is the younger of Shekure's two sons, and is six years old at the time the novel is set. Orhan is loving and loyal to his mother and he often fights with his older brother, Shevket. Unlike Shevket, Orhan warms to Black and jumps at the opportunity to help get his family away from Hasan's house. At the end of the novel, Shekure reveals that she told her

stories to Orhan and she warns the reader that Orhan may embellish and even lie in order to create an entertaining narrative. Orhan's name is thus also a playful reference to the actual author of the book, Orhan Pamuk.

Shevket – Shevket is the oldest son of Shekure, and is seven years old when the story takes place. Shevket is stubborn and rebellious, often causing trouble for his mother. He dislikes Black based on the unfounded belief that Black killed his father, and he (unsuccessfully) tries to get his family to move back to Hasan's house.

Butterfly – Butterfly is one of the three master miniaturists trained by Master Osman and recruited by Enishte to work on the Sultan's secret **book**. Extraordinarily handsome, his personality is defined by his desire to please others and his loyalty to great masters and the traditional style of miniaturist painting. Butterfly is Master Osman's favorite miniaturist, and there are strong hints that Osman is in love with him. Other miniaturists who are jealous of Osman's favoritism of Butterfly start rumors that Butterfly is an Erzurumi, and Butterfly makes a habit of going to the **coffeehouse** in order to disprove this. Of the three miniaturists, Butterfly is the least likely suspect in the murders of Elegant and Enishte.

Olive – Olive is another of the master miniaturists trained by Master Osman. He is the only miniaturist whose real name, Velijan, is provided in the book. He comes from a long line of Mongol illustrators and thus exhibits Chinese influence in his work. As such, he is less loyal to the traditional style of miniature painting than Butterfly, but also less enthusiastic about the European style than Stork. Master Osman describes Olive as the most "guilty" and "traitorous" of the miniaturists, but he still refuses to believe that Olive is the murderer, even when evidence suggests that Olive is. Only at the very end of the novel is it revealed definitively that Olive is indeed the murderer. He attempts to flee to India in order to continue practicing miniature painting there, but he is beheaded by Hasan outside the miniaturist workshop when Hasan mistakes him for one of Black's allies.

Stork – Stork is the third master miniaturist, and his nickname refers to his tall, thin figure. He is greedy, conceited, and ruthlessly ambitious, and he hopes to succeed Master Osman as Head Illuminator after Osman's death. He embraces the European style of painting; because of this, Master Osman hates him and the other miniaturists resent him. Osman accuses Stork of being the murderer, yet Stork's innocence is proven when it is revealed that the murderer is Olive.

Hasan – Hasan is the brother of Shekure's first husband. He is desperately in love with Shekure and hopes to marry her, since his brother has disappeared. However, while Shekure is living in Hasan's house and waiting for her husband to return from war, Hasan attempts to rape her, which Shekure uses as an excuse to go back to Enishte's house. Perhaps surprisingly, Shekure does feel some level of affection for Hasan, who reminds her of her missing husband. At times it seems as if Hasan is well-intentioned and genuinely cares for Shekure; however, he also becomes frustrated and loses his temper easily, causing him to behave in an erratic and violent manner. A key example of this is when he beheads Olive at the end of the novel, thinking Olive is in league with Black. Hasan thus performs a heroic deed without intending to. After the beheading, he disappears and is never heard from again.

Hasan's Father – The father of Hasan and Shekure's first husband is never named, although Esther mentions that he is polite and kind, and he is clearly a loving grandfather to Shevket and Orhan. He initially attempts to keep Shekure at his house when she returns there after marrying Black, but he allows her to leave when he learns that she wants to go.

Esther – Esther is a large Jewish woman who works as a clothier and lives in the Jewish Quarter of Istanbul with her husband, Nesim. She is something of a professional busybody; women from all over the city bribe her to convey messages and gather information on their behalf. In this sense, Esther represents an embodiment of public presence and autonomy—liberties from which Muslim women in Istanbul are restricted. Esther is a comic character who possesses a mix of conflicting qualities; she can at times be caring and kind, but at other times she will deliberately spread misinformation, hurt people's feelings, and cause trouble. Shekure relies on her to help inform Black of her love for him and to arrange their marriage after Enishte's death.

The Tree – The tree is an illustration that the storyteller impersonates during one of his performances at the **coffeehouse**. The tree describes how it was once part of a larger story but was separated from the rest of the book during a robbery. Its sadness at existing in isolation relates to the ongoing debate over whether single illustrations should be permitted within the Islamic artistic tradition, or whether such lone illustrations are blasphemous and encourage idolatry.

The Coin – The coin is another character that the storyteller impersonates at the **coffeehouse**. The coin initially boasts about being a genuine gold coin, before confessing that it is, in fact, a counterfeit. It meditates on the irony of the fact that Europeans are fans of realist painting and yet have flooded Istanbul with fake money. It also argues that Istanbulites are all incredibly greedy and materialistic, even though they pretend not to be.

Satan – The storyteller also impersonates Satan, who claims to want to clarify false rumors about him. Satan argues that people are too quick to blame their sinful behavior on him, and that, in fact, most of the time sinners are simply using their own free will. He also claims that God does not care about minor sins, and thus Satan embodies the storyteller's more liberal view of religion.

The Color Red – The storyteller narrates a chapter of the book from the perspective of the color red. In this chapter, red says that it is glad to be a "fiery and strong" color, and it also reflects on the fact that it is impossible to explain color to anyone who cannot see it. Red has further significance in Enishte's account of the afterlife, when he describes being surrounded by a brilliant red during his conversation with Allah.

Two Dervishes – The storyteller's penultimate tale is told through the perspective of two dervishes who are drawn by a traveling Frank. The Frank chooses to depict them because he can earn more money by illustrating the "worst" side of Ottoman culture, but the Dervishes come to like him because of the attention he pays to them. In real life they freeze to death during a **snowstorm**, however they achieve a kind of immortality through being depicted by the Frank and ventriloquized by the storyteller.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Hayrire – Hayrire is an enslaved woman, owned by Enishte, who runs his household and helps take care of Shevket and Orhan. She and Enishte secretly sleep together, and she is devastated after his death. Shekure is suspicious of her and treats her cruelly.

Nesim – Nesim is Esther's husband. We learn little about him, though Esther sometimes mockingly suggests that she wishes she weren't married.

Nuri – Nuri is one of the miniaturists who works in the royal workshop. He helps show Black around during his visit.

Death – The storyteller impersonates an illustration of Death. Death claims that the unnamed miniaturist who illustrated it regretted what he did and feared that he had become what he drew.

The Horse – The horse is another of the storyteller's characters. The horse boasts of how proud it feels to have been painted so often, and it provocatively suggests that the European style of painting is actually more in keeping with the doctrines of Islam than the miniaturist tradition.

The Imam – Black seeks the help of a local imam (Islamic religious leader) in order to legally certify Shekure's widowhood and then marry Shekure. The imam is initially resistant to providing these services, but he is happy to help after Black bribes him.

The Head Treasurer Hazim Agha – The Head Treasurer oversees the Royal Treasury, and he permits Black and Master Osman to look through the treasury's contents during their quest to find the murderer.

The Commander of the Imperial Guard – The Commander is another of the Sultan's high-ranking officials.

Kabilye – Kabilye is Elegant's wife. She is fiercely loyal to her husband and she is distrustful of Shekure and the miniaturists.

Jemzi Agha – Jemzi Agha is a dwarf who guards the books in the Royal Treasury. He tells Black and Master Osman that the spirits of the objects in the treasury whisper to each other at night.

Butterfly's Wife – Butterfly is married to an unnamed beautiful woman with whom he has a mischievous, playful relationship. When Butterfly pins Black to the ground at their home, he imagines the act as a kind of performance to titillate his wife.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

STORYTELLING, IDENTITY, AND PERSPECTIVE

My Name is Red explores how identity and perspective are created through storytelling, and it conveys the idea that any one story is best understood through a multiplicity of narrative perspectives. This corresponds to the Islamic teaching that painting from a single (human) perspective is sinful, and that virtuous representation must seek to imitate the all-seeing and all-knowing gaze of Allah. The novel is divided into 59 short chapters narrated by 12 different narrators, including the unnamed storyteller who takes on different personas. Each narrator has their own distinctive style and brings different elements of the story into focus. For example, while Enishte, Master Oman, and the three miniaturists devote much time to discussions of art, Shekure and Esther—the only female narrators—are more concerned with interpersonal relationships and the drama of domestic life. The diversity of narrative perspectives gives the novel a scope and complexity that would be impossible from a single perspective.

Some of the narrators consciously inhabit several different voices or identities, highlighting the theme of the desire to be two things at once. The murderer, for example, admits that he has decided to develop a "second voice" in order to live with the fact that he, an otherwise ordinary and innocent person, has committed such a terrible crime. This decision increases suspense, as the reader does not discover the murderer's true identity until the very end of the book. On a similar note, the storyteller explains that when he was a child, he felt a desire to become a woman—although he only experimented with dressing as a woman in his youth, the title of the chapter is "I Am a Woman." This is only one of a multitude of identities the storyteller inhabits, yet it emphasizes the desire to unite seemingly opposite identities, whether that be sinner/innocent,

hero/villain, or man/woman.

Perspective is a high-stakes issue within the book, due to the Islamic teaching that representational perspective can be sinful and dangerous. At the time the novel is set, European artists are experimenting with new realistic painting techniques, including the use of perspective to make paintings appear closer to what is observed by the human eye. Although this is seen as an impressive breakthrough in the West, many in the Islamic world find realist painting to be sinful and the use of perspective to be an insult to God. As visual storytellers, the miniaturists are supposed to depict the world in a way that demonstrates the glory of God, rather than as humans perceive it. The idea that first-person storytelling is an insult to God is emphasized when the murderer argues: "It was Satan who first said 'I'!". At the same time, the use of different narrative perspectives in the novel is a reminder that everything we perceive will inevitably be from a human perspective, rather than a direct illumination of God's creation.

Storytelling is also a way of creating religious and cultural identity. Throughout the book, the characters refer to stories from Islamic culture, such as accounts of the lives of Persian rulers or of the myth of Shirin and Hüsrev. These stories form a counterpoint to the main action occurring in the novel, setting an example against which the characters make their own decisions. The stories also help to create a sense of belonging and cultural coherence. In the chapter narrated by the picture of a tree, the tree admits: "The essential reason for my loneliness is that I don't even know where I belong. I was supposed to be part of a story but I fell from there like a leaf in autumn." The implication is that people also suffer when they are cut off from a broader story, whether that story is provided by religion, culture, family, or—in the case of the miniaturists—craft. Although each person has their own unique perspective and identity, people find meaning in the broader web of stories created by community and culture. At the same time, the book makes it clear that different identities and perspectives can come into conflict with each other, which leaves some characters (such as the murderer) feeling alienated from the world around them and even from themselves.

CREATION VS. REPRESENTATION

The novel is built around a point of tension within the Islamic artistic tradition: the question of how to faithfully represent God's creation. During a conversation with Black, Nuri voices the presiding religious view that "it is indeed important that a painting, through its beauty, summon us toward life's abundance, toward compassion, toward respect for the colors of the realm which God created, and toward reflection and faith." Yet there is a precariously fine line between being summoned to appreciate God's creation through looking at a painting and being summoned to admire the creation of the painter. The miniaturists must constantly navigate the dilemma between excelling at their craft and remaining humble enough that their painting does not constitute a challenge to the glory of God.

Under some interpretations of Islam, all representation is forbidden, and the only visual art permitted is calligraphy of passages from the Koran. The tradition of miniature painting evolved as a way of illustrating this calligraphy, and thus of creating images that didn't violate religious law. Some leaders, such as Sultan Murat III (who is in power at the time the book is set), were supporters of miniature painting, and the Sultan even commissions Enishte to create a **book** illustrated with the new European painting style, which is an even more obvious violation of Islamic custom than miniature painting. This shows that even the Sultan, who has the authority of a religious leader, is not able to resolve the tension between religiously sanctioned representation and the appeal of more daring forms of artistic creation.

This tension is no light matter; in fact, the murders of both Elegant and Enishte are inspired by the conflict over artistic representation. The murders are thus a testament to art's dangerous power. Pamuk also shows artistic creation to have mystical or supernatural properties; for example, in the story of Shirin and Hüsrev, which is referenced many times in the novel, the main characters fall in love after seeing pictures of one another. The impact of art on reality is shown, too, when Master Oman states: "By furtively and gradually re-creating the same pictures for hundreds and hundreds of years, thousands of artists had cunningly depicted the gradual transformation of their world into another." According to this line of thinking, art does not only represent the world; it can transform the world and, in this sense, create new worlds. From a religious perspective, this automatically makes art and artists the subject of suspicion, and it is the reason that the miniaturists are warned against the sin of "competing with Allah."

However, the very concept of idolatry also highlights the limitations of art's power. The murderer references a passage of the Koran, which states that "on Judgment Day, the idol makers will be asked to bring the images they've created to life." When the idol makers fail to do so, their sin will be proven; they will be humbled before God, and they will be sent to hell. From one perspective, this belief seems to confirm the dangerous power of idolatry. On the other hand, it is also a reminder of the limitations of representation in comparison to the power of God. God created the world, and "idol makers" like painters only create representations of God's creation. Can art thus really be a threat to God and Islam? Once again, the answer is ambiguous. The characters live in a perpetual state of doubt over whether artistic representation should be permitted or banned, revered or feared.

LIFE, DEATH, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

In a typical murder mystery, the dead don't speak. However, in this novel, both Elegant and Enishte narrate from the afterlife. This inherently challenges the idea that life and death are disconnected in any absolute sense—Pamuk suggests instead that the consciousness of the soul unites life and death. Perhaps one of the most striking features of *My Name is Red*'s exploration of life and death is its literal interpretation of Muslim teachings about the afterlife. In the opening chapter, Elegant's corpse is aware that people will find it miraculous that he is narrating from the afterlife: "There is indeed another world, thank God, and the proof is that I'm speaking to you from here. I've died, but as you can plainly tell, I haven't ceased to be."

Yet Elegant's relief about the existence of the afterlife is tempered by his unhappiness at the fact that his murdered corpse remains rotting at the bottom of a well. These mixed feelings underscore that the boundary between life and death is porous, and that even though the afterlife is hierarchized as the more important state within religious teaching, there is something remarkable and special about life that the soul misses once the body dies. Watching his own funeral, Enishte reflects: "However blissful it is being a soul without a body in the realm of the dead, so too is being a body without a soul among the living; what a pity nobody realizes this before dying." This idea corresponds to the related tension between the power and beauty of the human world versus the glory of God and the heavens.

The idea of a transitional phase between life and death reflects Islamic doctrine, which—as the dead Enishte explains—stipulates that the soul occupies four different states of being: "1. the womb; 2. the terrestrial world; 3. Berzah, or divine limbo, where I now await Judgment Day; and 4. Heaven or Hell, where I will arrive after the Judgment." The fact that dead souls contribute to the narration of the novel suggests that there isn't an absolute divide between the living and the dead, and that the dead play an active role in human reality. The story of Shekure's divorce also highlights the idea that life and death aren't always absolute states of being. After her husband has been missing for four years, Shekure must convince a judge that he is dead in order to remarry. Whether or not her husband is truly dead is somewhat irrelevant; he is dead to Shekure and their sons, having disappeared from their life.

The novel also collapses the binary between humans and animals and between living beings and inanimate objects, exploring the idea that animals and inanimate objects might have their own kind of consciousness. The narrators include a dog, a tree, a horse, a coin, and the color red. Although it is actually the storyteller who narrates through these voices, this again speaks to the notion that art can animate things we normally assume not to have a spirit or sense of awareness. It also invites the reader to question what seemingly inanimate things would say about the human life going on around them. Some characters possess a real belief in the sentience of inanimate things, such as Jemzi Agha, who tells Black, "At night the spirits of these objects whisper to each other." Whether or not this is literally true is less important than the fact that the objects have a powerfully important role in the world of the novel, and thus they do possess a kind of active consciousness. Indeed, the novel's unusual and slightly surreal portrayal of life, death, and consciousness emerges from an acknowledgment of the limits of human knowledge about these phenomena.

VIRTUE VS. SIN

The culture depicted in the novel is devoutly Muslim, and the characters are all concerned with questions of virtue and sin. Most of the characters believe in an absolute sense of morality, meaning that there are universal rules which dictate what is virtuous and what is sinful. In other words, it's black and white: on Judgment Day, "the guilty [will be] separated from the innocent."

Despite this common preoccupation with virtue and sin, though, there is little agreement within the world of the novel about what is sinful and what isn't. Strict clerics condemn popular features of Istanbul's culture, such as dervish lodges, **coffee**, dogs, and manuscript illumination, while other characters find all of these things to be culturally and spiritually acceptable. The followers of the fundamentalist Hoja of Erzurum, nicknamed Erzurumis, are particularly zealous about chasing after these supposedly-sinful phenomena, and they murder patrons of a coffeehouse—including the storyteller—as a result. This raises questions about the relative offensiveness of different sins. Even if it is a sin to drink coffee, is it not worse to murder someone? In his own chapter, Satan clarifies that some believers are overzealous in their condemnation of sin, arguing: "Even the Almighty couldn't find anything evil in passing wind or jacking off." However, it is perhaps unwise to trust the word of the devil in this matter, particularly given that he also admits: "I work very hard so you might commit grave sins."

Satan is insightful, though, in his argument that humans are too quick to blame him for their sinful behavior. He clarifies that most people commit sins on account of their own free will, not because they have been led astray by him. This statement hints at the fact that many people are less virtuous then they would like to believe, an idea further emphasized by the murderer. Shortly after killing Elegant, the murderer watches strangers in the street and thinks: "Many of them believe they're innocent because they haven't yet had the opportunity to snuff out a life… Only imbeciles are innocent." The words of Satan and the murderer suggest that everyone is capable—and perhaps guilty—of committing sin, due to the fact that they have free will. This in turn raises one of the major conundrums in the history of religious ethics: if God gives people free will, is it

sinful to use this faculty to question and push against religious teaching?

A similar question arises in the context of artistic representation. At one point, Stork asks the question of whether the **blind** and the seeing could be equal, and Olive thinks to himself: "Was he implying that even though what we saw was obscene, the pleasure of sight that Allah had bestowed upon us was glorious?" Like the problem of free will, this question grapples with how a talent given by Allah (such as artistic skill) could be automatically sinful when put into practice. Indeed, the miniaturists at times make fun of the denunciation of their work as sinful, such as when Stork signs his name as "the Sinning Painter Mustafa Chelebi." Ultimately, this moral ambiguity means that each character decides for themselves what is virtuous and what is sinful, aware that they will not be able to know for certain until the Day of Judgment.

LOVE, DESIRE, AND GREED

Although less prominent than the themes of art, morality, and religion, love and desire also play an important role within the novel. To a certain extent, love is presented in a positive light; for example, the love between Black and Shekure and between Shekure and her children is shown to be powerful and enriching, even if it is also, at times, tumultuous. Like many other religions, Islam teaches that love for another person—if practiced properly—can be a way of loving God, a doctrine mentioned several times in the novel.

At the same time, love is also shown to be dangerous, particularly when it becomes obsessive and leads to a loss of self-control. Early in the novel, Esther comments that Shekure is so deeply in love that "she has gone clear out of her mind." Both Hasan and Black become obsessed with Shekure, meanwhile, and behave badly as a result. Hasan attempts to rape Shekure, and Black requests that she perform oral sex on him. This enrages Shekure, who considers such an act sinful, and leads her to protest that, "If you truly loved me, passionately and obsessively… you'd try to control yourself like a gentleman." Shekure's use of the words "passionately and obsessively" highlight a paradox within the issue of romantic love; even though it is supposed to lead to respect for one's beloved and for God, in reality it can lead to sexual desires that are considered wicked and depraved.

Overall, desire is shown to be a negative and dangerous phenomenon that weakens people and leads them away from God. Enishte comments that desire is a sin because it is a way of being "arrogant before God" by "placing oneself at the centre of the world." In the chapter entitled "I Am a Woman," the storyteller satirically argues that Europeans lose battles against the Ottomans because their women dress in an insufficiently modest way, meaning that the men are constantly distracted and always have erections. The desire for money is also shown to be sinful, and at several points the narrators condemn artists who paint for money, instead of painting as a way of exercising their talents and honoring God's creation. Greed has also led the Venetians to produce counterfeit coins, which has created a massive wave of inflation within Istanbul.

At the same time, the novel acknowledges that desire, envy, and greed are inescapable parts of life. Homosexual desire is a common and normalized (if morally contested) element of life in Istanbul, and it is a major element of the master-apprentice relationship through which the miniaturists hone their craft. At several points the narrators suggest that dreams are a way of expressing desires that cannot be articulated out loud, and the murderer even comments that "envy is the prime emotion in life." Although desire and greed are shown to be dangerous and sinful, they are a fundamental part of the human condition and they coexist with more positive emotions, such as marital love, artistic creation, and religious devotion.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

COFFEE

Like dancing, music, and painting, coffee is a controversial phenomenon within the world of the book, with some characters praising its virtues and others denouncing it as a sin. Coffee is thought to have arrived in Istanbul from other parts of the Islamic world in the mid-16th century, only a few decades before the novel is set. As a result, coffee is still new to Istanbul, and is the cause of both great excitement and anger. The storyteller represents the pro-coffee faction in Istanbul, speaking enthusiastically about coffee and impersonating a Tree who claims that giving up coffee can lead to the degeneration of the mind. On the other hand, the fundamentalist Erzurumis and other religious zealots denounce coffee as a sinful vice. Coffee thus becomes a controversial symbol of cosmopolitanism, pleasure, and religious liberalism—much like realist painting. It's significant to note that the future of coffee—like the future of traditional Muslim religious life—is left uncertain in the novel. Near the book's end, the Erzurumis descend on the coffeehouse, destroy it, and kill the storyteller. This event suggests that coffee culture—and tolerant, cosmopolitan culture in general—will continue to have a vexed future in Istanbul.

BLINDNESS

According to miniaturist folklore, the greatest master miniaturists will go blind in old age as a "reward" from Allah for a lifetime of devotion to their art.

Though blindness might seem like a strange reward, considering that miniaturists' lives revolve around their visual art, the celebration of blindness comes from the notion that blindness brings a person away from human sight and closer to divine sight. This also highlights what makes miniaturist painting distinct from other artistic traditions. As the miniaturists often point out, the goal of miniaturists is not to depict the world as the human eye sees it, but rather to illustrate the imagined vision of Allah. Master Osman—who ultimately chooses to blind himself—notes that the best miniaturists work as if they are blind to the world around them. At the same time, other characters maintain a more ambivalent relationship to blindness. Black is particularly determined not to go blind, for example, because he wants to spend the rest of his life looking at Shekure. The resistance of some characters to blindness indicates an attachment to the pleasures of the mortal world, which contrasts to complete surrender to the world of Allah (the afterlife) to which Muslims are encouraged to aspire. In this sense, blindness is another way in which the tensions between traditional Muslim life and the Europeanization of Istanbul are explored.

THE BOOK

The main source of conflict in the novel is a secret book, intended to show off the splendor of the Ottoman Empire, that the Sultan commissions Enishte to create with the help of the master miniaturists. The project is highly controversial, due to the fact that the Sultan asks it to be completed in the European style, rather than in the traditional Islamic style. This is a direct violation of Islamic artistic practice, and several characters—such as Elegant, Master Osman, and the Erzurumis—thus consider the book to be sinful. However, the religious and moral legitimacy of the book is not clear-cut. While the book does violate Islamic doctrine, it is also intended to be a celebration of Islam, and it is commissioned by the Sultan, who is a religious leader as well as a political one. Although the book may not be a sin against God, it nonetheless has a powerful and sinister impact on Istanbul society. The arguments over the propriety of the book lead many Muslims to sins including murder. This highlights the theme that people's obsession with virtue and sin can end up having a harmful effect, creating needless conflict and even fatal violence. At the same time, it's unclear whether the book was the real cause of the murders, or whether the murderer used it as an excuse to kill Enishte. Often in the novel people denounce sin as a way of furthering their own power and authority, rather than as a sincere gesture of faith. Each of the characters' position on the book, then, can be seen as guided not only by their religious beliefs, but also their own self-interest.

SNOW

During the first half of the book, snow is falling over Istanbul, which creates an atmosphere of mystery and melancholy. Since snow is not common in Istanbul, its presence adds to the impression that the events of the novel are unusual, with a supernatural edge. The snow is particularly meaningful to Black, who is returning to the city for the first time in 12 years. Walking through the streets, Black notes that there have been many changes since he left, leaving him feel like a stranger in his own home. The snow intensifies this feeling, making it seem as if there are secrets lying beneath its surface. Snow is also associated with death; the two dervishes freeze to death in a snowstorm, and when Enishte dies his soul passes through "mountains of snow and ice" as he ascends to the afterlife. At other points in the novel, snow is linked to the theme of innocence. Unlike humans, who are portrayed as never being wholly innocent, snow is pure in an absolute sense, as emphasized when the murderer claims: "You cannot claim with any conviction that you're as innocent as freshly fallen snow." Overall, therefore, snow is closely tied to the murder mystery plot. It creates a dramatic, suspenseful setting within which the murders take place, and amplifies the melancholy permanence of the murder victims' deaths. At the same time, it highlights the theme of innocence in a somewhat ironic way; while Istanbul is covered in a veneer of purity provided by the snow, the murderer argues that Istanbul is a crime-ridden place and that none of its inhabitants are truly innocent.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *My Name is Red* published in 2002.

Chapter 3 Quotes

I'm a dog, and because you humans are less rational beasts than I, you're telling yourselves, "Dogs don't talk." Nevertheless, you seem to believe a story in which corpses speak and characters use words they couldn't possibly know. Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen.

Related Characters: The Dog (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is from the opening of the chapter narrated by the dog, whom the storyteller is impersonating to entertain

the patrons of the coffeehouse. The dog has boasted about his long canines, and he now taunts the audience for believing that "dogs don't talk." On one level, this statement is tongue-in-cheek; after all, it is not truly a dog talking, but a man impersonating a dog. The claim that humans are less rational than dogs is both a joke and a provocation to religious zealots who argue that humans have higher status than other animals because of their rational capacities.

This quotation can also be read as a statement about the novel as a whole, as, throughout the book, Pamuk plays with conventions of realism (such as by having corpses speak from the afterlife). The dog's reference to characters using "words they couldn't possibly know" could point to an evaluation of the characters' intelligence or worldliness, but it could also refer to the way writers of historical fiction must, to some degree, use the language of their own era because, if the characters spoke in a way that was entirely historically accurate, contemporary readers would not be able to understand them.

❝ I heard tell that this Husret Hoja, taking matters even further, declared with spittle flying from his mouth, "Ah, my devoted believers! The drinking of coffee is an absolute sin! Our Glorious Prophet did not partake of coffee because he knew it dulled the intellect, caused ulcers, hernia and sterility; he understood that coffee was nothing but the Devil's ruse. Coffeehouses are places where pleasure-seekers and wealthy gadabouts sit knee-to-knee, involving themselves in all sorts of vulgar behavior; in fact, even before the dervish houses are closed, coffeehouses ought to be banned. Do the poor have enough money to drink coffee? Men frequent these places, become besotted with coffee and lose control of their mental faculties to the point that they actually listen to and believe what dogs and mongrels have to say.

Related Characters: The Dog (speaker), Nesrut, Hoja of Erzurum

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

At the coffeehouse, the dog has been telling stories about the "Husret Hoja," a thinly-veiled version of the Hoja of Erzurum. The stories are intended to make the hoja sound ridiculous, and this passage is no exception. Despite its satirical tone, however, the passage also explains some of the actual reasons for religious opposition to coffee. Under strict interpretations of Islam, Muslims should avoid behaviors that did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad as much as possible. The hoja also opposes coffee because of its association with earthly pleasure and "vulgar behavior." Significantly, the hoja's words illustrate the fact that the conflict between strict and liberal interpretations of Islam during this period was closely related to class tensions. Religious zealots like the hoja fashioned themselves as representatives of poor (and rural) people against the cosmopolitan, liberal elite.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Nevertheless, being a murderer takes some getting used to. I can't stand being at home, so I head out to the street. I can't stand my street, so I walk on to another, and then another. As I stare at people's faces, I realize that many of them believe they're innocent because they haven't yet had the opportunity to snuff out a life. It's hard to believe that most men are more moral or better than me simply on account of some minor twist of fate. At most, they wear somewhat stupider expressions because they haven't yet killed, and like all fools, they appear to have good intentions.
After I took care of that pathetic man, wandering the streets of Istanbul for four days was enough to confirm that everyone with a gleam of cleverness in his eye and the shadow of his soul cast across his face was a hidden assassin. Only imbeciles are innocent.

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker), Elegant

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

The murderer has admitted that, at first, he found it difficult to believe that he had actually killed Elegant and that he still sometimes struggles to acknowledge the fact that he has "committed any crime at all." In this passage, he discusses the sense of alienation he feels among the people of Istanbul who "believe they're innocent." The murderer has a very cynical idea about innocence and morality, arguing that people are only innocent because they haven't had an "opportunity to snuff out a life." This provocative statement raises the question of whether the murderer sincerely believes this, or whether he is simply trying to comfort himself and ease his own loneliness and guilt.

This passage is also significant in light of the murder mystery plot that lies at the heart of the novel. Over the course of the book, the search to discover the murderer's identity provides narrative momentum, as both the characters and the reader search for clues that will help determine who is innocent and who is guilty. Yet the murderer argues that crime is more a matter of circumstance than disposition; if this is true, trying to discover who murdered elegant based on different characters' personalities and possible motivations may prove impossible.

❝ Not one could approach my mastery in imbuing illustrations with the poetry of the soul, not even in gilding. I'm not bragging, but explaining this to you so you might fully understand me. Over time, jealousy becomes an element as indispensable as paint in the life of the master artist.

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

The murderer has explained that he has taken to going to the coffeehouse at night in order to ease his loneliness. Most miniaturists go to the coffeehouse every night, but the murderer dislikes these other men, accusing them of being gossip-prone and jealous of his superior skills as an artist. He boastfully states that he is the best miniaturist, before assuring the reader that he is "not bragging." This passage explores the link between the murderer's identity as a criminal and his identity as a talented artist; both isolate the murderer from other people, albeit for different reasons. The murderer's statement about jealousy is also important. Every character in the novel experiences jealousy, a form of desire that is often shown to be one of the prime motivators for the characters' actions.

❝ Where there is true art and genuine virtuosity the artist can paint an incomparable masterpiece without leaving even a trace of his identity.

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

The murderer has stated that if he names even one detail about Elegant's death, the reader will identify him straight away. He goes on to bring up the question of individual style, and whether miniaturists have such a style. This statement further emphasizes the connection between the murderer's identity as a criminal and his vocation as an artist. In the miniaturist tradition, painters are not supposed to leave any hint of their own unique style on their work; such a signature, even if left deliberately, would be thought of as a flaw. Instead, the best miniaturists are those whose work is least distinguishable from that of the great masters. In this sense, miniaturist painting is comparable to murder, as both require the person committing the act to leave no trace of their own identity.

While the murderer is confident that he paints without a signature style (which also suggests that he has left no identifiable clues at the scene of the crime), it's not clear whether it is truly possible to paint without leaving a trace of one's identity, or to commit a crime without leaving any clues. Humans are neither all-powerful nor perfect, and thus human endeavors arguably all carry traces of human flaws—flaws which can be evidence of a person's unique identity.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Perhaps one day someone from a distant land will listen to this story of mine. Isn't this what lies behind the desire to be inscribed in the pages of a book? Isn't it just for the sake of this delight that sultans and viziers proffer bags of gold to have their histories written? When I feel this delight, just like those beautiful women with one eye on the life within the book and one eye on the life outside, I, too, long to speak with you who are observing me from who knows which distant time and place. I'm an attractive and intelligent woman, and it pleases me that I'm being watched. And if I happen to tell a lie or two from time to time it's so you don't come to any false conclusions about me.

Related Characters: Shekure (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Shekure has recapped the story of her relationship with

Black, who has returned to Istanbul after Enishte exiled him for 12 years as punishment for falling in love with her. Now that Black has returned, Shekure has taken to spying on him when he visits Enishte's house and secretly sending him notes. She then switches to addressing the reader directly, saying: "Don't be surprised that I'm talking to you." In this passage, she describes the delight she experiences from imagining that someone in an unknown time and place will read about her story.

This is a metafictional moment in the narrative, meaning a passage in which a character self-consciously refers to the fact that they are in a story. Shekure playfully indicates that she may be an unreliable narrator with the humorously ironic admission that she might lie in order to make sure the reader doesn't get any wrong ideas about her. This confession speaks to a major theme in the novel—the gulf between who we think we are and how other people perceive us. Shekure likes the idea of being immortalized in a book, but is wary about being misrepresented or misunderstood. This anxiety conveys the fact that being depicted in any art form—whether a painting or a novel—is a mixed blessing, as it leaves the subject unable to control how their story is interpreted.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ When a God-fearing man like myself unexpectedly becomes a murderer, it takes time to adjust. I've adopted a second voice, one befitting a murderer, so that I might still carry on as though my old life continued. I am speaking now in this derisive and devious second voice, which I keep out of my regular life. From time to time, of course, you'll hear my familiar regular voice, which would've remained my only voice had I not become a murderer. But when I speak under my workshop name, I'll never admit to being "a murderer." Let no one try to associate these two voices, I have no individual style or flaws in artistry to betray my hidden persona. Indeed, I believe that style, or for that matter, anything that serves to distinguish one artist from another, is a flaw––not individual character, as some arrogantly claim.

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 97-98

Explanation and Analysis

At Elegant's funeral, the murderer proclaims his sorrow in such a dramatic way that he begins to fear he is overdoing it and goes to hide behind a tree. He has explained the way each of the master miniaturists came to have their own nickname, and how happy it used to make him to be addressed by Master Osman and feel his love and aspiration. In this passage, the murderer elaborates on the connection between murder and artistry, proposing that individual style unites the two. He also emphasizes the idea that he has become alienated from himself (as well as those around him) ever since he committed his crime.

The murderer explains that he has had to develop a whole separate identity and narrative voice in his mind in order to be able to bear the fact that he is both a master miniaturist and a murderer. This is significant, as the murderer literally speaks in two separate voices in the novel, narrating some chapters as "Olive" and some as "the murderer." Even when the murder mystery is solved and Olive is identified as the murderer, these narrative voices never merge into one, and this passage helps to explain why. It is impossible for the murderer to reconcile his own vision of himself with the reality that he has taken another man's life.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ He was frightened because he suddenly understood––and perhaps desired––that Islamic artistry perfected and securely established by the old masters of Herat, would meet its end on account of the appeal of portraiture.
"However, it was as if I too wanted to feel extraordinary different and unique," he said. As if prodded by the Devil, he felt himself strongly drawn to what he feared, "How should I say it? It is as if this were a sin of desire, like growing arrogant before God, like considering oneself of utmost importance, like situating oneself at the center of the world."

Related Characters: Black (speaker), Enishte

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

At Enishte's house, Black has been listening to his uncle tell stories about the time he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Venice. Enishte has described the way in which the Venetian paintings—executed in the realist style, with the subjects placed in the centre of the portrait—both frightened and intrigued him. In this passage, Enishte further examines his mixed feelings about the European style, and Black notes his concern that a desire to paint in this manner will be the death of the Islamic miniaturist tradition. These realizations convey the idea that there is something dangerous about both European painting and

desire in general, particularly when that desire manifests itself as a kind of self-centeredness and competitiveness with God.

At the same time, Enishte also speaks honestly about the fact that this sinful desire—and the fear that accompanies it—is appealing. This is important not only on a thematic level, but also in what it tells us about Enishte's character. Many of the other characters in the novel—particularly the three master miniaturists—keep negative feelings (such as jealousy, fear, arrogance, and hatred) secret, confessing them to the reader but not to others around them. Enishte is more open and honest about the ambiguities that define life as a miniaturist and religious believer—ambiguities that also pervade the cosmopolitan world of Istanbul. In this sense, Enishte can be seen as having more wisdom and moral integrity than the other characters.

Chapter 28 Quotes

"Why did they all believe that painting would bar them from the gates of Heaven?"
"You know quite well why! Because they remembered Our Prophet's warning that on Judgment Day, Allah will punish painters most severely."
"Not painters," corrected Enishte Effendi. "Those who make idols. And this is not from the Koran but from Bukhari."
"On Judgment Day, the idol makers will be asked to bring the images they've created to life," I said cautiously. "Since they'll be unable to do so their lot will be to suffer the torments of Hell. Let it not be forgotten that in the Glorious Koran, 'creator' is one of the attributes of Allah. It is Allah who is creative, who brings that which is not into existence, who gives life to the lifeless. No one ought to compete with Him. The greatest of sins is committed by painters who presume to do what He does, who claim to be as creative as He."

Related Characters: Enishte, The Murderer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

The murderer has gone to Enishte's house, and the two men have been discussing the secret book. Enishte has asked the murderer if he is afraid of the illustrations; although the murderer did not answer directly, he expressed concern about the rumors that are now spreading about the book. In this passage, the two discuss the question of whether or not painting itself is a sin. The murderer takes a surprisingly conservative view, perhaps in order to antagonize Enishte.

At the same time, the murderer does seem to be speaking out of a place of genuine fear.

This passage highlights the ambiguity of religious doctrine and illustrates the way in which this can cause neurosis in believers. Enishte is confident that painting does not constitute idolatry, but there are certainly many within the world of the novel who disagree with him—particularly when it comes to the European style of painting, which the miniaturists have used for the Sultan's secret book. It is easy to sympathize with the murderer's anxiety; at the same time, the murderer's fears are somewhat ironic given that he has already committed a much more serious crime of killing someone.

Chapter 37 Quotes

The world was faithful to the illustrations and legends that I'd avidly scrutinized over the years. I beheld Creation with awe and surprise as if for the first time, but also as if it'd somehow emerged from my memory. What I called "memory" contained an entire world: With time spread out infinitely before me in both directions, I understood how the world as I first experienced it could persist afterward as memory.

Related Characters: Enishte (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

Enishte is narrating from the afterlife, and has described how pleased he was with his funeral. He then goes on to explain what happened immediately after he died, when his soul was liberated from his body and rose to the heavens, during which time he witnessed an explosion of thousands of different colors. In this passage, Enishte's claim that he experiences the world as a "memory" could have two possible meanings. On one hand, this statement could broadly refer to the knowledge of Creation from which Enishte was barred as a soul bound to a mortal body. However, Enishte's words also connect more directly to the idea that miniaturist painters paint from their "memory" of the world as Allah sees it. This interpretation is supported by Enishte's observation that world is "faithful to the illustrations" he spent his life looking at.

"East and West belong to me."

Related Characters: Enishte

Related Themes:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

Enishte feels a profound sense of peace and sees a brilliant, vivid red; he then realizes that he is in the presence of Allah. Enishte knows that Allah has already asked the angels about him and that the angels will have praised him. He explains that during the last two decades of his life he was influenced by "the infidel illustrations that I saw in Venice" and that he organized the creation of a book in this manner. Allah replies: "East and West belong to me." This statement indicates that Enishte's open and tolerant attitude of the European style was correct and not an offense to God.

It also serves as a rejection of the religious orthodoxy and prejudice exhibited by some characters in the book, such as the Erzurumis. Allah's words suggest that it could even be seen as sinful to presume that European culture is blasphemous, because all human culture is part of God's creation. This quotation is also particularly significant in relation to the city of Istanbul, which is known as the meeting point between East and West.

Chapter 46 Quotes

I had the urge to say, "It was Satan who first said 'I'! It was Satan who adopted a style. It was Satan who separated East from West."

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 287

Explanation and Analysis

The murderer, in an increasingly intense state of turmoil, has gone to the coffeehouse, where he has told two stories about blindness and style. As he is about to begin the third, he is distracted by the storyteller, who is beginning to narrate a story from the perspective of Satan. This passage contains the murderer's horror at the storyteller's decision and further conveys the murderer's generally frantic state of mind. The murderer seems to want to blame Satan for all the problems facing the miniaturists, from the issue of individual style to the tension between the Ottomans and Europeans.

This short quotation contains a number of important allusions to other parts of the book. The murderer's claim that it was Satan who separated East from West echoes Allah's statement that "East and West belong to me." This statement seems to imply that, since Allah says that East and West are not truly separate, Satan must have created the illusion of their separation. The murderer's argument that Satan should be blamed for first saying "I" is also significant in light of the fact that each chapter of the novel begins with "I." By associating first-person perspective with the devil, the murderer suggests that the whole way in which the book is narrated could be considered sinful.

Chapter 47 Quotes

I believe in myself, and, most of the time, pay no mind to what's been said about me. Tonight, however, I've come to this coffeehouse to set my miniaturist and calligrapher brethren straight about certain gossip, lies and rumors.
Of course, because I'm the one speaking, you're already prepared to believe the exact opposite of what I say. But you're smart enough to sense that the opposite of what I say is not always true, and though you might doubt me, you're astute enough to take an interest in my words: You're well aware that my name, which appears in the Glorious Koran fifty-two times, is one of the most frequently cited.
All right then, let me begin with God's book, the Glorious Koran. Everything about me in there is the truth. Let it be known that when I say this, I do so with the utmost humility. For there's also the issue of style. It has always caused me great pain that I'm belittled in the Glorious Koran. But this pain is my way of life. This is simply the way it is.

Related Characters: Satan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 287-288

Explanation and Analysis

The storyteller's impersonation of Satan begins with Satan claiming he usually does not care what is said about him, but that he now wishes to clear up certain rumors and lies that have been circulating about him. Once again, this relates to the book's recurring observation that a person's perception of their own identity can differ from the way they're perceived by others. Satan is accustomed to people distrusting him and he doesn't seem to feel particularly hopeful that he will earn the audience's sympathy, yet he feels compelled to try anyway—a testament to the desire to take control of one's own identity through narrative, which is one of the major themes of the book.

Satan's framing of his objections to the way he is depicted in the Koran is also significant. He acknowledges that everything said in the Koran is true, but suggests that the style in which it is presented is unfair. Of course, it could be the case that stating that everything in the Koran is true is more a matter of obligation than Satan's real belief, as belief that the Koran is God's word is one of the most fundamental doctrines in Islam. On the other hand, Satan's suggestion that the style of the Koran is misleading or unfair is in itself highly controversial. His discussion of style links this passage to the perspective of the murderer, who insists that style itself is evidence of human flaws. In this sense, Satan's very claim that the Koran has a style can be interpreted as blasphemous.

Chapter 49 Quotes

❝ This chamber was red, tinged with the color of the velvet cloth, carpets and kilims hanging on the walls. With due reverence, I considered how the accumulation of all this wealth was the consequence of wars waged, blood spilt and cities and treasuries plundered.
"Frightened?" asked the elderly dwarf, giving voice to my feelings. "Everybody is frightened on their first visit. At night the spirits of these objects whisper to each other."

Related Characters: Jemzi Agha, Black (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 299

Explanation and Analysis

The Sultan has permitted Black and Master Osman to search through the Royal Treasury in service of their quest to discover the murderer's identity. The treasury is overseen by an elderly dwarf named Jemzi Agha, who shows Black through the collection. There are two important things to note about this quotation, the first of which is the prominence of the color red. In previous parts of the novel, red has been associated with the power of art, creation, and God. This quotation adds another layer of meaning to red by emphasizing the connection of red to violence. This in turn highlights the fact that Ottoman cultural traditions are inextricably tied to violence and imperialism.

The other significant element of this passage is Jemzi Agha's comment: "At night the spirits of these objects whisper to each other." Throughout the novel, inanimate things are imagined to have a narrative voice, particularly in the storyteller's narration from the perspective of the tree, the color red, and the coin. This challenges the assumption that only humans are sentient by suggesting that the inanimate (and animal) worlds also have their own forms of consciousness.

❝ There was a time when Allah looked upon the world in all its uniqueness, and believing in the beauty of what he saw, bequeathed his creation to us, his servants. The duty of illustrators and of those who, loving art, gaze upon the world, is to remember the magnificence that Allah beheld and left to us. The greatest masters in each generation of painters, expending their lives and toiling until blind, strove with great effort and inspiration to attain and record the wondrous dream that Allah commanded us to see. Their work resembled Mankind recalling his own golden memories from the very beginning. Unfortunately, even the greatest masters, just like tired old men or great miniaturists gone blind from their labors, were only vaguely able to recollect random parts of that magnificent vision.

Related Characters: Black (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 303

Explanation and Analysis

Black and Master Osman have been looking through the books housed in the treasury, poring over the illustrations in silence. Unprompted, Master Osman states: "To paint is to remember," and in this passage Black elaborates on what this means. Note that Black explains that miniaturists do not paint from their own individual memories, but rather from an attempt to access the divine memory of Allah. In this sense, miniature painting is a form of imitating Allah, a way of attempting to look at creation with the same loving gaze as the Creator. Because miniaturists are only human, they can only partially achieve this.

Black's claim that the imperfections of humanity stop them from accessing Allah's vision is paradoxical, however. He argues that human mortality and frailty means that they will become tired, old, and blind before they are able to truly recreate the world as Allah sees it. Yet in miniaturist folklore, blindness is in fact a way of better accessing Allah's vision, and thus not a hindrance to miniaturists but an added skill.

Chapter 51 Quotes

Hundreds of years hence, men looking at our world through the illustrations

we've made won't understand anything. Desiring to take a closer look, yet lacking the patience, they might feel the embarrassment, the joy, the deep pain and pleasure of observation I now feel as I examine pictures in this freezing treasury––but they'll never truly know.

Related Characters: Master Osman (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 315

Explanation and Analysis

Master Osman has been looking through the books housed in the Royal Treasury with great excitement, and he questions the extent to which Black and Jemzi Agha share his enthusiasm. Master Osman then begins to meditate on what he sees as the inevitable death of the miniaturist tradition. In this passage, he laments that future generations will never be able to understand miniaturist painting as he does in that moment. This is one of the most tragic moments in the novel, and it elicits sympathy for Master Osman, who is otherwise a rather cruel and unlikeable character.

On one level, Osman's prediction about the miniaturist tradition is correct; as the final chapter of the book establishes, the Sultan Murad (who succeeds the current Sultan after his death) ceases to provide support for the arts and, in the long run, miniature painting will die out. On the other hand, the very existence of the novel proves that miniature painting will not be forgotten completely. While future generations may not be able to understand miniature illustrations in the way that Master Osman does, is this not true of all art forms? Change is an inevitable part of artistic tradition, and thus Master Osman is arguably mistaken to hold onto the past too tightly.

Chapter 54 Quotes

My fickle heart longs for the West when I'm in the East and for the East when I'm in the West.
My other parts insist I be a woman when I'm a man and a man when I'm a woman.
How difficult it is being human, even worse is living a human's life.
I only want to amuse myself frontside and backside, to be Eastern and Western both.

Related Characters: The Storyteller (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 354

Explanation and Analysis

During his final performance at the coffeehouse, the storyteller has told the audience that, as a child, he became fascinated by women and even felt a desire to be a woman himself. After experimenting with cross-dressing, the storyteller recalls breaking out into a sung poem that he made up on the spot. The poem, which he sings again for the audience, is both comic and serious. The lyrics are somewhat childish and simplistic, with vulgar humor ("I only want to amuse myself frontside and backside"). On the other hand, the song also conveys feelings of conflicted identity, which is one of the most significant themes in the book. The storyteller's emphasis on East and West also suggests that feelings of conflicted identity are particularly likely to be experienced by inhabitants of Istanbul, known as the nexus between East and West.

Chapter 57 Quotes

From now on, the European style would be preeminent in Our Sultan's workshop; the styles and books to which we'd devoted our entire lives would slowly be forgotten––yes, in fact, the whole venture would come to an end, and if the Erzurumis didn't throttle us and finish us off, the Sultan's torturers would leave us maimed . . . But as I cried, sobbed and sighed––even though I continued to listen to the sad patter of the rain––a part of my mind sensed that these were not the things I was actually crying about. To what extent were the others aware of this? I felt vaguely guilty for my tears, which were at once genuine and false.

Related Characters: Olive (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 381

Explanation and Analysis

Black, Butterfly, and Stork, who now suspect that Olive is the murderer, have been searching Olive's house for the final illustration from the secret book, which will prove his guilt. The miniaturists have also been in the midst of a heated discussion about art, morality, vision, and blindness, and Olive finds himself overcome with emotion and starts to cry. In this passage, he explains the reasons behind his tears.

Like Master Osman, Olive laments the disappearance of the miniaturist tradition, although Olive imagines it coming to a much more violent close.

However, Olive also admits that this is not necessarily the real reason why he is crying, and he even claims that his tears are "at once genuine and false." This again conveys the idea of a split identity; right until the end of the novel Olive narrates as himself and the murderer separately, suggesting that he is never able to resolve these identities into one, and never able to fully understand himself.

Chapter 58 Quotes

❝ Had Enishte Effendi's book been completed and sent to them, the Venetian masters would've smirked, and their ridicule would've reached the Venetian Doge––that is all. They'd have quipped that the Ottomans have given up being Ottoman and would no longer fear us.

Related Characters: The Murderer (speaker), Enishte

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 399-400

Explanation and Analysis

Black, Butterfly, and Stork have discovered that Olive is indeed the murderer, and that in the final illustration of the secret book, Olive has depicted himself where the portrait of the Sultan should be. Olive warns the other miniaturists that continuing to paint in the European style will lead to nothing but trouble. He explains that this is not necessarily because the European style is sinful, but rather because Ottoman miniaturists will never be able to compete with the Europeans in their own tradition.

This is arguably the single moment at which the murderer displays the most wisdom. He points out that a culture should never completely abandon its own traditions in favor of emulating the traditions of others. At the same time, the murderer likely overstates his case. As the novel shows, Ottoman culture is itself a product of imitation, blending a large variety of pre-existing cultural traditions. As Enishte points out much earlier in the narrative, "nothing is pure."

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: I AM A CORPSE

Elegant Effendi is now a corpse lying in the bottom of the well, but no one knows this except the murderer who killed him. He has been missing for 4 days, and his wife and children are distraught. Before his death, Elegant was the best illuminator in the Sultan's workshop and earned 900 silver coins per month. He worked on manuscripts because the Sultan paid highly for it. Elegant acknowledges that the reader must be interested in the afterlife, and he explains that his narration is proof that another world exists. He has yet to see Heaven, but this is to be expected. The fact that his body remains unburied causes his soul great distress, and he recalls with horror the moment when the murderer sneaked up and smashed his skull with a rock. He clung to life, but as soon as he began to die he was overcome with a feeling of relief.

The opening of the novel provides a twist on the conventions of the thriller genre. To some extent, the setup is familiar: a crime has just taken place, and we learn some details about the identity of the victim but not the murderer. However in this case, the victim is narrating from beyond the grave, a fact that introduces the surreal and supernatural elements of the novel. Elegant's perspective from the afterlife also introduces the themes of religion and moral ambiguity. Elegant is in the afterlife, but it remains unclear whether he will get to heaven.

Elegant is not upset about his death, but he is concerned that people still think he is alive. He longs for people to catch the murderer and torture him slowly; until then, Elegant will not be able to rest. He warns that his murder is part of a broader "conspiracy" against Islam and its traditions, which was foretold by the Hoja of Erzurum. Elegant admits that when he was a young apprentice, he was dismissive of "truths and voices from beyond," and now he has ended up dead. He hopes his body rots quickly, so people will be able to find him by the smell.

Clearly, Elegant believes that his perspective as someone speaking from the afterlife will confer authority to his words. In contrast to his younger self, Elegant now takes seriously the concerns of religion and tradition. However, the exact issue Elegant is discussing remains unclear. Overall, the main purpose of this opening passage is to build up a sinister atmosphere of mystery and suspense.

CHAPTER 2: I AM CALLED BLACK

After 12 years away, Black is "called back" to Istanbul by death. Before he left, he'd fallen in love with his cousin, Shekure. While he was away, he performed administrative tasks in Persia, and over the years he was horrified to find that he forgot what Shekure's face looked like. Black returns to Istanbul to find that many of his friends have died. He visits his mother's grave while it is **snowing** and cries, though he stops when he sees a black dog standing near him. Black walks through the streets of Istanbul, noticing that there are more wealthy people, as well as a handful of beggars, including a **blind** man who smiles at the falling snow. Black learns that Shekure's mother has died, and that she and his uncle (Enishte) have moved away.

Black's return to Istanbul has a myth-like quality, recalling Odysseus' ten-year absence from home, which is chronicled in the Odyssey. (Note that "My Name is Red" is considered to be in conversation with James Joyce's "Ulysses," which is itself inspired by the Odyssey.) Black's return to Istanbul is filled with meaningful symbols—in particular the dog, the snow, and the blind man. These help to create the impression that Black has been summoned back to Istanbul by mysterious, supernatural forces for a special purpose.

Before Black's return, he received a letter from Enishte inviting him back to Istanbul in order to assist him with a "secret **book**" commissioned by the Sultan. Black walks through the city, marveling at how it has changed. He notes that inflation has become so bad that "money no longer had any value." There are rumors that the Flemish and Venetians are producing counterfeit coins and bringing them over on ships. In amongst this chaos, a hoja called Nesrut from Erzurum has achieved a significant following by blaming the problems of the Ottoman Empire on deviance from the teachings of the Koran, tolerance of Christians, and sins such as wine and music. A pickle seller tells Black that counterfeit money and foreign people are together dragging Istanbul to "absolute degradation." The pickle seller paints an evocative picture of opium-addicted followers of an illegal dervish sect who dance and have gay sex.

This passage introduces the idea that Istanbul is a city of clashing cultures. The Hoja of Erzurum and his followers denounce this diversity, arguing that it is leading the city to ruin and that living a virtuous life involves denouncing all non-Muslim people and practices. On one level, it is true that the influence of foreigners has had some negative consequences on Istanbul, such as the inflation caused by counterfeit money. However, the Hoja of Erzurum and his followers seem to go too far in blaming all of Istanbul's problems on foreign influence, using this influence as a scapegoat.

Black watches the **snow** falling and sees a ship coming in. He listens to the sounds of the city and feels that Shekure's face might "suddenly appear." After evening prayers, Black goes into a **coffeehouse**, where a storyteller is entertaining the crowd. He shows the audience a drawing of a dog, speaking in the dog's voice.

Black's visit to the coffeehouse shows that he does not follow as strict an interpretation of Islam as the Hoja of Erzurum. The presence of the storyteller creates layers of metafiction. Within the story Black is narrating, the storyteller is narrating his own story through the voice of the dog.

CHAPTER 3: I AM A DOG

The dog boasts about the length of his canines, which give him a fearsome look. He explains that for a dog, "nothing is as satisfying as sinking his teeth into a miserable enemy." He accuses humans of being less rational than dogs and wrongfully assuming that dogs don't talk. He then begins a story about a "brash" and "boneheaded" cleric called Husret Hoja. The cleric had a powerful speaking style, and was able to both intimidate his audience and move them to tears. Husret Hoja began declaring that all problems, from inflation to military failure, were caused by "forgetting Islam." He considered any innovation to religious tradition to be sacrilege, and any mode of behavior that did not exist in the Prophet's time to be unacceptable. He denounced dervishes who sing the Koran to music as "kaffirs" (unbelievers). Husret Hoja also condemned **coffee**, claiming that coffee causes mental incapacitation such that coffee-drinkers would believe what "dogs and mongrels" say.

It is clear that "Husret Hoja" is supposed to represent the Hoja of Erzurum, whom Black introduced in the previous chapter. While Black describes Erzurum in rather neutral terms, the dog openly mocks and scorns the Hoja and his followers. Furthermore, the context in which this story is presented automatically invites criticism of the Hoja's claims. Not only is the story being narrated in a coffeehouse—which the Hoja wishes to make illegal—but it is being told through the voice of a dog, an animal the Hoja disdains. Even the fact that the storyteller is using a picture to represent the dog violates conservative interpretations of Islam, which forbid all representational art.

The dog notes that most clerics despise dogs, which may be blamed on a story that suggests that the Prophet favored cats. However, the dog then mentions a chapter of the Koran called "The Cave," in which Allah puts 7 young people to sleep in a cave for 309 years. When they awaken, the youths are stunned by how much the world has changed. The dog notes that the 18th verse mentions a dog sleeping at the mouth of the cave, and that as a dog he is proud of this chapter. He questions why people have come to think of dogs as impure and "a bad omen." However, he is even more disturbed by the Hoja's condemnation of **coffeehouses**. He admits that there may be some in the audience who distrust the views of a dog whose master is a "picture-hanging storyteller." Yet he points out that people love coffee and would "die" for coffeehouses.

The dog presents a convincing critique of the Hoja's orthodoxy, pointing out that there is little evidence that dogs and coffee are actually sinful in the eyes of God. However, the dog doesn't provide a particularly convincing case that dogs and coffeehouses are virtuous, either. That a dog appears in the Koran or that people love coffeehouses do not necessarily indicate that either of these things have religious value. In this sense, the dog is arguing for a lifestyle that does not revolve around religious teachings—one that embraces earthly pleasures.

The dog tells the audience that the Venetian Doge (senior official) sent the Sultan's daughter a female dog as a gift. The dog "is so spoiled she has a red silk dress." It is common in Europe for dogs to wear clothes, to the point that people are horrified to see a "naked dog." The dog condemns the fact that in Europe, all dogs have owners and are domesticated. The dog concludes by telling a story about his previous master, a "very just man" who was a thief and would cut people's throats at night. The thief would then boil the flesh of these victims and serve it to the dog. The dog notes that he doesn't like raw meat, and that he hopes whoever kills the Hoja of Erzurum cooks him first "so I won't upset my stomach with that scoundrel's raw flesh."

As this passage shows, people in Istanbul often evaluate their own morality against the foil (contrast) of European culture. While Istanbul may have its problems, these appear minor in comparison to the scandal of the European treatment of animals. Throughout the book, the characters mention their horror at the fact that European women do not dress in a sufficiently modest way; this passage adds another level of perceived perversity to European notions of modesty with the comment about the "naked dog."

CHAPTER 4: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

The murderer admits he never would have believed he could kill someone, and he still hardly believes that he has done it now. Elegant was "like a brother" to him, but the murderer felt he had no choice but to kill Elegant because Elegant was endangering "the entire society of miniaturists." The murderer walks through the streets of Istanbul, disdainful of the belief of most people in their own innocence. He goes to the **coffeehouse**, looks at the picture of the dog hanging on the wall, and laughs at the storyteller's impersonation of the dog along with the rest of the audience. He suspects that the man sitting next to him is also a murderer, and that the Erzurumis will raid his house. It is cold, and at night the **snow**-covered streets are completely dark. He thinks he sees a ghost, and he listens to the sounds of people whom he imagines to be fighting and screaming inside their houses. He goes to the coffeehouse several nights in a row and notes that most miniaturists go there every night. He sketches a picture of the storyteller and notes that the other members of the audience are jealous of the murderer's skill as a painter, which he claims surpasses all others.

The murderer struggles with many moral dilemmas. There's the moral conundrum of the murder he has committed, but other aspects of his life as a miniaturist in Istanbul are morally fraught, too. Even before he killed Elegant, the murderer took part in activities deemed sinful by the Erzurumis and other strict Muslims, from attending the coffeehouse to drawing pictures to boastfulness over his ability as an artist. The dark and snow-covered streets of Istanbul come to represent the murderer's internal sense of horror and moral nihilism. Whereas Black perceived the streets of Istanbul as prosperous and bustling, the murderer feels that they are desolate and haunted, filled with the sights and sounds of misery.

While the murderer is on a walk, he passes "one of our most pure and innocent religious countrymen," and he is paranoid that if he is thinking about the murder, the man will be able to "read" it on his face. He admits that he is purposefully withholding details about the murder in order to keep his identity a secret. He then brings up the question of whether miniaturists each have a distinctive style. He considers the example of a 90-year-old book by Bihzad, who was a miniaturist in the famed Herat school. The book tells the story of Hüsrev and Shirin, which ends with Hüsrev being stabbed to death in the night while he sleeps next to Shirin. The murderer admits that one of his great fears is being killed in this way, and he describes how the beauty of the illustration of Hüsrev's death makes it even more horrifying. Bihzad was so talented, and his style so well-known, that he did not even need to sign the picture. The murderer, meanwhile, returns to the spot of the murder every night to ensure no trace of his "style" remains by which he could be identified. He concludes that the **snow** covering the spot means Allah is on his side.

In this passage, there is a strong parallel drawn between the act of murder and the act of artistic creation. Both are condemned by conservative Muslims, such as the man the murderer encounters during his walk. His paranoia about being discovered seems to suggest that—although he denies it—the murderer is coming to feel that "murderer" is as much a part of his public identity as "miniaturist." The parallel is further emphasized in the discussion of Bihzad's book, which is an artistic representation of a murder. The fact that Bihzad did not need to sign his work is a testament to his skill and the honor of artistic anonymity, which is seen as virtuous. The murderer's anonymity, on the other hand, makes his sin even worse because it is deception.

It was **snowing** on the night of the murder. The murderer told Elegant that he had been hiding money, and that if Elegant kept everything a secret, he would be rewarded. Elegant asked if the murderer knew the picture he was creating was "a desecration" and "a sacrilege," and Elegant told the murderer that he would go to hell. The murderer began to feel nervous. He knew that rumors were circulating about Enishte and the **book**, and that Master Osman, the Head Illuminator, hated Enishte. The murderer realized with horror that Elegant was "prepared to confess everything to everyone."

The murderer has just insisted on the importance of not revealing the details of the murder, yet now he reveals these details anyway. He introduces the reasons for murdering Elegant but only half-explains those reasons, which increases the mystery and suspense surrounding the events that night.

The murderer told Elegant that Enishte asked him to draw a horse from his own imagination, and that it took hours to figure out what this would look like. He showed Elegant the sketch of the horses he completed in this manner. The murderer adds that the old masters used to say that it would take an illuminator fifty years to draw a horse as Allah would see it, and that the illuminator would go **blind** in the process.

This short passage articulates three different methods of painting: using one's eyes (painting from life), using one's imagination, and copying the horses that were made by the old masters. However, it is not necessarily clear which style is the closest approximation to the vision of Allah.

The murderer tells Elegant that miniaturists simply follow the instructions of their patrons, but Elegant insists that miniaturists bear responsibility for the morality of their art because Allah has given them free will. The murderer asks Elegant if he realizes that the Sultan is "behind" Enishte's work, and Elegant says nothing. The murderer asks Elegant to count twelve paces and dig, and he promises that he will tell Enishte to destroy the pictures and will reward Elegant with money. Elegant, who the murderer notes is greedy, immediately begins counting the steps. In a panic, the murderer picks up a rock and strikes Elegant over the head. After, he thinks that the murder did not "in the least befit the grace of a miniaturist."

Elegant at first appears to be a have stricter moral and religious convictions than the murderer. However, the murderer's comment about Elegant's greed suggests that, in reality, Elegant is no more righteous than the rest of the miniaturists. Rather, Elegant simply has a different vice. The murderer's final statement about the murder not fitting "the grace of a miniaturist" is both sinister and comic, and it underlines the parallel between artistic creation and murder.

CHAPTER 5: I AM YOUR BELOVED UNCLE

Enishte explains that he is Black's uncle, but that other people also call him "uncle" (which is what "Enishte" means). When Black was young, he and his mother would come to stay for spells at Enishte's house, seeking refuge from Black's bad-tempered, alcoholic father. Recently, Black gave Enishte a Mongolian inkpot and insisted it should only be used for the color red. Enishte feels that Black has grown up to be a polite and respectful man. When Black was younger, he and Enishte bonded over a shared love of books, and Enishte taught Black about the different miniaturist traditions. Enishte is glad that Black now realizes it is important not to approach art as a "career" and not use art in order to gain money and power. Black recalls that during his travels in Persia, he met many of the most well-known illuminators and saw that they were all living in poverty. Many were driven to stop making manuscripts and instead create single-leaf illustrations they could sell to European tourists.

Despite not adhering to the same religious rules as the Erzurumis and other conservative Muslims, Enishte nonetheless takes his own kind of puritanical attitude to the practice of art. He insists that Black and other artists not seek power and money through their artistic practice, but the reality of what this conviction means is illustrated by Black's descriptions of the impoverished masters in Persia. The fact that these masters turn to producing single-leaf illustrations for Europeans highlights a second problem: the fact that in Europe, art and money are intimately intertwined, a fact that Ottoman artists cannot ignore.

Like all young men who visit Enishte's house, Black fell in love with Shekure, Enishte's daughter. Because Black refused to "bury" his love for Shekure, he was no longer allowed to visit, and three years after Black left Istanbul Shekure married a soldier and had two sons with him. However, soon after this, the soldier disappeared in battle, and no one has heard from him in four years. Shekure and her sons have thus returned to live with Enishte, who has built a new two-story house. Enishte and Black sit in Enishte's workshop together, and Enishte tells Black that the Sultan has commissioned him to make a secret **book**. Enishte has arranged for the most talented painters to each take on one part of the illustration: a dog, a tree, the border design, and horses. These illustrations are intended to display both the external and internal riches of the Sultan's realm. Enishte also decided to include Death and Satan, "because we fear them," and has asked his team of illustrators, Stork, Olive, Elegant, and Butterfly, to choose their own subjects as well.

This first introduction of the book does not clarify what about it is so controversial and threatening. In particular, the fact that the book was commissioned by the Sultan makes it difficult to understand why it is dangerous. At the same time, there are other details about the book that hint at its mysterious power. First, the fact that it is a secret is intriguing and somewhat paradoxical. If the book is designed to show off the splendor of the Sultan's realm, why would he not want people to know about it? Furthermore, the names and tasks of the illuminators commissioned to work on the book have a magical quality. Why do the illuminators have these mythical nicknames, and why must they conceal their true identities?

Enishte admits that he cannot presently tell Black about the meaning of the **book's** pictures, because he doesn't know himself. He tells Black that he used to think that painting could only illustrate text, and that it could not stand on its own. However, two years ago Enishte visited Venice "as the Sultan's ambassador," and was stunned to find paintings displayed out of context of any story. One painting in particular shocked him; it was a portrait of a Venetian nobleman and his "stunningly beautiful" daughter. The picture was created in a realist style, and Enishte realized that the only story it was intended to convey was the story of the portrait itself. Enishte could not stop thinking about the picture, and he desired to be portrayed in that way himself, even though he knew such a thing was sinful. He concluded that the Sultan should be depicted instead, along with all the things of his realm. Enishte notes that the Venetians have learned how to depict the individual features of people such that a person would be recognizable in a crowd from their portrait. In this way, being painted in a portrait bestows a kind of immortality on the subject. Black and Enishte sit in silence for a while, before Enishte adds that one of the miniaturists, Elegant, is missing; Enishte fears "they might have done him in."

This passage heightens the suspense surrounding Enishte's work, and helps explain why it is being treated as a dangerous threat. The Venetian artwork that so captivated Enishte violates Islamic teachings against idolatry by portraying an ordinary human being as the central subject of a portrait. The realist style is also a transgression, due to the fact that it depicts the subject according to the perception of the human eye rather than the (perceived) vision of Allah. Finally, the portrait also defies Islamic custom by highlighting the individual features of its sitter. To Muslims, over-emphasizing a person's individuality—particularly in the context of representational art—risks elevating a human being to a status that arguably challenges or insults the glory of Allah. The magical effect the portrait has on Enishte confirms the notion that European art has a dark and dangerous power.

CHAPTER 6: I AM ORHAN

This chapter begins at the exact moment where the previous one finished, although with a shift to the perspective of Enishte's six-year-old grandson Orhan. Enishte asks Orhan to kiss the hand of his uncle, Black, who greets him warmly. Enishte explains to Black that Orhan also has an older brother, Shevket, who is seven. Orhan tells Enishte that Shevket is with the master binder; both Orhan and Shevket serve as binding apprentices after Koran school. Enishte asks Orhan to leave them, but Orhan keeps listening to the two men's conversation. Enishte wonders whether new forms of illustration mean new ways of seeing, and reflects about Elegant, who is still only missing but whom Enishte suspects has been murdered. Enishte explains that the miniaturists have been commissioned to create a Book of Festivities for the Sultan under the guidance of Master Osman. The miniaturists still call each other by the nicknames Osman gave them as apprentices: Butterfly, Olive, and Stork.

At first this appears to be a happy familial scene, although it is soon revealed that more sinister things lurk beneath the surface. Orhan seems to have a close relationship with his grandfather (note that they live in the same house), and Enishte is one of several adult figures who plays an active role in shaping Orhan's development. The master binder, for example, teaches Orhan and Shevket a trade, which provides a useful supplement to their religious education. However, there is something disturbing about the causal way in which Enishte brings up Elegant and his possible murder. Enishte is similarly causal when discussing the Book of Festivities, as if he hadn't just been describing the secret book minutes before.

Orhan goes into the room of Hayriye, the enslaved woman owned by Enishte, and finds Shekure sitting there. She questions Orhan insistently, asking what Black and Enishte were doing, and Orhan imitates the two men in a mocking fashion. Shekure orders Orhan to go down to the kitchen and fetch Hayriye; Shevket is there, and he calls Orhan a "traitor" for leaving him alone with the master binder. Shevket grabs Orhan by the arm and makes him swear on the Koran never to leave without finishing his "duties" again. Hayriye covers herself to go outside, and when the boys ask her where she is going she says she is buying lemons, even though, according to Shevket, "the cupboard is full of lemons." Shekure sneaks downstairs and separates her sons, gently slapping Shevket, who declares that when his father comes back, they will all go to live with "Uncle Hasan" again. This infuriates Shekure, who forces both her sons into a dark cupboard, before instructing them to wait in the kitchen until Black leaves. She orders them to remain seated and not to fight. Orhan tells her that Enishte's gilder (Elegant) has been killed.

Because Orhan is only a six-year-old child, he doesn't fully understand the events going on around him. As a result, the information provided in this chapter is often presented without explanation, provoking many unanswered questions. Why did Orhan leave the master binder's workshop early? Where does Hayriye go, and why does she lie about needing to buy lemons? Who is Uncle Hasan, and why does Shekure become so angry when Shevket mentions his name? The use of a child's perspective is a common narrative tool for increasing suspense, and thus can be used to particularly powerful effect in murder mystery stories.

CHAPTER 7: I AM CALLED BLACK

When Black sees Orhan's face, he realizes that he has been remembering Shekure's face wrongly. He thinks that if he had taken a portrait of Shekure painted in the Venetian realist style on his travels, he would have felt as if he had never left home. Seeing Orhan made Black desperate to sneak through the house to see Shekure, but he reminds himself that the last time he impulsively revealed his love for Shekure, he was forced to leave Istanbul for 12 years. Meanwhile, Enishte explains that the Sultan wants to have the secret book finished in time for the one-thousandth anniversary of the Hegira (the Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina). This will be a lot of work for the miniaturists, who will also be working on the *Book of Festivities*. Enishte tells Black that he should go to see Master Osman, who Enishte believes is now blind and senile. Enishte has been given responsibility over the secret manuscript even though he is not a master illustrator, which has caused Master Osman to resent him.

This passage highlights issues among the miniaturists that have nothing to do with weighty questions of religious virtue and sin, but rather much more ordinary matters, such as romance, favoritism, and jealousy. After 12 years, Black is more in love with Shekure then ever, but respect for his uncle forces him to completely ignore the fact that she is in the house with him. Black feels closer to Shekure through seeing Orhan, even though it must also be painful to see the face of a child Shekure had with another man. Meanwhile, the politics of the royal manuscript illumination workshop demonstrate part of the reason why the book has become so controversial, even aside from the serious religious dilemmas it provokes.

Black looks at the objects in Enishte's house and recalls the happy time in his youth he spent painting in the house and being with Shekure. He describes painting and happiness as "the genesis of my world." Even though Black's love for Shekure forced him to leave the "paradise" of Enishte's house, he is grateful for this, as it allowed him to see both the positive and negative sides of the world. Enishte brings up the topic of death, and says he is not afraid of death itself but is afraid of dying before finishing the **book**. Black promises to tell Enishte about everything he learns during his visits with the miniaturists, kisses his uncle's hand, and leaves.

During this moment of reflection, Black thinks of his life in religious terms. He describes painting and happiness as "the genesis of my world," an allusion to the Genesis narrative which describes how God created the world. Similarly, Black's exile from the "paradise" of Enishte's house resembles the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, a story depicted in both the Bible and the Koran.

Black rides away on his horse and sees a large, "boisterous" Jewish woman dressed in pink. The woman remarks that Black is as handsome as people say. She introduces herself as Esther, and asks if Black would like to buy some silk from her. When Black says no, Esther remarks that he surely must have a secret lover whom he'd like to give a gift. Suddenly, Esther hands Black a letter, which he takes quickly. Esther directs Black to a pomegranate tree, and when he arrives a window opens to reveal the face of Shekure. Black cannot tell if she is smiling or sad, and the moment reminds him of a scene from the tale of Shirin and Hüsrev. He notes the similarity between this great love story and the story of himself and Shekure.

Black's rumination on the tale of Shirin and Hüsrev emphasizes the idea that the characters in the novel understand their own lives through a mosaic of other stories—whether religious stories (as in the passage above) or stories from the Islamic literary tradition, such as the romance of Shirin and Hüsrev. Of course, this scene itself resembles a fairy tale. Black, the handsome man riding through the city on a horse, is the classic image of a hero, while Shekure gazing out of her window is like a maiden imprisoned in a tower, waiting for a magic spell to unite her with her love.

CHAPTER 8: I AM ESTHER

Esther says she knows the reader will be curious what Shekure wrote in the letter. It is now evening, and Esther is at home in the Jewish Quarter with her husband, Nesim. She recalls that earlier that day, she was given a letter by Hayriye, and was shocked because she assumed it was for Hasan. She notes that Hasan is Shekure's husband's brother, who is also in love with Shekure. Esther was surprised to learn it was not for Hasan, but for Black. Esther is ashamed to admit that she read the letter; in it, Shekure tells Black that since he left, she got married and had two sons. She confesses that after Black's outburst which caused him to leave Istanbul, it took her a long time to regain honor in Enishte's eyes. As a result, she hopes Black doesn't come to the house gain, and she returns a picture Black painted and gave to her along with the letter. Esther notes that some people will be confused how she, an "illiterate Jew," can read. She explains that "a letter doesn't communicate by words alone."

Esther is a comic character, but she serves an important role in the novel. As a Jewish woman, she is an outsider to the group of Istanbulites that the novel depicts, and this perspective allows her to explain the narrative in a more holistic (if not objective) way than some of the other narrators. Furthermore, Esther is not only an outsider, but also a gossip, who loves to know as much as possible about other people's lives. Indeed, Esther's curiosity is so strong that it enables her to read Shekure's letter despite claiming to be illiterate. This detail suggests that reading is as much about being open to information as it is about literally reading.

Esther lists the ways in which the letter reveals information that have nothing to do with the words Shekure wrote. The way the letter is sent to Black via Esther, the way it is folded, the smell of the letter, and the enclosed painting (which depicts Shirin and Hüsrev) all contradict Shekure's claim that she wants Black to stop coming to Enishte's house. Esther explains that often, illiterate women who receive love letters will ask someone to read the letter for them, asking the reader to repeat the letter so many times that by the end they both have memorized it. Some of the letter-readers are cruel, and will treat the letter like it belongs to them and not give it back to the addressee. In these circumstances, Esther sometimes intervenes to get the letter back.

Although the connection is not made explicitly, Esther's reflection about reading is also relevant to the novel's exploration of ideas about creation and representation. The question of how a reader gains meaning from a letter is similar, after all, to the question of how a viewer gains meaning from a painting. In both cases, meaning is not entirely dictated by the creator of the letter or painting, but rather produced through the interpretation of the reader or viewer.

CHAPTER 9: I, SHEKURE

Shekure explains that she opened the window instinctively when Black rode past, and that his face "dazzled" her "like the sun." Not only has Black become more handsome over time, but his good nature shines through in his eyes. Shekure tells herself to marry him, even though she'd given the opposite message in her letter. When Black was last in Istanbul, Shekure was 12 and Black was 24. However, he behaved like a child, hiding his face in a book whenever Shekure was around. Shekure admits that at the time, every man who saw her fell in love with her. There is a moment in the story of Shirin and Hüsrev that she and Black discuss regularly in which Shirin sees a picture of Hüsrev and is overcome by her love for him. This moment has been depicted by many miniaturists, including Black, who replaced Shirin and Hüsrev with Shekure and himself and even wrote their names beneath the figures.

Shekure and Black's love story has a mythic quality, and not only because of the comparison to the story of Shirin and Hüsrev. Shekure's beauty is described as having an almost magical power, causing every man who sees her to fall in love with her and creating a high level of drama in its wake. On the other hand, Black's behavior before he left Istanbul is hardly the stuff of epic romances. Rather than behaving like a courageous and charming hero, Black resembles an awkward teenager. Indeed, the fact that he hides his face from Shirin is comically un-masculine. However, now Black returns to fully live up to the role of a romantic hero.

When Black gave her the picture, Shekure felt that she couldn't love him like Shirin, and told Enishte about Black's advances. Enishte had been working hard to establish professional connections for Black, but Black was not taking advantage of this help and was acting like an "ignoramus." After Shekure's confession, her mother asked Enishte not to break Black's heart, but Enishte felt that Black had disrespected him and thus did not honor this request. After Black left, Shekure covered up the names "Shekure" and "Black" on the picture, so her husband and father would not notice.

Honor and respect are highly important within the world of the novel. Enishte clearly loves Black and wishes to help him, but is frustrated and offended when Black does not respond to this support in the proper manner. Enishte's belief that he had been disrespected by Black overrode any affection Enishte harbored for his nephew and caused him to suddenly and harshly cut him off.

Shekure admits that she was sad to hear of Elegant's disappearance, but she adds that Elegant was the ugliest of the miniaturists, both in appearance and personality. After Black leaves, Shekure asks Enishte if Black gave him any trouble, and Enishte responds that he was "as respectful as ever," although also "measured and calculating." Later that night, Shekure embraces both her sons, and Shevket asks why Shekure wore her beautiful purple blouse that day. She goes into the other room and takes it off, and rubs off the rouge she had put on her cheeks. She has spent her life searching for images of beautiful women in manuscripts, and has been disappointed by how few there are and how the women always look embarrassed and apologetic. Shekure dreams that one day people in the future will read about her. She likes the idea that of being "watched" and dreams of speaking to the readers of her story.

Shekure's thoughts about the readers of her story connect her experience to several of the major themes of the novel. Shekure occupies the paradoxical position of being a beautiful woman in a society that celebrates beauty to some extent, while also treating it as suspicious and even sinful. Shekure's desire to be "watched" speaks to the fact that she has little real power in the world, and thus finds power and joy in simply being beheld and consumed by others. Her wish for the immortality that comes from being recorded in a book highlights what is both appealing and (from a religious perspective) dangerous about literature.

Shekure explains that Enishte "adores" her; she originally had three older brothers, but they all died. Enishte would have wanted her to marry a rich and powerful scholar who loved art, but instead Shekure married a handsome soldier with whom she had fallen in love. Enishte did not approve of the match because the soldier was poor, but Shekure threatened to kill herself if she could not marry him. After they wed, her husband was awarded 10,000 silver coins for heroism and everyone envied the now-wealthy couple. At first Shekure was not worried by her husband's disappearance, but as time passed she resigned herself to the idea that he was never going to come home. Despite this, she would comfort her children with false rumors that their father was coming home. They lived with the soldier's father and his brother, Hasan, who were poor and were forced to sell their slave, leaving Shekure to do the housework. Furthermore, after the slave-girl was sold, Hasan repeatedly attempted to rape Shekure.

Despite the restrictions placed on women in the world of 16th-century Istanbul, Shekure only really feels limited and oppressed due to economic factors. She does not protest the fact that she has to threaten to kill herself in order to marry the man she wants, or even the fact that Hasan attempts to rape her. The only aspect of her life that Shekure truly resents is the period when she has to perform domestic work, which she believes reduces her to the status of an enslaved woman. Of course, it is not the case that Shekure only cares about money—she is also a dedicated mother, and she is very romantic. However, it is important for her to live in a wealthy household in order to not feel oppressed.

Shekure would have gone back to Enishte's house, but because her husband was still possibly alive his family could have punished her and Enishte if she left. Eventually her husband's father decided it was time for Shekure to marry Hasan, which would require convincing a judge that Shekure's husband had died. Shekure realized that if she married Hasan she would certainly not be able to leave the house and its drudgery. In previous years, Shekure had found Hasan sweet, but while she lived in his father's house he would yell and threaten Shekure as she cried. One night, when Hasan attempted to force down Shekure's door, she began shrieking that there were jinns (spirits) in the house and made her father-in-law stand guard at her door. The next day, Shekure returned to Enishte's house, which turned Hasan's unrequited love into an "inferno." He wrote Shekure love letters decorated with drawings of sad animals, promising that he had made money and that she would not have to do housework if they married. Tonight, Shekure mixes a drink for her father; he asks if it is **snowing**, and Shekure is suddenly convinced that it is the last snowfall Enishte will ever see.

As well as being beautiful, Shekure is also intelligent and courageous. She endures the loss of her husband, her confinement to his father's house, and the sinister advances of Hasan, biding her time until she can leverage the little power she has and leave the house for good. Shekure has declared that Enishte adores her, and it is clear from this passage that Shekure loves her father just as much. She would rather stay at her husband's father's house than risk getting Enishte into trouble, and once she does return to Enishte's house she dotes on him. Shekure's observation that it will be Enishte's last snowfall connects to a comment Enishte himself made in the previous chapter, when he brought up the topic of death with Black and admitted that he worries about dying before finishing the Sultan's book.

CHAPTER 10: I AM A TREE

The tree admits that it is lonely, and asks the audience to drink their **coffees** and listen to its story. The tree has been sketched onto a rough piece of paper to hang behind the master storyteller, and there are no other trees around. The tree wishes it were part of a book; as it is, there is a chance that infidels will worship the tree where it hangs alone (a prospect the tree secretly enjoys). The tree doesn't know where it belongs because it was supposed to be part of a story, and wishes to explain how it fell out of that story. 40 years ago, the Persian Shah Tahmasp, a patron of the arts and enemy of the Ottomans, stopped drinking coffee, so "naturally, his brain stopped working." Later, he was possessed by a jinn and denounced "wine, handsome young boys, and painting," which the tree takes as evidence that he had truly gone mad. As a result, the miniaturists, calligraphists, and bookbinders all scattered to seek work elsewhere. The Shah's son-in-law, Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, commissioned an illustrated manuscript of the poet Jami's *Seven Thrones*; this infuriated the Shah, who banished the Sultan to a small town called Sebzivar.

It is clear from the tree's mention of coffee and the storyteller makes it clear that the storyteller is impersonating the tree just as he did the dog. Once again, there are several layers of metafiction (stories-within-stories) at play in this chapter. The novel itself is an obviously work of fiction, and within that story the storyteller is narrating as the tree. Another layer is added when the tree tells the story about the Persian Shah Tahmasp and the Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, and even within this story there are mentions of other stories, such as Jami's "Seven Thrones." The result is a Russian doll effect, and each story becomes intimately intertwined with the other layers of storytelling that surround it. In this way, Pamuk demonstrates how important storytelling is to Istanbul culture and to the creation of Ottoman identity.

Thanks to the Sultan's librarian, work on the book continued, and was performed by the very best artists who were now spread all over the land. As a result, different pages of the manuscript were carried long distances by messengers, including the picture of the tree. One night, the messenger carrying the tree was ambushed by thieves who robbed, raped, and killed him. The tree fell from its page and therefore does not know which story it was intended to illustrate. One of the thieves sold the tree to a man who eventually died of grief, and the tree was sold again, this time to the storyteller. Last night the storyteller told the audience about the dog and the Hoja of Erzurum, and the tree mockingly suggests that the audience misunderstood the storyteller's words. He promises to set the record straight by telling the story of "the Cross-Eyed Nedret Hoja of Sivas."

The tree's story contains both serious and satirical elements. The story of the Shah and the Sultan illustrates the negative impact of religious orthodoxy on the arts. It also a highlights a sense of hypocrisy or misguidance in condemning things like coffee and painting when the world is full of people who rob, rape, and murder others. At the same time, the story is also comic, particularly when it comes to the section about the Hoja of Sivas, who is obviously a thinly-veiled version of the Hoja of Erzurum.

The Nedret Hoja of Sivas denounced painting, seducing "pretty boys," and **coffee**. The tree says that one of its branches is bent, and this is because an enormous man once climbed up into it and had sex with the Hoja of Sivas there. Later, the tree realized the giant man was actually the Devil, and as he had sex with the Hoja he whispered in his ear: "Coffee is a sin, coffee is a vice…". The tree moves on to describe the realist style of European painting, and the fact that European women walk around "freely" in the street. The tree suggests that more "expert" painters may think that painting must be in the most vivid, realistic style possible, but that the tree itself is glad to not have been depicted in such a way. It concludes: "I don't want to be a tree, I want to be its meaning."

This part of the story also mixes comedy and seriousness, although this time the order is reversed. The absurd and satirical story about the Hoja and the Devil emphasizes the perversity of prosecuting coffee in comparison to other vices, and even suggests that denouncing innocent activities is the Devil's way of distracting Muslims from real moral problems. The ending of the chapter is significant, as it contains one of the most important justifications for non-realist painting—the fact that this style arguably better conveys meaning than realism.

CHAPTER 11: I AM CALLED BLACK

The **snow** falls all night, and Black reads Shekure's letter over and over again. He dreams that he and Shekure are happily in love and that they get married, only to argue once they are together. Black realizes this dream has been inspired by a book he read called *The Revival of Religious Science*, which details "the ills of marriage." Black attempts to masturbate to distract himself but he is unable to do so, which he feels is proof he has fallen deeply in love. Eventually, he writes a response to Shekure and takes the letter out with him in the morning. He sends a "little street urchin" to tell Esther to meet him after noon prayers, and then he goes straight to the royal artisans' workshop, where he witnesses a flurry of activity and recalls the time he spent there as a young apprentice. Black goes into a warm room and sees Master Osman, whom he has not seen in 15 years. Osman is wearing white and, surrounded by the white light of the snow, resembles a spirit from the afterlife. Black introduces himself and explains the story of his life.

The snow falling in Istanbul creates a sense of mystery and otherworldliness, which is underlined in Black's description of Master Osman. There is a hint of magic surrounding the royal artisans' workshop and particularly Master Osman, whose authority and prestige—as well as his age—turn him into a somewhat larger-than-life figure. Furthermore, Black's statement that Osman resembles a spirit from the afterlife conveys the idea that there is something supernatural about the practice of manuscript illumination. This helps explain why the illuminators' work is so important, and also why it is treated as a threat by those who are very religious.

Black can see in Master Osman's half-**blind** eyes that he hates Enishte and is suspicious of Black. Osman asks what the illuminators depict in the places Black has visited, and Black notices the apprentices listening intently to his answer. He tells Master Osman the story of Shah Tahmasp, and how the legendary masters of Kazvin and Herat were left suddenly without work, and were thus forced to scatter in all different directions. Black comments that many are now wasting their talents producing cheap and rushed books for patrons who do not appreciate them. Master Osman asks how much the pieces are sold for, and Black lists the different prices, noting that many illuminators produce single-leaf works that don't tell any story at all, but rather depict a single subject such as sex or a battle. Master Osman tells Black that Elegant, one of his most talented miniaturists, has been missing for six days, and that the Sultan has instructed other young masters—Stork, Olive, and Butterfly—to work from home.

Perhaps to gain favor in the eyes of Master Osman, Black speaks in a disdainful way about what he witnessed in Persia, particularly the fact that many illustrators are now selling work which violates the proper standards of manuscript illumination in order to make money. Black does not adhere to strict religious standards about the proper way to paint, but he has inherited Enishte's disdain for using art as a way to make money. Furthermore, like the tree, Black expresses the view that painted images should not exist on their own (as single-leaf illustrations)—they should always be part of a broader story.

Master Osman asks a painter to give Black the "survey" of their workshop, which was originally a ritual that took place during the Sultan's visits, when the illuminators would show him their work-in-progress. Black finds the ritual sad now, however, because the master miniaturists are all at home and the Sultan no longer feels as enthusiastic about their work as he once did. However, Black is still pleased to behold the *Book of Festivities*, which depicts the Sultan overseeing the festivities at the Hippodrome, flanked by ambassadors and dignitaries from all over Europe and Asia. Other parts of the book portray other aspects of Istanbul society, from coppersmiths to magicians to rabbits and birds. One picture depicts a lion, symbolizing Islam, chasing after a pig that represents "the cunning Christian infidel." Black asks Nuri the miniaturist who painted this last picture, and Nuri replies that the purpose of painting is to encourage respect for God's creation, and that the identity of the painter is not important. Black wonders why Nuri responds in this cautious, righteous manner.

This passage emphasizes the idea that the culture and practice of miniaturist painting is changing at a remarkable pace. The ritual "survey" of the workshop recalls a time when the work of the royal artisans was entirely in harmony with the wishes of the Sultan and society at large. However, now the Sultan has developed a more ambivalent relationship to art, and many people are condemning art on religious grounds. This religious righteousness has even affected the minds of the artists themselves, as Nuri's comment demonstrates. Yet it is possible that Nuri makes this statement as a self-protective gesture, a way of asserting that he is virtuous in order to defend himself and his craft from religious zealots.

Black asks who will take over the gilding now Elegant has gone, but Nuri only replies that, God willing, Elegant will return to finish the work. Nuri shows Black other pieces in the workshop, including a plate depicting Shirin and Hüsrev. Black meets a 92-year-old former master who is half **blind** and who describes meeting the famous Master Bizhad, who was drunk and blind himself at the time. As Black kisses Master Osman's hand goodbye, he experiences mixed feelings of adoration, respect, pity, and guilt, in part because Osman is Enishte's arch rival. Black asks Osman "what separates the genuine miniaturist from the ordinary," and Osman replies that this changes over time, but that he would determine a genuine miniaturist with three questions. First, he would ask about style and signature in order to determine if the miniaturist admired the European individualist style of painting. Then he would ask a question about a time, which Black fails to understand. Finally, he would ask a question about blindness. After this, Black leaves and meets Esther. He gives her the letter and asks her to tell Shekure that he has gone to visit Olive, Butterfly, and Stork.

In this passage, the idea of blindness plays an important role in a number of different ways. When Nuri refuses to ask Black's question about gilding and instead replies that God willing Elegant will come back, he engages in a kind of willful blindness about what has really happened to Elegant, who at this point is widely presumed to be dead. The story about Master Bizhad suggests that a lifetime of devotion to painting can create both physical blindness and a more metaphorical mental blindness that comes in the form of drunkenness or madness. Finally, Master Osman includes a question about blindness in the three questions he would pose to a miniaturist. However, the questions themselves are too vague and mysterious for Black to understand—in this sense, Black is "blind" to their meaning.

CHAPTER 12: I AM CALLED "BUTTERFLY"

Black arrives at Butterfly's door; they embrace and Black tells Butterfly that he has come in friendship, and he wishes to see Butterfly's work. Black also wishes to ask a question, but the question is omitted from the narrative. Butterfly's answer is that greed and corruption are bound to increase while money and fame play a role in the lives of painters, although Butterfly silently admits that he doesn't believe in this answer. He then tells three parables about style and signature.

The fact that Black's question is left out from Butterfly's narrative draws attention to the fact that Butterfly is a biased and possibly unreliable narrator. This in turn provokes the question of whether other narrators are also unreliable. Part of the mystery of the novel is created by the intertwining of so many dubious narratives.

The first parable tells the story of a young Khan (nobleman) in Herat who was "fascinated" by painting and was in love with a Tatar woman in his harem. The couple were so happy that they wanted to live forever, and found that the closest they could get to doing so was gazing for hours at paintings by the old masters, which had the effect of making time stand still. One of the royal miniaturists then painted a scene from Shirin and Hüsrev, but replaced the mythical figures with the Khan and his lover. However, the miniaturist then began to paint more and more in his own individual style, and the Khan, horrified at the image of the Tatar woman painted in this unorthodox way, had sex with another woman. As a result, the Tatar woman hanged herself, and the horrified Khan **blinded** the miniaturist in punishment.

The first parable emphasizes the theme of the dangers of art—dangers that lie within art's relationship to mortality. The Khan and his lover achieve a sense of immortality by looking at the paintings by the old masters, suggesting that these paintings override God's power over life and death. Furthermore, the individualist style in which the miniaturist paints the Tatar woman has the effect of bringing her to life. Yet in an ironic twist, it is by bringing the representation of the Tatar woman to life that the miniaturist causes her death.

The second parable describes an elderly Sultan who lived happily with his beautiful Chinese wife until his son from a previous marriage fell in love with the wife. Not wanting to upset his father, the son devoted himself to painting, and the passion of his frustrated love made him an exceptional painter. The Sultan's wife persuaded the son to sign his paintings, so that as time passed people would know he was the one who painted them. The first painting he signs is a scene from Shirin and Hüsrev which depicts Hüsrev's son, Shiruye, stabbing his father with a dagger. After signing it, the son was overcome by a feeling that the painting contained a flaw, and then he became convinced that the painting depicted reality rather than a myth. Shortly after, he stabbed the Sultan in the exact same manner as Shiruye did to Hüsrev.

The second parable further emphasizes the idea that art has a supernatural, dangerous power over people. Even though the Sultan's son is well-intentioned and does not want to harm his father, the painting of Shiruye stabbing Hüsrev influences the son's behavior in an almost demonic manner. Crucially, the son is moved to stab his father because he witnesses a flaw in the painting, which convinces him that the painting is real. This may seem paradoxical, but it makes more sense in light of the fact that flaws are connected to individuality, and thus to individualist, realist styles of painting.

The third parable takes place 250 years before, when manuscript illumination, calligraphy, and illustration were celebrated as the best of the arts. The Shah who reigned at the time had a powerful empire but no male heir, so decided to marry his daughter to a respected miniaturist. He held a painting competition to choose the husband, and each of the candidates painted the same scene in the style of the old masters. In the first round of the competition, one candidate was eliminated for leaving a signature on his painting, and in the next round a candidate was eliminated for including a small stylistic variation. However, when the day of the wedding came, the Shah's daughter told her father that miniaturists who are in love paint some trace of their lover's likeness in their paintings, and that her husband—who painted so faithfully in the style of the old masters—clearly did not love her. Thus the Shah cancelled the wedding.

The third parable appears to contain a slightly different message to the others. While the first two parables expressed the idea that there is something dangerous about artistic flaws, individual style, and signature within painting, this parable suggests that there can be a positive side to these variations. Faithfully imitating the style of the old masters to an absolute degree suggests that the painter has an inability to love. Although this parable does not necessarily suggest that it is better to paint with individualist touches, it does indicate that being a perfectly faithful miniaturist and being a good lover are incompatible.

Butterfly explains that together, the three parables explain that "style" is nothing more than imperfection, and that "signature" is a way of congratulating oneself for imperfection. Butterfly goes on to tell the reader that he is the best of the miniaturists, and that he recently married "the most beautiful maiden in the neighborhood." However, he tells Black that being too good a miniaturist will have a bad impact on one's marriage, and vice versa, even though he secretly thinks this is a lie. Black asks to see Butterfly's recent work, and Butterfly shows him some pages from the *Book of Festivities*. Black then asks Butterfly if he knows where Elegant is, and Butterfly, offended, replies that he doesn't. Black goes on to ask if Butterfly has considered that Elegant has been killed by the Erzurumis, and Butterfly—who is somewhat sympathetic to the Hoja of Erzurum—believes Black is asking if it was Butterfly himself who killed Elegant. Black looks around Butterfly's workshop, while Butterfly reflects on the rumors that have been spreading about Elegant's disappearance. Butterfly notes that he is the best miniaturist because he makes the most money, and he adds that painting is a form of ecstasy because "the world itself is ecstasy to those who truly see."

Butterfly keeps telling Black stories and statements that he does not believe himself, which creates the impression that the miniaturists' world is filled with dishonesty and deception. In contrast to Black's anxiety (about Elegant, the secret book, religious intolerance, and his love for Shekure), Butterfly has a relaxed and boastful attitude. He considers himself to be the best miniaturist because he earns the most money, and thus he evidently does not follow Enishte's belief that the desire to make money from art is indicative of corruption. At the same time, he also expresses sympathy with the Hoja of Erzurum, a sentiment that contradicts his casual attitude toward dishonesty, greed, and boastfulness, all of which religious fundamentalists denounce as sinful. Overall, Butterfly appears to be a deliberately provocative and contrarian character with little interest in moral seriousness.

CHAPTER 13: I AM CALLED "STORK"

Next, Black arrives at Stork's house. He mentions Master Osman's question about time, and asks Stork for his thoughts. Stork begins his response by discussing the fact that, in the past, Arab painters would not use the perspective technique that the Europeans now boast about. This left their paintings "dull and limited." Stork then launches into his own three stories, the first of which is set in Baghdad 350 years ago. During this time, Ibn Shakir was the best calligrapher in the entire Islamic world and he believed that his books would last forever. However, when Mongol soldiers invaded Baghdad, Ibn Shakir watched them destroy the whole city, including his books. He swore to never write again, but he felt compelled to express the pain he felt through painting, an art form he had previously condemned. This gave birth to the 300-year "renaissance" of the tradition of Islamic illustration, in which Ibn Shakir's desire for his work's immortality was truly realized.

It may seem like the Islamic illustration tradition is defined by a lack of passion imposed by strict rules and humility before God. However, Stork's first story explains that the renaissance of Islamic illustration was in fact inspired by a single individual's moment of great emotion. Ibn Shakir's torment and his desire to express it via painting were so powerful that they overrode his previous condemnation of painting, suggesting that sometimes human emotion can be more forceful than the restraint required by strict religious observance. Once again, this idea creates a great sense of tension at the heart of the Islamic painting tradition.

The second story is set at an unspecified point in the past, when Fahir Shah's army defeated the soldiers of Selahattin Khan and tortured their leader to death. After this victory, Fahir Shah visited Selahattin Khan's library and replaced images of the dead ruler with himself. He then visited Selahattin Khan's harem and attempted to seduce the most beautiful woman there, Neriman Sultan. Neriman implored Fahir Shah not to destroy an illustration that depicted herself and Selahattin Khan in the place of the lovers from the famous romance *Leyla and Mejnun*, and Fahir Shah agreed. The two then fell in love, but five years later Fahir Shah was still troubled by the illustration, believing that as long as it existed he would not "join the ranks of the immortals with his wife." He altered the illustration to resemble himself, but upon seeing it, the royal librarian became convinced that it had been altered to resemble Fahir Shah's enemy. On hearing this rumor, the enemy decided to attack, killing Fahir Shah and marrying Neriman.

This story functions as a warning against several different kinds of desire: romantic desire, the desire for immortality, and the desire to be represented in art. Note that these desires are presented as more dangerous than the more obviously sinful behavior in the story. Fahir Shah is not punished for the fact that he tortures Selahattin Khan to death, but he is punished for the desire to be immortally preserved alongside his wife in a painting. The story thus reflects the particular tensions that are facing the miniaturists during the time the book is set—namely, the social and cultural impact of the new styles used by European painters.

The final story is about Tall Mehmet, a master illustrator who worked until the age of 110 before going **blind**. Mehmet was famous for being absolutely faithful to the old masters and having no distinct style of his own. By the time he was 80, some people believed Mehmet would never die, and they claimed that he went blind because he was immortal. At age 119, Mehmet, who was still a virgin, met a beautiful 16-year-old apprentice with whom he fell in love and seduced through "deception and trickery." Although he succeeded in winning the boy's heart, before long he became completely blind, and soon after he died.

Tall Mehmet's story suggests that even the most virtuous people are only ever a hair's breadth away from sin. Mehmet lives his entire life in a virtuous manner, dedicating himself entirely to his art and to honoring the tradition of the great masters. However, even the fact that this righteous dedication makes him immortal is not satisfactory, and he ends up falling into the trap of sinful lust and—as a result—mortality.

Once the story is over, Black stares at the picture of the Sultan that Stork is working on. Stork feels uncomfortable about the way Black is looking around his workshop, including at his "comely" assistant and the collage album he secretly made to sell to a European traveler. Stork tells Black that he is familiar with the sights of battle, and that he makes sure he illustrates everything he remembers seeing. Black asks about the moral of each story Stork told. Stork replies that the first story shows that it is only time that can make a picture perfect, and the second suggests that time can only be escaped through painting. He asks Black to tell him the moral of the last story, and Black replies that it reveals that those who give up the "perfect life and perfect illuminating" will soon experience the end of time in death.

By the end of this chapter, it is clear that many people believe that miniature painting is a way of circumventing the passage of time as well as mortality. The most faithful miniaturists evade the pull of time, and to be represented in a painting is to be preserved in an immortal state. However, it's not clear if this is a good or a bad thing—surely painting's power over time is sacrilegious, a challenge to God. Furthermore, is it really good for people to transcend time? After all, mortality is arguably the most important element of the human condition.

CHAPTER 14: I AM CALLED "OLIVE"

Olive is drawing "the darling faces of boys" when he hears Black's knock at the door. Olive notes that when Black was away, Black had been jealous of the miniaturists in Istanbul. Black mentions that Master Osman discussed the connection between painting and blindness and Olive reflects that painting brings light to a world of darkness, reminding people of Allah's command to "See!" He argues that all artists seek the void of blackness that Allah originally saw. He will explain what this means in three stories.

Olive's understanding of miniaturists' desire for blindness evokes a purity and religious righteousness which forms a contrast to the idea that miniaturists seek personal glory or monetary reward through their work. According to Olive, the goal of the miniaturist is to experience a hint of what Allah experiences, which could be interpreted as either arrogant or virtuous.

The first story concerns a master called Sheikh Ali Tabrizi who illustrated "a magnificent version" of *Shirin and Hüsrev*. Jihan Shah, ruler of the Blacksheep nation, was archenemies with Tall Hasan, ruler of the Whitesheep. The Shah became irrationally paranoid that Sheikh Ali would make an even better version of *Shirin and Hüsrev* for Tall Hasan, and ordered Sheikh Ali to be killed. However, a kind woman in his harem persuaded him to only **blind** Sheikh Ali instead. Sheikh Ali heard rumors about this plan, but still did not deliberately sabotage his work on the manuscript, as others would have. As expected, when Sheikh Ali finished the manuscript, he was blinded on Jihan Shah's orders. Sheikh Ali immediately went to Tall Hasan and explained that although he was now blind, he remembered the manuscript in complete detail, and would in fact be able to produce a better version as his blindness led him closer to the vision of Allah. Sheikh Ali did indeed produce a better version, and this superior manuscript was credited with giving the Whitesheep a subsequent victory in battle over the Blacksheep.

It might seem that blindness would be considered a fate like death (or even worse than death) by miniaturists whose entire lives revolve around images and vision. However, this story contradicts this idea, suggesting that the truest miniaturists do not fear blindness, as their own vision is less important than their ability to create images that correspond to the "vision" of Allah. Indeed, the story explores what it means to speak of God as having a vision, considering that God's perspective on the world must inherently be much different from the perspective of humanity. The story suggests that God's vision is akin to blindness, not because God does not have the ability to see, but rather because God's mode of seeing is more similar to the human faculty of memory than the faculty of sight.

The second story is set just after the death of Tamerlane, Ruler of the World, whose descendants fiercely fought each other. When Tamerlane's great- grandson Abdüllatif conquered Heart, he immediately asked his miniaturists and calligraphers to make a book in honor of his father Ulug Bey. However, they rushed the job and the book's pages came to be all out of order. The most senior master was charged with putting them back in the right order, but it was soon revealed that he was **blind**. He asked for an intelligent boy younger than seven who hadn't yet learned to read and write to describe the pages aloud to him, and in this way was able to successfully put the book back together. The master explained that Allah designed the world the way a seven-year-old would want to see it, and that painting is a way of "seeking out Allah's memories" in order to see the world as He sees it.

This story further explores the idea of blindness by suggesting that blindness is akin to a form of innocence. The blind master could have asked any of the miniaturists to describe the pages of the book to him, and one would assume that they would have been able to do a more sophisticated and accurate job. However, the story suggests that the miniaturists' craft—as well as the experience of adulthood—in fact draws them away from the ability to see the world as Allah designed it. The naïve, "blind" innocence of a child is necessary to access God's vision of the world.

The final story is set 250 years ago, when many miniaturists would stare at the horizon in order to ward off **blindness**, while others believed that the sun caused blindness and thus would work in a dark corner lit by candlelight. However, one miniaturist called Seyyit Mirek believed that blindness was a gift from Allah given to the most dedicated miniaturists. Mirek argued that all miniaturists rely on memory when drawing, and that drawing from life or from other images is in fact only practice for the final achievement of being able to draw entirely from memory. When Mirek turned 70, the Sultan allowed him to look at all the old manuscripts in the royal library as a reward for his lifetime of work; after looking at them for three days, Mirek went blind, and never spoke or painted again.

The stories told by Butterfly and Stork mainly feature characters who make foolish and immoral decisions, and thus the stories serve as warnings against bad behavior. In contrast, Olive's stories feature righteous, dedicated, and pure-hearted characters who understand the true path of a miniaturist and conduct their lives accordingly. The story of Seyyit Mirek confirms the idea that the best miniaturists must sacrifice the possibility of leaving normal lives in dedication to their work, as shown by the fact that after going blind, Mirek never paints or speaks again.

Having finished his stories, Olive comments that "blindness is a realm of bliss from which the Devil and guilt are barred." Black notes that some of the miniaturists in Tabriz take this reverential attitude toward blindness and sometimes even pretend to go blind and practice looking at things in the darkness in order to experience the world as a blind person does. There is another knock at the door, and a handsome young apprentice informs them that Elegant's body has been found and the funeral will be held that day.

Like the characters in his stories, Olive seems to be more virtuous than Butterfly and Stork. He doesn't secretly admit contradictory thoughts and he seems to genuinely hold the belief that blindness is a gift that brings miniaturists closer to God. The news about Elegant, meanwhile, brings a sinister note back into the narrative.

CHAPTER 15: I AM ESTHER

Esther observes that Black is clearly deeply in love, because when he speaks about Shekure he loses his self control. When she meets Black at the bazaar she assures him that Shekure is lovesick herself, and Black urges her to deliver his letter as soon as possible. However, Esther delays the delivery, as she believes "haste delays the fruits of love." She visits another woman for whom she'd delivered letters and this woman, now pregnant, gives her money in gratitude. Esther then takes Black's letter to Hasan's house and gives it to Hasan, who reads it aloud. In the letter, Black says he understands that Shekure wants to wait for news of her husband, and insists that just seeing her face was enough for him. He admits that during his travels he used to dream that she would appear to him as she did at the window. He concludes the letter by telling her that he met Orhan, and that one day he hopes to become the boy's father.

Esther is a comic, mischievous character, and it is never quite clear whether her actions are well-intentioned. She seems to like Shekure and be sympathetic to Black, and her assertion about delaying the delivery of the letter seems wise. However, the fact that Esther takes the letter to Hasan's house suggests that she cannot be trusted. Meanwhile, from Esther's perspective Black emerges as a rather foolish, amusing hero. While his love for Shekure is undoubtedly passionate, Black seems to turn into a timid and hapless child when it comes to matters of the heart.

Esther comments that Black has written well, but Hasan responds that he has stolen lines from another writer. Hasan asks Esther to deliver his own letter to Shekure, and the request makes her uncomfortable. At first Hasan asks Esther to tell Shekure that he will force her to return to his father's house, but he then reconsiders and asks Esther to tell Shekure that he loves her. Later, Esther delivers both letters to Shekure, who is pleased to learn about Black's love-struck state. Esther also notes that everyone is gossiping about Elegant's murder, and that Elegant's relatives have promised to avenge his death. Shekure returns to her letters, and asks Esther if Hasan knows about Black. Esther lies, saying that Hasan doesn't know of Black's existence. She warns Shekure that Hasan is obsessively in love with her and plans to try to marry her. Shekure confesses that she feels confused and anxious, wondering what will happen to herself and her children when Enishte dies. Esther attempts to reassure her, but Shekure insists that she is conflicted about who to marry. As Esther leaves, she assures Shekure that nothing bad will happen to her.

Like Esther and Black, Hasan is presented in an ambivalent way. Although he has behaved cruelly toward Shekure, he seems to be making an effort to reform his ways, and Shekure herself has previously admitted that she feels somewhat sympathetic toward him. At the same time, it is still rather surprising that Shekure expresses mixed feelings over whom she should marry. After all, Black is a famously handsome individual who has only ever been kind to her, whereas Hasan once tried to rape her. Esther's confidence that everything will be fine suggests that she may think Shekure is merely putting on a front of confusion. At the same time, Esther's belief that no misfortune will befall Shekure seems unfounded, and is perhaps rooted in Esther's perspective as a marginalized outsider.

CHAPTER 16: I, SHEKURE

Shekure admits that every time Esther leaves her house, she feels "confused" and "wretched." Orhan comes in, and Shekure puts away the letters and embraces him. She asks him if he would wish to have a father, and he replies he wouldn't because he wants to marry her himself. Shekure then goes to see Enishte, who admits that he is distressed by Elegant's murder. Shekure tells him that she would like to get married as soon as possible and Enishte is shocked, reminding her that she is already married. Shekure says that the previous night she dreamed her husband had died, and Enishte replies that although this is enough to convince him, a judge would need further proof. Enishte blinks hard, a nervous habit. He confesses that he'd been afraid of being murdered because of the **book**, but if Shekure and the boys leave he will "welcome death." Shekure stops herself from mentioning the fact that she knows Enishte sleeps with Hayrire at night. Enishte asks who wants to marry Shekure; she doesn't respond and her eyes fill with tears. Later, Orhan comforts her, and Shekure asks the reader to forget what she said about Enishte and Hayrire.

Shekure is a very passionate person, yet she lacks conviction and confidence in her opinions. This is likely due to the fact that, as a woman, her ability to make decisions about her own life is restricted by both legal and cultural norms. Even though Enishte loves her and seems to want her to be happy, he nonetheless uses his authority as her father to prevent her from getting remarried and leaving his house. Furthermore, Shekure's mention of the fact that Enishte sleeps with Hayrire demonstrates the fact that—when it comes to sex—different rules apply for men and women within the world of the novel. Whereas Shekure is not allowed to get remarried until it is definitely proven that her husband is dead, Enishte is able to sneakily sleep with the enslaved girl he owns while everyone turns a blind eye.

CHAPTER 17: I AM YOUR BELOVED UNCLE

Enishte hears Shekure's sobbing as he reads a passage from the *Book of the Apocalypse*, which states that three days after death, the soul returns to the body and is horrified to see the state it's in. Enishte thinks sadly about Elegant, and heads out through the **snow**-covered streets to the funeral. At the mosque, Enishte embraces Elegant's brothers and the miniaturists, and feels such anger at Elegant's murderer that he almost forgets his prayers. He notes that he'd forgotten that Stork sometimes made negative comments about Elegant's gilding work. Olive embraces Enishte, and Enishte thinks that he has most faith in Olive out of all the miniaturists. Enishte sees Master Osman and there is an awkward tension between them. Enishte knows that Osman is angry about the secret **book** and resentful of having to imitate the European painters. Black puts a hand on his uncle's shoulders, and Enishte admits that he knows this is who has been troubling Shekure. Enishte wonders if Black will agree to live in his house should he and Shekure wed.

Enishte has a powerful sense of intuition, which allows him to know immediately that Black and Shekure are in love simply by the feeling of Black's hands on his shoulders. At the same time, his sense of intuition is not necessarily completely reliable. He expresses trust in Olive and hints at a sense of distrust in Stork, yet these feelings seem more based on sporadic memories than well-founded rational assessment. Although Enishte is not presented as being a bad person, he does approach matters in a rather self-centered way. For example, he trusts Olive because of the fact that Olive embraces him, and he indicates that he will approve of Black and Shekure marrying if they stay in his house. This self-interest leaves Enishte vulnerable to manipulation.

The procession continues. Butterfly walks over and tells Enishte he knows Olive and Stork are behind Elegant's death. They knew Butterfly had a bad relationship with Elegant and they believe the blame will fall on him. Enishte is dismissive of this claim, telling Butterfly he doesn't think any of the miniaturists are capable of murder. However, immediately afterwards Enishte has an "epiphany" and realizes that the murderer is a member of the royal artisans' workshop and is even in the funeral procession. He begins to feel suspicious of Butterfly, and suddenly tells him he's decided to cease work on the **book**, feeling that there's "ill-fortune" in the project. At that moment, Elegant's face is uncovered to reveal his smashed skull. Enishte immediately remembers a time 30 years ago when the Sultan's grandfather decided to take Cyprus from the Venetians. Enishte was charged with going to Venice and informing them of the Sultan's intentions. Some local citizens attempted to murder Enishte, and he was confronted with the reality of his own death. Back in the present, Enishte asks Black to take him home. Faced with death, Enishte resolves once again to complete the book "whatever the cost."

This passage intensifies the sense that Enishte is losing his grip on reason due to his paranoia, confusion, and fear. At first Enishte is entirely trustful of the miniaturists, refusing to believe that any of them would be capable of murdering Enishte. However, almost immediately he changes his mind and becomes convinced that the opposite is true. Enishte has a similar series of sudden changes of opinion over the book. Although Enishte is a well-respected authority among the miniaturists, the specter of Elegant's death and the possibility of Enishte's own death cause him to think in a frantic, irrational way. This does not bode well for Enishte's ultimate decision to finish work on the book; his statement that he will do so "whatever the cost" seems to imply that Enishte knows the book will lead to his death.

CHAPTER 18: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

As dirt is thrown on Elegant's grave, the murderer cries out that he wants to die with Elegant, before realizing that people might think he and Elegant were in love and thus choosing to calm himself down. He spends the rest of the funeral hiding behind a tree. The murderer recalls that in his youth, he and all the other apprentices loved Master Osman. It was Osman who gave the apprentices their nicknames, and the murderer feels emotional thinking back on how Master Osman loved and supported them. Ever since killing Elegant, the murderer has been tormented by internal conflict. He has even had to invent a new voice to speak in when discussing Elegant's death in order to keep his identity as a miniaturist separate from the reality of his status as a murderer. This means that the reader has no way of knowing whether he is Butterfly, Olive, or Stork, although the murderer challenges the reader to recognize him through his style of language.

Although the murderer expresses little regret over killing Elegant, he is simultaneously desperate to preserve his old life which existed before he committed the murder. All of his actions, from his fake performance of grief at Elegant's funeral to the caution with which he guards his true identity, show that he is able to completely dissociate the two sides of his life. The murderer may not be able to put aside thoughts about Elegant's death, but he is able to insist that this act does not define him as a person and even has little to do with his other life as an ordinary, seemingly-innocent miniaturist.

The murderer knows that if his identity is discovered it will bring peace to Elegant's soul. He admits that as soon as Elegant joined the Erzurumis he stopped liking him, forsaking their 25 years of friendship. When Elegant's body was discovered, his body had been lying in the well for four days and his face was disfigured. When Elegant's brother cried out asking who could have murdered him, the murderer tried to make a mental list of Elegant's enemies. There were some people who resented Elegant's faithful commitment to the style of the old masters and his tendency to point out flaws in other people's work.

This passage reveals that the murderer's grave act arose from a fairly ordinary set of circumstances. The murderer was annoyed by Elegant's rigid fidelity to the old styles and the seemingly careless way in which he threw out their friendship. These reasons are somewhat convincing, but they seem to not tell the whole story. Could this really account for why the murderer felt compelled to kill his lifelong friend?

The murderer was not "at all bothered" to hear Enishte announce that he would stop working on the **book**; Enishte must know that one of the miniaturists working on the book is the murderer, and understandably he does not want a murderer coming to his house at night. The murderer is confident that Enishte will find him the most talented miniaturist, refuse to be believe that he could be a murderer, and continue working with him alone. After the funeral, the murderer follows Black and Enishte down to the quay and gets in a boat behind them. He thinks about how easy it is to end someone's life, and how this one decision changes a person forever such that they will henceforth never be able to shake off the identity of a murderer. The murderer gazes at Istanbul, reflecting on how much crime is hidden within its colorful streets. He watches Black and Enishte walk up to Enishte's house, where "the most beautiful woman in the world" lives. However, the murderer then stops himself, resolving not to drive himself mad.

Above anything else, the murderer is highly self-centered and arrogant. He has complete confidence that Enishte thinks he is the best miniaturist and will select him as the only one to continue work on the book in secret. When he reflects on the ease with which it is possible to end someone's life, he considers only how the act of murder has changed his own life, rather than giving any thought to the dead Elegant or his grief-stricken family. The murderer's thoughts about the amount of crime in Istanbul indicate that he considers his deed to have been nothing exceptional, but rather one of many crimes committed in the city. At the same time, he maintains a self-centered, even boastful attitude about his "achievement."

CHAPTER 19: I AM A GOLD COIN

The narrator introduces itself as a genuine 22-carat gold coin drawn by Stork at the **coffeehouse**. In the past month, Stork has earned 47 gold coins, the most of all the miniaturists. Before money played such a significant role in the lives of the miniaturists, they would fight over who was the most talented; however, now that there is an objective measure, the workshop is more harmonious. The coin lists the various things that it can buy, from 10 jugs of wine to an hour with a young male prostitute. The coin asks if it can tell a secret, and reveals that it is not in fact a genuine 22-carat coin but a counterfeit made in Venice. The coin comments that it's ironic that the Venetians paint in a realist style yet make fake coins. The coin has been in circulation for seven years, most of which has spent in Istanbul; it has changed hands 560 times. During this time, it has heard many people denounce greed and materialism, yet it is confident that most people truly love money. The coin describes all the places in Istanbul its been, from the asshole of a thief to the lips of a maiden. He mentions "the gilder, no longer among us" who would arrange his coins into "various designs." The coin concludes his speech by saying that he is now in the purse of the best miniaturist, Stork, and if anyone wants to dispute this, they should try get the coin for themselves.

The coin's narrative is one of the most humorous parts of the novel, yet it also highlights several serious and important themes. Having been produced in Venice and sent to Istanbul, the coin resembles an explorer who travels to a distant land and reports back on what it sees. As the coin boasts, it visits every part of Istanbul, and thus has a privileged insight into Istanbul society. One of the most remarkable aspects of the coin's narrative is its descriptions of the intimate relationship the people of Istanbul have to money. The coin describes being kissed by maidens and being lovingly arranged into different designs by Elegant, emphasizing the idea that even though people denounce greed in public, in private they love and treasure their money to the point of obsession. Finally, the coin's statements about the miniaturists are rather facetious. Can it really be the case that the fixation with money has made the workshop more harmonious?

CHAPTER 20: I AM CALLED BLACK

Black suspects that Enishte knows about the letters he has exchanged with Shekure. Enishte sits him down and begins to tell him about a visit to Venice during which he saw portraits painted in the new realist style. Enishte explains that everyone in Venice wanted their portrait painted as a symbol of their wealth and power, and also as a marker of immortality. Black observes that Enishte seems both bitter and enraptured as he speaks. Enishte adds that real people pay to be painted into religious paintings and are so desperate to be included that they will consent to be portrayed as a servant or a prostitute. Black thinks he hears a sound in the house, and Enishte concludes that it seems "as if the Venetian paintings were made to frighten us." Yet it is clear that Enishte understands the appeal of the portraits, and he realizes that the desire to be painted in this style will prove to be the end of the Islamic artistic tradition.

Enishte's ambivalence about the Venetian paintings conveys their mysterious power. Enishte knows that it is sinful not only to have one's portrait painted in such a manner, but also to have such a strong desire to be painted this way—a desire that becomes a kind of arrogance and greed for immortality. At the same time, Enishte cannot deny the impact the portraits have, and he correctly senses that this style of painting will have a revolutionary impact on the artistic traditions of both the East and West. Rather than being a sideline issue, art is in fact a central and definitive force within a given culture.

When Enishte and the Sultan decided to create the **book**, the Sultan insisted that the story remain an important part of the manuscript; otherwise the pictures within would become false idols. As he discussed the placement of the pictures with the Sultan, Enishte became nervous about the prospect of centering a subject in a sacrilegious way. The Sultan insisted that the portrait of himself would never be put on display, lest it end up being worshipped. However, Enishte whispers that, in fact, this is exactly what the Sultan wanted. The book would come to represent the glory of the Ottoman empire on the thousandth anniversary of the Hegira. The Sultan ordered Enishte to begin immediately.

This passage makes clear that the Sultan is happy to pick and choose between the mandates that ensure Islamic art coheres with religious doctrine. He insists that there must be a story and that his portrait not be placed on a wall, yet wishes to be portrayed in a realist style, a clear violation of Islamic law. Enishte is thus caught between a desire to please the Sultan (who is both a political and religious leader), a desire to try out the European painting style himself, and a fear of angering God.

CHAPTER 21: I AM YOUR BELOVED UNCLE

Enishte admits that he plans to ask Black to write the stories for the **book**. Enishte tells Black that, along with the three miniaturists, he has completed most of the book's illustrations, including a depiction of Death, a tree, Satan, a horse, a dog, and a coin. Enishte considers telling Black he wants him to marry Shekure, knowing that they are planning to elope. After Friday prayers, the two discuss shadow, the most important Venetian technique. As Enishte explains how it is done, he suspects that Black might want to kill him for deviating from the traditional painting style, as well as for keeping Shekure from him. Enishte shows Black the picture of Death and tells him it was painted by Butterfly, whom Master Osman has been in love with for years. Enishte says he knows that, after they leave his house at night, the miniaturists go to the **coffeehouse** and mock him.

This passage further explores Enishte's ambivalent relationship with the book, as well as with the other miniaturists and with Black. Although Enishte has secured a powerful and respected position in society, he is mocked by the miniaturists and increasingly fears that the murderer is coming for his life. Furthermore, even his close relationship with Black is marred by Enishte's suspicion that Black plans to go behind his back and elope with Shekure. In this light, Enishte is a rather sympathetic character who finds himself trapped between the opposing views and desires of others.

Enishte shows Black all the illustrations except the last one, which he cannot finish. They discuss the possibility that Elegant was murdered by someone who was jealous of his wealth. As Enishte walks Black out, he notices Shekure standing in her white gown "looking like a ghost" and he asks her if she really wants to marry Black. Shekure says that she doesn't because Enishte does not want her to. However, she admits that she now feels certain that her husband is dead. Enishte says that if he dies, he wants Shekure to ensure that the **book** is finished, and she promises that she will. Enishte notices that Shekure is smiling slightly, and asks if she and Black have been communicating with secret signals. Shekure insists that she hasn't, though Enishte does not believe her.

Enishte is clearly preoccupied with death, as shown by the fact that he perceives Shekure "looking like a ghost" in her white dress. At the same time, Shekure herself has been thinking about the same subject ever since the dream of her husband's death. Although Shekure loves her father and makes an effort to appear virtuous and loyal to him, in reality she is lying about her relationship with Black. With each passing moment, Enishte's paranoia seems more and more justified.

CHAPTER 22: I AM CALLED BLACK

Black goes home and locks himself in his room, thinking about Shekure. Although she didn't show herself that day at Enishte's house, she made her presence felt, and Black is sure she was watching him. Black hears Shekure laughing and becomes paranoid that she is laughing at him. He imagines having sex with Shekure and begins to get an erection, before growing even more paranoid that Shekure can see him. In the afternoon, Shevket runs into Black and asks if he would like to see a dead cat at the house of the Hanged Jew. Shevket leads Black there and explains that the family who live there are having Esther sell the house. The cat's body is gone, and Shevket remarks that Enishte says that "the dead wander." Black corrects him, saying that it is only the spirits of the dead that wander. Shevket asks Black if he has ever killed anyone, and Black replies that he has killed two people. Shevket tells Black about Shekure's dream that her husband is dead. Later, Black considers the fact that he will have to write stories for the **book** if he wants to marry Shekure; however, the only stories that come to his mind are those told by the storyteller at the **coffeehouse**.

Black's inability to maintain composure while at Enishte's house is rather comic; although Black has supposedly matured from the years in which he would hide behind his books and act strangely around Shekure, this scene makes it seem as if that is not really the case. However, there are sinister as well as comic elements at play in this passage. Shevket's fixation with the dead cat further emphasizes the idea that death is everywhere. Note that the cat had been lying outside the house of the Hanged Jew—although there is no information about what happened to the Jew, the two combined seem to constitute a particularly bad omen. Shevket's interest in death is not simply childhood curiosity, but instead results from the fact that he has spent years not knowing whether his father is dead or alive.

CHAPTER 23: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

The murderer quickly sketches a picture of an opium addict, which is part of a book he commissioned by a traveling Armenian. He has completed many of these books in order to earn a little money, and finds them boring. A week has passed since the murder, and the murderer does not feel able to suppress the jinns (spirits) within him. At night, he walks through the city to an abandoned, semi-collapsed dervish house which he visits frequently. The murderer notes that he does not fear earthly punishments, only the judgment of Allah. He is familiar with the punishments that murderers will suffer in Hell, although he adds that Elegant was not a real believer and that he had good reasons for killing Elegant. If he hadn't killed Elegant, the Erzurumis would have condemned the miniaturists and destroyed the royal workshop. Before Elegant's death, he had been insulting Enishte and the work he was doing on the **book**.

The murderer's arrogantly dismissive attitude towards earthly punishments seems misplaced, given the fact that the eternal punishment of Hell is obviously far worse than whatever earthly fate will befall him. Although the murderer reassures himself that he had good reasons for killing Elegant, it is not clear that this is really true. The murderer does not seem to want to admit that he is disturbed by what he has done, but the fact that he wanders the city at night troubled by jinns suggests otherwise. At the same time, the murderer's reasons for murdering Enishte are still not entirely clear—the fact that Elegant was insulting Enishte cannot be the only motivation.

Enishte kept the final illustration of the **book** secret, even from the miniaturists who were helping him to complete the other illustrations. The murderer wonders if this last illustration proves that Elegant's prejudices were actually well-founded. The murderer passes Enishte's house and sees Black leaving; he realizes that Black will complete the book and marry Shekure, and that Elegant had been right and was thus killed for nothing. The murderer follows Black down the street, intending to kill him. He watches the way Black walks, hating him for his sense of entitlement. The murderer is also in love with Shekure, and as he follows Black through the city streets he feels as though he is "imitating him."

It is striking that the murderer is so suddenly convinced that Elegant could have been right, and that he could have thus murdered him for no reason. The murderer projects a sense of cool confidence, but is he really as self-assured as he seems? Note that this passage proves that the murderer is a jealous person, resentful not only of Black's involvement with the book but also of his relationship with Shekure. Perhaps the murderer was motivated by jealousy of Elegant's wealth after all.

CHAPTER 24: I AM DEATH

The narrator introduces itself as Death, though tells the reader not to be afraid because it is only an illustration. One year ago, a mysterious old man (Enishte) invited a young miniaturist to his house and asked the miniaturist to illustrate Death. Enishte gave the miniaturist the best drawing materials and said he would pay well, but the miniaturist protested that he didn't know what to draw because he had never seen Death. The two proceeded to have a long conversation about what qualifies miniaturists to draw certain subjects and how one could draw something one has never seen. They moved to discuss stylistic differences between Venetians and Ottomans and the ethics of imitating "the artistry of infidels." The miniaturist researched his subject by reading the *Book of the Soul* and the *Book of the Apocalypse*, and depicted Death accordingly, as both "thoughtful" and frightening. Later, the miniaturist regretted his illustration, first because it wasn't good enough, second because he had imitated the European style, and finally because "Death is no laughing matter." Now he walks the streets at night, afraid that he has become the thing he drew.

The superficial purpose of this chapter is to provide further information about the construction of the secret book and how the miniaturists come to illustrate in the European style under the guidance of Enishte. However, there is also a second message at play, which relates to the murder mystery. Neither the miniaturist nor the "old man" in this chapter are named, although it is obvious that the old man is Enishte. The miniaturist's identity, meanwhile, remains a secret, as it could be any one of the three illustrators employed by Enishte to work on the book. However, when Death mentions that the miniaturist now walks the streets at night haunted by his illustration, it is clear that the miniaturist who drew Death is the murderer. Ironically, Death does not understand the true reason why the murderer is haunted.

CHAPTER 25: I AM ESTHER

As Esther is packing fabric into her bag to sell, Hayrire arrives at her door with a letter from Shekure. Esther orders Hayrire to go home and comments that Shekure is "out of her mind" with love. Esther goes to Hasan's house, where Hasan's father informs her that Hasan has been up all night waiting for news from her. Esther gives Hasan Shekure's note, in which she tells Black that he must finish the manuscript before he can hope to marry her. Hasan asks about the **book**, and Esther responds: "Our Sultan is funding the whole project they say." Hasan mentions other rumors about the book, including that glancing at one of its pages will cause **blindness**. Later, when Esther delivers the letter to Black, he is almost hysterical with happiness. He gives Esther a letter to give to Shekure, and she is so curious to hear what it says that she practically runs back to Hasan.

Once again, it is difficult to tell whether Esther is ultimately a help or hindrance to Shekure. She professes loyalty to Shekure, but then sneakily shows the letters exchanged between Shekure and Black to Hasan. Running back and forth between different people's houses, Esther is a kind of physical manifestation of rumors and gossip. Her lack of real loyalty highlights the fact that gossip itself is not loyal to anyone, but is instead rather dangerous and unpredictable. At the same time, Esther also serves a vital role in the world of the novel, and the characters are all utterly dependent on her.

In the letter, Black assures Shekure that he will complete the **book**, but that he is suffering a block due to the fact that he hasn't seen Shekure's face. He suggests that they meet at the house of the Hanged Jew, where no one will find them. Esther comments that Black is "genuinely in love with Shekure," and Hasan responds that this proves she's on Black's side. Hasan begins writing his own letter, and Esther explains that the Hanged Jew was killed during a mass murder of Jews sparked by the rumor that a Greek youth had been killed in the Jewish quarter so his blood could be used to make unleavened bread. Esther looks into Hasan's eyes and feels that love has aged him; she notes that rejection in love can make people accept evil and quickly become cruel. Esther stops for a meal with another of her "maidens" before delivering the letters to Shekure.

This passage portrays Esther in a more sympathetic light, as it reminds the reader that she is a member of a marginalized and persecuted minority in Istanbul, doomed to live on the edges of society. The story of the Hanged Jew reveals the dark side to gossip—the rumor that Jews kill young gentiles in order to use their blood to make bread was a common anti-Semitic falsehood used to justify the persecution of Jews at many different points across history. Hasan expresses no sympathy for Esther as she tells the story, which reinforces the idea that people are only nice to Esther in order to take advantage of her assistance.

CHAPTER 26: I, SHEKURE

When Hayrire returns with Esther, Shekure is spying on Black and Enishte. She worries that Black's love for her will not be "eternal," and if he continues to be unable to marry her he will surely fall in love with someone else. Shekure is also concerned that Hayrire might be snitching on her to Enishte. Shekure snatches the letters from Esther's hand and reads Black's first. She then reads Hasan's letter, which she feels confirms that he's gone mad. Hasan tells her he's heard about her dream, and that he intends to go to the judge to force her to return to his father's house. Shekure begins writing a response to Black and pauses. Esther reassures her that everything will be alright, and when Shekure doubts whether anyone would want to marry a widow with two children, Esther insists that "a slew of men" would.

Until this point, Shekure was happy to coyly evade Black's advances and remain at home with Enishte. However, it becomes clear in this chapter that the stakes have been raised and Shekure feels that the time for her to act is running out. Meanwhile, it is hard to know whether Esther's reassurances are well-founded or not. She seems to believe that just because Shekure is beautiful and the daughter of a wealthy man, everything will turn out fine. Yet terrible misfortune has befallen Shekure before, and could do so again.

Shekure hears Black and Enishte discussing the European portrayal of facial expressions in the next room. She spies on them and is shocked to see that Black's handsome face is completely pale. She fantasizes about kissing and embracing Black and about the size of his penis, but her thoughts are interrupted by Orhan and Shevket, who are squabbling. She writes a note to Black promising that she will meet him at the house of the Hanged Jew. She doesn't respond to Hasan's letter, though she admits that she loves him as well, particularly after learning that he makes a lot of money. Shekure takes Shevket to one side and asks him to deliver a letter to Black, but Shevket protests that yesterday Black admitted that he killed Shevket's father. Shevket cries and Shekure slaps him, before embracing him.

Just as Black fantasizes about having sex with Shekure during his conversation with Enishte, she fantasizes while watching them. This parallel suggests that they have grown perfectly in sync through their love, despite having still not seen one another face-to-face. At the same time, Shekure admits that she still loves Hasan, too, despite her feelings for Black and despite the way Hasan has behaved toward her. The strangeness of Shekure's enduring love for Hasan could indicate that she does not really love him—perhaps she only claims that she does to the reader.

Shekure notes that dreams are powerful. In Portugal, where Esther comes from, the Jesuits would torture Jews who claimed to be Catholic, forcing them to confess to dreams that proved they had sex with the Devil. Shekure adds that dreams are useful as a way of covertly expressing thoughts and desires that cannot be stated explicitly. Shekure sends Shevket to the kitchen and asks Orhan to deliver the piece of paper to Black. Orhan hesitates, but eventually agrees. Later, she calls the two boys together and scold Shevket for telling Orhan that Black killed their father. Shevket cries that he'd prefer Hasan to become their new father, and Shekure slaps him again. They all cry and embrace again, and Shekure sends them downstairs to eat. After Orhan successfully delivers the letter to Black, she sends the boys out to the market with Hayrire.

To some degree Shekure behaves in a similar way to her children, frequently alternating between quick-tempered anger, tears, and reconciliation. However, at least while they are young, Shekure is still permitted to make decisions on behalf of her sons and does not take their protests too seriously. Although Shevket is firmly against the prospect of his mother marrying Black, this does not seem to be based in any real objection to Black's character, but rather only in Shevket's childish fantasies. The fact that both Shevket and Orhan dream of marrying their mother confirms the idea that her beauty has a supernatural power.

Shekure tries on different outfits and closes the door softly as she leaves, "like a ghost." At the house of the Hanged Jew, she briefly thinks that Black will not come; however, shortly after, he arrives. He asks her to remove the veil covering her face, and after some resistance, she does. Black declares that she has become even more beautiful with time, and that he wishes he'd had a portrait of her to treasure during the 12 years they spent apart. They kiss, and Shekure is too happy to feel guilty. She thinks about how their embrace would be depicted by the master illustrators of Herat. At first there is some awkwardness and embarrassment between them, but as they begin to have sex this dies away. However, Black then asks Shekure to perform a "vulgar act" that so infuriates her that she shouts and pushes him away.

Shevket is often compared to a ghost. On one level, this emerges from the fact that she is a ghostly presence in the house, felt and sometimes heard but never seen. The veil covering her face further emphasizes her ghost-like quality, as if she exists behind a kind of mysterious haze. At this point in the novel, Shekure is ghost-like because she remains trapped in a marriage to a man who is probably dead, but not proven to be so. As a result, Shekure remains caught in a liminal (in-between) state of being, unable to move forward with her life.

CHAPTER 27: I AM CALLED BLACK

Shekure yells at Black to stick his penis in the mouth of a prostitute and accuses him of losing "all sense of decorum." Black listens quietly, and Shekure adds that if he really loves her he would learn to control himself. They both listen to check if anyone is around, and Shekure tells Black that the house is haunted by the ghost of the Hanged Jew. They discuss Black's conversation with Shevket; Black admits that Shevket does not like him, but Orhan does. Shekure tells him about Hasan's plan to go to the judge, and asks him if he would agree to live in Enishte's house once they marry. Black says he will think about it, but agrees to testify to the judge that he knows Shekure's husband is dead. Shekure then urges Black to finish the **book**, as she believes it is bringing them trouble. Shekure explains how she came to marry her husband, and Black reflects on the difference between love and lust. Shekure asks him if she is still beautiful; they kiss, but Shekure insists that they do not have sex. Shekure goes home, leaving fading footprints in the **snow**.

Black's reaction to seeing Shekure after so long is rather simple; he wishes to immediately have sex with her, forgetting about the problems that could arise from this. Shekure, however, remains more measured. She asks Black a series of questions that she has clearly planned in advance, and makes sure that he knows about the potential obstacles to their marriage. This confirms the idea that, even though she is 12 years younger than him, Shekure is still more mature than Black. Counter to the stereotype that women are foolish and flighty, Shekure is responsible and level-headed. The final image of her footprints confirms the idea that she has a ghost-like existence.

CHAPTER 28: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

The murderer admits that he often feels inclined to narrate the events of his own life while they happen as if they were already in the past. Tonight, he goes to Enishte's house with a clear sense of purpose, entering without waiting to be let in. Enishte hears him and calls out, asking whether the sound is Hayrire or Shekure, and the murderer announces himself with his full name, followed by "your poor sinful servant." Enishte welcomes him and asks what he wants, and the murderer decides to explain through the story of Sheikh Muhammad of Ifsahan, who was the greatest painter of his time. He was also a keen innovator, and would imitate painting styles originating everywhere from Europe to East Asia. However, in old age he became increasingly pious and denounced all his former work as sacrilegious. He even resorted to burning down the library which contained his work, and he himself died in the fire.

By now, the story of Sheikh Muhammad Ifsahan should be rather familiar; his story is similar to many of the three stories told by each of the miniaturists earlier in the book. Sheikh Muhammad's story suggests that art and religion inherently exist in tension with one another, and that while some artists dismiss the religious implications of their work while they are young, it is inevitable that when they grow old and begin to confront the reality of death they will change their minds. However, Enishte himself contradicts this narrative. Enishte is old and has lately been preoccupied by thoughts of death; however, he has not lost his interest in art nor his resolve to finish the book.

Enishte kindly asks if the murderer is afraid of the pictures they have produced. The murderer replies that the **book** is no longer a secret and that there are rumors about its sinfulness. He confesses that he cannot sleep out of guilt, and that there is a rumor that the miniaturists killed Elegant because he saw the mysterious final illustration and was opposed to it. The murderer is not sure if Enishte has an expression of pride or pity, and he worries that Enishte realizes it was he who killed Elegant. Enishte calmly discusses the way that rulers such as the Sultan feel about painting, and how this changes over time. First they are bold and curious, then they develop their own individual taste, and finally, in old age, they worry about pleasing God and renounce art as they near their deaths. The murderer insists that painters will be punished the most harshly on the Day of Judgment, but Enishte corrects him that it is idol-makers who will be punished this way. Enishte adds that "nothing is pure," and that all Islamic art has been influenced by non-Islamic sources.

Enishte's level-headed attitude regarding the tensions between art and religion is not necessarily based in his own religious convictions, but rather in his observance of the way the world works. He notes that all leaders go through the same cycle of initial enthusiasm about art, which eventually gives way to religious paranoia; the fact that Enishte has seen this happen to several different people seems to make him take their opposition to art less seriously. He also understands that Islamic painting is actually an amalgamation of many different traditions, and that the conventions of Islamic painting have thus evolved in a somewhat arbitrary way—even if they are originally based in religious doctrine.

The murderer finds Enishte's words reasonable, but still doesn't believe him. Enishte tells the murderer that there is a part to the story of Sheikh Muhammad of Ifsahan that the murderer doesn't know. When Sheikh Muhammad was hunting down his works to burn, most of what he found was imitations of his paintings. He came to realize that his work had changed not only the way people painted, but the way they saw. Overcome with emotion, the murderer drops to his knees and kisses Enishte's hand. Enishte tells him that true miniaturists don't pay attention to enemies and zealots; he adds that he is not afraid of "them" because he is not afraid of death. He suggests that they show "them" the last illustration of the **book** to prove that they are not afraid. The murderer says that Elegant was killed by a miniaturist who knew he was planning to set the Erzurumis on Enishte and his team, but that he doesn't know which miniaturist. The murderer suggests that whoever killed Elegant might have done a good deed after all, and Enishte does not reply.

During this conversation, Enishte and the murderer convey information both through what they say and what they don't. Enishte doesn't say so explicitly, but his twist to the story of Sheikh Muhammad suggests that he and the miniaturists might achieve enduring fame and influence through their work on the book. Meanwhile, Enishte's vague reference to "them" assumedly means the Erzurumis. However, this lack of explicit specification is a reminder that the supporters and enemies of Enishte and the book are not necessarily easy to identify. Elegant, for example, was a miniaturist who sided with the Erzurumis; the murderer, meanwhile, is theoretically on the side of the miniaturists but may cause their downfall.

Outside, it is **snowing** again and the streets are deserted. Enishte says that now that he knows one of the miniaturists is a murderer, he will keep working only with Black. The murderer's love for Enishte suddenly turns to hate. He picks up the Mongolian inkpot and almost smashes it over Enishte's head. Instead, he tells Enishte that it was he who murdered Elegant.

This chapter clarifies that the murderer does in fact love and respect Enishte; however, these feelings are marred by his jealousy of Black. It is thus significant that the end of the chapter revolves around the Mongolian inkpot that Black gave to Enishte as a gift.

CHAPTER 29: I AM YOUR BELOVED UNCLE

Enishte panics after the murderer's revelation, wondering if he will be killed next. He tells the murderer that he's surprised that he killed Elegant; as artists in an Islamic city, miniaturists have a difficult life, but they normally react to this by simply feeling guilty. Enishte remarks that the murderer killed Elegant "because you wanted to paint as you wished, without fear." The murderer says that it feels like there is something within him compelling him to commit evil deeds, but Enishte is dismissive of this idea, saying that the murderer is not taking responsibility for his own thoughts. Enishte asks how he killed Elegant, and in the midst of explaining the murderer digresses into a conversation about style. Enishte tells him that style evolves organically as a compromise between different influences. The murderer asks if he has a style of his own, and Enishte replies that the murderer is the most talented artist he has ever met. However, the murderer accuses him of lying.

There is something rather comic about the way in which the murderer and Enishte's conversation swerves between discussions of murder and of artistic style. The murderer's insistence that Enishte speak about his talents as an artist suggests that above all, the murderer is simply egotistical and vain. Ironically, the murderer cannot even gain any satisfaction from Enishte's assurance that he is the most talented of the miniaturists. This fact highlights the extent to which the murderer has isolated himself through his crime. As soon as people realize that he killed Elegant, they no longer relate to him as a normal person, but instead fear that he will kill them next.

The murderer forces Enishte to keep complimenting his work, and then asks why Enishte is working with Black and not him. Enishte explains that the **book** does not require "a miniaturist's skill," and adds that Black is not a murderer. They discuss the inkpot, and then Enishte explains that once the book is finished, the Sultan will lock it away and everything will continue as normal. They then discuss the appeal of the European style, and Enishte admits that Islamic art will not be able to compete with the Europeans in the long run. The books made by miniaturists will fade, rot, or be destroyed by religious zealots. He describes all the images that will disappear, and, at the end of this long speech, the murderer strikes Enishte on the head with the inkpot. Enishte howls and begs for the murderer not to kill him, but the murderer smashes the inkpot against his skull again and again.

Enishte's discussion of the reality that Islamic miniaturist painting is doomed to disappear is in some ways a discussion about death. The fact that Enishte has accepted the inevitable disappearance of miniaturist painting indicates that he has also accepted death. The murderer, however, has not accepted death and lives in fear of God's judgment once he dies. As a result, he kills Enishte, which is, of course, an ironically ineffective solution; while he sends Enishte to the death that Enishte is prepared to greet, he doubles his own crimes and thus reduces the likelihood of receiving mercy from God.

Enishte clarifies that "death is not the end," but that it is beyond human understanding. He recalls an Assyrian legend where an old man is confronted by Death, refuses it, and lives on for another 20 years—however, this does not happen to him. Not wanting to look at the face of the murderer any longer, Enishte closes his eyes and meets Azrael, the Angel of Death. Although he was previously distressed and frightened, just before he finally dies, he comes to desire death. Satan appears, asking Enishte to denounce the Prophet Muhammad, but Enishte simply ignores him. Azrael asks Enishte to open his mouth so his soul can leave; Enishte resists, but eventually relents. His soul, which is "the size of a bee," rests in Azrael's hand. Everything is silent and Enishte feels calm. He no longer experiences time in a linear fashion, but rather as if everything is happening at once.

Like Elegant's narration from the afterlife, Enishte's narration of his own death confirms that the Muslim ideas about death mentioned throughout the book—such as those contained in the "Book of the Apocalypse" and "Book of the Soul"—are true in a literal way. More importantly, Enishte's death serves as a vindication of Enishte's character and beliefs. Although the final verdict on Enishte's life won't come until Judgment Day, the fact that he is greeted warmly by Azrael and feels at peace indicate that he did not commit grave sins during his life (as the Erzurumis claim).

CHAPTER 30: I, SHEKURE

It is **snowing** hard as Shekure walks home from the House of the Hanged Jew. She believes that Black truly loves her, but she is dismayed by his haste to have sex. When she gets home, she notices that Hayrire and the boys still haven't returned from the market. She hears the front door squeak and walks into a room that is in shambles; she then sees Enishte lying on the floor. She screams, hugs Enishte, and begs Allah to return the life to his body. Once she stops crying, she locks Enishte's body in another room and begins to mop up the blood. When the children return with Hayrire, Shekure tells them that Enishte is ill and is sleeping. The boys try to go into the room where Enishte's body lies, and she tells them that a jinn came to visit Enishte and that they must stay out or they'll die.

The opening to this chapter builds suspense, as Shekure seems to be incriminating herself by hiding Enishte's body and lying to her sons about his death. Furthermore, Shekure does not provide a reason as to why she takes this course of action, creating further tension. Yet even though her reasoning remains a mystery to the reader, Shekure shows no signs of hesitation as she goes about hiding Enishte's body. This confirms the sense that she is an exceptionally bold woman with a strong desire to command her own fate.

Having locked the boys in their room, Shekure goes downstairs and tells Hayrire that Enishte is dead. Hayrire shrieks and insists on going to see the body. Shekure confesses that she was with Black at the time of the murder. She insists that they act as if everything is normal. That night, she tells the boys a love story about a prince and princess in order to help them go to sleep. Later, Shekure and Hayrire recite a chapter from the Koran, wash Enishte's body and change his clothes. Hayrire asks if she may put her mattress in Shekure's room that night, but Shekure refuses.

As this passage shows, Shekure's uncompromising boldness can cause her to behave cruelly toward others. Despite the fact that Enishte was murdered inside the house by someone who is still at large, Shekure refuses to allow Hayrire to sleep with her and the boys. It seems that now that Enishte is dead, Shekure wishes to assert herself as the new, tough "man of the house."

CHAPTER 31: I AM RED

The color red describes places it has appeared in different books, stating: "I've been everywhere and I am everywhere." It knows the reader will wonder what it means to be a color and it answers poetically, adding that it is fortunate to be "fiery" and "strong." It explains that it came to exist when a master miniaturist crushed dried red beetles and turned the pigment into paint while drinking **coffee**. It recalls once hearing two **blind** masters discussing how they would explain the color red to someone who had never seen it; one master said that red would burn to the touch, would taste like meat, and would smell like daisies. However, the miniaturists concluded that red cannot truly be explained to someone who cannot see.

Immediately it is clear that this short and abstract chapter is important, as it shares the same title as the novel overall. Through the perspective of red specifically, the chapter explores the magical nature of art and vision. As the color red argues, visual phenomena—particularly phenomena as pure and simple as colors—cannot be explained to those who cannot see. They exist in their own plane of meaning, and the masters who have gone blind realize that this meaning is inaccessible to those who cannot experience it firsthand.

CHAPTER 32: I, SHEKURE

In the morning, Shekure writes a note to Black telling him to meet her at the house of the Hanged Jew and she gives it to Hayrire to give to Esther. When the boys wake up, Shekure tells them that Enishte is better and has gone to the Mustafa Pasha district. At the house of the Hanged Jew, she tells Black that Enishte was murdered, and adds that the murderer stole the final picture from the **book**. She explains that, with Enishte dead, she will be legally required to return to Hasan's house and that this is why she is hiding her father's death. Immediately, she begins to arrange her and Black's marriage, setting out conditions which include a demand that Black not sleep with her until the murderer is caught and the book is finished. Black agrees to the conditions, and Shekure explains that "love comes after marriage" and that they will be happy this way. Shekure tells Black to arrange for a certain sympathetic judge to hear her case and have her first husband be ruled dead. If he does so by the afternoon, they can get married in the evening and all stay at Enishte's house together that night. Black agrees and tells Shekure she is beautiful; she replies that she is glad to be praised for her intelligence.

Despite being in mourning and in fear of the murderer who killed Enishte, Shekure wastes no time in taking next steps to ensure the safety and well-being of herself and the boys. Her assertiveness in this chapter demonstrates the fact that women, despite having few legal rights, still end up bearing huge responsibilities. Furthermore, because Shekure has little structural access to power, she must do everything via proxy—for example, by giving the note for Black to Hayrire and Esther, and by sending Black to the judge in order to establish her husband's death. While the extent to which Shekure plans her route to marrying Black down to the tiniest detail seems extreme, this makes sense in light of the fact that she is not able to execute almost any of the steps herself, but rather has to trust others to carry out her wishes for her.

CHAPTER 33: I AM CALLED BLACK

Shekure leaves, and Black feels both anxious and happy at the thought of their marriage. Black finds an imam and asks him for help with a legal proceeding, which the imam agrees to do for a bribe. Black says that Enishte is ill and wishes to have Shekure's widowhood certified before he dies, and the imam happily obliges. Black imagines the rest of his day as four scenes depicted by a miniaturist. In the first, Black is traveling across the Bosphorus (the strait that runs through Istanbul) accompanied by the imam and his brother. In the second, Black gives a second bribe to an official in order to secure Shekure's certificate of widowhood. In the third scene, a proxy for the judge refuses to grant the certificate until Shekure's male guardian is present. The proxy is only persuaded when Black explains that he plans to marry Shekure and promises to make her happy. The final picture shows the proxy certifying the end of Shekure's marriage and handing the document to Black.

From a contemporary perspective, Black's impression of the "four scenes" of his mission to get Shekure's widowhood certificate resembles a movie montage. Black himself, meanwhile, views his journey through the primary art form of his time—miniature painting. This suggests that miniature painting is such a major part of Black's life—and life in Istanbul in general—that he begins to see his ordinary actions through the lens of this form of art. Furthermore, this proves correct the story Enishte told to the murderer—that painting can be so powerful that it influences the way people see the world around them.

Rushing back to Enishte's house, Black feels paranoid that other people will thwart his plan, guilty that he has not had time to mourn Enishte, and pleased that everything has gone well so far. Outside the house, Hayrire informs him that Shekure wants a wedding procession and that she has been cooking dishes for the reception. However, Black insists that the wedding must be small and melancholy, otherwise someone will try to stop it from taking place. Black goes to the imam and asks him to perform the ceremony; after some resistance, the imam agrees. Black then goes to the barber, who embraces him and begins gossiping about the neighborhood as if Black had not been gone the past 12 years. Suddenly, Shevket appears at the door, and hands Black a note from Shekure in which she states that she refuses to get married without a bridal procession. Black tells Shevket "all right."

Even though they are about to be married, Black and Shekure still cannot communicate directly and must do so through other people. This makes their plan even more complicated; not only do they have to hastily arrange their marriage while convincing everyone that Enishte is still alive, but there is a constant risk that they will miscommunicate or fail to appropriately carry out the other's wishes. There is also no possibility of discussion, and thus when they disagree over the wedding procession Black must either overrule Shekure's wishes (as conventional gender roles dictate) or honor them against his will—which is what he does.

Black goes back to Enishte's house, where a small crowd has gathered. Shekure emerges, wearing a red bridal dress and pink streamers. As the procession begins, Black realizes that Shekure insisted on having it in order to secure the approval of the neighborhood for their marriage. As the crowd around them joyfully shouts good wishes, Black still feels nervous that the wedding may be sabotaged at any moment. He also feels sad for Shekure about the fact that the wedding is modest and held at such a melancholy time. When they arrive back at the house, they are immediately struck by the smell of Enishte's body rotting. However, Hayrire has lit the room such that it is impossible to tell that Enishte is actually dead, and thus he serves as Shekure's legal guardian during the ceremony. Just as it seems a "nosy" person is about to ask Enishte about his health, Black grabs Enishte's hand and loudly promises to take care of Shekure and leans in so as to pretend that Enishte is whispering something to him. Once the ceremony is over, Black goes to the women's room to tell Shekure that they are now married and that Enishte wishes to speak with her. They go to the room where the body is, kiss Enishte's hand, and then passionately kiss each other.

The wedding itself is a tragicomic event. On one level, many extremely funny things take place—particularly when the ceremony is held around Enishte's dead body and Black must convince the attendees that Enishte is still alive. This surreal scene blurs the boundary between life and death; although Enishte is dead, he is still made to play an active role, and is forced to consent to a marriage of which he did not exactly approve during his life. Meanwhile, the reader knows that Enishte is not truly gone but is instead in the afterlife, and presumably knows about the marriage. Although his body is giving approval for the marriage, we can imagine that his soul is watching on from somewhere else and possibly opposing it. While the chapter ends on the happy (and amusing) note of Black and Shekure kissing, this is overshadowed by the fact that neither have yet had a chance to grieve.

CHAPTER 34: I, SHEKURE

As the final guests leave, Shekure asks Orhan and Shevket to kiss Black's hand. She tells them to respect Black and asks Black to be patient with them, as they are unused to having a father around. She then tells the boys that Enishte is very ill and ignores Shevket's request to go and see him. As the boys go to bed, Hayrire begins to tell them a story about a blue man and a jinn, and Shekure scolds her for speaking of jinns tonight of all nights. After cuddling Orhan, Shekure goes into the next room and lays out the illustrations for the book before Black, and they look at them together in silence. Shekure suggests that in the morning they tell the children that Enishte died in the night. She walks into the room where Enishte's body lies, looks at his face and feels frightened. When she returns to Black, he embraces and kisses her, and she fights him off, saying that she will not share his bed until the murderer is caught. She then goes into the children's room and gets into bed with them. Once asleep, Shekure has "fitful" dreams and awakes covered in sweat, worried that she heard a sound.

The surreal antics continue as the family settles down for a highly unusual wedding night. It seems as if Black has not only married Shekure but the whole group of Shekure, the boys, Hayrire, and even Enishte's dead body. Shekure's frantic movement between the different rooms emphasizes that there is little privacy in the house; even if she and Black did decide to consummate the marriage that night, it is difficult to imagine they could do so without being interrupted. Although theoretically Black and Shekure's plan has been executed successfully, there is a distinct sense that trouble lurks around the corner. As long as Enishte's body is in the house, Black and Shekure are hiding a secret that jeopardizes their future together.

Shekure thinks that if this had happened before she was married she would have taken "charge of the situation like the man of the house." Instead, she gets up cautiously and notices that the front gate is open. She then feels certain that Enishte's soul is at that moment struggling to leave his body, and that perhaps Black's presence in the house is upsetting him. Shekure then hears that Black is speaking with Hasan in the street, and part of her feels sympathy for Hasan, who is telling Black that the marriage is illegitimate, as Shekure's first husband is still alive. Black explains that Shekure's widowhood was legally certified and that Enishte—who is on his deathbed—consented to the marriage, and Hasan accuses him of poisoning Enishte. Suddenly there is a cry from inside the house; Shevket wails that Enishte is dead. Hasan tells Shekure that if she silently returns to his house immediately, he will forget about her "crimes."

While Shekure's husband was absent, she was afforded a level of autonomy that was highly unusual for women. Ordinarily, women in 16th-century Istanbul were legally controlled by a father, husband, brother, or son. However, because Shekure's husband was legally considered alive yet was effectively nonexistent, she could—at least in her own home—assume the position of "man of the house." Although this was undoubtedly a difficult position to occupy, it is also a difficult position to let go of. Now that she is married to Black, Shekure feels unsure about her role within her own home.

As Hasan continues to accuse Black of killing Enishte, Black concedes that Enishte was murdered, but suggests that it was Hasan himself who did it. Shekure refuses to go with Hasan, and Hasan states that this leaves him no choice but to go to the judge in the morning. Black counters that in that case, he will tell the judge that Hasan murdered Enishte. Shekure cries out that both of them will be tortured, and Hasan insists that he has no fear of this. He then asks Black what is depicted in the **book**; Black replies "nothing." Hasan leaves, and Shekure returns to bed, after checking on Enishte once more.

This chaotic encounter highlights the fact that no one is truly innocent. While Black and Shekure were arguably in the right when they annulled Shekure's marriage, they have clearly sinned by pretending that Enishte was still alive. Meanwhile, although Hasan claims to want Shekure to return to his house in order to honor religious law, in reality he wishes her to return so that he can marry her himself.

CHAPTER 35: I AM A HORSE

The horse announces that it has been "galloping for centuries… in countless illustrations." It admits that it is proud to have been painted so often, and brings up the question of whether being depicted in a realist style is sinful. The horse itself has been depicted in the Islamic miniaturist style, such that there is theoretically no difference between its image and that of other horses in miniature paintings. It might seem strange that miniaturists take pride in illustrating horses in the exact same way over and over again, but this is because they are trying to see the world as Allah sees it. The horse suggests that the European style is paradoxically more in keeping with Islamic teaching, even though Europeans themselves may be infidels who commit all kinds of sins, such as immodesty. The horse accuses miniaturists of painting horses not as they really are, and concludes with a story about a prince who grew up imprisoned in a single room. When he was finally let out, the prince demanded that someone bring him a horse; yet when a beautiful horse was brought to him, the prince was so enraged that it did not resemble illustrations of horses that he ordered all the horses in the kingdom to be slaughtered. Without a cavalry, the kingdom was defeated in battle and the prince was killed.

In this chapter, the horse presents a new perspective on the religious ethics of different styles of painting. It admits that Islamic miniaturists use an unrealistic, uniform style as a way of honoring the vision of Allah. However, it then suggests that this is a perversion of the world as it truly is. Surely the truest way to honor God is to depict the world as God created it—even if this is mediated through the lens of human perception. In this sense, the horse advocates a view of religion that is strikingly liberal and contemporary. According to the horse's argument, if God created something, then it cannot be sinful—however, the horse itself contradicts this point by arguing that Europeans sin by refusing to sufficiently cover up their bodies. On the other hand, the horse's argument seems to be deliberately provocative, so perhaps it does not matter that it is not logically coherent.

CHAPTER 36: I AM CALLED BLACK

After Shekure returns to the boys' room, Black listens anxiously to the sounds of the house. He stares at the illustrations for the **book**, trying to come up with a story. In the morning, Black is awakened by Hayrire shouting. Shekure tells the children that Enishte has just died; Shevket replies that Enishte in fact died in the night and asks Black if he killed him. Shekure shrieks in mourning, and Black begins to cry, too. They embrace and Black announces "*La ilahe illallah*, There is no God but Allah" and recites a chapter of the Koran. They move Enishte's body so his head faces Mecca and they cover him with a white sheet. Black collects the illustrations for the book and goes to the mosque. He asks the imam to perform the death rites for Enishte, giving him another gold coin.

Having hidden the fact that Enishte was dead for over a day—and in doing so broken Islamic law—Black, Shekure, and Hayrire immediately launch into a performance of grief and do the appropriate religious rites for Enishte's body. At this moment, they are finally able to express the grief that they have been suppressing up until that point, and thus the performance is authentic even if it is also rather duplicitous.

Black then sets off to the palace to inform the Sultan. He goes to the door of the Sultan's Head Treasurer, where a number of royal artisans are also waiting. When it is Black's turn to enter, he tells the clerk that he needs to speak with the Head Treasurer about a **book** the Sultan has commissioned and shows him the illustrations. When the Head Treasurer finally appears and asks if Enishte is dead, Black is so overcome to be in his presence that he begins to weep. Overwhelmed by his proximity to the Sultan, Black confesses everything to the Head Treasurer, from his marriage to Shekure to his difficulty in finishing the book. He also relates his suspicions about who might have killed Enishte, and why. The Head Treasurer asks where the final illustration is, and Black explains that the murderer stole it. The Head Treasurer also inquires after the text, and is shocked to learn that Enishte was illustrating a book without a story for a whole year. Black then confesses that Enishte knew that one of the miniaturists murdered Elegant, and that he suspected it was either Butterfly, Olive, or Stork. He panics that the Head Treasurer will think he is a liar, but when the Treasurer says they should keep Enishte's death a secret, Black feels that the Treasurer believes him.

Up until this point, the role of the Sultan and his impact on Istanbul society have not been explored in any detail. Furthermore, Black himself has not said anything to make it seem like the Sultan has any particular importance to him. However, as soon as Black is face-to-face with the Head Treasurer he is completely overcome with emotion and confesses all the secrets he has been guarding so closely up until this point. This strange turn of events illustrates the insidious way in which power operates. The Head Treasurer does not even have to say anything to get Black to confess everything to him. Simply the fact that Black is in the palace and near the Sultan makes him immediately let his guard down and behave in a somewhat ridiculous manner. This conveys the Sultan's power and shows how this power is sustained.

CHAPTER 37: I AM YOUR BELOVED UNCLE

Enishte's funeral is "splendid," attended by many important figures in Istanbul society. The presence of the Head Treasurer and Commander of the Imperial Guard make it clear that the Sultan is extremely distressed by Enishte's death. Enishte is infuriated to see the murderer among the crowd, though he assures the reader that his soul is at peace. After death, Enishte's soul was lifted through the seven Heavens by two angels, just as *The Book of the Soul* describes. During this time, he saw a fantastic array of colors that, before long, were overtaken by a "an absolutely matchless red." Enishte knew that he was close to the presence of God, and he confessed about his experimentation with European painting styles. God assured him: "East and West belong to me." Enishte is relieved to learn that the idea that the soul reenters the dead body after death is only a figure of speech. He experiences time in a non-linear fashion, his memories of childhood mixing in with his impression of his own funeral. He notes that the soul lives in four realms: 1) the womb 2) earth 3) Berzah (limbo), and 4) Heaven/Hell. Enishte reflects that it is both wonderful to be a soul without a body and to be a body without a soul.

Enishte's experience of death is a distinct contrast to the narrative given by the dead soul of Elegant. Whereas Elegant's soul remained disgruntled and infuriated by the fact that nobody realized he had been murdered, Enishte attains the peace and reassurance that cannot be obtained in life. Note that as Enishte nears the presence of God, he is surrounded by a brilliant shade of red. This does not necessarily suggest that God Himself is the color red, but rather it evokes a connection between the visual art to which Enishte has devoted his life and the divine. The fact that God seems not to mind that Enishte experimented with European painting styles provides an answer on this central debate that is surprisingly definitive given the multiplicity and complexity of opinions provided within the novel.

CHAPTER 38: IT IS I, MASTER OMAN

Master Osman expresses a wish to counter what he perceives to be false accusations aimed at the old masters. He defends the fact that he forgets people easily and treats most people like morons, and adds that masters do not like innovation because "there is truly nothing new worth liking." During Enishte's funeral, Master Osman is so moved that he almost forgets that during his lifetime, Enishte forced Osman to copy the European style of painting. After a long period working on an illustration, Master Osman walks out into the street and is delighted by what he sees. He notices a dog, a horse, and a tree, and as he walks through the Hippodrome he feels like he is inside one of his own paintings. A page boy leads him to the Sultan's Private Garden, where the Head Treasurer and Commander of the Imperial Guard are waiting. Osman observes that they are like an angel and devil, explaining that the Commander is responsible for torturing and executing people.

Master Osman is, to some extent, a human manifestation of the traditional style of miniature painting. His attitude toward change and innovation is rather typical of an older person whose authority within a particular tradition is well-established and who personally benefits from the conservative maintenance of that tradition. Osman's life is so closely bound up in his practice as a miniaturist that, walking through the streets of Istanbul, he feels like he is inside a painting. However, the fact that he notices a dog, a horse, and a tree suggests that he is perhaps not actually in his own painting, but rather inside Enishte's book.

The Head Treasurer mentions the **book** and states that the Sultan thought Master Osman would be too busy to work on it. He adds that the Sultan is furious about Enishte's murder and has ordered that the book must be finished and the murderer found. He also explains that Black believes one of the master miniaturists is the murderer, yet Master Osman maintains that the miniaturists are incapable of such an act. The Commander notes that they have permission to use torture while interrogating Black, but that they don't want to hinder the progression of the book. Master Osman imagines the miniaturists being tortured and urges that they not be harmed. The Head Treasurer and Commander bring out the illustrations for the book and ask if Master Osman knows which miniaturist completed which illustration. Osman replies that he does, and at that moment, the Sultan arrives.

At this point in the novel, Enishte's book does indeed seem to be an omen of violence and destruction. The miniaturists' involvement with the book has made them all suspects in Enishte's murder, and it seems that the book will now be used as a clue in order to identify the murderer. At this moment, the novel's two main plots are united: the murder mystery and the narrative surrounding the creation of the book. The themes of art, identity, life, death, virtue, and sin are thus united through the book and through the mission to discover the identity of the murderer.

CHAPTER 39: I AM ESTHER

Esther enjoys the experience of being among the crowd at Enishte's funeral. At Enishte's house, she asks Hayrire to pour her a glass of water and mentions that there is a rumor that Enishte was dead before Shekure's wedding. Shekure arrives and confesses that she is anxious that she made the wrong decision. She claims that she and the boys will not be at peace until Enishte's murderer is captured. Esther goes to visit Kabilye, the widow of Elegant, who has not visited Shekure to express condolences in the wake of Enishte's death. Kabilye disapproved of Elegant's work on the **book** and believes that he was murdered as a result of his involvement with it. Esther points out that she and Shekure are united in grief and that Elegant and Enishte were likely murdered by the same person. Kabilye gives Esther a piece of paper which contains several rough sketches of horses, explaining it was found on Elegant's person when his body was discovered. She points out that Elegant was a gilder, not an illustrator, and that if Shekure wants to see the horses she must come in person.

Like Elegant, Kabilye is stubborn and suspicious about the book and all those who are involved with it. This prejudice prevents her from seeing the reality that Elegant and Enishte were murdered by the same person, and that it would therefore probably be wise to unite with Shekure in an attempt to discover the murderer's identity. Kabilye's distrust of Shekure could originate in resentment of her beauty or belief that her marriage to Black is illegitimate. In this sense, Kabilye represents the side of Istanbul society that is more fervently religious and suspicious of art (and the miniaturists in particular). This is shown by the fact that she insistently points out that Elegant was a gilder, not an illustrator.

CHAPTER 40: I AM CALLED BLACK

Black admits that men like him who have melancholy natures do not experience real joy or sadness, only constant turmoil. After Enishte's funeral, Shekure bursts into tears and Black worries that if he begins to cry, too, it will seem insincere. At that moment, a royal page arrives and summons Black to the Sultan's palace. On the way there, Black panics, fearing that he is about to be tortured. These fears seem to be confirmed when Black arrives and is locked in a small, dark room. He wonders if the silver coin in his pocket will be enough to protect him. Two executioners arrive; one takes off Black's shirt and the other puts a vice on his head and begins to squeeze. Black screams, yet maintains that he did not kill Enishte and doesn't know who did. Just as Black thinks he is about to die, they remove the vice and Master Osman enters, telling him that the Sultan has ordered that he not be tortured. The Sultan is giving him three days in which to scrutinize the **book's** illustrations in order to find out who killed Enishte. If he does not come up with an answer after three days, he and the master's miniaturists will all be tortured.

Black's melancholy nature borders on being humorous. Although he is presented as the hero of the story, Black remains rather hapless, inhibited by his constant inner turmoil. Once again, he is shown to be a somewhat feminized figure, particularly in relation to Shekure who has a more forthright, dominant personality. Master Osman, meanwhile, continues to be associated with both good and evil. He interrupts Black's torture, but only after the executioners have already begun, and in general he has a rather sinister presence in this chapter. The Sultan's demand that Osman and Black find the murderer within three days creates a sense of narrative momentum building up to the climax of the novel, in which the murderer's identity may (or may not) be revealed.

CHAPTER 41: IT IS I, MASTER OSMAN

Master Osman admits that he was horrified when he first saw the illustrations of the **book**, and has now decided to return to them in order to figure out what disturbed him so much. He is angered by the fact that there is no story, and that the illustration exist in isolation. He objects to the style in which the illustrations have been rendered, which he considers to be "devoid of any skill whatsoever." He is also offended by the subjects of the illustrations, particularly Satan, the dervishes, and the dog. He is "terrified" by the vividness of the color red in the illustrations. Osman claims that he knows which miniaturist completed which picture, but Black says he doubts that, given that they were not produced in the miniaturists' usual styles.

Master Osman's objection to the book rests on two distinct yet interrelated issues. His disdain for the use of the realist style makes immediate sense, as this is the result of European influence and a clear violation of Islamic dictates against realist representation. The issue of the illustrations standing on their own, however, is more complex. After all, there is supposed to be a story uniting the pictures eventually, it just hasn't been written yet. The danger of solitary illustrations seems to rest on the fact that the viewer must determine the pictures' meanings.

Master Osman answers with a parable about a shah who loved two things: illustrated manuscripts and his beautiful daughter. One day, a miniaturist delivered a version of Shirin and Hüsrev to the shah, and he realized that his daughter was depicted as one of the background characters. The miniaturist attempted to conceal his identity, but the shah located him through examining the way he depicted ears. Osman explains that painters do not pay much attention to ears and thus unconsciously illustrate them in their own distinct style. The Commander's men enter the room, carrying illustrations they have seized from the miniaturists. Black asks how the story ends, and Osman decides not to tell him that the miniaturist was **blinded**; instead, he says that the miniaturist married the shah's daughter. Osman repeats that it is difficult to identify the style of a miniaturist who has taken care to conceal any kind of "stylistic signature"; however, by looking at certain clues it is possible.

The idea of stylistic signature being a hidden clue further draws together the murder mystery plot with the novel's thematic questions about artistic creation and representation. Just as a murderer attempting to conceal his identity can unwittingly leave clues that will identify him, so too can an artist who wishes to paint without a stylistic signature accidentally leave stylistic clues in his paintings. The act of murder and the act of painting are thus drawn together by the fact that they are both mortal acts imitating the work of God (who is both the creator and extinguisher of life). Unlike God, humans are flawed, and thus leave marks of their flaws on their "work."

Master Osman and Black look through the **book** and are able to attribute particular illustrations to Olive, Stork, and Butterfly. In this way, they are able to learn the stylistic attributes of each miniaturist. Osman notes that Olive comes from a long line of Mongol illustrators and that he was never able to persuade Olive to abandon East Asian stylistic influences. Osman once paid him a surprise visit at home and saw that his workspace was messy and disorganized. Osman claims that Olive is both the most "quiet and sensitive" miniaturist and the most "guilty," "traitorous," and "devious." However, Osman does not believe Olive is the murderer because Olive doesn't "believe in anything." Black and Osman discuss possible reasons why Olive might have murdered Enishte, but they reach no conclusion.

Master Osman's method for determining which miniaturist is the murderer does not exactly hold up to conventional methods of criminal identification. Rather than considering objective evidence, Osman focuses on his own impression of Olive. Even when his subjective assessment of Olive's qualities indicate that Olive does seem to possess the capacity for murder (Osman even thinks of him as being the most "guilty"), Osman still overrides this impression with the rather groundless claim that Olive could not be the murderer.

Next Black and Osman consider Butterfly. Osman admits that he finds it unbelievable that a man could be both as handsome and as talented as Butterfly. He admits that, although he beats all his miniaturists, he still respects them—particularly Butterfly. Butterfly has a strong sense of justice and is eager to please. Black and Osman wonder whether Butterfly's desperation to become Head Illuminator after Osman's death could have led him to murder. In fact, Osman already wants Butterfly to succeed him, as he doesn't trust Olive and he believes that Stork will "unwittingly become a slave to the Venetian style." Osman tells Black that his special relationship with Butterfly used to make the other miniaturists jealous. Black mentions that there are rumors that Butterfly is a follower of the Hoja of Erzurum. Osman comments that the tradition of miniaturist painting is doomed to be forgotten in favor of the European style.

Butterfly is clearly Master Osman's favorite miniaturist, but, once again, Osman seems to be taking a rather biased and subjective view. He is seduced by Butterfly's extraordinary beauty, which is important in terms of the broader themes of appearance, beauty, and idolatry. Like the realist illustrations in Enishte's book, Butterfly's appearance leads Master Osman to adore and even worship him. Furthermore, Butterfly's tendency for sycophantic behavior plays into Master Osman's vanity, and his faithfulness to the existing miniaturist tradition confirms why he is Osman's favorite. Yet do these facts rule him out as the murderer?

Black and Osman move on to Stork, who Osman claims is "ambitious and conceited." Osman admits that if one of the three miniaturists is indeed the murderer, he hopes it's Stork. Stork uses the same level of realist detail as the European painters, but unlike the Europeans he doesn't depict people's faces as unique and individual. Stork is cynical and mocks everything. Black comments that Stork loved to paint violent and "gruesome" scenes, however Master Osman replies that a painter's character is not revealed in his subject matter.

Even though Master Osman believes that Stork is the murderer and thus he presumably would want to convince Black of the same thing, he refuses to concede that Stork's preference for depicting violent scenes is evidence that he committed murder. In this sense, Osman's beliefs about art are even more important to him than identifying the murderer.

CHAPTER 42: I AM CALLED BLACK

Just when Master Osman and Black have finished poring over the illustrations for the **book**, one of the Commander's men brandishes a new piece of paper. Black is in the middle of doing an eye exercise that is supposed to help prevent **blindness** when he notices that the new piece of paper is a letter from Shekure accompanied by a painting. Osman takes the painting and hands the letter to Black. Shekure tells Black that Esther visited Kabilye, who gave her the enclosed painting, which was found on Elegant's dead body. Kalbiye insists that Elegant did not draw the horses on the piece of paper and that they must have been done by someone else. Master Osman comments that whoever drew the horses is the same miniaturist who drew the horse for the book; yet they are not sure who that is. Black wonders aloud why the horses are so entrancing. The horses themselves are beautiful, but it is the realist style in which the scene has been depicted that has such a magically appealing effect.

This passage further emphasizes the idea that there is something both magical and dangerous about the European-influenced realist style of painting. After all, a horse painted in the Islamic style would not be able to serve as a clue to the murderer's identity, as it would likely resemble countless other horses rendered according to the same strict formula. The horses on the piece of paper, however, are "real" in a double sense; they are drawn from real life in a lifelike manner, and they serve an important role in the real event of Elegant's murder. As a potential clue, the horses come to life through their ability to impact reality.

Master Osman states that "no miniaturist in his right mind would depict a horse using a real horse as a model." He believes that artists always draw from their own memories, rather than from what they can see. Osman decisively announces that none of the miniaturists could have done the illustration of the horses, and that they should forget the horses. Yet he and Black notice something unusual about the depiction of the horses' nostrils. They continue to search through the other books illustrated by the miniaturists, but cannot find a clue that links any of these illustrations to the picture of the horses. Black suddenly notices the presence of the Sultan, who, along with the Head Treasurer has been listening to Master Osman's words. The Sultan tells Black that he loved and misses Enishte, but Black is so stunned that he misses some of the Sultan's words. The Sultan tells Black that he must discover the identity of the murderer, and that, if he doesn't, all the master miniaturists will be tortured. The Sultan mentions that his favorite story by the Poet Nizami is the one in which doctors compete to the death. As Black hurries home that night, he recalls the story of the doctors with horror.

Once again, the stakes are raised in this passage as the Sultan reminds Black and Osman that they have a very limited time period in which to discover the identity of the murderer. Black's shock at being in the presence of the Sultan further increases the sense of drama in this scene. Although the Sultan is threatening to (unjustly) torture Black if he doesn't find the murderer in an incredibly short period of time, Black still exhibits a sense of absolute loyalty to and reverence for the Sultan, such that he can barely even stand to be in his presence. The Sultan's mention of the story of the doctors who compete to the death is sinister, suggesting he actually enjoys the power of life and death he holds over the miniaturists. Yet the Sultan's power is so absolute that Black does not even think to question its possible abuse.

CHAPTER 43: I AM CALLED "OLIVE"

Before evening prayers, one of the Commander's men arrives at Olive's house and announces that the Sultan has called for a contest to see which miniaturist can draw the best horse in the shortest time. Olive fetches his materials, yet just before he is about to begin drawing he freezes, panicking that the whole thing might be a trap and, simultaneously, that he won't be able to draw a good horse. However, his hands then take over and he begins to draw the horse. As he does so he admires the natural beauty of the animal. When he draws the horse's rump, he feels a pleasant tingle in his own butt. He finishes off the drawing and thinks: "When I draw a magnificent horse, I become that magnificent horse."

Olive's account of drawing the horse suggests that his identity is somewhat fluid and tied to the subjects of his artistic practice. When he looks at the horse while drawing it, he feels that he is looking at himself, and even experiences physical sensations that mirror his feelings of admiration (and perhaps even desire) for the horse. Through his art, Olive's identity becomes subsumed in his subject, which also elevates him to the status of a "magnificent" figure.

CHAPTER 44: I AM CALLED "BUTTERFLY"

Around the time of evening prayers, someone arrives at Butterfly's house and announces the Sultan's horse-drawing competition. Butterfly is happy to participate but frustrated that the horse must be drawn in blank ink, because, of all the miniaturists, he makes the best use of color. He stares at the page and tries to envision a horse that will please both the Sultan and Master Osman; immediately, he begins to draw at a fast pace. Butterfly basks in his own talent as he draws, thinking about how everyone will be impressed by the horse. He imagines winning the prize and being given compliments and a bag of gold coins by the Sultan. When he is almost finished, he takes time over the final details in order to make it clear that he worked hard on the picture. He concludes: "When I draw a magnificent horse, I become a great master of old drawing that horse."

This passage proves that Master Osman's opinion about Butterfly is correct. Clearly, Butterfly is desperately eager to please, as shown by the fact that he tries to envision a horse that will satisfy both the Sultan and Master Osman and that he fantasizes about the Sultan giving him compliments when he wins. Because of this, Butterfly does not have much of an original style as an artist, which, in fact, makes him a better miniaturist in the traditional sense. Butterfly's fidelity to the traditional style is confirmed by his statement at the end of the chapter that when he draws a magnificent horse, he becomes a "great master."

CHAPTER 45: I AM CALLED "STORK"

Stork is on the way to the **coffeehouse** after evening prayers when a boy from the palace arrives at his door. When he hears about the competition, Stork thinks that it is impossible to select the world's most beautiful horse from all the varieties that exist in nature, but he understands that the Sultan doesn't mean the most beautiful real horse but one that looks like an old Persian drawing. Stork is certain the Sultan knows that he is the best miniaturist, so he doesn't understand the point of the competition, but he draws a horse anyway. He then tries to draw another and the boy tells him to stop; however, Stork bribes him with two counterfeit gold coins. Stork then retrieves a secret notebook where he keeps copies of his best illustrations and cuts a picture of a horse out to use as a stencil. He gives the boy three more coins in order to bribe him into secrecy about the stencil, and states: "When I draw a magnificent horse, I am who I am, nothing more."

Like the previous chapter, this chapter confirms that Master Osman is also right about Stork. Stork's vanity and ambition are demonstrated by the fact that he thinks that it is so obvious that he is the best miniaturist that the competition is unnecessary, and by the fact that he bribes the boy from the palace in order to break the competition rules. The chapter also shows that Master Osman is right to be suspicious of Stork's interest in European-influenced realist styles of painting. Stork immediately imagines the competition as a contest between real horses, even though he reminds himself that actual horses are irrelevant within the miniaturist tradition.

CHAPTER 46: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

The murderer asks if the reader was able to identify him through the drawing competition. He admits that he knew immediately that the competition was a trap in order to identify the creator of the horse drawings found on Elegant's body, but he believes there is no flaw or signature in his work that could be used to identify him. The murderer walks through a market, past shops, and into the street kitchen where he often eats dinner. The Syrian cook greets him warmly and gives him a bowl of cabbage dolma. A young clerk begins a conversation with the murderer; when he asks who the murderer is, the murderer introduces himself as Bihzad, the famous master from Herat. The murderer claims that painting and beauty are about conjuring in front of one's eyes what one's mind already knows. The clerk doesn't realize who Bihzad is, so the murderer keeps telling him about the master, describing scenes and stories that he depicted. After a while, the murderer tires of the conversation and leaves the kitchen.

Following the conventions of murder mystery, the reader is encouraged to hunt for clues and develop a theory about the murderer's identity alongside the characters. The murderer emphasizes this aspect of the narrative by speaking directly to the reader and tauntingly asking if they have discovered his identity. This passage confirms the sense that the murderer now has a completely fragmented and duplicitous sense of his own identity. By pretending to be Bihzad, the murderer not only commits the sin of deception but also engages in a rather blasphemous act of disrespect against one of the most important masters in the miniaturist tradition.

The murderer goes to the abandoned dervish lodge, gets out a mirror and attempts to draw a self-portrait. However, looking at his own face fills him with misery, and he begins to cry. He returns to the streets and reluctantly ends up at "the despicable **coffeehouse**." The murderer feels paranoid that the patrons of the coffeehouse are laughing at him. He admits that at times he has taken part in the homoerotic culture that is the norm among his peers in Istanbul, but he ultimately feels isolated and miserable. Drunk from wine, he decides to tell two stories in order to "ease the loneliness in his soul." In the first story, the murderer states that drawing horses from real life is not actually an invention of the Europeans, but was first done by the old master Jemalettin of Kazvin. Jemalettin believed that a miniaturist's talents lay in his mind, not his hand, and when he lost his sight he hired a calligrapher's apprentice and dictated how to draw the horses that appeared to him in his divine **blindness**. These notes were published as three volumes that have now been used to instruct countless miniaturists.

The murderer finds himself so despicable that he cannot bring himself to even look at a mirror, let alone draw a self-portrait. This is a somewhat fitting turn of events given the fact that self-portraits are a part of European visual culture which are not permitted within the Islamic tradition. Of course, the murderer is disturbed by his own image not only because his is the face of a man who has killed two people, but also because he does not truly identify as that man. He attempts to ease his loneliness by telling stories, however this does not seem like a viable solution as the stories do not resolve the problem of the murderer's fractured sense of his own identity.

The murderer then begins the second story. In Herat and Shiraz, it was considered an honor for master miniaturists to go **blind** in old age, such that some who didn't go blind would actually try to induce blindness and sometimes even violently blinded themselves. However, it soon became the case that the imitation of blindness was considered just as good as actual blindness. The truest miniaturists drew as if they were blind. When one master refused to refute the Koranic verse stating: "The blind and the seeing are not equal," he was blinded and then killed. The murderer is about to tell a third story when the storyteller begins to tell his own tale, this time from the perspective of Satan. The murderer sketches a picture of Satan while others look on and laugh.

Throughout the book, the different characters draw into question the binary between authenticity and inauthenticity. In his second story, the murderer shows how blindness came to be valued less as an actual, physical state of being, and more as an attitude toward drawing. Indeed, this evokes the idea that the miniaturist tradition in some ways requires artists to work as if they are blind from the beginning; after all, true miniaturists are supposed to largely ignore the physical world and draw according to the imagined vision of Allah.

CHAPTER 47: I, SATAN

Satan announces that he believes in himself and normally does not care what others say about him, but now he wishes to clarify the truth in the face of rumors and slander. He admits that it's true that he refused to bow before man, and that he swore he would tempt people into committing sins until the Day of Judgment. Satan points out that evil is an important and necessary part of the universe, otherwise Allah would not have permitted it to exist. He stresses that he is "not the source of all the evil and sin in the world." People are too eager to blame Satan for things they are tempted to do out of their own free will. He adds that religious zealots label some activities sinful that God does not actually object to, such as "passing wind and jacking off." He notes that the Hoja of Erzurum has been denouncing figurative painting and blaming it on Satan. However, Satan points out that he has never bowed before man as the European figurative painters do. In fact, it was by forcing the angels to bow before humanity that God made humanity proud in the first place.

Satan's narrative is a crucially important chapter in the book. On one level, Satan confirms the beliefs of Enishte, Stork, Black, and the Sultan by noting that Allah does not consider minor offenses a sin and that concerns that the European style is idolatrous are misplaced. Indeed, Satan puts an interesting spin on the question of idolatry by suggesting that he is the opposite of idolatrous, having refused to bow down before man. At the same time, this passage also explores the idea of narrative trust and it playfully suggests that the reader is likely not to trust Satan. This is especially true because "Satan" is, of course, not really Satan at all, but rather the storyteller who is personally invested in denouncing religious fundamentalism.

CHAPTER 48: I, SHEKURE

Shekure has a frightening dream about Enishte; she wakes up, leaves the boys in bed, and goes to Black's room. She says Enishte told her in the dream that Black killed him and she questions Black suspiciously, even though they were together at the time of the murder. Shekure continues to anxiously discuss the possibility that their marriage was a mistake, while Black tries to reassure her. Shekure tells Black that he shouldn't be cooperating with Enishte's enemy, Master Osman, in order to find Enishte's murderer. However, Black insists that Enishte cannot see them now. Shekure remains coy about her love for Black, but eventually they begin to kiss. However, she then pushes him away suddenly and shrieks that there is someone in the house.

Of all the characters in the novel, Shekure is most closely associated with dreams. She uses her dreams to inform her opinions and decisions even when they contradict her conscious mind; for example, she becomes suspicious of Black after a dream, even though she was with him at the time of Enishte's murder. Shekure's reliance on dreams may be because she is in touch with the unconscious side of reality, or perhaps because, as she admits, she has desires that she cannot express directly.

CHAPTER 49: I AM CALLED BLACK

Early the next morning, Black slips out and goes to the mosque to pray. He then goes to Master Osman's house and onto the palace, where he and Osman meet the Commander of the Imperial Guard and his men. The Commander tells them that the Sultan is confident that they will be able to determine the murderer based on the horse-drawing competition and that they will be able to torture him straight away, without further investigation. However, Master Osman only looks at the drawings for a few seconds before announcing that the murderer has not left a flaw or signature through which he could be traced. The Sultan enters, and Osman tells him that they have not had any success with the drawings. Osman asks that they be allowed to enter the Royal Treasury in order to study the archive of manuscripts housed there and search for the historical origins of the murderer's stylistic signature. Black is stunned by Osman's boldness and fears that he will be killed without ever seeing Shekure again.

Master Osman carries himself with the confidence of a widely-respected, elderly authority figure. He is rigid in his ideas, has no patience for dissent, and is unafraid of being stubborn and demanding even in front of the Sultan. Because Master Osman represents the traditional, conservative side of artistic practice, it follows that these qualities also apply to artistic conservatism, too. To some extent, these qualities constitute a positive side of artistic conservatism; after all, sticking to tradition means that one is not easily persuaded by greed, power, or the changing fashions of a given era. On the other hand, Black fears that Osman's stubbornness could also prove dangerous.

To Black's surprise, the Sultan does grant them permission. As they enter the treasury, the Head Treasurer introduces them to Jemzi Agha, a dwarf wearing a strange headdress who will show them around. The treasury is extremely dark and smells of dust and mildew. Black feels frightened by the chamber and the huge array of objects held within it. Master Osman asks to see the books that Shah Tahmasp sent as a gift 25 years ago. Black is stunned by the illustrations, but Osman looks through the books too quickly for him to get a proper look. They look at illustrations depicting scenes of war, love, and religion. Osman expertly picks out small flaws and stylistic signatures in the paintings and points out how the painters were influenced by the traditions that came before them, stating: "To paint is to remember." Black meditates on the nature of painting, and wonders if Osman is really searching for clues about the murderer or just taking the opportunity to look through these legendary books.

Black's relationship to Master Osman is complex and difficult to define. On one level, Black admires Osman and trusts his judgment in the search for the murderer. (Indeed, Black has fairly little choice but to follow Osman's lead, due to Osman's position of seniority). However, Black is also suspicious of Osman, and he wonders if Osman is using the task of finding the murderer simply as an excuse to look through the Royal Treasury. Although not mentioned explicitly here, this suspicion is mutual; after all, Master Osman and Enishte were enemies, and thus Osman has good reason to distrust Black. Black and Osman are united, however, by their passionate interest in miniature painting, allowing them to temporarily put aside their differences.

At times, Black grows exhausted from looking at all the paintings and has to take a break. Eventually, Master Osman concludes that by imitating the paintings that came before them, miniaturists have "depicted the gradual transformation of their world into another." At the time of evening prayers, one of the Sultan's men opens the door to the treasury to usher Black and Osman out; however, Osman says that he does not wish to leave. Black chooses to stay with him, but immediately regrets it.

Master Osman's statement about the miniaturists depicting the transformation of their world has two possible meanings. It could refer to the way that artists document the historical change happening around them; however, it could also mean that by changing the way people view the world, artists in fact propel that change through their work.

CHAPTER 50: WE TWO DERVISHES

The two dervishes explain that their picture was previously hidden away in the Royal Treasury, and that they will now tell their story to the patrons of the **coffeehouse**. They have been dead for 110 years but they stand here today because they were painted in the European style. A Frankish traveler gave them each a silver coin and asked to sketch them; while he was drawing, a hoja came along and demanded to know why the Frank was drawing these two devilish figures. The Frank explained that drawings of "the bad side" of Ottoman culture can be sold for the most money. He finished the painting and took it home to his "infidel city," which was soon invaded by the Ottomans; thus the painting ended up in the Sultan's Royal Treasury. The dervishes point out that the hoja claimed that dervishes are "superfluous" members of society. They admit that when the Frank was drawing them, he paid such ardent attention to them that they came to like him. Now they have achieved a kind of immortality through being depicted in a painting. In reality, they died in the middle of a **snowstorm**. Just before death, one of them dreamed that he was the subject of a painting that entered heaven after thousands of years.

The storyteller continues to slander religious zealots, this time from the perspective of two dervishes. Dervishes are Sufi Muslims who live austere, impoverished lives and use physical methods (such as dancing) in order to reach a state of religious transcendence. At the time the novel is set, dervishes are persecuted by Erzurumis (among others). It is important to note that the hoja in the story denounces dervishes for being "superfluous" members of society. This comment seems to condemn dervishes for not having a productive role within the economy. Like Elegant, who was both greedy and religiously conservative, the hoja's comment establishes a link between religious fervor and greed. On the other hand, the dervishes themselves are somewhat greedy, as is the Frank, who paints the bad sides of Ottoman culture in order to earn more money.

CHAPTER 51: IT IS I, MASTER OSMAN

Master Osman tells a story about Abdullah Khan, a suspicious ruler who did not allow his miniaturists to copy from one another's work. He welcomed two famous masters fleeing war to his court, but refused to let them see each other's paintings, which made both of them desperately curious. When Abdullah Khan died, the masters immediately rushed to each other's rooms to view their paintings, only to be disappointed that they did not live up to their imagination. Standing in the treasury, Osman does not have the same experience; instead, he thanks God for the opportunity to view so many glorious manuscripts. Osman knows that, as a true master, he will eventually go **blind**, but he is glad that this has not happened yet. Pointing out a vivid red to Black, he claims that Allah only shows the true red in the blood of humanity. Throughout the night, they discuss the paintings, pointing out details and themes to one another.

Master Osman's comments about the color red further illuminate the important role that the color plays within the novel. Red is shown to have a special, magical power, and in this passage it becomes clear that this power is linked to the fact that red is the color of blood. Although Master Osman is not aware of this, after Enishte dies he also experiences the color red when he is close to God. Red thus symbolizes the life force that connects God to humanity. The fact that artists can use the color red (even if it is less vivid than the divine red) suggests that art can indeed be a way for humanity to come nearer to God.

Master Osman wonders if Black and Jemzi Agha have the same intense emotional reaction to the books as he does. He feels that only "true artists" who have suffered during their lives can render portrayals of violence, pain, and suffering in a vibrant way. Osman feels a profound sense of melancholy at the fate of miniaturists, who spend their lives laboring over art only to eventually disappear into "anonymity and **blindness**." Looking at a painting, he recalls a time earlier in his life when he felt a profound desire for a beautiful young boy; thinking about his past brings tears to his eyes. Osman opens another volume at random and is astonished to find it is the work of the great master Bihzad. He tells Black: "We miniaturists are brethren… but now everything is coming to an end," meaning miniature painting is being killed by the European style.

Overall, Master Osman is not presented in a particularly sympathetic light; he is often shown to be vain, stubborn, narrow-minded, and cruel. In this passage, however, Master Osman's sense of profound sadness about the disappearance of the past and the miniaturist tradition reveal him to be more sensitive and vulnerable than the reader may have previously assumed. In one sense, Osman can perhaps be condemned for trying too hard to hold onto the past. At the same time, his sorrow over the disappearance of the brotherhood of miniaturists is rather moving.

In the middle of the night, after Black has fallen asleep, Master Osman discovers the enormous *Book of Kings*. Osman feels distracted as he looks through it and wishes he could lose himself in it. By the time dawn arrives, Osman still hasn't found a horse's nose that will give any clue about the murderer's identity, although he reminds himself that he still has one day left to look. He also sadly concludes that the Persians have produced "more masterpieces" than the Ottomans. Suddenly, Osman is seized by the impulse to scratch out the eyes of the figures lying before him. After he has done so, he wishes that blood would pour from the pages. In another book, Osman reads that, at the end of his life, Bihzad gouged his own eyes out with his painting needle. With Jemzi Agha's help, Osman retrieves this same needle from another part of the treasury and shivers thinking about the fact that Bihzad held it in his own hands. Gazing into the mirror, Master Osman takes Bihzad's needle and begins to gouge out his own eyes, smiling as he does so. The colors he can see begin to "bleed" into each other. Osman looks forward to seeing the most beautiful thing of all, God's vision of the world.

This passage is a dramatic depiction of the mimeses (mirroring) of stories, images, and reality. Looking at the picture, Master Osman experiences an inexplicable impulse to "blind" the figures before him, before remembering the story about how Bihzad blinded himself. These two stories—one visual, one lodged in Osman's memory—compel Osman to use Bihzad's needle to blind himself. Does he do so because he feels that there is a strong parallel between his own life and these stories, or perhaps because he wants to create such a parallel? Osman's act seems to confirm that he experiences life as if he is living inside one of his paintings or the stories that inspire them. Furthermore, it demonstrates Osman's faith in the story that miniaturists who blind themselves will be rewarded with God's vision.

CHAPTER 52: I AM CALLED BLACK

Master Osman shows Black Bihzad's needle, and tells him that miniaturists have a duty to try to see the world as God sees it. He adds that when the great masters of history were forced to adopt new styles, they **blinded** themselves in order to avoid this indignity. Black confesses that he wishes to spend eternity gazing at Shekure's face. He goes on to look through more books, and thinks about the stylistic choices in a version of Shirin and Hüsrev. Suddenly, a horse in a wedding scene catches his eye, and he immediately rushes to show Master Osman. Black explains that although the painting has been done in the Chinese style, the horses' nostrils have the same peculiarity as the nostrils in the drawing found on Elegant. Osman asks Black to describe the picture; it is clear he cannot see it properly himself. They look through the rest of the illustrations, and see that the miniaturist has depicted melancholy figures and strange, frightening devils. Osman explains that clipping a horse's nostrils is a Mongol tradition and that this is what is depicted in the illustration.

Black's sudden discovery of the horse with the clipped nostrils indicates that Master Osman might have chosen to blind himself at precisely the wrong moment. Although Osman is not yet fully blind, he now needs to rely on Black's assistance to continue with their mission to identify the murderer, and thus the power dynamic between them shifts somewhat. Black and Osman's observations about the horse give clues about the murderer's identity that are not revealed explicitly to the reader, but which invite the reader to make their own judgments. The horse is drawn in the Chinese style, and Osman notes that clipping horses' nostrils is a Mongol tradition. Note that in the chapter about Olive, Osman said that Olive descended from a long line of Mongol painters.

Master Osman declares that he will stay and stare at these books until he is forced to leave by the Sultan and Head Treasurer; however, Black realizes that Osman is now going **blind**. He asks Osman who the murderer is, but Osman replies that whoever painted the nostrils in this clipped manner must have been unconsciously displaying a Mongol influence, and that it could have been anyone. Black praises Osman's ability to unite the royal miniaturists in such a way that he has shaped and defined the Ottoman style in their era. Osman smiles and strokes Black's arms and face. Black asks again who painted the horse with the clipped nostrils, and this time Osman replies that it was Olive, but adds that he is sure it was not Olive who murdered Elegant. Rather, he believes that Stork is the murderer. He thinks that Elegant must have confessed to Stork his feelings of conflict about the secret **book**, and that the argument that ensued resulted in Elegant's murder. Because Elegant had confided his feelings to the Erzurumis as well, they avenged his death by murdering Enishte.

Black feels a sudden surge of admiration for Master Osman in this passage, and the two share a moment of affection. However, it seems that Black's words of praise may be somewhat ill-advised. Having spent so many hours searching the Royal Treasury for a visual clue that will lead them to the murderer, Master Osman finds such a clue, traces it to one of the miniaturists (Olive), and then discounts this finding because it contradicts his own opinion. Osman is thus more faithful to what he believes about the murderer's identity (or, more accurately, what he desires to believe) than he is to the actual evidence. Like many characters in the novel, Osman prefers living according to his own idea of reality to living with the truth—even when this truth is right in front of him.

Master Osman goes on to denounce Enishte for leading the miniaturists to betray him. He claims that all the miniaturists deserve to be tortured for what they have done. Black suspects that Osman may have been the one who planned the murders in order to obstruct the creation of the **book**. He continues to look through the books in the treasury until dusk and then announces to Osman that he intends to leave soon, as they have now figured out the clue of the horses' nostrils. Together, they admire the picture in front of Osman, a scene from Shirin and Hüsrev. At the time of evening prayers, the door to the treasury is opened and the officers do not notice Bihzad's needle hidden in Black's clothes. Walking home, Black is overcome with excitement; now that the murderer's identity is known, he will be able to share Shekure's bed. However, when he gets back to Enishte's house, he realizes no one is there, and he runs off joyfully to find them.

The end of this chapter highlights the weaknesses of both Black and Master Osman. Osman is once again shown to be vain and unforgiving, even going so far as to say he believes the miniaturists should be tortured for their betrayal of him. Black, meanwhile, is naïve and incapable of giving much deep thought to anything other than Shekure. He feels relieved and triumphant that they have supposedly discovered the identity of the murderer through the clue of the nostrils, but in reality Osman has disregarded this clue in favor of what he thought all along. Black's naïveté creates a sense of foreboding, suggesting that his happy state will not last long.

CHAPTER 53: I AM ESTHER

Black arrives at Esther's house and she tells him she will meet him outside. She explains that Shekure's first husband is back and that they are at "their" house. She says that Hasan visited Enishte's house and told Shevket that his father was coming back from war, so Shevket went to Hasan's house to wait for him. Shekure, unsure of what to do, waited up all night for Black to come home, but when he didn't come, she also went to Hasan's. Black and Esther go to Hasan's house, but first Black insists on taking a diversion. He gathers together a gang of men from the neighborhood armed with swords and axes. Esther warns Black to be careful; the night before, Erzurumis raided a tavern and a dervish house, beating up everyone inside and killing an old man. Black and his men surround Hasan's house, but a **blind** beggar tells them that Hasan is not home. Black asks Esther to give Shekure a note saying he has found the murderer.

The narrative momentum continues to build in this chapter, creating the impression that everything will soon erupt in a dramatic climax. Not only must Black deal with the imminent identification of the murderer, he must also now take Shekure away from Hasan's house, and at the same time dodge the raging Erzurumis who are wreaking destruction on the neighborhood. Of course, each of these forces—the murderer, Hasan, and the Erzurumis—also conspire to keep Black and Shekure apart. Thus Black and Shekure's love story becomes a thread uniting many different aspects of the narrative.

Esther fears for her safety and regrets getting involved in Black's business. She enters Hasan's house and announces that Black is waiting outside, before giving Shekure the note. Shekure manages to take Esther to one side and explains that she is only at Hasan's house because of Shevket, and that she was told that Black had been tortured and had confessed to involvement in Enishte's murder. Shekure says she will go back to Black as long as he promises to treat her sons well and not to inquire about why she went to Hasan's house. Hasan's father says he will not permit Shekure to leave, and that Shekure's first husband is on the way home from Persia. Esther goes back outside and tells Black that Shekure is confused, but wants to come back to him. She hatches a plan of attack with Black, and then returns to the front door, which Hasan's father once again answers. She tells Hasan's father that everyone knows Shekure was legally widowed and remarried and that he has thus kidnapped a married woman. Shekure cries, and at this moment Black's men descend on the house.

In private, Shekure is a strong-willed, persistent, and even quite bossy person who acts according to her own beliefs. However, when she is forced to make decisions in the public eye, she takes on a passive role. Although it can create chaos and confusion (as it does in this scene), Shekure's passivity is in keeping with the expectations of women at the time. At the same time, it also means that Shekure relies on Esther to communicate with Black and make decisions on her behalf. (Although Esther is also a woman, as a Jew she is also an outsider within Istanbul society, and thus different rules apply to her.) Shekure's friendship with Esther is useful, but also risky, as Esther often behaves in a duplicitous, untrustworthy manner.

As the sounds of the attack echo through the house, Hasan's father says that if Shekure wants to leave, she can go. The children cry, and Esther urges Shekure to put on her veil and get out, but Shekure expresses fear about Hasan's revenge. Shekure says that she will have to be taken out by Black's men, but Esther knows that this will be violent. Suddenly, Esther has the idea that Orhan should open the door; as soon as Orhan hears this, he scampers off as if he'd been waiting all along for permission. Shevket makes a fuss as they prepare to leave, and Hasan's father kindly warns them to be wary of Hasan's desire for revenge. Esther, Shekure, Hayrire, and the boys walk in the darkness back to Enisthe's house. On the way, they pass by the **coffeehouse**, which is being violently raided by the Erzurumis. Black urges the women and boys to head home, promising he will follow shortly.

In order to escape with minimal risk of harm, Shekure and her children must rely on being perceived as "innocent" by the men around them. This is why Shekure refuses to leave of her own accord; as long as she maintains the passive, "innocent" role of a submissive wife, she will be able to keep herself relatively safe. On similar grounds, it makes sense to use Orhan as a decoy in order to get them out of the house, as no one will blame a six-year-old child for the decisions he makes. Of course, in reality, both Shekure and Orhan do have their own opinions and agency and are not necessarily any more "innocent" than the other characters.

CHAPTER 54: I AM A WOMAN

The storyteller imagines that people will object to him impersonating a woman, but he pays this no mind. He has known four women personally: his mother, his aunt, his sister-in-law (who he fell in love with), and a woman he once saw at an open window while he was traveling. He says that it is important for men not to gaze at women, as this will provoke lust; instead, they should settle for "pretty boys." In Europe, where the women walk around uncovered, the men walk around in a constant state of arousal, which is why they are so often defeated by the Ottomans in battle. As a child, the storyteller was curious about women and fantasized about dressing up in women's clothes, however he was never able to express these thoughts. One day, he dressed in his mother's clothing and fantasized about a man falling in love with him. Seeing his own reflection gave him an erection, and he began to sing a poem about his conflicted identity.

This is the only one of the storyteller's narratives in which he does not fully inhabit the character he is ventriloquizing; instead, he speaks as himself and his relationship to the "character" of himself-as-a-woman. On one level, this passage is little more than crude nonsense, full of surreal statements and dirty jokes. However, it also contains complex and significant meditations on the nature of gender and identity in society at the time. Because women were "hidden" by conventions of modesty within the public sphere, the storyteller develops an insatiable curiosity about them, suggesting that people are inevitably curious about what they cannot see.

The storyteller announces that he doesn't care if the Erzurumis hear him singing. He has heard rumors that the Hoja of Erzurum prefers young boys to his own wife. He then tells a story about a Chelebi (gentleman) called Ahment who falls in love with a married woman. He doesn't tell anyone about his love, but his neighbors nonetheless find out because he gets drunk and cries every night. Eventually, the Chelebi moves away with his own wife, leaving the woman he loves behind, and he is never happy again. The storyteller comments: "Oh, how wonderful love is!" and then exclaims as he notices strangers bursting through the **coffeehouse** door.

The storyteller's ironic pronouncement about "how wonderful love is" conveys his disdain for social and religious conservatism as well as his thoughts on the torment of love. When the Chelebi moves away, he honors the dictates of marriage, yet he condemns himself to a lifetime of unhappiness. The fact that the Erzurumis arrive at this moment suggests that it was better that the coffeehouse existed as a place of dissent and freedom, even if it ends in violence and destruction.

CHAPTER 55: I AM CALLED "BUTTERFLY"

After the Erzurumis leave, Butterfly walks into the **coffeehouse** and looks around the chaos left behind. There are bodies all over the floor; Black joins him inside, and they notice that the Erzurumis killed the storyteller. They go out into the night and Black says that he wants to search Butterfly's house, even though Butterfly tells him it has already been searched. As they approach, Butterfly speaks loudly in order to warn his beautiful wife that he is not alone. Black mentions that the final page of the **book** is missing, and that whoever killed Enishte stole it. He questions Butterfly suspiciously, asking why he frequented the coffeehouse. Butterfly admits that after he was recognized as the best miniaturist, others became jealous and accused him of being an Erzurumi. He went to the coffeehouse to disprove these accusations. Black repeats Master Osman's words about Butterfly's "flaws," and Butterfly is hurt. He accuses Black and Enishte of treachery for their embrace of the European style.

This passage confirms the fact that Butterfly is almost pathologically eager to please others. Rather than simply ignoring the other miniaturists' jealous accusation that he is an Erzurumi, Butterfly starts going to the coffeehouse in order to prove that he is not, in fact, a religious zealot. Meanwhile, Black's questioning of Butterfly is executed in a rather unsophisticated fashion. It is not clear why it is necessary to bring up Master Osman's cruel words about Butterfly, and in doing so Black risks alienating Butterfly and jeopardizing the chance of Butterfly assisting Black as they track down the murderer.

Butterfly goes into this next room, where his wife tosses her silk nightgown at him. He conceals a sword inside the fabric and returns to Black. While Black's back is turned, Butterfly pins him to the ground, pointing the sword at his neck. Butterfly lies on top of him and asks if they look beautiful; Black replies that he doesn't know. Butterfly thinks of his wife looking in from the next room and is tempted to bite Black's ear. Black asks Butterfly to describe how Master Osman used to caress and beat him, and Butterfly does so with enthusiasm. Butterfly insists that, in spite of the brutality of the beatings, he still loves Osman. Black tells Butterfly all about his and Osman's search to find the murderer, adding that while the stylistic clue pointed to Olive, Osman remained convinced the culprit was Stork. Butterfly suspects both Olive and Stork are guilty, and suggests that he and Black raid their houses, starting with Olive. They go to Olive's house, which is dirty and cheaply furnished, and search through his things. Black asks who drew the horse with the slit nostrils; Butterfly replies Stork would know, and then concludes it was Stork who drew it.

The confrontation between Butterfly and Black is strangely erotic, a manifestation of the intense, romantic attachment that the miniaturists developed during their youth. However, it is not only the fact that Butterfly lies on top of Black and asks him if they look beautiful—thereby establishing a parallel between their scuffle and the act of having sex—that makes this scene so remarkable. Arguably the most striking and unusual element is the fact that Butterfly imagines himself performing for his wife, who is watching from the other room. On one level, this seems to be another example of Butterfly's obsession with other people's opinions about him and his desire to please. At the same time, it also emphasizes the idea that the miniaturists always think of themselves as being watched, like subjects in a painting.

CHAPTER 56: I AM CALLED "STORK"

Butterfly and Black arrive at Stork's house in the middle of the night and ask who made the illustration; with Butterfly's knife at his throat, Stork identifies the artist responsible for each illustration in Enishte's **book**, and notes that Olive drew the horse. Stork apologizes for the state of his house and says his wife is sleeping in the next room. He enjoys pretending to be afraid of them. They ask about the **coffeehouse**, and Stork suggests that the proprietor of the coffeehouse conspired with Olive to kill Elegant, and that the Erzurumis murdered Enishte and raided the coffeehouse in revenge. Butterfly and Stork have an argument about style, with Butterfly insisting that miniaturists must depict the world as Allah sees it, and Stork replying that Allah sees everything that people see. Having searched the house, Butterfly and Black remain empty-handed. Black tells Stork that the clue of the horse's nostril suggest that the murderer is Olive, but that Master Osman suspects Stork.

Stork has a more smug, arrogant reaction to the arrival of Black and Butterfly than one might expect, and it is precisely this arrogance that led Master Osman to suspect that Stork is the murderer. However, as Stork points out, the evidence of the horses' nostrils still implicates Olive, and it is thus up to the characters (and reader) to decide whether artistic clues or personality traits are more important in determining the murderer's identity. Note that discussions about artistic style are interwoven in this scene (as in the last), highlighting the fact that—at least for the miniaturists—painting is always on their minds, and thus is arguably the most important factor in the murder.

Stork feels that Butterfly and Black came to his house "out of loneliness and desperation." Stork doesn't wish to insult Osman in front of Butterfly, whose close, erotic relationship with Osman is well-known. Instead, he acknowledges that Osman is a great master who deserves respect, but regrets that he attempted to divert blame away from the true murderer. He tells them that Olive won't be at home but will instead be at the abandoned dervish lodge. He then seizes Butterfly, grips him from behind, and makes him drop his dagger. Stork claims that they have all betrayed Master Osman but that they must now unite against Olive. They set off for the abandoned dervish lodge, and, as they approach, Stork sees a shadow of a man in the window praying—or perhaps only pretending to pray.

The alliance the three miniaturists build in this chapter is a shaky one, grounded in sustained suspicion of one another. Stork knows Olive spends his nights at the abandoned dervish lodge; has this not led him to wonder if Olive is committing any suspicious activity there, and if indeed Olive is the murderer? The fact that Stork turns his knife on Butterfly—just as Butterfly did to Black—further demonstrates that even though the three men seem to be uniting against Olive, they remain suspicious of one another and prepared to resort to violence.

CHAPTER 57: I AM CALLED "OLIVE"

Olive notices the three men watching him and quickly finishes his prayers. He embraces Butterfly, asking: "What do they want from us? Why are they killing us?" Black states that the murderer may perhaps be among them, and Olive says he has heard rumors to the same effect. Black asks about the illustrations Olive drew for the book, and Olive describes Satan and the two dervishes, insisting "that's all." After Olive repeatedly denies drawing the horse, Black tells him that a stylistic clue identifies him as the horse's creator. Olive claims to have no style, but Black explains the whole story of how they discovered the clue in the horse's nostrils. Olive passionately and proudly insists it was not him who drew the horse, but Black says they will now search the dervish lodge for the portrait of the Sultan stolen at the time of Enishte's murder. Olive accompanies them, even giving them a key to help their search.

Olive's initial words to Butterfly have a possible double meaning. On the surface, he is referring to the Erzurumi's persecution of the miniaturists as a group. However, his use of the word "us" arguably also speaks to his fragmented identity. By this point in the novel, it is becoming increasingly clear that Olive will be identified as the murderer. Perhaps he senses that this is near, and his concerns about "us" refer to his two identities: the murderer and Olive. On the other hand, in the rest of the passage Olive behaves calmly, giving no indication that he is guilty. He is also markedly less hostile than both Butterfly and Stork.

Olive feels that Black's desire to capture the murderer is not only rooted in his willingness to please Shekure or avoid being tortured; he suspects that it is part of a larger scheme to encourage the miniaturists to adopt the European style. He thinks that Stork, meanwhile, hopes to "get rid" of all of them, including Master Osman, so that he can become Head Illuminator. Stork and Black seize one of Olive's leather pouches and find within it all manner of secret things, such as stolen money and "indecent pictures"—but not the portrait of the Sultan. Olive senses that this puts the two men at ease, and he asks the reader: "Have I gained your trust as well?" Black says that they will now all have to decide what to say when they are put under torture. Stork asks: "Could the **blind** and seeing ever be equal?" and the men each respond with a different view. Olive shudders, feeling frightened.

It is rather ironic that Olive spends this passage silently accusing Black and Stork of having selfish, sinister ulterior motives, when it is Olive himself who has acted in the most selfish, sinister, and duplicitous way throughout the novel. At the same time, Olive's thoughts point out that, although he is the murderer, none of the miniaturists are completely innocent. Olive's direct address to the reader creates narrative suspense surrounding the eventual revelation of the murderer's identity. Although the reader may now suspect that Olive is indeed the murderer, nothing has been proven definitively yet.

When it is Olive's turn to speak, he panics, having not read the Koran in a while. In the end, he simply mentions a passage which implores God to "treat us with mercy." He begins to cry, and Black comforts him, which makes him sob even harder. The miniaturists then sit down and warmly recall memories of their youth and training together. Olive concludes: "Time doesn't flow if you don't dream."

In the end, Olive's cool exterior crumbles and he breaks down in tears. However, note the fact that it is not the threat of violence or punishment that makes Olive cry—rather, it is the love and support of the other miniaturists, a marked contrast to Olive's suffocating loneliness.

CHAPTER 58: I WILL BE CALLED A MURDERER

The murderer asks why he should conceal his identity from the reader any longer. He is content sitting with the other miniaturists reminiscing over their happy memories. It is as if they are describing a different world, full of people and objects that no longer exist. The miniaturists agree that it was a bad thing when the Sultan ordered them to start working from home. They discuss scenes they've painted as if they were their own memories. Suddenly, the murderer declares that Master Osman will either betray and kill them, or they should betray and kill him. There is a stunned silence; then the other miniaturists pounce on the murderer and pin him to the ground. Black demands that the murderer tell him the location of the last picture, pressing a knife to his throat. The other miniaturists slap the murderer, but he only smiles and says nothing. One of the miniaturists kisses the murder passionately, before beating him.

Throughout the novel the characters make reference to the intense fraternal bond that the miniaturists developed during their youth, but it is only in the final chapters that this bond is actually shown in a significant way. At the time the novel is set, each of the miniaturists has developed the flaws and anxieties of adulthood; however, for just a moment they are able to put these troubles and differences aside in order to reminisce about happier times. Even after the three miniaturists turn on Olive and Black holds him at gunpoint, a trace of the affection and intensity of their "brotherhood" remains when one of the miniaturists passionately kisses him.

Black takes out the needle and explains that 80 years ago the great master Bihzad used it to **blind** himself. He adds that the previous night, Master Osman used it to blind himself in the Royal Treasury, and he threatens to do the same to the murderer. The murderer responds that it doesn't matter if this happens, as the eventual death of Osman and the takeover of the European style will mean that the miniaturists have no future anyway. The other miniaturists try to restrain Black and there is another scuffle, during which the murderer is blinded in both eyes. The murderer demands that they get off him so he can see everything for the last time, but first Black demands that he explain how he killed Elegant. The murderer explains that he had been heading home from the **coffeehouse** when Elegant confronted him about the pictures for Enishte's **book**, which Elegant considered to be "heresy."

Although the murderer is arguably only putting up a front of toughness, his comments in response to Black's threat to blind him are important. Blindness is mostly thought of as a positive state of being in the novel, a reward from Allah given to the truest miniaturists. However, this idea requires there to always be a new generation of miniaturists to take over from the ageing, blinded masters. As the murderer points out, it seems that there will soon be no more masters working in the miniaturist tradition anyway. Miniaturist painting—as a way of seeing as well as a set of visual images—will disappear, a far more permanent kind of blindness.

Black asks if the murderer killed both Elegant and Enishte; the murderer evades the question, claiming that there was nothing truly blasphemous about the **book**, but that Enishte liked to pretend that there was. He then goes on to explain that he brought Elegant to the dervish lodge, where Elegant begged the murderer to assure him that they would not go to hell as the Hoja of Erzurum claimed. Then the murderer says that when he offered Elegant money, this proved how "wretched" Elegant was. The murderer insists that any of the miniaturists would also have killed Elegant for their fellow artists. The miniaturists agree that they would have, and the murderer begins to cry. He tells them that he killed Enishte quickly, and that just before he killed him he asked Enishte if he had a style of his own. Black comments that everyone secretly wishes to have a signature style, and the murderer comments: "All illumination is God's illumination."

Once again, the murderer is brought to tears by the other miniaturists' demonstration of solidarity and friendship. His suggestion that Enishte liked the idea that the book was blasphemous is not implausible; most of the characters in the novel are shown to be rather vain and egotistical, and it thus could be possible that Enishte was flattered by the rumors circulating about the book. Meanwhile, although the murderer's statement that "All illumination is God's illumination" is meant to demonstrate that he doesn't have an individual style, this claim also echoes the argument that East and West belong to God.

The murderer demands to be let go so he can see the world one last time, and Black insists that he show them the last illustration. The murderer takes out the picture, yet—in the place where the portrait of the Sultan should be—there lies the murderer's own face, situated "at the center of a vast world." The murderer tells them that he is not worried about realist representation or idolatry, and that idolatry is in fact what he wants. He admits that he may have murdered Elegant and Enishte in order to create this picture, but that now that it's done, he feels completely isolated and humiliated for his lack of skill compared to the European painters. He says he pities Shekure because she had to marry Black, and that if everything hadn't happened the way it did Shekure would have happily married the murderer himself. Finally, he claims that even if miniaturists embraced the European style, they could only hope to become weak imitators of it. Akbar, the Sultan of Hindustan, is gathering the best miniaturists from far and wide. The miniaturists could leave Istanbul and create a truly great book in the traditional style there.

The murderer's final statements to the other miniaturists take the form of a rather incoherent ramble, covering a strange variety of topics and opinions. Although the murderer feels no shame about having portrayed himself instead of the Sultan, he does feel shame about his lack of skill compared to the European painters. This admission suggests that underlying the charge that the European style is blasphemous may be a hint of jealousy about the European painters' mastery of their own techniques. Furthermore, the murderer's statement that he would have married Shekure suggests that he is arrogant to the point of being delusional. It is possible that his plan to flee to Hindustan is also nothing more than a desperate delusion.

Stork condemns the murderer for speaking in such a "high and mighty" way. The murderer considers killing the three men, but he feels "only affection" for them. Instead, he repeats Enishte's words: "To God belongs the East and West," to which Black responds: "But is East is east and West is west." The murderer asks to kiss Butterfly, but just as he is about to do so Black lunges for the murderer and trips over a small table. The murderer grabs Black and holds a dagger to his neck. Black tells the murderer that his blood may clot, causing him to go **blind**, or it may not; this will depend on whether Allah is pleased with his work as a painter. The murderer says he will "practice genuine artistry" once he is in Hindustan. He tells Black that he could kill him right now, but will spare his life for the sake of Shekure's happiness, and he makes Black promise to take care of her. However, the murderer then moves to kill Black anyway; Black dodges, and the knife sinks into his shoulder. While Black moans in agony, Stork leaves the room. The murderer kisses Butterfly and flees.

Stork and Black's interactions with the murderer lead them to behave in a contrarian manner. Stork accuses the murderer of speaking in a "high and mighty" way, when Stork himself has a conceited attitude. Meanwhile, Black insists that "East is east and West is west," when he—following Enishte—was an advocate of the adoption of the European style by painters in Istanbul. It seems that Stork and Black refuse to acknowledge that, even though the murderer has committed terrible sins, he may also be making some true and wise statements. At the same time, Stork and Black's suspicion of the murderer is well-founded; even after the murderer appears to show sympathy and affection for his "brothers," he betrays them again and attempts to kill Black.

The murderer darts through the empty streets of Istanbul, tears streaming from his eyes. He goes to the workshop, and there hears the strange voice of someone claiming to be Shevket's uncle (Hasan). Hasan assumes that the murderer is one of Black's men, and before the murderer can move, Hasan cuts the murderer's head off. The murderer does not die straight away, but rather remains stuck in an in-between moment that is "bitter and tedious."

The fact that the murderer dies at Hasan's hands is significant. In the complex world of Istanbul society, everyone has both friends and enemies, with alliances and prejudices regularly forming for rather dubious reasons. In such a climate, it is hardly surprising (and rather fitting) that the murderer would accidentally be killed by someone who does not even realize his true identity.

CHAPTER 59: I, SHEKURE

Black has sent Shekure and the boys to a distant relative's house to hide. In the midst of a sleepless night, she sees Black staggering toward the house. He asks her to call the children, telling her there is nothing to fear anymore and that they can go home. Shekure fears that Black is going to die as she helps to mount him on a horse. Back at home, Shekure and Hayrire tend to Black's wounds. Esther bursts into the house and joyously declares that Olive's head was found outside the workshop and that the pictures in his satchel proved he was the murderer. Shekure gives Esther four gold coins and Esther leaves. Shekure then gets into bed with the naked Black, and they have oral sex, both of them overcome with happiness.

This passage constitutes the happy ending that comes at the conclusion of a conventional murder mystery plot. The murderer's identity has been revealed and he has been punished, while the hero, Black, having narrowly avoided being murdered himself, can finally be at peace. This creates a ripple effect of happiness in the community, with Esther receiving a handsome reward for her work and Shekure being so happy that she is willing to engage in the sex act that she previously found abhorrent.

Black lives for 26 years before dropping dead next to the well one day. In the intervening time, Shekure and the boys are happy, but Black remains melancholy for the rest of his life, supposedly because his wounds never heal. In reality, Shekure believes he is possessed by a jinn, which causes him to drink wine and chase after young boys with the other miniaturists. In four years after the story ends, the Sultan dies, and is replaced by Sultan Mehmed, "who turned his back entirely on all artistry." The Queen of England sends Mehmed an elaborate clock as a gift, but Mehmed destroys it with a hammer. Rather than being taken over by the European style, the tradition of painting in Istanbul dies altogether. Enishte's **book** is never finished; Hasan flees and is never heard from again. Master Osman dies two years after going **blind**, and Stork becomes Head Illuminator. Butterfly spends the rest of his life drawing ornamental designs for fabric.

While the passage above presented a tidy "happily ever after," this passage describes what happens after that "ever after," and reveals that this state of happiness does not last. This twist confirms the fact that life is full of turmoil and highly unpredictable. While the entire novel up to this point rested on the tension between the European and Islamic artistic traditions, in the end Sultan Mehmed's total disdain for all forms of art means that neither *tradition survives in Istanbul, and all the conflict over the European style was for nothing.*

Shekure has always dreamed of two paintings: a portrait of herself, and "a picture of bliss," which she imagines in the form of a mother with her two children. Orhan tells Shekure that the picture of bliss is not possible to depict, and Shekure considers that perhaps he is right, as people look for happiness in life, not in painting. She concludes by saying that she has told this story to Orhan and given him the letters she exchanged with Hasan and Black, as well as the illustrations that remain from Enishte's **book**. However, she warns the reader that Orhan may have embellished the narrative, as he is happy to lie in service of "a delightful and convincing story."

The final passage of the novel provides a clever twist on the theme of storytelling and narrative perspective. Orhan is, of course, also the name of the novel's author; while throughout the book the fact that this is also Shekure's son's name seems purely coincidental, in this final passage it is revealed not to be a coincidence at all. Does this mean that Orhan the character simply imagines all the other narrative perspectives in the novel? It is left up to the reader to decide.

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