

In Other Rooms, Other Wonders Study Guide

In Other Rooms, Other Wonders by Daniyal Mueenuddin

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Plot Summary

The collection, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin, begins with "Nawabdin Electrician," a story named after its protagonist, Nawabdin (Nawab). In the piece, Nawab, a hard-working tradesman and father of over a dozen children, is the employee of businessman K.K. Harouni. Nawab is injured while preventing a valuable possession from being stolen. Placed in a hospital bed next to the man who was attempting to rob him, Nawab shows neither mercy nor remorse. By the time the would-be robber has died, Nawab is congratulating himself for being the survivor of their altercation.

The second story in the collection, "Saleema," features another character employed by K.K. Harouni, albeit indirectly. Saleema becomes a servant to Harouni's sister and becomes involved with one of Harouni's senior servants, having his child and leaving her drug-addicted husband. Eventually, however, the servant's wife returns to her long-estranged husband, and Saleema and her child end up living a life on the streets.

Another master-servant relationship is the central element in the collection's third story. "Provide, Provide" is the story of Jaglani, Harouni's manager during a prosperous time some years earlier than the first two stories. Jaglani becomes involved with Zainab, a woman originally engaged to be a servant; marries her; and arranges for her to become the mother of a child fathered by his son from an earlier marriage. Just as Jaglani is both becoming politically successful and disillusioned with Zainab, he is stricken with cancer and dies, his family ensuring that Zainab receives no financial or moral considerations in the aftermath of his death. A similar situation plays out in the central story in the collection, a story that gives the collection its title. K.K. Harouni is one of the central characters in the short story (which lends its name to the book) "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders." This is the story of servant girl Husna who becomes Harouni's mistress but who, after his death, is treated as badly by his family as Zainab was treated by Jaglani's.

Between "Provide, Provide" and the short story "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders" is the only first-person narration in the collection, "About a Burning Girl." This story is unique for another reason. It takes the form of a mystery with its narrator (a corrupt judge) telling how a member of his household is arrested for a crime he did not commit and how a knowledgeable, unemotional law clerk manages to unearth the truth about the motivations of the servant and his family, all of whom are distantly connected (through employment) to K.K. Harouni's nephew. Distant connections to the Harouni family are also found in "Our Lady of Paris," the story of the relationship between Sohail, the law-student son of one of K.K. Harouni's cousins, and Helen, a young American woman he met while attending a university in the United States. Sohail's parents, particularly his mother, take a deep and influential interest in the development of the relationship. At the end of the story, there is uncertainty about the continuation of the relationship.

The two final stories in the collection, "Lily" and "A Spoiled Man." indicate that the relationship in "Our Lady of Paris," did not survive. Both stories include references to

Sohail and to Sonya, the American woman he eventually married. The two are peripheral characters in "Lily," the story of a young woman who marries an unlikely husband out of a determination to no longer be the party person she used to be. Then, as the collection draws to a close, Sonya plays a key role in "A Spoiled Man," the story of an elderly servant who benefits from the good intentions of Sonya and other characters. However, in spite of everyone's best efforts and intentions, the servant ends up dying alone, with his precious possessions looted.



Story 1

Summary

In “Nawabdin Electrician,” a narrator describes the life of clever electrician Nawab, a married man with thirteen children (twelve of them daughters). Nawab is skilled at rigging electrical installations so that they use less power and cost less money. Though his busy, regular job is working for landowner K.K. Harouni, Nawab takes on extra odd jobs to sustain his large family. Those jobs are not always successful.

Nawab convinces Harouni to buy him a motorcycle, saying that he (Nawab) is aging and cannot get around on foot as well as he used to. Harouni, who is feeling generous that evening, agrees to Nawab’s request and buys him a motorcycle. Nawab is soon busier than ever. Nevertheless, he manages to make it home every night to be with his family. Even though he is working harder than ever, he is still happy.

One evening, Nawab is riding his motorcycle home when he stops to pick up a hitchhiker who, a few miles into their ride, pulls out a gun. He orders Nawab to get off and then shoots him in the groin. As Nawab tries to stop the blood, the robber tries to take the motorcycle. However, it cannot get it to start. Nawab attempts to get the motorcycle back, but he fails. Two men from a nearby village arrive, scaring the robber into the bushes. Eventually, he is shot. Both the robber and Nawab are then taken to a hospital, where they are treated in adjoining beds.

The doctor takes better care of Nawab than he does of the robber, who begs for mercy from both the doctor and Nawab, trying to explain how difficult his life has been. Nawab angrily tells him that there will be no mercy, commenting on how his life was almost ruined by the robber and saying that his (Nawab’s) daughters would have ended up begging on the street if the robber had gotten what he wanted. The robber continues to plead with Nawab and the doctor for both understanding and medical aid, becoming steadily weaker and eventually dying. The doctor “did nothing to help him” (p. 28). Narration describes how Nawab considered the robber’s pleas, but then chose to think of his motorcycle instead “and the glory of saving it” (28), reminding himself that he had had six shots fired at him. “Not one of them killed him,” narration comments, “not Nawabdin Electrician.” (28)

Analysis

This story is highlighted by the vivid, entertaining portrayal of the wily, determined, and tough minded Nawab. His attitude and actions foreshadow, in many ways, those of other characters in the collection who, like Nawab are determined to make important, lasting changes in their lives (see “Themes – The Struggle to Achieve Change”) and do what needs to be done in order to hold on to that change. Nawab is a unique character in the collection. While the struggles for change of most of the other principal characters



in the various stories (including K.K. Harouni himself, who plays a central role in the later story “In Other Rooms ...”) end in failure, Nawab comes out of his struggle with somewhat of a triumph. He holds on to both his motorcycle (for him, the ultimate symbol of both success and transformation of his circumstances) and his life (ironically enough, less important for him to hold onto than the motorbike).

Both of Nawab’s victories, however, come at some cost. The first element of that cost is the robber’s life, the latter’s death proving to be an element of the narrative that paints all of Nawab’s positive qualities (courage, tenaciousness, strength) in something of a negative light. This is the second degree of cost to Nawab’s actions: he triumphs, the narrative suggests, at the cost of his shared humanity with the robber and, arguably, of his compassion. The narrative seems to be asking what good are all his positive qualities, not to mention his survival, if none of it is tempered by compassion of a sort that Nawab fails to act on.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the robber’s actions relate to the book’s thematic exploration of the struggle to achieve change?

Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Nawab’s feelings toward the robber? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Nawab’s saving of his motorcycle a thing of “glory”? What is glorious about it?

Vocabulary

itinerant, banyan, haunches, flagstone, circumvent, dowry, sufficient, proliferate, demur, aviator, founder, ubiquitous, florid, crux, expansive, vestigial, diligent, mosey, superimpose, ochre, tangent, contrivance, haughty, pannier, canopy, piquancy, deference, pilfer, ricochet, carburetor, supplication, cicada, prevalent, convulse



Story 2

Summary

In “Saleema,” Saleema’s ancestors are described as a tribe of bandits who, decades before she was born, overran a small village. Saleema’s father became a heroin addict, and her mother became a prostitute. A young Saleema married a man who, eventually, became an amphetamine addict. Saleema then became a servant in the home of K.K. Harouni. She became a maid to his daughter, Begum Kamila.

Saleema has a short-lived affair with Harouni’s chef Hassan. When that ends, she considers which other men in the household she could become involved with – that is, which man could be counted upon to protect her. A chance encounter brings her into contact with Rafik, Harouni’s married manservant. Saleema looks for ways to be with him and, at the same time, to leave him alone with his thoughts of her. She has more opportunities to spend time with Rafik when they are both taken to Harouni’s farm, where he and his daughter are staying for a week. In spite of being busy, Saleema is happy as she looks forward to further developments in her relationship with Rafik. The relationship becomes closer in the aftermath of Hassan’s brief taunting of Saleema and closer still after a kiss in a rainstorm. Soon the household knows what is going on between the two of them.

Meanwhile, Begum Kamila goes to America. Although there are plans to let Saleema go with her, Rafik convinces Harouni to let her stay. He takes her into his confidence as he prepares his annual homemade marijuana potion. Sometimes, he slips the potion into the food of both the family and the servants. Narration describes how they sleep together but do not actually have sex and how Saleema finds herself using tender tones of voice with Rafik that she had never used with anyone.

One day, when Harouni is away on business, Rafik puts his potion into a batch of samosas, which all the servants eat. As she feels the effects of the marijuana, Saleema becomes more open to Rafik’s attentions, and they make love for the first time. In the aftermath, she goes to visit her husband, who is deep in his addiction. She tells him she will never be with him again, takes her things, and goes back to Rafik’s. There she climbs into bed with him. She realizes that their wedding dinner had been “drugged samosas, and she felt sad and worn and frightened.” (49).

As the relationship between Saleema and Rafik continues, and as her love for Rafik deepens, Saleema becomes pregnant. She is determined to have the baby. At first Rafik is unsure, but then he accepts her decision and gives her his life’s savings in case she has to visit a doctor. After visiting her home and fending off her greedy mother, Saleema has the baby and returns to Harouni’s household, where she is happy to discover that Rafik and the baby bond immediately. That bond is shaken, however, when Rafik receives a letter from his wife begging him to come home and take care of his family. Saleema sees that Rafik has been upset by the letter. She becomes upset



herself, accusing him of becoming tired of her and their baby. He tries to reassure her, but because he is a “man of principle” (55), he goes to see his other family. When he returns, he behaves differently toward Saleema. He has told his wife about the new baby.

Rafik’s wife then arrives and joins the household. As she makes her presence increasingly felt, and as Rafik becomes more and more distant from her, Saleema is forced to move back in with her husband. Soon the household is thrown into turmoil by the sudden death of K.K. Harouni. Rafik and Hassan (because of their seniority) are moved into another of the family’s households, but all the other servants (including Saleema) are let go. Saleema has one last conversation with Rafik, in which he confesses that he loved her.

Narration then briefly describes what happens to Saleema after her departure from the house. She begins using drugs and becomes a street beggar. She eventually dies. Her son also ends up a beggar.

Analysis

The first point to note about this story is how it introduces and develops one of the collection’s secondary motifs, or repeated images which is the way in which drugs influence the lives of the characters. In this story, those developments can first be found in the references to Saleema’s parents and to her husband, with the lives of all those characters being defined by the negative aspects of drug use. Interestingly, though, the story looks at the other side of the coin when it refers to Rafik’s activities with the marijuana and what happens between him and Saleema in the aftermath of those activities. While there is arguably a positive outcome of drug use for Saleema and Rafik (in that Saleema gets what she wants – a more solid relationship with Rafik), it could be argued that a negative outcome to that drug use does take place (i.e. their separation). Its effect is just delayed. This sense of their drug use is reinforced by Saleema’s feeling of near-remorse. Meanwhile, the final image of the story also manifests this motif and functions as a kind of bookend, with images at both the story’s opening and its closing indicating the life-destroying side of drug use.

Another significantly noteworthy point is the way in which this story manifests the collection’s thematic interest in inter-connectedness – that is, aside from the second reference, in as many stories, to K.K. Harouni. The seeds of future inter-connectedness are planted here: later in the collection, the story “In Other Rooms ...” features not only characters that also appear in this story (Hassan, Rafik, Harouni himself) but also features events that appear first here, specifically Harouni’s death. There are also parallels between the experiences of the central female characters in both stories. Other themes common to the connection and developed in this story are related to sex in relationships and the struggle to achieve change, which is arguably this story’s central theme. This manifests primarily in the story of Saleema – her struggles to improve her life, the temporary successes she experiences, and the almost inevitable failures. All these elements to her story foreshadow similar patterns in both life and narrative that



appear in other stories in the collection (most notably: “In Other Rooms ...”). One other main theme of the collection that appears in this story is the exploration of the hold of the past on the present. The past here is represented by Rafik’s wife and her return to her husband’s life.

Discussion Question 1

What does the story say about the collection's theme relating to sex and relationships?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the implied connection between Saleema’s family history and the story of her life? How does one reflect the other? Discuss both thematic and narrative elements.

Discussion Question 3

How do you respond to the story’s final moments – specifically, its sketching in of the lives of Saleema and her son? Is what happens to them tragic? Is it earned? Is it justice?

Vocabulary

adjacent, unscrupulous, amphetamine, temperament, delicacy, inedible, forlorn, hookah, martial, magnate, bodice, expectant, mercantile, coquettish, verandah, arcade, retinue, acquiescent, purview, sinecure, eminence, servile, emaciated, gravid, attribute, carnal, rickshaw, rheumy, resolute, lugubrious, lucrative



Story 3

Summary

“Provide, Provide” is set several years earlier than the previous two narratives. It begins with a description of how K.K. Harouni’s manager, Jaglani, makes a complicated series of arrangements that gain him profit of his own at the same time as they are benefiting Harouni.

Jaglani’s closest relationship is with Harouni’s driver Mustafa who, one day, asks Jaglani to give his sister a job. He says that she needs help to leave her unhappy marriage. Jaglani agrees to give her a try. Later, after she cooks him a meal that he enjoys, he decides to hire her. Only at this point does narration reveal her name, Zainab. Over time, the relationship between Jaglani and Zainab becomes sexual, but Zainab refuses to stay the night, always returning home. For his part, Jaglani (who had married and become a father at a very young age, his wife subsequently dying) becomes increasingly attracted to Zainab. He offers to give her money to help her improve her life. At one point, he leaves it on her bedside table. She refuses to take it, leaving the money where he placed it. He eventually takes it back.

One night, after seeing a farm worker die from the bite of a poisonous snake, Jaglani reflects on how he recognized the man, but did not really know him. Jaglani finds he cannot sleep. He calls Zainab to him. As they make love, he tells her he wants to marry her, saying he will make the arrangements with her husband. Zainab kisses him. For the next few days, however, Jaglani does not mention marriage again, and Zainab becomes distant. Jaglani realizes that he has begun to love her, makes the final arrangements for her divorce from her husband (for whom he finds a more rewarding job), and completes the paperwork arranging for the marriage. When Jaglani insists that the marriage remain a secret, Zainab agrees, but only as long as they no longer use birth control. She moves into Jaglani’s quarters full time, and he falls more deeply in love with her. Over time, she realizes that she is unable to have children, and begs Jaglani to let her raise the youngest daughter of his son Shabir. At first, Jaglani refuses, but later, after he has decided to get involved in politics and has told his wife and sons about Zainab, he brings her the baby that she requested.

Time passes: the baby grows and starts calling Zainab “Ma,” and Jaglani becomes a very successful politician. He prospers in his career, until he is diagnosed with inoperable cancer and is given only a few months to live. As Zainab and Mustafa worry about what’s going to happen to them, Jaglani attempts to ensure that Shabir will hold on to his political position. The party officials to whom he speaks, however, don’t agree to what he wants, and he leaves their offices, defeated. As he returns home, Jaglani reflects on his happy times working for K.K. Harouni, and on how much he has come to resent Zainab, and the way her presence in his life could potentially ruin everything he strove to achieve. When they are reunited, however, Jaglani realizes how much she must have given up for him. As he leaves, he tells her that he will make sure his sons



take care of her after he's gone. She thanks him, narration commenting that they both know that what he promised will not happen.

Over the next few days, Jaglani's condition deteriorates. His family arranges his affairs to benefit themselves, omitting any kind of recognition of Zainab. One day, Zainab comes to visit him. His family refuses to let her in, and Jaglani himself refuses to see her, telling himself that she has plenty of opportunity to rebuild a new life. She leaves with Mustafa, commenting that the family never even gave her a cup of tea. This is the last time she appears in the story.

Two nights later, Jaglani dies. In the aftermath of his death, Shabir goes to see the political officials his father had gone to see, but they tell him he can expect nothing, adding that he should go home, accept what he has, and "learn to know [his] level" (95). They also suggest that he should publicly step aside in favor of the candidate they want to promote. Shabir agrees, and later gives a concession speech that is disrupted by hecklers. As he is being driven home by Mustafa, Shabir vows to himself that he is going to fire him (Mustafa), "the sole companion of his father's triumphs" (96) as soon as possible.

Analysis

The first point to note about this story is the way in which it develops the collection's thematic interest in inter-connectedness: specifically, the way in which it places yet another story within the context of the life and home of K.K. Harouni. The story of Jaglani and Zainab simultaneously echoes the thematic and narrative patterns of a previous story ("Saleema") and foreshadows similar patterns in a story to come ("In Other Rooms ..."). In both cases, those patterns include manifestations of the collection's thematic interest in the power and nature of sex in relationships and the struggle to achieve change. In the case of the latter, struggling characters include Jaglani (who is constantly striving to change the circumstances of his life, both by manipulating Harouni's books and by manipulating Zainab), Zainab (whose struggle for change is discussed in more detail below), and Shabir. As the story concludes, he struggles to change the way politics seemingly work in his situation, which also seems to be an evocation of the collection's theme relating to the relationship between past and present: there is the clear sense that the power figures who give Shabir their bad news have the kind of power they do because they and people like them have always had it. In other words, their power in the past has a controlling influence over Shabir in the present.

Then, and as noted in "Themes", this story contains the most vivid, dramatic, and perhaps most surprising example of the theme of the power of longing. This manifests in the way Zainab goes about getting a child, which seems to be her sole reason for marrying: her request to Jaglani to have Shabir's youngest child indicates and defines how desperately she longs to be a mother. Interestingly, the narrative doesn't dwell on her feelings in the aftermath of her discovery that she cannot become a biological mother, but instead demonstrates the intensity of her feelings through action (i.e. her



request to Jaglani). Meanwhile, there are clear parallels (interconnectedness?) here between the stories of Zainab and Saleema, principally in the narrative fact that they both face empty, ruined lives as a result of the actions they take in pursuit of their goals. This foreshadows the outcome of a similar character's similar situation and choices in "In Other Rooms ...". In this context, what's interesting about this particular piece is that the narrative continues beyond the ending of Zainab's presence in both Jaglani's life and in the story (the line about the cup of tea can be seen / felt as being incredibly sad). Instead of ending the story there, the narrative goes further into what happens to Shabir who, to this point, had been barely glimpsed at all. With this ending, the author is suggesting a connection between Zainab's being brought into Jaglani's household and what happens to Shabir. The narrative never makes it clear what happens to the baby – Shabir's baby that becomes Zainab's. Does the baby return to Shabir's household? Does the baby leave with Zainab? The question remains unanswered.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the book's thematic interest in the struggle to achieve change manifest in this story?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the relationship between what happens to Zainab and what happens to Shabir?

Discussion Question 3

Given what happens to Zainab and to Shabir as the story concludes, what do you think will happen to the child they have in common?

Vocabulary

feudal, condescension, deficit, incongruous, courtier, dispersion, allegiance, incapacity, secede, migratory, allegiance, incapacity, secede, migratory, succumb, monsoon, lintel, deference, pliable, preeminent, preamble, expenditure, dubious, stipulation, complacent, hereditary, preliminary, prerogative, enormity, antimacassar, culmination, ascendance, obeisance, deferential, expectancy, abjure, ratification, profusion, commotion, adherent, placid



Story 4

Summary

In "About a Burning Girl," the first person narrator describes himself as "a sessions judge in the Lahore High Court" (97), but he adds that he has no real sense of justice. He makes decisions "based on the relative pressures brought to bear on me" (97). He describes his unhappy but functional relationship with his wife and children. He goes on to describe how happy he is with one of his servants, Khadim, whom he describes as reliable and attentive.

One day, Khadim makes an unexpected request: to go to his village home and see an unwell relative. The narrator agrees. Shortly afterwards, the narrator learns that Khadim has been charged with murder. The wife of his older brother was burned to death, and before she died named Khadim as the one who set the fire. The narrator has a meeting with the brother, in which he (the narrator) learns that there was a robbery at the family home on the night of the killing. The brother believes that his wife and HER brother were involved and that his wife killed herself out of remorse. He adds, however, that because she said that Khadim killed her, the police refuse to believe that she killed herself. The brother also tells the narrator that his and Khadim's father work for the nephew of K.K. Harouni, who has agreed to pay any expenses that might arise as a result of the attempt to free Khadim. It is understood by the characters that these expenses will include bribes. The narrator demands to see the father, clearly indicating that he knows the brother is lying. After the brother goes, the narrator tells his wife about the situation, and she insists that he send his most trusted and skilled assistant, Mian Sarkar, to investigate.

After describing, in considerable detail, Sarkar's abilities and knowledge, the narrator then describes his meeting with Khadim's father, who blames the dead woman's family for both the robbery (which resulted in all his savings being stolen) and the murder. After seeking reassurance that Harouni's nephew will pay all the bills, the narrator sends the father into the house for tea.

Two days later, Sarkar returns and reveals to the narrator what he has discovered. He tells the narrator that Khadim and his brother conspired to rob the father, faced the prospect of being blackmailed by the police, and killed the wife so they could have someone to accuse who could not speak in self-defense. The brother, Sarkar says, fully planned to let Khadim die and keep his share of the stolen money, adding that the brother gave him (Sarkar) a great deal of money: "in these inflationary times," Sarkar comments, "to escape murder charges is ruinously expensive." (109). Sarkar then says that because the narrator's wife wants to keep Khadim as her servant, he (Sarkar) arranged with the police and a doctor to refute the burned girl's confession, thereby setting Khadim free. Finally, Sarkar reveals who the judge in Khadim's trial will be. The narrator is reminded of a complicated chain of events that places that judge into an obligation to the narrator. The narrator calls the judge.



Analysis

The first point to note about this piece is the narrator's frank, ironic admission that his legal opinions have nothing to do with the law. They have more to do with circumstances – his own, those of the case, and those of the legal system. This admission and its concurrent sense of corruption foreshadow both events later in this piece (i.e. the fact that Khadim is let off, but no one else is actually charged or convicted) and the comment later in the story about the expense of avoiding a murder charge. Here it is important to note that as it concludes, the narrative never indicates who is actually going to be charged with the crime. Sarkar and the narrator are only interested in making sure that Khadim is not found guilty. With that accomplished, it seems that they have no further interest in actual justice, a turn of events also foreshadowed by the anonymous narrator's opening self-description. All these, in turn, also foreshadow events in a story later in the collection: specifically, in "A Spoiled Man," in which the central character receives the sort of corrupt treatment that the narrator here seems to practice.

Another point to note about this piece is its structure which, unlike the other stories in the collection, follows a genre-specific pattern: in this case, the pattern of a so-called "traditional" murder mystery. There is the establishment of a crime; the exploration of the situation and circumstances; and the "traditional" lengthy explanation from an investigator/detective that reveals the truth. What's interesting here is that this structure becomes the framework for yet another of the collection's explorations of the corrupt nature of life in Pakistan. There is the sense here, as well as in other stories, that taking action based on integrity is less of a priority and of less interest than seizing advantage by manipulation and ruthlessness. Throughout the collection, these qualities manifest in relationships and situations ranging from the domestic through the professional into the political.

Discussion Question 1

How is the collection's thematic interest in the struggle to achieve change developed in this story?

Discussion Question 2

How is the collection's thematic interest in inter-connection developed in this story?

Discussion Question 3

In what metaphoric ways is the situation of the unnamed woman here similar to those of Saleema and Zainab?

Vocabulary

clamor, grovel, covet, dyspepsia, bovine, dissipation, supplement, dispensation, portfolio, judicious, enormity, punctilio, proverbial, tubular, bacillus, portico, implicit, exactitude, acquiesce, nefarious, ruinous, effusive



Story 5, Section 1

Summary

Story 5, "In Other Rooms, Other Wonders," pages 113 – 128, begins with a description of how Husna "needed a job ... stole up the long drive to the Lahore house of the retired civil servant and landlord K.K. Harouni, bearing in her little lacquered fingers a letter of introduction from, of all people, his estranged first wife." (113). Husna is seated in a waiting area by a servant later identified as Rafik (see "Saleema – Section 2"), and is eventually seen by Harouni himself, reminding him of her troubled family history and, in a sudden turn of attitude from the subservient to the determined, indicates her independence. Harouni invites her to come every day to study typing.

Husna begins her lessons, but doesn't do well: narration describes how she lets herself give in to daydreaming. Harouni, meanwhile, starts making efforts first to see her, and then go walking with her, sending her home in his car. During all this, Husna develops an understanding with Rafik who, in turn, develops an understanding of her relationship with Harouni. Narration describes how, as she is driven home, Husna contemplates the unlikelihood of her marrying into one of the old, established (feudal) families and how she has to make her own future. Later, as weeks pass and she starts going on regular walks with Harouni, Husna becomes increasingly distracted by daydreams of wealth and of becoming a kept woman, in spite of recalling the contempt with which such women were held by her mother and many others. She also reveals the full extent of her somewhat unrefined personality to Harouni, seemingly unaware that for him (as narration reveals), she is a reminder of the low-class servant girls with whom he lost his virginity.

Six weeks after Harouni and Husna start walking together, Harouni's first wife Begum Harouni, who is still technically Husna's employer, announces she is going on a religious pilgrimage. Husna manipulates Harouni into asking her to move in, and she takes up residence in the guest space above his garage. "To Husna," narration comments, "it felt like a validation, almost like revenge, and yet with the bitterness of triumph after humiliation." (124). On the day she is to leave, Husna takes advantage of what she perceives to be her new status and abuses the servant in Begum Harouni's house. She also makes nasty comments to Harouni's driver, as he drives her to her new home. Narration then comments that a week after she moved into the guest quarters, Husna and Harouni slept together for the first time, Husna losing her virginity to Harouni in the quiet aftermath of a lunch he had hosted for important guests. Narration describes Husna's surprise at how she suddenly felt more romantic than she had ever felt before, and how glad she was that she would not have to live the sort of poor, suburban life that she was afraid she would have been forced to live. "She knew then," narration comments, "that she wouldn't have another man, because any man after this would have to be a compromise, a salary man." (128).



Analysis

The first point to note about the story as a whole is that it is the only one in the collection in which K.K. Harouni is a principal character: he and/or his name appear peripherally, and/or is referred to, in every other story, but nowhere else does he play as significant a narrative role as he does here. The sense is that in this story, he is more of a human being, with the reader coming to understand who he is as a person: in all the other stories he is a presence, an authority, a power that doesn't necessarily have a human identity. A related point to note is how the presence of Harouni is one way in which the collection's thematic interest in / emphasis on inter-connection is developed: other ways include the notable parallels between the experiences of Husna and Saleema (see "Discussion Question 2"), and between the experiences of those two characters and that of Zainab in "Provide ..."

Meanwhile, it is important to note a key difference between Husna's story and those of Saleema and Zainab, two female characters who, earlier in the connection, have similar experiences and make similar choices. The most significant of these similarities has to do with Husna's apparent character: she seems here to be more determined to take advantage of her new status than either Saleema or Zainab. There is the sense that her longing for change in her power and status (note the thematically significant language) is greater than the longing for those types of change in the other two women. That is not to say that the other two women are not without their own intensities of longing: for them, however, those intensities manifest in different ways. All that said, there remain significant parallels between the experiences of all three women, aside from how they each become involved with older men who can give them things they want, need, or lack.

One of the secondary characters appearing in this story is the driver who takes Husna to Harouni's home. He is unnamed. Perhaps, he is Mustafa, Harouni's driver who appears in "Provide, Provide." It is also possible that his appearance is insignificant. It is important to remember that this story takes place later in the timeline of Harouni's life than "Provide, Provide." in that story, Harouni is still in his prime as a landowner. Here, he is coming close to the end of his life. It's not clear, or defined, how MUCH later this story takes place, meaning that it's possible that the driver here could be Mustafa, but it's not absolutely certain. If it is, it would be another example of how this story develops / explores the theme of interconnection: Rafik and Hassan (from "Saleema") are already here, it might make sense for Mustafa to be here as well.

Discussion Question 1

In what thematically significant ways does the theme of sex in relationships manifest in this section of this story?



Discussion Question 2

What are the noteworthy parallels between the relationship at the heart of this story and the relationship at the heart of “Saleema,” which arguably takes place at approximately the same time and in the same place as this story?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the quote taken from p. 124 – specifically, its reference to “the bitterness of triumph after humiliation”. What does this mean? What does this feel like? Why would triumph, in such a situation, feel bitter?

Vocabulary

capacity, brocade, lineage, consolidate, emblematic, immemorial, recourse, serpentine, comity, lassitude, ambiguous, mediocre, demimonde, equilibrium, amulet, philter, dissipate, piquant, placid, avid, validation, impervious



Story 5, Section 2

Summary

“In Other Rooms, Other Wonders,” pages 128 - 142, describes how a routine of sexual activity and eating together developed between Husna and Harouni; how Harouni’s daughter Sarwat learned of their relationship and disapproved; and how Husna, after hearing about things Sarwat said to Harouni about her, lost her temper. Harouni tells her to calm down, reminding her that he had already had one heart attack and he did not want her to cause him to have another. Husna persists, telling him how badly she is being treated by the servants (including Hassan, Harouni’s cook, first mentioned in “Saleema – Section 2”).

Husna gains power and status in the household, benefiting from the same manipulation of the household accounts and collecting money and possessions in a set of trunks. For his part, Harouni enjoys her company, particularly in the moments when he can watch her sleep. Narration reveals here that Husna relies on sleeping pills to both help her sleep and keep her calm in general, and that Harouni worries that if something happened to him in the night, she’d be unable to hear it. She cries with worry and fear at this thought, leading Harouni to consider that perhaps she genuinely loves him. Narration refers to a thought Harouni repeatedly has in relation to Husna: “Too old to be roused by pleasure, I seek pain.” (136)

One night, Harouni suffers a heart attack. He is taken to a hospital. Narration describes how, as she watches him go, Husna “for the first time ... [thinks] of him as a lover, sick and possibly dying.” (137). Shortly afterwards, Harouni dies. For a while, Husna behaves almost like a widow, receiving the visitors that come to pay their respect. Then, when Sarwat and her sisters arrive, Husna is banished to her old quarters, unable to talk with anyone until the day of the funeral. Then, she is allowed down into the main house once again. However, she sits far away from the other guests, including Begum Harouni and several other women whom narration describes as having had close friendships with Harouni. After the funeral, Husna is sent back into isolation, until she is called to meet with Sarwat and her sisters. They tell her to leave and take nothing except her trunks. The shocked Husna remains silent, thinking afterwards of all the dignified things she could / should have said. The next day, Husna and her trunks are taken away.

Analysis

This story develops narrative threads introduced in the first part of the story (i.e. Husna’s demands for power and status, the tensions between her and the more established members of Harouni’s household and family) and introduces several new ones. Examples of the latter include the initial reference to Harouni’s heart condition (which foreshadows the events of the story’s climax, and which can be seen as



reflecting the collection's thematic interest in the hold of the past – i.e. Harouni's poor health – on the present) and the reference to Husna's reliance on sleeping pills. This is another manifestation of one of the collection's primary motifs, or repeated images: its indication that drug use, of one kind or another, has an important (and damaging) effect on the lives of those who use them.

Meanwhile, it's important to note that events that define the climax of this story – the illness and death of Harouni – are the same as those that define the climax of "Saleema." Interestingly, while the same events are narrated from different points of view, their effect on the central characters of each story (Saleema and Husna) is essentially the same: both women lose all the advantages they've gained, all the change that they have struggled so hard to achieve. Their longings have been realized, albeit briefly: but when circumstances change, they seem to have no choice but to go back to their lives as they once were.

Discussion Question 1

How does the book's thematic exploration of the power of longing play out in this section of the story?

Discussion Question 2

What are the metaphoric implications of Harouni's comment on the relationship between pleasure and pain (p. 136)?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think are the metaphoric implications of Harouni's comment on the relationship between pleasure and pain (p. 136)?

Vocabulary

portico, scabbard, voluptuous, insolence, flirtatious, vestibule, esoteric



Story 6

Summary

The initial narration of “Our Lady of Paris” describes how Sohail (a graduate law student) and Helen (an undergraduate) met while they were both at school at Yal and how Sohail’s schooling was his attempt to put off being absorbed into his father’s family business. It also tells how, after spending several months at his home in Pakistan, Sohail told his mother he wanted to spend Christmas in Paris with Helen. A few days later, his well-dressed, sophisticated mother tells him she and his father want to spend Christmas in Paris as well. The implication is that she wants to meet and get to know Helen. Sohail sees he has no choice but to agree.

In Paris, when Sohail and Helen arrive at the apartment where Sohail’s parents are staying, Helen is told to call Sohail’s mother Rafia and his father Amjad. As Rafia and Sohail go into the kitchen to prepare dinner, conversation between Amjad and Helen reveals that Helen aspires to be a doctor and that she has hopes of living and working in New York. Amjad wonders aloud whether Sohail can set up a branch of the company business there, a comment that the returning Sohail says is his father’s attempt at a joke. As the evening progresses, everyone becomes more comfortable. Conversation reveals that Amjad would like to be free of his family identity, saying he is tired of always being referred to as K.K. Harouni’s cousin (see “Quote 9”). When asked if she thinks that SHE is free, Helen comments that she doesn’t think she’s old enough to know, although “that at twenty-one many girls think they are.” (152). The rest of the evening goes smoothly, and the quartet makes plans to go to the ballet on Christmas Eve. When they get back to the apartment where they’re staying, Sohail reassures Helen that his parents liked her, and they make love. In the aftermath, Helen looks at Sohail, who is staring out the window, and “knew that she loved him very much.” (154)

The next day, Sohail and Helen wander through Paris, enjoying each other’s company. The night after that, Christmas Eve, is the ballet, “Sleeping Beauty”, and Helen is both moved and disturbed by both the production and by intimacies that she sees between Sohail’s parents, including catching the tail end of a conversation that she believes is about her: “ ‘I suppose that depends on who is being fascinated,’ said Mr. Harouni. ‘Not really, answered Rafia.’” (158).

Sohail and Helen make plans to travel into the country between Christmas and New Year’s. Rafia asks for Helen to meet for tea before they go, and Helen agrees. Their polite but frank conversation, held in a high-class hotel restaurant, reveals that Rafia believes that living in America would make Sohail unhappy, while living in Pakistan would make Helen unhappy. When Rafia says that she trusts Helen to “do what she will”, Helen takes her comments to mean that Rafia wants her to abandon her relationship with Sohail. Rafia’s response is non-committal. Helen then thanks Rafia for making Sohail into the person that he is. Rafia suggests that Helen’s comments sound



like something has come to an end. Helen's response, in turn, is also non-committal. They embrace each other and go their separate ways.

While Sohail and Helen are traveling through the country, they have a brief argument on the way to their hotel. When they finally arrive, and after they have dinner, Helen tries to make friends with a cautious kitten, and then initiates passionate lovemaking with Sohail. Afterwards she once again sees the kitten out their window and calls to it, but it ignores her. The next morning, Helen asks to go back to Paris, and Sohail agrees. As they prepare to leave, Sohail insists upon going through a maze: it takes him a long time, but Helen finds him beautiful as she watches him. Eventually he finds his way into the centre of the maze, waving to Helen when he gets there. As makes his way out, Helen watches "almost with horror ... harden[ing] herself to meet him ... willing herself to remember the centuries, the kings and their queens who had walked here, seen this river, this wet forest – and now their loves blown away, their pain." (168).

Analysis

This story is unique in the collection for several reasons. First and foremost, it is the only story to feature a non-Pakistani as a central character (Helen). A second, and perhaps related, aspect of uniqueness is how Helen, unlike so many of the other female characters at the center of the collection's stories, seems to have an attitude of independence: unlike Saleema, Zainab, and Husna (as examples), Helen has her own identity, her own sense of place in the world independent of a relationship with a man, and her own sense of freedom. She also has her own sense of sexuality: for Helen, sexuality is clearly an expression of her emotional connection to Sohail, a very clear contrast to experiences of sexuality represented by women earlier in the collection and also in the major story to come (the title character in "Lily").

In this context it is interesting to note how Helen comes into conflict with another strong woman, Sohail's mother Rafia. There is the clear sense that on one level, the conflict between the two women is one of tradition (represented by Rafia) and what might be called evolution, or moving forward (Helen). In other words, Helen can be seen as embodying and/or representing the book's central theme of longing for change: there is certainly the sense that she is deepening a desire for change in Sohail, a change that he seems to be longing for as the story begins and increases as the story continues. Meanwhile, in this context Rafia can be seen as embodying and/or representing another of the collection's themes: the hold of the past on the present.

This story is also unique in that it features more metaphoric / poetic writing than most (all?) the other stories, with possible symbolic implications in several story elements. The story of "Sleeping Beauty", for example, is one of a character being put to sleep by a curse but being woken up by the power of true love: this could be seen as relating to the experiences of Sohail, or Helen, or both. Then there are the symbols at the end of the story: the kitten (which can be seen as representing Sohail's diffidence towards Helen), and the maze (which can be seen as representing / externalizing Sohail's struggle to choose the right path in his life). Finally, in terms of metaphoric writing, there



are the piece's final lines, which can be seen as poetically foreshadowing the outcome of the relationship between Sohail and Helen, the truth of which is revealed in subsequent stories in the collection.

One final point relates to the story's title. The phrase "our lady" is often used, in the Christian faith, to refer to the Virgin Mary. The phrase is often used as part of a larger phrase to indicate the presence of the Virgin at a particular church or in a particular community: "Our Lady of Lourdes," for example, refers to the "presence" of the Virgin at a shrine of healing in France. There is the sense here that the use of the phrase "our lady" in the title of this particular story functions on a couple of levels. First, it seems to be a reference to Helen, whom Sohail seems, on some level and on some occasions, to treat as some kind of inspiration or divine power leading him to a new life. Second, the reference can also be seen as being significantly ironic, given that Helen is clearly not a virgin.

Discussion Question 1

What different sorts of longings drive the actions of the various characters in this story?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think is the significance of Amjad asking Helen whether she believes she is free? What point is the author trying to make here?

Discussion Question 3

What are the implications of the comment about being "fascinated"? In what ways might the comment refer to one or another of the two main characters, Sohail and Helen?

Vocabulary

abeyance, indolent, divan, diminutive, speculative, bouillabaisse, saffron, aromatic, equanimity, tentative, cabochon, agitation, constrained, decorous, valedictory, ingenuous, sarong, fantastical, filigree



Story 7, Section 1

Summary

“Lily - Islamabad,” pages 169 – 189 begins as one night, while Leila, a late twenties party girl who is known as Lily to her friends, is at yet another party with the same too familiar people (including the party’s host, Mino). Lily finds herself in a surprising conversation with an attractive man, Murad. Their dialogue, both flirtatious and sometimes unexpectedly serious, includes a reference to Murad being connected to a well-to-do family, and leaves Lily intrigued enough to give him her cell phone number, but not interested in actively pursuing any kind of relationship. Narration reveals that she is the daughter of a well-off “feudal” (173) Pakistani family; that she has angrily alienated her parents; and that a few months before this particular party, she had a near-death experience in a drunken car crash that led her to spend a significant amount of time in hospital. During her stay, she had a dream of surviving an airplane crash by hovering in the air as the plane crashed below her, a dream she took to mean that it was time to change her selfish life and become more compassionate, more vulnerable. Narration describes how, soon after leaving hospital, Lily went back to her partying, sexually promiscuous habits, but kept part of her “new” self active, beginning “to turn away from her friends, look[ing] at them, at their conversation, their jokes, from a slight distance.” (172).

Back in the present, Murad gets in touch with Lily after a couple of days, inviting her to have a picnic with him in a place he describes as being near a place where two very different rivers join after running in parallel for several miles. Lily comments that it sounds like a metaphor, and agrees to go. Several days later, when they arrive at the place Murad described, Lily is surprised to learn that they are the only ones there, and she very much enjoys the expansive picnic Murad has prepared. Later, he puts on a pair of swimming trunks and rides one of the very turbulent rivers, frightening Lily. After he quotes “a bit of Persian poetry that [his] father quotes: ‘Standing there on the shore / what do you know of my troubles / as I struggle here in midstream” (181), she tells him she is not going to sleep with him in spite of the fact that he clearly wants her to. He responds by lighting a marijuana cigarette, which disappoints Lily even though she expected it. Nevertheless, as she smokes, she feels “immense tenderness” for him (182), realizing that she had never felt so comfortable, so soon, with so many other young Pakistani men.

A week later, after Murad has been to the vegetable farm he has established as a business, Lily invites him to her home. As Lily lights a fire for them, she reflects first on how attractive he looks, and second on how different the situation feels from the last time she lit a fire: for a man she didn’t care for, both of them knowing that they were in a familiar dance of inevitable seduction. As Lily and Murad sit by the fire and talk, Murad reveals that he had seen Lily at a party thrown by Sohail Harouni and his American wife Sonya, which he (Murad) had attended after a period of unhappiness-triggered seclusion at the family farm. He describes seeing her walk thoughtfully and gracefully to



a swimming pool and sit next to it. Lily says that she remembers that night, adding that she had just had a painful experience. Murad tells her that he doesn't want to know what it was, describing how, after she walked away from the pool and the party, he went home. Lily describes it as the nicest story she has ever heard about herself, and they spend the night together – not sexually, just curled up together in front of the fireplace. Murad, narration reveals, refuses Lily's offer of a marijuana cigarette.

Analysis

There are several important points to note about this section of the story. First, it references the system of “feudalism” (see “Symbols / Symbolism”) that defines the social and/or political context of many of the collection's stories. Neither Lily nor Murad is a member of the Harouni family, the most pervasive example of feudalism throughout the collection, but the tradition of their families is the same as that of the Harounis, with Lily being portrayed as trying to break free of that system, and Murad portrayed as embracing it. In sketching in both these sets of circumstances, the story is exploring the theme related to the hold of the present on the past, a theme that also plays out on a second, but very different, level in Lily. This is her expressed, and acted upon, desire to change, which is itself thematically significant: she is trying to let go of a partying past that seems to have a tight grip on her and experience life and relationships in a different way. As the story gets underway, it is a struggle for her. However, she does seem to be making an effort. Even though she still smokes marijuana, she does not immediately have sex with Murad. She feels differently than she might have in the past about not doing so. This, in turn, can be seen as evoking the collection's thematic interest in the nature of sex in relationships, albeit in a significantly different way from other stories in the collection.

Other important points to note include alcohol and marijuana, which reiterate the motif of drug use influencing action that appears throughout the collection. Here it is interesting to note how at first Murad joins Lily in smoking (which suggests that they are, at least for a moment or two, on the same path / track in their relationship) and later refuses to join her, an action that foreshadows other, similar actions in subsequent sections of the narrative that metaphorically suggest that within their relationship they are heading opposite directions. Then there is the passing reference to Sohail Harouni and his new wife, a clear indication that following the events of “Our Lady ...”, Sohail and Helen did not continue their relationship. Meanwhile, Lily's passing reference to having had a humiliating experience on the night to which Murad refers (the night he describes as the first night he saw her) is never followed through: the incident is never actually defined or described. There are specific references earlier in the chapter to random sexual encounters about which Lily is embarrassed, and there is the possibility that her comment to Murad is a response to one of those: again, however, the narrative is not specific.

Finally, it's useful to note the inter-connectedness in this story, not just in terms of the peripheral connection with the Harouni family but also in terms of time frames for the action. In the same way as “In Other Voices ...” took place at roughly the same time as



“Saleema”, this story is set at roughly the same time as a story later in the collection, “The Spoiled Man,” in which Sonya Harouni plays a significant role.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways does the portrayal of sex in relationships in this story differ and/or parallel the portrayal of sex in other relationships in the collection?

Discussion Question 2

Narration in this story indicates that Sohail (who appeared in the story “Our Lady of Paris”) is not married to the woman (Helen) he loved in that story. Instead, he married someone else. What do you think happened to Helen? Based on what you know about Sohail and Helen from “Our Lady of Paris,” why do you think Sohail ended his relationship with her and married Sonya instead?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the “midstream” quote reflect the experiences of both Lily and Murad?

Vocabulary

extravagant, fastidious, brigadier, colonial (n.), perceptible, regimental, supercilious, matrimony, pneumatic, tributary, fixation, benign, appraise, sentinel, languid



Story 7, Section 2

Summary

In “Lily - Islamabad,” pages 189 – 204, as Lily and Murad make plans to get married (her parents are happy, his family isn’t), narration suggests that “despite her past Lily at heart was a homebody” (190), efficient and organized, particularly when it came to her small dress design business and property ownership. Narration also comments that Lily and Murad “both acknowledged an intention to join together protectively and go forth” (190).

The story then flashes back to a time before their engagement when Murad took Lily to see his aging father, bedridden since the death of his wife some time before. In narration, Lily notes how the atmosphere and the manipulative servants are similar to those of her own family, and how the house where Murad’s father lives seems disorganized and unwelcoming. She is then introduced to Murad’s father, who makes an effort to be pleasant but, in Lily’s perception, seems distracted. After a while, and as arranged, Murad leaves Lily and his father alone. Lily is about to speak when Murad’s father (who, Lily thinks, has been told about her past) talks about her and Murad’s prospective marriage, urging her to “keep the faith” (193). Narration then describes how, some undefined time later, Lily realized that this was the first point that she began to feel like her hopes of being changed by her marriage were not going to be realized.

As the day of the wedding approaches, Murad continues to believe his father will be well enough to attend. He is deeply upset, however, when his father sends word he is not coming, telling Lily that it’s just another example of how selfish his father has always been. Lily reassures him that they will be able to make their own independent life together. In every other way, however, the wedding goes as planned, with Murad and Lily taking a moment together to exchange private vows. Later, Lily wanders through her house alone, overhearing a conversation between some of the male guests who laughingly talk about how “she’ll peel the bark off him soon enough” (198). Afterwards, she goes back down into the tent where the wedding dinner was served, narration describing how everything, including the tables, has been stripped of its decoration. She sees a group of faces looking through a clear plastic strip in the tent, faces that she realizes belong to some of the poverty-stricken people from a nearby slum, also realizing that the servants will have given them some of the leftovers from the banquet. She turns to move away, “not making any gesture toward them” (198).

In the aftermath of their wedding, Lily and Murad move to his farm, narration revealing that “they slept together for the first time only a few weeks before ... clumsily, both of them, after having resisted so long.” (199). Their arrival is celebrated by the community and by the workers of the farm, Lily coming to realize how many people depend on her husband. At the farm, she is taken into the bedroom, Murad revealing that it used to be his father’s and that he (Murad) has had it completely redecorated for her. That night, a



sandstorm blows in, and he takes her up to the roof to experience it: she shouts in excitement and happiness.

Analysis

The thematically significant struggles of both Lily and Murad to simultaneously escape their pasts and move into a longed for, changed future continue in this section. Murad struggles to escape his emotional ties to his father, but is disappointed when he can't, while Lily struggles to escape what she sees as the unhealthy attitudes and behaviors of her past, and is ecstatic when she seems to have an initial degree of success. This is represented / revealed by her reaction to the sandstorm: see below. Meanwhile, a related element of both these struggles is also thematically significant. This is the way that sex manifests in Murad and Lily's relationship, both of them delaying their sexual union indicating how they want to make changes in their lives.

Other important elements in this section of the story include Lily's reflection on the words of Murad's father (which accurately foreshadows events in the following, and concluding, section); the comments Lily overhears from the wedding guests (which, in their implied references to Murad's closed-off-ness, also foreshadow the relationship difficulties faced by Lily and Murad later in the story); and the arrival of Lily and Murad at the farm. This is also a significant piece of foreshadowing – specifically, of the way Murad seems, in the following section, to prioritize his work on the farm over Lily and their marriage.

Finally, there are several important metaphors in this section of the story, two of which are related to Lily's return to the banquet hall at the end of the wedding festivities. Then there is the remodeling of the bedroom, which can be seen as Murad's effort to both change his relationship with his family and his past and to assure Lily that he is committed to making such changes. There is the sense here that for Lily (and for the reader), the sandstorm represents a new, but wild and dangerous, kind of freedom.

Discussion Question 1

How does the theme of struggle to achieve change manifest in this section of the story?

Discussion Question 2

What is the metaphoric value of Lily returning to the banquet tent and finding that all the decorations have been stripped away?

Discussion Question 3

What seems to be the metaphoric implication of the image of the slum-dwellers at the wedding?



Vocabulary

extravagant, fastidious, brigadier, colonial (n.), perceptible, regimental, supercilious, matrimony, pneumatic, tributary, fixation, benign, appraise, sentinel, languid / formidable, sanatorium, atelier, dilapidation, volition, gargantuan, complicit, pomade, inoculate, malevolent, cloisonné, chagrin, inveterate, aberrant, personage, intaglio, propitiation



Story 7, Section 3

Summary

In "Lily - Jalpana," pages 204 - 220, within a few months of the wedding, Lily starts becoming bored with Murad's hints that they should start a family. She is also bored with their sex life and with the farm's isolation. She gets Murad to agree to have some of her old friends in for a visit Mino (the host of the party where Lily and Murad met), Bumpy (a friend of Mino's and an old flirtation of Lily's), and a couple of others. Lily soon falls back into her party habits (i.e. drinking, using drugs, flirting), and at first Murad joins in, but after a day or two has to leave to take care of business for the farm. Lily continues to party, aware that Bumpy is flirting with her. When Murad returns, Lily tries to pay attention to him, even though he is busy writing in his journal. She finds herself drawn, irresistibly, to the party continuing in the other part of the house. Later, after Mino and the others have gone to sleep, Lily gives in to Bumpy's flirtation and her own desire for excitement by having sex with him by the pool. She immediately regrets what she did, going back to the house and cleaning herself up, anxious that Murad might want to make love with her in the night. He does not.

After Mino and the others leave, Murad goes out once again to take care of farm business. Aware that she promised never to do it, Lily reads his journal, and discovers both his unhappiness with the partying that's been going on and his resolve to be firmer that he and Lily both fully commit to the life they agreed to make together. Lily puts the journal back where she found it, contemplating the commitment she made and what she remembers of the changes she wanted to make in her life.

Narration reveals that that night, after Mino and the other guests have left and Murad has gotten home, Lily lights a marijuana cigarette for herself and throws one to Murad: he, however, doesn't smoke it. After she orders more drinks, he suggests that in the aftermath of the house party, it might be an idea to not drink so much for a while. When she protests that she doesn't want to, an argument begins between them about what they want their lives to be. The argument ends with Murad quoting a saying: "At the beginning of a love affair, and at the end, the lovers can't bear to be alone together." (217). Lily reacts angrily and storms out, going into the fields with a bottle of whisky.

Narration describes how Lily had, before then, never been out in the fields at night, out of fear of snakes, but goes and sits in a grove of mango trees anyway. She contemplates how little of the life on the farm has any relationship to her; how, when she looked in the mirror, she felt like she was both improving and lost; and how she, in spite of wanting independence, had become MORE dependent on her husband. As she reflects, she hears a sound in the bushes that narration implies might be a snake. She reaches for it in spite of the inner warnings of fear and danger, but nothing happens. She breathes again, throws away the now-empty whisky bottle, and remembers both Murad's comment about lovers at the end of a relationship and what he wrote in his journal. She becomes aware of a future "she must avoid" (220): the two of them



becoming cold and distant from each other, living apart emotionally and eventually physically. She realizes that she has to remember this vision so she can avoid it, instead “becoming old and wise, old and self-forgiving”. There the story ends.

Analysis

The events around the invitation to, and arrival of, Lily's house guests function on a number of thematic levels. They dramatize how difficult the struggle to achieve change can be in the portrayal of Lily being unable to resist the temptations of her old life: this is also a manifestation of the collection's thematic interest in the hold of the past on the present. Meanwhile, Lily gives in to her old habit of sensual, sexual longings, which exert their corruptive power on her, in turn leading her and the story to reveal a different side to the collection's thematic exploration of the power of sex in relationships. Here it's important to note that this particular story shows two sides of the same coin: how sex, when related to in a particular way, can be a positive aspect of change (i.e. how Lily and Murad's waiting for sex manifests and activates their desire to live differently); and how sex, when related to in a different way (i.e. Lily's involvement with Bumpy), can be a trap of the past.

Other important elements include Lily's reading of Murad's journal, which on one level is an unarguable invasion of privacy, but which, on another level, is also an important catalytic, transformative element in Lily's struggle to achieve change. Then there is a recurrence of the drug use motif which, here as elsewhere in the collection, leads characters to actions that they later regret, or at the very least, question. A similarly important element is the quote Murad offers as part of his argument with Lily: its reference to the beginnings of a relationship suggests that for those in that stage of a relationship, feelings of longing and desire are too overwhelming, too intense, for people to be together, in the same way that at the end of a relationship, feelings of anger and resentment are likewise too strong, and likewise have similar consequences. There is the sense here that the reference to relationship beginnings applies to the beginnings of the Lily / Murad relationship: it is important to remember that for both characters, significant amounts of time passed between meetings, the implication being that their feelings were too intense for them to be together. There is a less sure sense that the latter half of the quote, about relationship endings, similarly applies to Lily and Murad. Yes, Lily storms out of their conversation, but the story's final words and images suggest that she has not stormed out of the marriage, at least not completely. She seems, once again, to be considering a change to her perspectives, her values, and how she acts on both. Whether she will succeed remains to be seen.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do the themes of sex in relationships and the struggle to achieve change intertwine in this section?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Lily reaches for the shadow that she thinks is a snake?

Discussion Question 3

As the story reaches its conclusion, what do you think will happen between Lily and Murad?

Vocabulary

caper (v.), parquet, lacquer, diffuse, exultation, pennant, guava, expectant, luxuriate, piratical, palindrome, petulant, enormity, protégé, assiduous, excursion, malice, blithe, instigator, dispensation, mitigate, banality, genuflection, reverberate, minaret, defiant, resolute, aphorism, desiccate



Story 8

Summary

"A Spoiled Man" begins with "There he stood at the stone gateway of the Harounis' weekend home above Islamabad, a small bowlegged man with a lopsided battered face." The man is Rezak, an elderly part-time servant to Sohail Harouni and his American wife Sonya. Narration describes how Rezak gets by with making a small income doing odd jobs around the Harouni house and how he calls a small, portable cubicle, constructed out of pieces of salvaged junk, home.

A senior servant of the Harounis takes pity on Rezak and asks Sonya to give him a job tending her new gardens. She agrees and arranges to offer Rezak a salary, narration commenting that "it made her happy to think of spoiling him in his old age." (227). Rezak packs up his cubicle and moves it onto the Harouni estate where, at one point during a Harouni party, he shows it off to Sonya and her guests, unaware (in his pride) of how shabby it appears. Sonya arranges for him to get electricity, and he hooks up a radio, a television, and some lights.

Rezak is visited by a man from his home village, narration revealing that several years before, Rezak had had a falling out with his brothers and left. Narration also reveals that he was once married, but that both his wife and the child to which she was giving birth died. Rezak speaks of his loneliness to his visitor, who tells him of a distant female relative, "a bit simple" (231) but potentially someone who could make a good home and give Rezak a child. Rezak excitedly agrees, pays the woman's family out of money he's saved, and allows her to move into the cubicle. "Life and hope, the flames of individuality that had burned out to nothing, to smoke, again flickered within him." (233). At first the young woman (who is never named) is shy and barely able to communicate, but she and Rezak manage to work out a comfortable arrangement. The woman does not, however, become pregnant. One day she disappears and cannot be found, not even when Rezak enlists the aid of some of the other Harouni employees. In the aftermath of his wife's disappearance, Rezak prepares to resume being lonely, believing she has been kidnapped into a life of prostitution.

The senior servant learns of the disappearance, and asks for Sonya's help. At a party, Sonya asks a police officer to take an interest, and he orders an investigation, past experience suggesting that in disappearances like this, either the husband or the family is responsible. Rezak is arrested, tortured, and interrogated. Eventually, the police come to believe him when he says he was not responsible. He is released, but told to never say anything to anyone. Believing that what happened to him was his own fault (see "Quote 13"), he agrees.

Narration describes how different Rezak becomes in the aftermath of his wife's disappearance: reserved, sad, and quiet. He continues to work and to save his salary, at one point asking to be buried in a small corner of the Harouni estate because he



believes it to be a fair recognition of the work he did for them. He uses the money he's saved to pay for a marble tombstone.

Time passes, and Rezak dies. He is buried as he wished on the estate, with the marble gravestone. The senior servant tells Sonya, and together they say prayers at the grave. Sonya remembers her dead family in America. She gives orders that Rezak's cubicle is to be moved onto a corner of the estate, as a memorial and as a potential, inevitable subject of her husband's stories. Eventually, however, she and everyone else forgets all about the cubicle and about Rezak. Bit by bit, the cubicle is looted and emptied. After everything potentially usefully is taken, narration comments that "the door of the little cabin hung open, the wind and blown rain scour[ing] it clean." (247)

Analysis

This story ends the collection on what is arguably the saddest image in the book, the carefully furnished and tended home of a simple man, content with little, emptied by people and essentially destroyed by nature. As noted in "Style – Language and Meaning", there are very few happy endings in this collection, or even endings with positive perspectives on the collection's themes or even on humanity in general: the ending of this story is arguably the darkest of them all as it counters the positive aspects of the book's key themes with a stark, powerful statement of futility. There is no point to the struggle to achieve change; giving in to the power of longing leads to danger and destruction; sex in relationships is pointless in the face of the inevitability of decay, destruction, and corruption; and even the most affirming, supportive experiences of inter-connectedness are ultimately useless. All of these seem to be the thematic points made by the story's conclusion. The only major theme not looked at in this story, or sealed with a dark statement of hopelessness, is that which comments on the relationship between the past and the present: the ending, in fact, turns that idea on its head, suggesting that no matter how appealing or full of potential the present, there will come a point where there is no future.

Before the story gets to its ending, however, it includes several important elements. The theme of inter-connectedness is developed through the inclusion of the omnipresent Harouni family – in this case, distant Sohail and well-meaning but flighty Sonya. This aspect of the story also relates to the collection's exploration of the idea of feudalism (see "Symbols / Motifs"), in that the behavior of Sonya on all levels, compassion and ultimate forgetfulness, can be seen in a great many feudal situations and circumstances. Then there is the presence / treatment of Rezak's wife, perhaps the ultimate in the collection's almost universally negative portrayals of the female experience. Not only is she treated as a possession, and not only is her disappearance portrayed / perceived as that of just another woman disappearing into prostitution: she is not even given the dignity of a name. Meanwhile, the corrupt nature of Pakistani justice is given the collection's second airing, the first taking place in "... Burning Girl."

Finally, there are interesting multiple layers meaning in the story's title. First: in her generosity, Sonya sees herself as "spoiling" someone who, to this point in his life, has



not HAD much of a life. That “spoiling” turns out to be ironic, in that Rezak’s life actually ends up in worse shape than it was originally as an indirect result of Sonya’s good intentions. Rezak’s relative contentment, dreams, and overall well-being are all “spoiled” not only by Sonya, but more significantly by the corrupt, violent, destructive actions of the police. As a man, he and his life are “spoiled” by those who do moral and physical violence to him.

Discussion Question 1

In what specific ways do longings define and/or motivate the actions of the various characters in the story?

Discussion Question 2

Given that this story takes place within a similar time frame to “Lily,” in that the time frames of both are broadly defined as taking place within the context of Sohail and Sonya’s marriage, what do you see as either parallels or ironies between the two stories?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is the significance of Rezak’s wife never being identified by name?

Vocabulary

majordomo, fistula, consolation, spittoon, precedence, diffidence, lurid, exuberance, impediment, imbecile, impassive, expectant, manacle, excruciating, ponderous, hirsute, raconteur, inviolate



Characters

K.K. Harouni

This character appears as a central character in only one story in the collection: appropriately enough, the story that gives the collection its name (“In Other Rooms, Other Wonders”). Nevertheless, he is the central and most significant character in the entire book, in that every other story, and every protagonist in those stories, has a connection of one kind or another, to one degree or another, with him. Several main characters work for him (i.e. Nawabdin, Rafik), while others are connected to those who work for him (i.e. Saleema). Several other characters are related to him (i.e. Sohail in “Our Lady of Paris,” who is a son of his cousin), while others define their lives by their relationships to him (i.e. Husna, “In Other Rooms...”). Finally, other characters have distant, peripheral relationships with him through their relationships with people who have closer ties: Rezak in “A Spoiled Man” is an example of this sort of character, his relationship with Harouni existing as a result of his (Rezak’s) relationship with Sohail’s wife Sonya. Ultimately, the collection as a whole suggests that Harouni is a bit like a spider, sitting at the center of a web of connections and relationships of which he has varying degrees of knowledge, and over which he has similarly varying degrees of control.

All that said, Harouni is portrayed as not being all that effective in any of his roles: as a businessman, as a husband, as a father, as a lover, he comes across as at best well-meaning but ineffectual, at worst insensitive and selfish. There is the sense that he holds the position of power that he does as a result more of family history, relationships, and reputation than by any personal skill or effort. In fact, the opposite is the case: “Provide, Provide,” which is the story of Harouni’s manager, portrays him as being essentially inept with, and unaware of, the various demands of running his businesses.

All that said, there is little sense in the collection as a whole of who Harouni is outside of his business dealings. He is portrayed as having the vulnerabilities of a lonely, aging man (revealed in “In Other Rooms...”) and as having a certain degree of gullible compassion (revealed in “Nawabdin...”), but in terms of his values, his dreams, his goals, his fears - ? The collection is quite quiet on all these subjects, defining him, in terms of the lack of information, the same way for the reader and for the characters whose stories are tied to him. He is a man of power, less a man of identity and/or integrity.

Sohail Harouni

Sohail Harouni is the son of a cousin of K.K. Harouni (see “Amjad Harouni” below). Sohail is one of the central characters in “Our Lady of Paris.” He is referred to passingly in “Lily,” and plays a peripheral but significant role in “A Spoiled Man.”



In “Our Lady ...,” Sohail is a student of law attending an American university. He is emotionally involved with an American student named Helen and is portrayed as doing his best to be a good partner in that relationship. Easily manipulated by his quietly strong-willed mother (see “Rafia Harouni” below), Sohail comes across as having good intentions, though weak. This is a situation his mother seems to fully understand and one which seems to echo the personality of his influential relative, such as it is, as revealed in “In Other Rooms.”

Meanwhile, the glancing reference to Sohail in “Lily” indicates that his relationship with Helen did not last and that he ended up marrying another American woman, Sonya. The slightly more detailed reference to him in “Spoiled Man” suggests that he is somewhat superficial and shallow, having become fond of entertaining his guests with stories and parties. The portrayal of Sohail is, arguably, similar in some ways to that of Murad in “Lily,” given that both characters have inherited money, status, and their sense of self from their families.

Sonya Harouni

Sonya is Sohail’s wife. She is a principal character in “A Spoiled Man,” more so than her husband. It is through her attitudes, actions, and choices that many of the story’s events unfold, whereas Sohail is spoken of very briefly, and almost as the punchline of a joke. Sonya is also spoken of in “Lily,” and in much the same way as is Sohail. They are, in fact, referred to virtually in the same breath, as Murad refers to a party thrown by Sohail and Sonya at which he first encountered Lily. Sonya is not developed with any great depth. She is, however, portrayed in “Spoiled Man” as well-meaning and compassionate, if somewhat flighty and unpredictable in terms of how that compassion manifests. She makes promises with every intention of following through; but, over time, she allows herself to become distracted and eventually moves on to other things.

Hassan

Hassan is a minor character in two stories, “Saleema” and “In Other Rooms...” In both stories (which share a setting in time and place), Hassan is the head chef in the home of K. K. Harouni. In “Saleema,” in which he has a more important role, he is the first servant with whom Saleema has an affair in the hopes of creating some security in the household for herself. Hassan, however, is shallow and capricious, discarding Saleema on a whim. He appears more briefly in “In Other Rooms...” as one of the servants whom Harouni’s mistress, Husna tries to dominate in the aftermath of her becoming Harouni’s mistress. Hassan is blunt, emotional, and rough around the edges. He takes no guff from anyone, and is a telling contrast to Harouni who, it seems, absorbs all kinds of guff from all kinds of people.



Rafik

Rafik, like Hassan, appears in “Saleema” and “In Other Rooms...”. Also like Hassan, he is employed (as a personal servant) in the household of K.K. Harouni, and enjoys relatively high status within that household. Again like Hassan, Rafik plays a relatively minor part in “In Other Rooms...” and has much the same sort of role, although slightly more significant: his interactions with Husna in that story, because of his position as Harouni’s personal valet, are somewhat more intimate and important to her story. In both stories, Rafik is portrayed as being wise, compassionate, and malleable: there are no absolute rules or laws for or with him. He is able to take realities as they come to him, and to adapt to those realities carefully, with little protest, and little remorse when there is pain (i.e. Saleema’s, or his wife’s) as a result of his choices.

“Nawabdin Electrician” – Nawab

Nawab is the central character and protagonist of "Nawabdin Electrician." He is an electrician by trade. Since he married at a young age and fathered thirteen children, his need for extra money leads him into having to do any odd job he can find. His prized possession is a motorcycle that he wheedles out of his employer, K.K. Harouni, so that he (Nawab) can ostensibly do more work for his boss, but is, in fact, a tool to help him make more money for himself. When he and his motorcycle are hijacked by a robber, Nawab's inventiveness and determination to survive / succeed serve him in good stead: he manages to hold on to the motorcycle, his sense of accomplishment in life convincing him that he has the right to survive when the robber, seriously injured in the attempted theft, does not. Nawab may be a survivor, but his lack of compassion make him something less than a fully admirable human being.

The Robber

This unnamed character is the man who tries to steal Nawab's motorcycle. At first, the robber seems friendly and normal enough. Later, though, as a result of his attempted theft and his subsequent pleas for help in the hospital to which he was taken in the aftermath of the robbery, he is revealed to be profoundly desperate. He is left to die by the pharmacist / doctor treating Nawab, and receives no compassion for Nawab himself, both men seemingly believing that no matter his motivations, he tried to rob someone, and is therefore not worth consideration.

"Saleema" - Saleema

The title character of this story is, like several other important characters in the collection, a woman struggling to improve her situation in life through becoming involved with an influential man. In Saleema's case, her initiating situation includes difficult relationships with her parents and her drug-addicted husband. The influential man with whom she becomes involved is Rafik (see above), an established, respected servant.



Her relationship is at times manipulative and at other times genuinely affectionate, but is at all times precarious: she has no guarantees, at any point, that anything she gains as a result of being with Rafik (status, income, affection) will last. Still she persists, her longing for a better life overwhelming her sense of the inevitable, which eventually happens: in the aftermath of the death of her employer (K.K. Harouni), the situation changes and Saleema (along with the child she had by Rafik) ends up on the street, eventually dying there.

Rafik's Wife

Early in her relationship with Rafik, Saleema learns he is still married, but she enters into their union anyway. After Saleema has had a baby by Rafik, Rafik returns home and reveals his situation to his wife. His wife comes to join her husband in the Harouni household. The arrival of Rafik's wife marks the beginning of the end of Saleema's improved life, making the wife an important catalytic character in spite of the fact that she does not actually participate in too much of the story's action.

“Provide, Provide” – Jaglani

Jaglani is the central character and protagonist of yet another story in the collection that is set in the household of businessman K.K. Harouni. In this case, Jaglani is the manager of one of Harouni's properties, a widower with several children who becomes involved with Zainab, a woman hired as a servant.

Jaglani, like Nawab in "Nawabdin Electrician," is ambitious and somewhat mercenary, determined to make as much money as he can in any way that he can. Unlike Nawab, however, Jaglani has a certain degree of dishonesty about him and his dealings, skimming personal income off the top of some of Harouni's businesses. In fact, Jaglani is one of the most complex characters in the collection. He is described as having personal integrity and a sense of justice. Yet, he has no qualms about essentially robbing his employer. He says he cares deeply for Zainab, but he takes no concrete steps to ensure her well being after he becomes fatally ill. His eventual death leaves both Zainab and his children bereft of his influence, the implication being that everything he did for himself and those whom he said he cared for has amounted to nothing lasting.

Zainab

Zainab is the second of three female characters who find themselves in similar situations in three of the collection's stories. The first is Saleema, and the third is Husna. All three women use relationships with influential men to gain improvements in their lives.

In Zainab's case, those improvements include not only better living circumstances, but the realization of a long-cherished goal, which is to become a mother. Even though she



discovers that she is biologically incapable of doing so, her relationship with Jaglani is such that she gets custody of the youngest child of one of his sons, Sabir.

Zainab is portrayed as being cool, distant, and persistent until she is in the relationship with Jaglani. After that relationship begins, she starts to open herself to deeper feelings for him. This awakens deeper feelings in him for her. When Jaglani becomes ill and his family begins to assert control over what is left of his life, Zainab is left in the cold. She tries to establish some ongoing status for herself, but she is rejected. She disappears from the narrative with the author giving no indication of what happens to her after she leaves the Jaglani sphere of influence.

Shabir

Shabir is Jaglani's son and the father of the child that Zainab eventually claims as her own. Shabir is a minor character in much of the story, referred to only in passing. Later, he becomes a more central figure when his father becomes fatally ill and Shabir makes efforts to take over his (Jaglani's) political position. Shabir assumes that it is his by right. His efforts are ultimately rejected by the political authorities, and he, like Zainab, is left with little of his own in the aftermath of his father's death.

“About a Burning Girl” – Narrator

The unnamed narrator of this story is a corrupt judge, someone whose legal decisions are based on ever-shifting circumstances rather than the law or evidence. He is not the central character in the story. He participates in the action and catalyzes the actions of other, more important characters. He is something of an observer, setting events in motion and commenting on them. He serves the needs of the moment and the situation, rather than the needs of any system of justice.

Khadim

Khadim is the narrator's favorite servant. He gets caught up in a murder investigation. At first, he protests his innocence, but he is later revealed to be an active participant in the burning death of his sister in law. Khadim is such a good servant that the narrator's wife wants him back in her service. The narrator agrees, doing what he needs to do in order to make sure that what his wife wants actually happens.

Mian Sarkar

Sarkar is the judge, but his knowledge and influence extend far beyond the judge's office and his relationship with the law. It is through the efforts of the calm, clever, and manipulative Sarkar that the truth about Khadim's involvement in the murder of his sister-in-law is revealed. The narrator and his wife receive the information they need in order to ensure that Khadim stays out of jail and in their employ.



"In Other Rooms ..." - Husna

Husna is the third of three women who, in three different stories, undergo three similar experiences. The first two are Saleema in "Saleema" and Zainab in "Provide..." All three women use their relationships with influential, successful men to improve their own lot in life. Husna, however, is different from the other two in that she lets her new situation go to her head, letting herself start to believe that she is better than the servants with whom she used to work. She also imagines that she is better than the daughters of the man (K.K. Harouni) with whom she has become involved. She feels that she is worthy of at least the same amount of respect as his wife.

Ultimately, though, Husna's fate is similar to that of both Saleema and Zainab. All three are left to their own devices after the disappearance of the men to whom they have become attached. They are without income or status. In her specific case, Husna disappears from the Harouni household and family, her fate (like Zainab's) never being specifically defined in the narrative.

Sarwat

Sarwat is one of K.K. Harouni's three daughters. She visits her father just as his relationship with Husna is being moved to a new level. She does not approve of Husna and makes her unhappiness very clear. Later in the story, after Harouni's death, she and her sisters insist that Husna leave the household that she (Husna) has started to take control over. She and her sisters, essentially, throw Husna out and make no effort to ensure that she will be able to support herself.

"Our Lady ..." - Helen

Helen is one of the central characters in "Our Lady of Paris": the other is Sohail Harouni. Helen is Sohail's young American girlfriend, an undergraduate in the university with ambitions to become a doctor. Helen is tactful but honest, clear in what she wants but unsure when conversations with Sohail's family and changes in Sohail himself sway what she believes about their relationship. Unlike other women in other stories, who use sexual activity with the men in their lives as a means of manipulation, Helen seems to enjoy sexual activity for its own sake, or as an extension of her feelings for Sohail. At the end of the story, she seems very unclear about what their relationship is going to become. Later stories indicate that she and Sohail did not stay together.

Amjad Harouni

Amjad is K.K. Harouni's cousin. As he himself suggests in the story, he is tired of always being referred to as such. He longs for his own identity. He is a teasing father to Sohail, a good and agreeable husband to Rafia, and an engaging potential father-in-law to Helen.



Rafia Harouni

Rafia is Sohail's mother. She is a strong-willed, dominant woman. She is not overtly aggressive, assertive, or angry. Instead, she is tactful and respectful in getting what she wants. However, she makes it very clear that she wants things her way. Her conversation with Helen about the relationship she (Helen) is building with Sohail makes it very clear, without actually saying so, that she (Rafia) thinks the relationship has no future and that Helen should leave it. Rafia leaves the story as she leaves the conversation, with the reader being in as little doubt as Rafia herself that she is going to get exactly what she intends to get.

"Lily" - Lily

Lily, whose actual name is Leila, is the central character and protagonist of the story that bears her name. A strikingly beautiful, young woman with a history of self-indulgence and partying, she strives to define herself and her life in a new way in the aftermath of a near-death experience. Her initial efforts meet with mixed results.

It is not until she meets Murad that Lily is inspired to go even further with her self-transformation, going as far as to marry him and start to reform her life in his image. It is not long, however, before she finds herself pulled back into her old ways, partying and engaging in no-strings-attached sex. In the aftermath of a brief affair, she guiltily gets into an argument with Murad, which results in her once again resolving to transform herself and her life. At its conclusion, the narrative leaves it unclear as to whether she succeeds.

Murad

Murad is the man whom Lily marries as part of her determination to change her life. The narrative is intriguingly quiet on the subject of whether she is actually in love with him. He comes from a well-to-do family, treats her with respect and affection, and seems to make himself vulnerable for her. After their marriage, however, he becomes increasingly involved in the running of his farm and property. This situation leaves Lily increasingly alone and bored. At the same time, he is increasingly determined to shape Lily into the kind of wife that not only she says she wants to be, but the kind of wife he believes she should be. In other words, he becomes more controlling and more traditional than his initial, more sensitive appearances might suggest.

Mino

Mino is one of Lily's party companions early in the story. It is at a party he hosts that Lily and Murad meet each other. Later, after Lily and Murad are married, Mino is one of the house-guests that Lily invites for a visit to help ease her boredom. Mino is a heavy party



person himself, and his presence tacitly encourages Lily to return to her old ways in rejection of the new life she is trying to build for herself.

Bumpy

Bumpy, a young man with a long-standing crush on Lily, is one of the house-guests that Mino brings with him when he comes to visit Lily. Bumpy's attentions to Lily become increasingly flirtatious and increasingly hard to resist, until she finally gives in and has sex with him. In the aftermath, she immediately rejects him, and he is sent back home.

"A Spoiled Man" - Rezak

Rezak is the central character and protagonist of the final story in the collection. A hard-working, humble servant, he seems to be content with very little in life. His situation changes when the well-intentioned Sonya Harouni decides that his life needs to be improved and ensures that he is given a small salary. Later, on the suggestion of a family member, Rezak decides to improve his life even more and take a wife in the hopes that he will finally become a father. Ironically, however, his life becomes worse. Not only is his wife somewhat emotionally immature, but she does not become pregnant. She disappears, and he is suspected of criminal involvement. Tortured, but eventually released, he comes to believe that what has happened to him is the result of having tried too hard to better himself. He makes his life even smaller and eventually dies. Although he has saved enough money to afford a marble tombstone for his grave, he is completely forgotten. His home, once a source of pride and comfort for him, becomes a looted and abandoned property.

Rezak's Wife

This unnamed young woman, whose emotional and intellectual development is somewhat stunted, marries Rezak as the result of the manipulations of one of her relatives. Mostly non-verbal, she is a quiet and soothing influence in Rezak's life. However, she is not able to have the child he desperately wants. She eventually disappears from Rezak's life and from the story without explanation. Other characters suggest that she has been kidnapped into slavery or prostitution.



Symbols and Symbolism

Feudalism

Feudalism is a system of economics and/or government in which power and money are controlled by traditional family endowment and practice. Feudalism is often associated with land ownership. A particular family owns a particular section of land and gains income and influence as a result. In many ways the owner runs the lives of those who work that land. Feudalism is primarily associated with the European Middle Ages. In the minds of many observers and experts, it still the dominant social, political, and economic system in Pakistan, hence the setting of the stories within the context of the Harouni family.

Drugs

In several of the collection's stories, drug use is a primary means by which emotional and cultural boundaries come down. Inhibitions are relaxed, restrictions on behavior fall apart, and a certain reckless freedom is embraced. In most cases in the collection, drug use leads to negative consequences, such as words that should not have been said and regret over choices made. Stories in which this occurs include "Saleema" and "Lily." In "In Other Rooms ...," sleeping pills are used to calm behavior in a relatively healthy way. However, even then, there is fear of the consequences of such usage.

"Nawabdin Electrician" - Nawab's Motorcycle

For the title character in this story, his motorcycle is a symbol of prosperity, self-worth, and accomplishment. It is also representative of what Nawab believes to be his successful relationship with his employer, K.K. Harouni. These are the reasons why Nawab fights so hard to ensure that the motorcycle is not stolen. In many ways, it represents his life for him.

"Provide, Provide" - The Baby

The character of Zainab in "Provide Provide" is so desperate to be a mother that she asks the man with whom she is involved (Jaglan, the manager of K.K. Harouni's farm) to let her take custody of the youngest child of one of his sons - Jaglan's grandchild. For her, the child represents fulfillment of an ultimate goal, the realization of a dominant longing.



"In Other Rooms ..." - Husna's Trunks

During the course of her relationship with K.K. Harouni, the servant who becomes his mistress (Husna) manipulates the household's manager into ensuring she gets, and holds onto, as many material possessions and as much cash as possible. She keeps everything she acquires in a number of trunks in her living quarters. The trunks are all Husna's is allowed to take with her when, in the aftermath of Harouni's death, she is told to leave his house. On a literal level, the trunks represent everything that Husna has to live on when she is thrown out. On a metaphoric level, the trunks and their contents represent Husna's hopes and goals for an improved life.

"Our Lady of Paris" - "Sleeping Beauty"

In "Our Lady of Paris" Sohail Harouni, the woman he's involved with (Helen), and his parents go to a performance of the ballet "Sleeping Beauty." There is the sense that this particular ballet was chosen for its metaphoric resemblance to Sohail's situation: for much of his life, his identity has "slept" within a metaphoric "forest of thorns," defined by his parents' ambitions for him. The narrative of the story suggests, however, that he is waking to a new life for himself as a result of becoming involved with (i.e. being kissed by, metaphorically and lyrically) someone capable of breaking the enchantment around, and restricting, him.

"Our Lady of Paris" - The Kitten

Late in the story, as she and Sohail Harouni are traveling, an American student named Helen encounters a kitten. In spite of her best efforts, Helen becomes close to the kitten. There is the strong sense that this diffident kitten is suggestive of a truth within Sohail that he does not seem to recognize. As a result of the interaction between Helen and the kitten, the reader comes to see that Sohail, in spite of what seems to be a well-intentioned desire for change in his life and for Helen in particular, is nonetheless remote from both.

"Our Lady of Paris" - The Maze

Also in "Our Lady ...," Sohail goes through the maze in the grounds of the hotel where he and Helen are staying. In narrative and in life, mazes are often representative of a search for truth, for insight, for understanding. In the case of this particular maze, there is the strong sense that Sohail, as he goes through it, is manifesting both a conscious and an unconscious truth. He consciously wants and needs to be free of his parents. Unconsciously, he does not seem to know what he wants. Helen senses this in him. As she watches him come out of the maze, her feelings are described as being close to "horror."



"Lily" - Parties

The story of "Lily" opens at a party. The narration contains a reference to a second party, after which the title character was seriously injured in a car accident. The story also comments on a third at which the man Lily eventually marries saw her for the first time. "Lily" reaches its climax in the wake of a fourth, days-long party in Lily's home. In all four of these instances, parties represent carelessly intense feeling, the impulsive acting on not-so-wholesome desires, and the inevitably painful consequences of such actions.

"Lily" - Murad's Farm

The home and lands to which Murad takes Lily, his new bride, represent an odd blend of security and stability. Murad has made a few renovations, which are the beginnings of an inclination toward change. The land and the farm are Murad's by right of feudal succession. They represent the controlling influence of the past. At the same time, they prove too much for the forward-looking Lily. Their dominating influence becomes part of the trigger for her reversion to her partying ways.

"Lily" - Murad's Journal

To Murad, his journal represents his innermost thoughts, secrets, and feelings. Even though Lily has agreed not to do so, she goes into the journal and reads some uncomfortable truths about herself and about her marriage. What she reads is a trigger for her eventual, perhaps inevitable, confrontation with her new husband. Eventually, the confrontation results in eruptions of anger on both sides as Murad and Lily each reveal truths about what they really want from their life together. The journal is a metaphoric catalyst for the revelation of painful truth on both sides of the marriage.

"A Spoiled Man" - Rezak's Cubicle

Rezak constructs a small, portable home out of bits of discarded crates and other refuse. Too small for him to stand up in, it is nevertheless of a convenient size for him to pack up and move to the site of a new job, whenever circumstances seem to become too difficult (which, narration suggests, happens often). The cubicle is a key symbol of safety, freedom, and independence. Rezak is very happy living there. All of this makes the ending of the story, in which the cubicle is described as being abandoned and falling apart, even sadder and more poignant.



Settings

Pakistan

The South Asian country of Pakistan is the primary setting for most of the stories in the collection. The country, with its history of feudalism (see "Symbols / Symbolism"), of class conflict, and pervasive corruption is an effective, appropriate backdrop for the collection's stories of characters struggling to improve their lives.

Lahore

Lahore is the second-largest city in Pakistan, and the setting of several stories or sequences within stories. It is a hub of political, cultural, and economic activity in the region. All aspects of Pakistani culture play significant roles in the collection's various narratives.

Rural Pakistan

The urban sophistication of Lahore and the people who live there is vividly contrasted with the somewhat less sophisticated sensibilities of more rural parts of Pakistan, where several stories in the collection, or scenes in stories, take place. The farming industry and the influence of landowners form an important backdrop to several narratives.

Paris

One story in the collection, "Our Lady of Paris," takes place almost entirely in Paris, the capital city of France. The characters who populate this story are mostly from Pakistan, with one being American. There is a sense that for all the characters, no matter what their country of origin, they are transplanting their values, beliefs, and practices to the life they are living in Paris.

The Relative Present

The stories take place over a span of time covering a few decades, from the late 19th Century through to the early 20th Century. While none of the stories specifically identifies a particular time, one story ("Our Lady In Paris") contains a reference to the events of September 11, 2001, the date of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. Because of the references, in this story and throughout the collection, to various events in the life and career of landowner K.K. Harouni, it is possible to give the collection as a whole a broad strokes setting in time. This is significant because several of the stories refer, directly or indirectly, to the cultural, economical, and political tradition in Pakistan of feudalism. Feudalism essentially died out in European culture centuries

ago, but it continues in contemporary Pakistan. The time setting for the collection can be seen as manifesting the themes by using the past to define the present.



Themes and Motifs

The Struggle to Achieve Change

In general, the struggle to achieve change is the primary theme of the collection. Each of the stories, in one way or another, explores the desires of characters, protagonists, and secondary characters to realize or hold onto change in their personal circumstances. This is true from the first story in the collection (“Narabdin Electrician,” in which the title character fights a literal life-and-death battle to hold on to the hard-earned symbol of his changed economic status) to the last (“A Spoiled Man,” in which another title character, Rezak, faces tragic consequences after attaching dreams of longed-for change to un-chosen circumstances).

There are different kinds of change. “Saleema,” “Provide ...,” and “In Other Rooms ...” all include female characters struggling to improve their personal circumstances through becoming involved with wealthier, successful men.

“Lily” is the story of a woman in a similar circumstance. She, too, gets involved with a man in the hopes of change. However, where the three women in the previous stories are focused on financial and/or social change, Lily is focused on changing her own moral, emotional, and sexual self.

Meanwhile, the events of “...Burning Girl” are set in motion by the violent, destructive desires of a man to change his financial circumstances. “Our Lady ...” is, on one level, about a young man’s struggle to change the circumstances of his relationship with his domineering mother.

The key point to note about the collection’s exploration of this theme is that the characters fighting for change of whatever sort generally achieve an early measure of success, but they ultimately fall short of their overall goals.

There are few happy endings in this collection. The struggles for change portrayed here all end in failure of one kind or another. The failures are due, in part, to the past’s hold on the present, another major theme.

The Hold of the Past on the Present

The circumstances and struggles of several of the stories in the collection are anchored in the cultural and economic tradition of feudalism, a system in which power and wealth are held by generations who keep old family traditions and practices in place. This is an external manifestation, in several of the stories, of the hold that the past has over the present. There are ways things have always been done and they have always worked, to the advantage of the powerful few and the disadvantage of the disenfranchised many. The disenfranchised have convinced themselves they should be grateful for the little that they have. From the perspectives on both sides of this equation, there is no real



reason for anything to change, If the system works, it is not broken. So, there is not need to fix it. This sense of feudalism and its pervasive power over individual lives manifests throughout the narrative in the form of the Harouni family and the role its members play in individual stories. The family's presence can be seen as a clear metaphoric representation of the controlling, omnipresent cultural circumstances within which lives in Pakistan unfold.

On another level, there are other aspects of traditional, conservative pasts that frequently occur in, and/or define the action of, several of these stories. These include traditional views of women, female sexuality, and marriage ("Saleema", "Provide ...", "In Other Rooms ..."); traditional views of class ("Nawabdin ...", "A Spoiled Man"); and, as noted above, traditional views of the passing on of power and influence ("Provide ..." and "In Other Rooms ...").

A particularly noteworthy evocation of this theme can be found in "Lily". Where the action of other stories in the collection is defined by more external experiences of the past's control on the present, the action of "Lily", and in particular the actions and reactions of the central character, are defined shaped by her INTERNAL experiences of the past (i.e. personal, emotional, spiritual). There is a clear sense that Lily's ultimate failure to change her internal situation arises from a failure to change those internal circumstances, a failure that parallels failures to change in the lives of other characters arising from external circumstances.

The Power of Longing

Whatever the specific change attempted by a specific character, whatever the circumstances (internal / external) of that change, and whatever the consequences of a character's efforts to change, the desire for change is triggered by, the same thing in each of the stories. There is a deeply felt personal longing for something different. Characters long to have more money; characters long for love; characters long for security, for power, for freedom. In this collection, all efforts to make change end in failure of one kind or another. In several of the characters, there is the sense that that failure is likely, if not inevitable. That does not stop any of them from trying to ease their longings. They are driven by an often irrational need to take desperate action so that the emptiness they feel inside will at least ease somewhat, if not disappear completely.

While most of the characters act as a result of powerful personal longings, perhaps the most vivid manifestation of this theme in the entire collection can be found in the story of Zainab in "Provide, Provide." At first, her situation seems to be echoing to that of the title character in "Saleema." Its foreshadowing is similar to that of Husna in "In Other Rooms ..."

Later, however, as Zainab's relationship with Jaglani becomes more secure, the true longing at the heart of her actions becomes apparent when she asks to be allowed to raise the youngest child of one of Jaglani's sons. It becomes clear that her involvement with Jaglani is less about self-preservation (as it is in the case with Saleema and



Husna) and more about her desperate longing to be a mother. She chooses what she does not because she loves Jaglani or because she wants to improve herself. She sees Jaglani as the only way open for her to achieve her intense maternal desires.

Zainab's longings and the actions she takes to realize those longings are arguably the most extreme examples of this theme in the collection. The longings of other characters are arguably just as influential of their choices and actions, making exploration of individual longing a core theme that exists at the heart of the other themes of the collection.

Sex in Relationships

Of all the stories in the collection, there is only one ("Nawabdin Electrician") in which heterosexual relations between two or more central characters do not play any role in the action. And of the seven stories that fall into the category of those that do include sexual elements, the narrative and thematic action of three are defined, to one degree or another, by how disenfranchised women use sex to advance their personal, economic, and cultural situations.

The title character in "Saleema," Zainab in "Provide ...," and Husna in "In Other Rooms ..." all make the provision of sexual pleasure to an influential man the centerpiece of their plans to realize their ambitions. Here it is important to consider that there is also a fundamentally negative aspect in the portrayal of the sexuality of the title character in "Lily," whose comfort with frequent sexual activity seems, the story implies, to spring from an unhealthy place. This negative take on female sexuality is notable because the story suggests Lily's shame-triggering sexual freedom is impossible to change. This suggests that the thematic stand taken on female sexuality by the collection as a whole has to do with something other than the lives of the individual characters.

In terms of male attitudes towards sexuality, the first point to note is that the men in relationships with Saleema (Rafik), Zainab (Jaglani), and Husna (K.K. Harouni) seem to take the provision of female sexual favors, even from women not their wives, as a matter of course. This can be seen as another aspect of feudalism. Men with power in that system were accustomed to sex being a currency of power.

There are suggestions that all three of these men develop feelings for the women with whom they become involved. However, in each case, sex came before the feelings. Sohail in "Our Lady ..." seems to have a relatively healthy attitude towards his sexual relationship with Helen. However, the woman comes across as, if not predatory, at least the driving force behind the sexuality in the relationship.

The role of sex in "...Burning Girl" is implied rather than overt. The girl of the title is the wife of one of the men who murders her. This implies that as a sexual partner and partner in crime she is essentially disposable.

The role of sex in "A Spoiled Man" is somewhat disturbingly developed. The central character takes a wife, who is never given a name and whose intellectual development



is delayed, solely because he wants to father a child. There are no references to sexual activity between them, but there is a reference to the woman not bearing a child (which implies some kind of sexual activity) before she disappears, never to be found. The reader learns, from the conversations of characters affiliated with the legal system, that such disappearances are often linked to a woman being forced into prostitution.

A reader, particularly a female reader, might justifiably wonder what is implied by all these portrayals of sexuality. Is it a sense of personal misogyny or cynicism on the part of the writer? Or, is it an unfortunate, but accurate, portrayal of a pervasive situation for women in Pakistan (in general) and within the feudal system (in particular)?

Interconnection

One of the collection's most intriguing, and engaging, elements, at least in terms of getting a reader involved, is its sense of how various elements (character, situation, story) are interconnected. On the most apparent level, this interconnection manifests in terms of how each story, one way or another, ties in with the life, career, and experiences of businessman K.K. Harouni.

In the earlier stories in the collection, Harouni himself is a character, albeit peripherally involved in the action; in the fourth story ("... Burning Girl") a Harouni relative's connection is somewhat distant but significant; in "Our Lady..." Meanwhile, the family connection is also distant but plays out on another, more emotional level, a level that also manifests in "A Spoiled Man" at the collection's conclusion. The same family connection of those two stories shows up in "Lily," but again in a very peripheral way.

In contrast to all these stories is the title story of the collection: "In Other Rooms" puts significant focus on Harouni himself, his immediate family, and the particular, individual circumstances of his life. Here it is important to note two other important ways in which the theme of interconnections manifests in the collection. One of those ways relates to the book's thematically-related interests in feudalism (given that Harouni is, or seems to be, the head of a so-called "feudal family") and all its implications for the need for change and the influence of the past on the present.

The other, and arguably more intriguing, way is the fact that the action of "The Other Rooms" takes place at roughly the same time as the action of "Saleema." The climaxes of both stories are connected to Harouni's death. What is particularly interesting about this is that both stories are also interconnected by their plots (i.e. the central female characters go through similar situations and experiences) and themes (i.e. both those female characters, desperate to effect change in their personal circumstances, use sexuality to advance their relationships with the influential men in their lives).

In short, there is the sense that the stories are interconnected not only thematically but also in terms of characters, events, and circumstances.

Styles

Point of View

For the most part, the stories are told from the third person, past tense point of view. They are also told, for the most part, from a limited perspective. This means that the narration in each piece focuses primarily on the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of that piece's central character, or protagonist. There are occasional exceptions, moments during several stories in which the inner life of a character other than the protagonist is explored: for example, in the story that gives the collection its title ("In Other Rooms, Other Wonders"), much of the narration is focused on the experiences and perspectives of protagonist Husna, but there are also glimpses into the inner life of K.K. Harouni, the man with whom Husna becomes involved. Here it's interesting to note how, in spite of Harouni having degrees of presence and/or importance in several of the other stories, this is the only story in which he plays a significant, if not primary, role. It is perhaps therefore not a surprise, or not inappropriate, that the narrative occasionally veer into glimpses of his point of view and/or perspective.

The only story in the collection that is not told from the third person point of view is "About a Burning Girl," which is told from the first person past tense perspective of a character observing the story's main action while being peripherally involved in it. This unnamed character's function is similar to that of K.K. Harouni in most of the other stories in the collection. It is present and peripheral. It is not central to either the narrative or its themes.

In terms of the book's moral point of view, the central issue at the heart of virtually all the stories is a character, protagonist or not, striving to improve his or her life. The specifics of the lives in question vary, but it is interesting to note that in every one of the collection's eight stories, the striving fails to succeed, if not permanently at least temporarily. This gives the collection an overall point of view that suggests that in spite of an individual's efforts to transform a life, there are inevitable aspects about the big picture world of human existence (i.e. death) and the smaller picture world of human existence in Pakistan (and/or Pakistani families) that make success in those efforts impossible.

Language and Meaning

In general, the language of the collection is relatively straightforward and easy to follow. The vocabulary is expansive but not overly challenging, or pretentious. While there are frequent inclusions of regionally and culturally specific words, phrases, and ideas, none are so esoteric as to be incomprehensible within the story's context. The first language of both the author and the book is English. Meanwhile, an interesting language element about the piece is that there are occasional diversions into poetry, which tend to stand



out because of a certain matter of fact manner about the language surrounding them. These diversions tend to appear at somewhat surprising points, taking the reader by surprise and suggesting that there is perhaps more depth, more meaning, and more feeling associated with the story's events than the language might otherwise suggest.

A consistent, noteworthy, and intriguing element of the collection's stories has to do with the meaning and implications of their endings. Several of them end with a clear and vivid sense of unhappiness, futility, or despair: these include "Saleema," "Provide, Provide," and "A Spoiled Man." Several others end inconclusively: "Nawabdin Electrician", "In Other Rooms ...," "Lily," and "Our Lady of Paris."

Meanwhile, "... Burning Girl," the lone story told in first-person narration, ends with a tone of deep cynicism about humanity and about the justice system that tries to monitor it. There are echoes of this cynicism which show up in "Spoiled Man." In short, there are no happy endings in the day-to-day world which the stories inhabit.

The only possible exception to a happy ending is "Nawabdin ...," in which the central character manages to hold on to the change he has wrought in his life. However, it is at the cost of both another human life and his own humanity, making it a hollow victory.

The idea that the desire for some kind of change or transformation, which in one way or another fuels the struggles of almost all the primary characters in the collection, is futile. The endings also seem to suggest that actions triggered by that desire are, inevitably, going to end in uncertainty at best, destruction of hope and of life at worst.

Structure

On a fundamental level, the structuring of each story in the collection is fairly straightforward, with narratives moving from beginning (set-up) through middle (complication) to end (resolution). Event A generally leads to Event B which leads to Event C in a direct cause-and-effect line of action or plot leading to climax and denouement. This arguably makes the essential narrative structure of each piece somewhat traditional.

On another level, that associated more with meaning than with structural technique, each story in the collection is constructed around the idea or central image implied by the book's title: specifically, the idea that for the characters, and in the narratives that reveal their lives, there is something inherently better in lives lived in other places.

Both the collection and the individual stories it contains are structured around actions taken and choices made as characters pursue their goal of change. As noted above in "Language and Meaning," most are inevitably disappointed. They encounter obstacles which become too big to transcend.

On yet another level, one associated more with theme than with meaning or technique, the overall collection is structured around another common element, connections between the characters, their situations, and businessman K.K. Harouni. Sometimes



those connections are quite close (i.e. in the title story of the collection); sometimes they are more peripheral (i.e. in “Nawadin Electrician”); and sometimes they are multi-generational and/or quite distant (“My Lady of Paris,” “A Spoiled Man”). However direct or intense the connections, they reinforce the sense that the book and the author are simultaneously making the suggestion that failures of individual efforts to succeed in relatively contemporary Pakistan are, on some level, associated not just with personal failings. They are associated at least as much with an old-world system of governance, economics, culture, and politics represented by Harouni.

The word “feudal” is used several times. In almost every case, it suggests that Harouni represents a way of thinking and functioning in Pakistani society that is ultimately repressive or destructive toward independence, self-improvement, and transformation.



Quotes

His face often at this moment had the same expression, an expression of childish innocent joy, which contrasted strangely and even sadly with the heaviness of his face and its lines and stubble.

-- Narration (Story 1 – “Nawabdin Electrician”)

Importance: This quote is a vivid description of the central character, encompassing narratively significant aspects of his personality (i.e. childishness juxtaposed with the consequences of a burden-filled life) in a description of his face.

[Saleema's] love affairs had been so plainly mercantile transactions that she hadn't learned to be coquettish. But the little hopeful girl in her awoke now.”

-- Narration (Story 2 – “Saleema”)

Importance: In this quote, narration describes the inner situation of not only this character, in her quest for security, but that of several other female characters in the collection in similar situations: the hope that awakens in conjunction with, perhaps in spite of, the more mercenary side of their inclinations towards relationship.

Lying and staring at the ceiling, nursing the baby when it woke, she felt her love for Rafik tearing at her breast, making her a stranger to herself, breaking her. Now she slept again next to this man who disgusted her, while her love must be sleeping beside his ancient wife, who had known him in his youth, who knew all about him.

-- Narration (Story 2 – “Saleema”)

Importance: This quote juxtaposes the two men loved by Saleema in her mind, thoughts, and heart. The first one she married, and she hates him now. She fell in love with the second, and she desperately misses him. As a man of honor, which Saleema's husband does not possess, the second went back to his wife.

Finally [Jaglani] could not deny to himself that he had fallen in love, for the first time in his life. He even acknowledged her aloof coldness, the possibility that she would mar his life. And yet he felt that he had risen so far, had become invulnerable to the judgments of those around him, had become preeminent in this area ... and now he deserved to make this mistake, for once not to make a calculated choice, but to surrender to his desire.”

-- Narration (Story 3, “Provide, Provide”)

Importance: With this quote, narration indicates the somewhat surprising depths of Jaglani's emerging feelings for the woman he has unexpectedly become involved with.

Jaglani could order men arrested or released, could appoint them to government posts, could have government officers removed. He decided whose villages the new roads passed through, decided which areas got electricity, manipulated the flow of water through the canals. He could settle cases, even cases of murder, by imposing a



reconciliation upon the two parties and ordering the police not to interfere ... because he had no higher ambitions, he became impartial. By temperament orderly, within this isolated area he sought to impose harmony and prosperity.”

-- Narration (Story 3, “Provide, Provide”)

Importance: This quote, somewhat ironically, outlines aspects of Jaglani's strong, defined moral identity that exist alongside his essentially selfish feelings for Zainab, feelings that lead him, as he nears death, to choices and decisions that are anything BUT impartial.

Quickening, [Husna] glanced at [Harouni] sideways, still a girl at twenty, still playing tag with her cousins in the courtyard of her parents' home; and yet now aware of men's eyes flickering over her as she walked through the lanes of the Old City.

-- Narration (Story 6, “In Other Rooms ...”, Section 1)

Importance: This quote captures the tension between Husna's idealistic, innocent girlhood and the cynical, harder-edged reality that she is encountering as a woman.

Though [Husna's] ambition always tolled in the background, she had come to respect him genuinely ... she wanted to keep her part of the bargain, and had only herself to give. It hurt her that it was so little; she imagined that her body, her virtue, meant almost nothing to her.

-- Narration (Story 7, “In Other Rooms ...”, Section 2)

Importance: As she moves further and deeper into her relationship with K.K. Harouni, Husna comes to realize how little she has valued herself in this situation and, arguably, how little she is valued by the man she believes she loves.

‘The one thing I've missed, I sometimes feel, is the sensation of being absolutely free, to do exactly what I like, to go where I like, to act as I like. I suspect that only an American ever feels that. You aren't weighed down by your families, and you aren't weighed down by history.

-- Amjad Harouni (Story 8, “Our Lady of Paris”)

Importance: As Amjad Harouni speaks to his son's American girlfriend Helen, he comments on the sense of restriction and inhibition he feels and struggles with as part of a feudal family that has run virtually his entire life. He does not realize that he shares these struggles, this perspective, with his son who, arguably, feels a similar envy of Helen's freedom.

[Lily] found Mino tiresome, though he was perhaps her best friend, found the whole group of them shallow and false – she included herself in the indictment – drifting from party to party, flying ... to Karachi, to Lahore, on the circuit in the spring weather, jet-propelled.

-- Narration (Story 9, “Lily”, Section 1)

Importance: This quote portrays Lily at the beginning of what she wants to believe is



her journey of transformation, defining what she has come to believe about the superficial life she thinks she wants to leave behind.

If initially [Murad's] fixation on [Lily] had appeared menacing – she had been excited by it – now she saw in it something benign and heartfelt, a spontaneous resolution that he had made in her favor, an impulse to belong to her and be with her. It struck her that she had been alone with him by the river, no human being for miles around, after spending at most half an hour chatting with him at a party – and yet she had been perfectly comfortable. How many Pakistani men would that be true of?

-- Narration (Story 9, "Lily", Section 1.)

Importance: Here is another manifestation of what Lily sees as the change in her: her becoming involved with a sort of man that, in earlier days, she would have gone nowhere near.

[Lily] thought of the story he had told her early in their relationship, of seeing her for the first time beside the swimming pool at the party in the mountains, finding her there, recognizing her ... how correctly he identified her desire for decency and honor and peace. She thought of Mino, his world, a lakeside party with a beach made of sand brought in on a convoy of trucks ... and what of her epiphany in the hospital room in London, the forgiveness she received, with the snow falling steadily all day? That at least was false, there was no moment of forgiveness, no renewal, just a series of negotiations, none of them final."

-- Narration (Story 11, "Lily", Section 2)

Importance: At a crisis point in her life, in her relationship with her husband, and in her relationship with herself, Lily reflects on the circumstances and choices that defined her current situation, realizing the shallowness of the commitments she originally made to herself with such determination and conviction.

God gave me so much more than I deserved, when I expected nothing at all.

-- Rezak (Story 12, "A Spoiled Man")

Importance: This quote sums up the essential life perspective of the central character as he considers what has happened to him in the aftermath of being suspected, arrested, and tortured as part of the police response to the disappearance of his wife.