

My Name Is Red Study Guide

My Name Is Red by Orhan Pamuk

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Contents

My Name Is Red Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapters 1-4.....	6
Chapters 5-7.....	9
Chapters 8-11.....	11
Chapters 12-14.....	14
Chapters 15-19.....	15
Chapters 20-24.....	18
Chapters 25-27.....	21
Chapters 28-29.....	23
Chapters 30-33.....	25
Chapters 34-37.....	27
Chapters 38-39.....	30
Chapters 40-42.....	32
Chapters 43-47.....	34
Chapters 48-50.....	36
Chapters 51-52.....	38
Chapters 53-54.....	40
Chapters 55-57.....	42
Chapter 58.....	44
Chapter 59.....	46
Characters.....	47
Objects/Places.....	54
Themes.....	57



Style..... 60

Quotes..... 63

Topics for Discussion..... 67



Plot Summary

My Name is Red by Orhan Pamuk is an historical novel translated from Turkish by Erdağ M. Göknar and set in late 16th century Istanbul. Black returns to Istanbul to help his uncle with a secret book, written by Enishte. As he attempts to solve a murder related to the provocative book and win the love of his beautiful cousin, a conflict between art and religion intensifies. *My Name is Red* is both a mystery and a love story amidst a religious world, where illustrations are both feared and valued.

Black's uncle invites Black to return to Istanbul to help with preparing a book for the Sultan, using the Frankish artistic techniques, which pose a religious problem. Black's first assignment is to solve the murder of Elegant, the gilder for the book. The other master artists, nicknamed Stork, Olive and Butterfly are the primary suspects. Before Black begins his investigation, he longs to see the face of Shekure, the reason he was banished twelve years ago. He only sees her sons, while Shekure spies on him and her father while they are talking about the book. Shekure sends Black a letter that is not truly representative of her feelings to begin the game of love.

Shekure is waiting for her husband, a soldier missing for four years. After Elegant's murder, she realizes that she must get a divorce from her missing husband and remarry before her father dies. The three suitors are Black, her brother-in-law, Hasan, and one of the miniaturists. Hasan threatens Shekure with legal action to return her to the home he shared with his brother and her, which Shekure left to escape Hasan's cruelty and inappropriate advances.

At the coffeehouse, a favorite hangout for the workshop artists, a storyteller uses drawings and a few details from Olive, Stork and Butterfly to tell tales based on the drawings in Enishte's book. These stories make fun of the book and create tension with a fanatical religious group led by Nusret Hoja from Erzurumi.

When Enishte is murdered, Shekure hides his death and instructs Black on obtaining a divorce for her. Black and Shekure marry later that day, and bury Enishte the next. Shekure does not allow Black full marital rights until he finds the murderer, who they suspect is the same person who killed Elegant.

Master Osman, the Sultan's Head Illuminator, gets involved in the murder investigation, but stops looking for clues and treats the opportunity to examine old books in the Sultan's Treasury as a feast for the eyes. Black tries to keep him on task. Master Osman feels betrayed by his artists and pierces a needle in his eyes to blind himself. Black leaves the Treasury to finish the murder investigation himself before Master Osman turns them all over to the torturer, and so he can go home to Shekure. In the meantime, fearful of the murderer, Shekure has gone to Hasan's home because she has nowhere else to go while waiting for Black. Leaving Hasan's home poses a problem, but Shekure manages with Black and Esther's help. Not wanting to leave their uncle's home, Shekure's sons take Hasan's ruby-handled dagger, which Black keeps.



Black confronts the murderer with the help of the other two artists. The murderer wounds Black with Hasan's dagger and escapes with all his belongings and the dagger. Before leaving town, Olive makes one more trip to the workshop, where Hasan sees the dagger. Assuming the murderer has helped to "steal" Shekure from his home, he beheads the murderer as revenge for losing Shekure and flees the city himself to avoid his consequences.

Shekure cleans Black's wounds and completes her attachment to him. When Olive's beheaded body is found with the incriminating illustrations, the workshop is absolved of the crimes, but the artistry is never the same. Black and Shekure have a long, happy marriage, although Black himself is never truly happy. In time, the sultans take a more traditional religious view toward art and forsake paintings and illustrations.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

My Name is Red by Orhan Pamuk is a historical novel translated from Turkish by Erdağ M. Göknar and set in late 16th century Istanbul. Black returns to Istanbul to help his uncle with a secret book, written by Enishte. As he attempts to solve a murder related to the provocative book and win the love of his beautiful cousin, a conflict between art and religion intensifies. My Name is Red is both a mystery and a love story amidst a religious world, where illustrations are both feared and valued.

The soul of Elegant describes his atrocious murder and his condition as a soul in limbo. He thinks of the wonders he experienced and has often illustrated, but he cannot view the wonders of Heaven or even tell us much about the Hereafter until his body is properly buried. Elegant encourages the faithful to continue living rightfully by explaining that in his current state, he can only see things that relate to him. Elegant reflects on his happy life and his work as an illuminator. He sees his family waiting for him. He agonizes over his current condition and compares it to the relief he felt at the moment he died. Elegant knows his friends and family imagine he is pursuing some project or woman in Istanbul. He urges them to find his body and bury it and then find his murderer and torture him. Elegant believes that his death is part of a conspiracy against his religion and traditions and warns of the implications.

Black has spent the last twelve years traveling across Persia doing secretary work for pashas, working as a letter carrier and tax collector and working as an agent to commission illustrated books for the wealthy. Black's uncle hears of Black's books and asks him in a letter to come back to Istanbul. Black returns to find things in his city much different. Many of his friends and family have died or moved, and he grieves for them. He finds a place to live in his old neighborhood. Although he finds Istanbul to be a city with more riches and more rich people, the value of money has declined to such an extent as to cause rioting at the Sultan's palace. Black wanders the city and listens to the complaints of a pickle seller regarding the prevalence of counterfeit coins. The pickle seller also informs Black of a popular preacher, who has risen to infamy during this period of inflation by proclaiming that all the city's woes are a result of the people's wicked ways. Black finds an excuse to get away from the pickle seller and wanders the city. He believes he will soon see his beloved cousin again. Black knows that he has completely forgotten what she looks like. Black ends up at the coffeehouse.

In the coffeehouse, the storyteller gives voice to the dog in the picture hanging next to him. The dog alludes to Nusret Hoja of Erzurum as a gifted orator, who has made up for his lack of intellect with his animated and chastising sermons. Nusret grows bold with his popularity and begins to blame inflation, the plague and military defeat on the people's failure to follow the Islam from Muhammad's time. Nusret cites numerous ways in which people have strayed from the faith; his evangelical tongue-lashings gain him even more popularity. The dog says that Nusret particularly rejects coffee drinking and



gathering at coffeehouses and accuses those men of such idiocy that they even listen to dogs. Nusret names these men his enemies and calls them dirty mongrels. The dog seeks to justify his species, believing the animosity toward dogs is unjustified. The dog reminds his listeners of the presence of a dog in the Koran, proud that a dog is barely mentioned in the chapter titled "The Cave." The dog does not understand why people believe that dogs are impure and why a person must ritualistically clean his or her home or person after coming in contact with a dog. In contrast, the dog tells of the Europeans, whose dogs all have owners and are allowed to frolic together. The dog says that being an enemy of dogs is to be an infidel. The dog would love to eat the boiled flesh of the cleric from Erzurum after his execution.

The murderer confesses to killing Elegant but conceals enough information so that his identity remains a mystery. As the murderer comes to terms with losing his innocence, he is restless. He wanders the streets endlessly. He goes to the coffeehouse, where his associates often go to listen to the storytellers, although he would rather avoid the other miniaturists. He does not want them to grow suspicious. The murderer even draws pictures for the storyteller, although he feels this is beneath him. He does the drawings so the others will not accuse him of being conceited. He laughs along with everyone at the dog's story, but he is paranoid when he overhears someone say that Nusret Hoja's men will probably raid the place.

The murderer reflects on the issue of style, beginning with a description of a picture from a book recounting the story of Hüsrev and Shirin. The famous master Bihzad had illustrated the beautiful picture in such a way that everyone knew he was the artist. He did not sign his name. The murderer had learned in his childhood that Bihzad must have felt embarrassed and ashamed to create such a work because a truly great masterpiece would not show any signs of the artist's identity. The murderer goes looking for signs of his guilt in the murder and finds that snow has covered and erased any traces.

The murderer recounts the scene of his crime. The murderer leads Elegant to a well and tells him where to dig to find gold pieces. This is a bribe to keep Elegant from talking to Enishte, then burning the pictures and inciting the Erzurumis. Elegant, however, is upset; his innocence and passion is obvious. Elegant is sure they will spend an eternity in Hell for working on the book, even though they did not fully understand what they were doing. The murderer sees that Elegant is ready to confess everything about the secret book. In a final attempt to quiet Elegant, the murderer shows his practice drawings of horses. As they argue, the murderer seeks and finds a sign. The murderer realizes that there is no way to reconcile with his childhood friend. He kills Elegant by smashing his skull with a stone and drops him into the well.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces the mystery of who killed Master Elegant Effendi and why. Effendi is proud, a little arrogant and something of an alarmist regarding a perceived conspiracy against his beliefs, which he assumes are pure. His realization that his life is a small space of light in between infinitely long periods of darkness introduces a recurring



imagery of light versus dark. He also introduces the powerful draw he and his associates feel towards their art, as well as the opposing belief that powerful ideas cannot be (or should not be) visually depicted. His admonitions also introduce the theme that the joy of seeing is more important than the joy of living.

Chapter 2 introduces the main character, Black. Having left Istanbul twelve years ago, very much in love with his cousin, Black has now returned, asked by his uncle to help with preparing a secret book for the Sultan. Black's uncle has heard of the books Black helped prepare for Istanbul's elite, using advance money to locate miniaturists and calligraphers to finish the commissioned books. This chapter also introduces the religious cult led by a cleric from Erzurum named Nusret. This preacher has become popular in these times of endless war with the Persians and inflation by blaming the hard times on the fact that Istanbul citizens have strayed from Muhammad's path and the strictures of the Koran.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed look at the Erzurumi cult from the perspective of the coffeehouse devotees. The dog's story makes Nusret look like a fanatical moron, who likes to put on a show for a buck. The dog has been hastily drawn on cheap paper, but the significance of this drawing is in its realism. The drawing is in the Frankish style, rather than the flat drawings usually allowed in the Ottoman books. This chapter introduces the coffeehouse setting, which is important later in the novel.

Chapter 4 introduces us to the murderer, who is one of the book-arts workshop miniaturists, though he keeps his identity to himself to avoid the consequences for his crime. The murderer knows he is the best artist and is sure the others are jealous of him. The murderer is restless after committing his deed but tries to justify it. He gropes about in the darkness like a blind man after visiting the coffeehouse, important to the theme of the joy of living. This chapter also introduces the ideals the miniaturists live by, including the ability to draw a horse from memory (or in the dark or blindness), which represents being able to remember Allah's world. This chapter includes more appearances from dogs and mongrels, a symbol introduced by the dog's story in the previous chapter.

Chapter 4 also introduces the popular story of Hüsrev and Shirin. The murderer, of course, focuses on the illustration from the story depicting Hüsrev's murder. The murderer uses the illustration to bring up the issue of style and signature. He believes that having a style or using a signature represents a flaw in the illustration, yet he defends the secret book by murdering the one threatening to end the project.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary

Enishte introduces himself and tells how his nephew Black came into his everyday life as a child. Enishte apprentices Black to the book-making arts, but when Black fails to hide his growing passion for his cousin, Shekure, Enishte forbids the match and banishes Black. With Black's return, Enishte is delighted to see a responsible, mature young man, with whom he can still share his love of books. Enishte has two dilemmas. His daughter, Shekure, has been waiting for her husband to return from war for four years. He does not discuss this problem with Black. Enishte's other dilemma is that one of his artists has gone missing. Enishte asks Black to investigate Elegant's disappearance.

The point of view changes in Chapter 6, to Enishte's grandson, Orhan, but the scene is still the discussion between Enishte and Black. Black sees Shekure's forgotten face in Orhan. Orhan recounts the dialog between Enishte and Black. They are talking about the probable murder of Elegant. Enishte assumes the issue of style has led someone to murder Elegant. Enishte describes the work of the book-arts workshop, an illustrated Book of Festivities, directed by Master Osman. Enishte tells Black to observe the miniaturists and Master Osman both at the workshop and their homes, where they are doing most of their work.

Orhan then leaves the room and meets his mother, Shekure. She is spying on the conversation between her father and Black. After scolding Orhan for not leaving them alone, Shekure quickly writes a letter, and asks Orhan to send in Hayriye, their slave. Orhan goes to the kitchen, where he fights with his older brother, Shevket. Hayriye leaves under the premise of buying more lemons, but Orhan knows she is lying. Shekure returns to the kitchen and scolds her children again for not behaving while their grandfather has a guest.

In Chapter 7, the point of view changes again to Black's. After seeing Orhan, he considers leaving his uncle to find his long-lost love. He knows she is in the next room. However, Black patiently indulges his uncle Enishte. Enishte says that the Sultan wants to reclaim the style of the Franks. The Sultan allows the artists to work at home to get the Book of Festivities done in time for the 1000th year anniversary of the Hegira. Of course, the Sultan knows they are all also working on the secret book.

Enishte describes Master Osman as both blind and senile, but instructs Black to visit with him to find out what he can about Elegant's disappearance. Black accepts the assignment and takes his leave of his uncle. Out in the street, a large, boisterous woman approaches him. She talks and compliments him, then stealthily presents a letter, which Black accepts. The woman tells him to ride around the street and look back at the house he just left, near a pomegranate tree. Black follows her instructions and is rewarded with a glimpse of his lost love's face, as Shekure opens the shutters and looks



out onto the courtyard. He thinks later how this scene reminds him of an illustration of Hüsrev beneath Shirin's window, and Black is once again in love with Shekure.

Chapters 5-7 Analysis

These chapters are set in Enishte's house, an important setting throughout the novel. These three chapters provide some of the back-story to the main characters, including the doomed romance between Black and Shekure twelve years ago, and what has happened to Shekure in the meantime. She has two sons from her marriage to a soldier, but now her husband has been missing for four years.

Enishte talks about the conflict brewing over the secret book. He says he used to think of pictures as an embellishment to a story, an appropriate view in the current religious climate. However, while he serves as ambassador to Venice, he changes his mind about art. In Venice, he sees a portrait of a man that tells its own story. Enishte becomes enamored with the Venetian portraits and feels that the Sultan must also be the subject of such art, pictured with everything of importance in his realm.

Orhan's point of view in this scene provides a more objective viewpoint of the dialog and gives us the glimpse of what is happening in the background with his mother, spying on Black and sending a letter to him by way of Hayriye and Esther. This viewpoint begins the plot of the renewed romance between Black and Shekure.

Black considers the description of portraits and realizes that if he had had a portrait of Shekure with him during his long travels, he would not have forgotten her face. This longing is a major motive for Black throughout the novel. Black understands the conflict between Enishte and Master Osman over the secret book. Enishte's relationship with Master Osman is strained because, although Enishte does not have the proper standing or expertise, he is in charge of an illustrated manuscript, which would normally be Master Osman's job.

Black follows the clothier's instructions almost instinctively, and gets to see Shekure looking out the window. It is just like his favorite story, of Hüsrev and Shirin falling in love, a story and its illustrations that are a recurring symbol in the book.



Chapters 8-11

Chapters 8-11 Summary

Esther introduces herself and describes the details relating to Shekure's secret letter to Black. Esther assumes the letter is to Shekure's brother-in-law, who is eager to replace his missing brother as Shekure's husband. Esther manages to read the letter, though she is illiterate. The letter asks Black not to repeat his youthful mistake and says that though he is close to her father, he should not call at the house any more. She is waiting for her husband, and though he has been missing for four years, she thinks of nothing else. Shekure also encloses the illustration that Black gave her years ago, depicting a personalized scene from the Hüsrev and Shirin story.

Esther then analyzes the letter, insisting that letters say much more than their words. She believes that Shekure does not really want to make the letter secret, but in giving the outward appearances of secrecy, she turns it into a love letter. Shekure has perfumed the letter, further inviting love. Esther says the script also has an effect of saying the opposite of appearances. Instead of being written carelessly, Esther is sure Shekure chose her words with precision. The enclosed illustration finalizes the love letter effect.

Shekure is thinking about Black, not sure why she opens the shutter at just the right moment for Black to see her. Shekure thinks about him and tells herself to marry him. Shekure relates the back-story of Black's inappropriate declaration of love twelve years ago. As youths, Shekure and Black often talk about the story of Hüsrev and Shirin. Black makes many copies of the favorite illustration from that story and secretly makes another one depicting himself as Hüsrev and Shekure as Shirin. He runs off fearful of rejection and embarrassed. Shekure tells her father about it. Her father considers Black insolent for such behavior. Black stops coming to the house altogether after that and soon leaves Istanbul. Shekure later disguises the names in the picture as flowers and keeps the picture as a memento of her childhood.

Shekure leaves the window and goes down to the kitchen. She asks her father about the meeting with Black, and her father makes light of it. Orhan wonders why she put on her nice blouse. Shekure goes to the other room to change clothes and smooths the rouge that the boys have smudged. Shekure thinks about her husband. Since he has been missing so long, Shekure is in an awkward situation at his home with his father and brother. She cannot marry another while her husband is considered alive and missing. Shekure's brother-in-law, Hasan, and her father-in-law are not motivated to allow her to obtain a divorce. Hasan wants Shekure, but he treats her badly, ruining his chances. Shekure makes sure her father-in-law knows about his son's inappropriate advances, so she can return to her father's home. Desperate for Shekure's love, Hasan writes her letters daily. Shekure brings her father some food and realizes this is the last snowfall he will see.



The coffeehouse storyteller takes on the voice of the drawing of a tree intended for an important book. The patron of the book is banished, so completing the book becomes complicated. A devoted librarian travels the country to find the scattered artists to complete the book. When the librarian hires couriers to help, the book progresses more quickly, but one of the couriers is robbed and murdered, and the page of the tree he carries switches hands a few times before coming to the storyteller. The tree says that the famous preacher and the Devil climb up into the branch of the tree together, making love. The tree also discusses the Franks and their way of portraiture. With satire, the tree reveals that if he had been drawn that way, he would be too real. Rather than be a real tree, the tree wants to be a tree's meaning.

Black knows he is in love with Shekure again. He realizes that by returning the illustration, she is playing a game with him. He writes her a response letter and sends word to Esther so she can deliver it to Shekure. Black goes to the artisans' workshop to begin his investigation. He meets Master Osman for the first time in fifteen years. Because Master Osman hates Enishte, he is suspicious of Black. Master Osman asks about Black's travels, and everyone in the workshop listens to the stories. One of the artists gives Black a tour of the workshop. Black pays attention to the illustrations and tries to learn who painted them. The tour guide reminds Black that the artists' identity is not important. An aged, half-blind master shows Black his holiday gift to the Sultan and gives Black the impression that everything is ending. Black begins to respect Master Osman. Master Osman tells him that the answers to three questions will determine a genuine miniaturist. True artists answer questions about style and signature, time and blindness correctly, or they are faithless. Black meets Esther and gives her the letter for Shekure. He wants Shekure to know his plans for the investigation.

Chapters 8-11 Analysis

Esther begins her matchmaking the moment Hayriye appears at her door and explains what Shekure wants. Esther wants to see the beautiful Shekure married again, and she knows that Shekure is not expressing (or maybe even aware of) her true feelings for Black.

Shekure puts on her best blouse and rouges her cheeks for Black's visit to her father. She spies on them, then sends a letter to him saying overtly to stay away but subtly to please love her again. She is unsure what to do with the power of thinking her own thoughts, something women do not usually do in her time and culture. She does not know what to do about the situation with Hasan. She needs Black's cooperation to have her husband declared dead, so she can get divorced, but Black will only agree if she marries him. She cannot even pretend to love him, though she wonders if just a few things were different if she could.

Chapter 10 returns to the conflict between art as representation of meaning, and art for its own sake. The tree laments that he is not part of a book and tells a story about how he should have been in a book. The tree returns to the Erzurumis and their ridiculous ways. The tree says that the preacher believes in the Devil instead of following the



commandments of their religion. The tree brings up the Frankish way of painting again, as contrast to the style in Istanbul of representing an item's meaning and depicting it without mistake. The tree says that the Frank's way invites pagan-like worship, but he secretly takes pride in the thought that he is not in a book.

Confused by Shekure's letter and appearance at the window, Black writes her back. He is lured into her game, and realizes that he loves her again. Black mentions struggling artists who would draw anything for money, touching on the theme of art as idolatry. Black gets a look at the Book of Festivities. Master Osman's answer to Black is significant to the central themes of the story. First, a true miniaturist does not want his own style and signature in his painting techniques. Second, a true miniaturist would recognize that Allah's time was more important than the illustrator's time. Third, a true miniaturist would hope for eventual blindness because only then could he see what Allah sees. Master Osman's opinions represents the traditionalist point of view in the conflict over art.

Chapters 12-14

Chapters 12-14 Summary

Black visits the three miniaturists to try to discover what has happened to Elegant. He presents each with one of Master Osman's questions. Butterfly answers with three parables on style and signature, hoping to convince Black that he believes style and signature are merely imperfections. Butterfly shows Black his latest work from the Book of Festivities, a scene in which debtors are released from prison. Stork relates three stories on time and painting, saying that time makes a drawing perfect and that illustrating with skill is the only way to escape time. However, if an illustrator stops aiming for perfection in his work, his reward is death. Olive tells three parables about blindness and memory, in which he expands on the reasons that miniaturists aspire to become blind. Before Olive can show Black any specific illustrations, an apprentice arrives to inform Olive that Elegant's body has been found and that the funeral will start with the afternoon prayers.

Chapters 12-14 Analysis

Black asks the miniaturists Master Osman's questions as a ruse to look for clues for Elegant's disappearance. All three artists seem to have nervous habits and are suspicious of Black. They know he is not just there to visit after all his years abroad, nor is he just curious about their illustrations. Butterfly lies about his beliefs on style and signature and is very arrogant about his abilities. Butterfly shows Black a scene from the Book of Festivities that includes a dog (as the old masters never would have done) and has a hidden logic to the inclusion of the color red. The dog and the repeated color red in his work serve as clues.

Stork's picture has also strayed from the style of the old masters to convey surprise by having the Sultan stand in this picture alone. Stork wants the whole picture to evoke emotion. Stork also does some moonlighting work for extra money and says that Black, in particular, is jealous of the other artists. However, Stork's stories, especially, evoke the ideology of the "true" miniaturist, as Master Osman would define him.

Olive is considering an offer to go to Hindustan to work on a new book. Olive's stories about blindness present some important foreshadowing, especially regarding the plume needle. His beliefs that blindness allows the artist to see Allah's vision of the world are important to the theme regarding the joy of seeing.



Chapters 15-19

Chapters 15-19 Summary

Esther talks about Shekure with Black. When she leaves, Esther does not deliver Black's letter right away as promised. She first visits Hasan, Shekure's brother-in-law, to let him read Black's letter. Black's letter is sincere, complimentary and ambitious in seeking Shekure's affections. Hasan returns Black's letter to deliver and gives Esther his own letter for Shekure, with a rude threat that Shekure must return to her husband's home. Esther leaves in poor spirits because she is starting to wonder whether she wants to help love-stricken Hasan.

Esther delivers the two letters to Shekure, telling Shekure that Black is very much in love. They gossip about Elegant's discovered body. Shekure has Hayriye take halva to Elegant's widow to show her condolences. Esther waits silently as Shekure reads Black's letter; Esther asks what he has written. Shekure automatically answers Esther's probes with her standard answer that she is married and waiting for her husband. This encourages Esther, who says that if all young maidens were as intelligent about the business of romance, they would be married quicker and have better marriages. Shekure does not read Hasan's letter in Esther's presence. Esther and Shekure discuss one of the miniaturists as a third suitor. Shekure does not know which of the three she should marry, but she does know that she should marry soon, before her father dies.

After Esther leaves, Shekure reads her letters. Orhan finds her and they cuddle. Pondering her situation, Shekure goes to talk to her father. She tells him she ought to get married soon. They discuss the difficulties of her situation. Most, but not all religious sects, think she is eligible for divorce. Enishte does not want her to leave. He still does not think anyone is good enough for Shekure. They argue and fail to come to any agreement, as Shekure storms off like a hurt child.

Enishte goes to Elegant's funeral procession, embracing the mourners. He sees Stork and Olive and has an uncomfortable encounter with Master Osman. Then Black comes to him and confidently takes his arm, as if to prove to he is worthy of Shekure. Reaching the cemetery, Enishte encounters the hotheaded Butterfly, who accuses Stork and Olive of Elegant's murder and for making Butterfly look guilty. Enishte realizes that one of the masters is the murderer, but tells Butterfly otherwise. He also tells Butterfly that he will not finish the secret book because of the murder. Enishte remembers his difficult job years ago of informing the Venetians of the Sultan's decision that Cyprus could not remain under Christian control. The people nearly kill him, but he escapes. Enishte envisions his death. At Elegant's funeral, Enishte starts thinking of his death again. He realizes he must finish the Sultan's book.

The murderer recounts how the miniaturists got their nicknames, based on the weekday that each one accompanied Master Osman to the workshop as apprentices. The murderer has split apart, not allowing his "murderer" voice to seep into his everyday life.



The murderer says that after Elegant joined Erzurumis, their previously close relationship changes. The murderer runs to Elegant's house when he hears of the discovery of Elegant's body. He sees Black watching him. Black wonders if Elegant has any other enemies. The murderer assumes that Enishte will secretly invite Black to continue the book. The murderer thinks about getting rid of Black next. Now that he has done one murder, he knows he could do another. He wonders about Elegant's claims about the secret book. He goes back toward Enishte's home to watch Shekure.

Chapter 19 is another coffeehouse performance. Stork is at the coffeehouse, drawing a picture of a gold coin with the Sultan's insignia and bragging about the money he has made. Having made more money than the other miniaturists, he thinks he is the most talented artist. This time the storyteller takes the point of view of the gold coin. The coin notes that his measure of talent has ended, or at least softened, the constant fighting among artists about who is best. The coin describes all the things that he could buy, but then reveals that he is actually a counterfeit. Because he is fake, he has changed hands many times; one disgusted owner trying to swindle the next. The gold coin has been in and out of Istanbul in many odd hiding places.

Chapters 15-19 Analysis

Esther takes her duty as matchmaker very seriously, encouraging suitors if needed, and keeping them from making impetuous mistakes. She tells Black things about Shekure meant to encourage him, but her words confuse him instead. With his rude threats, Hasan makes Esther think twice about helping him win Shekure. Esther tells the reader that she works for more than money. She wants to see Shekure happy.

While Shekure reads Black's letter, Esther is silent, so Shekure will know Esther approves of Black's affections. She asks about the letter, even though she knows what it says because Esther would not want Shekure to find out her extra efforts to help Hasan. Shekure frets about her situation. She has a premonition of the rough times ahead. Esther leaves with another point of view on the issue of sight and seeing. Esther tells all the young maidens that if they keep their eyes peeled, they will not suffer misfortune.

Chapter 16 provides more insight into Shekure's feelings about her situation. She is becoming increasingly distressed about her options, and the appearance of Black has just made it more confusing. Shekure knows that some of the other sects provide divorces more easily than hers and presents an idea to her father of approaching a particular judge to get her divorce. Enishte is worried that Shekure will leave him and take the children. Shekure says that is not her intent, knowing his real reluctance is in finding anyone worthy of her. Enishte also reminds her that while a dream of her husband's death (real or imagined) might be enough proof for herself and her father, Shekure's father-in-law and Hasan, as well as the judge, would require more proof to grant a divorce.

Enishte has death on his mind in this chapter. He starts out reading a book on death and ends the chapter with a memory of a vision of his own death. Chapter 17 provides



more tension in Enishte's strained relationship with Master Osman over the secret book. Enishte feels that either Butterfly, Stork or Olive must be the murderer. Stork has convinced Enishte that Elegant's work was inferior, and Butterfly is so hotheaded. Olive seems the least likely suspect because of his support of the book. Olive also pleases Enishte with his goodwill at the funeral.

The murderer almost overdoes his grief at the funeral. He tells the story of the workshop names, which binds the artists together like brothers, although there is always jealousy among them. However, after Elegant joins the Erzurumis, Elegant rejects the murderer. The murderer is adjusting to being a murderer, partly by keeping his God-fearing artist self and his murderer self separate. He believes that style is simply a flaw in artistry and that it is not present in his work or his hidden personality.

At Elegant's wake, the murderer goes to the house, not to mourn, but to find out who Elegant's other enemies were. He considers the arguments that Elegant had at the workshop over the years, especially over artists who moonlight for extra money. The murderer assumes he will be back at Enishte's home soon, working on the book again, despite what Enishte said about not finishing the book. The murderer gets comfortable with the evil within himself, realizing he could kill again. When he sees Enishte alone on the hill, he almost confesses. He is worried about Elegant's assertions that the artists are traitors to both the Sultan and their religion. He is worried about going to Hell over the book but ironically not for the murder.

Chapter 19 provides a unique way of giving description of the times and scenery of the novel. Money is important in the endless jealousy among the artists. This coin is sure that Stork is the best. The fact that as the Sultan pays the miniaturists less and less, they must make money wherever they can, serves as an important motive for their actions, sometimes doing things they might otherwise oppose, just for the sake of getting paid.



Chapters 20-24

Chapters 20-24 Summary

When Black visits Enishte in the morning, Enishte expands on the history of the secret book. When he serves as ambassador to Venice, Enishte sees thousands of portraits. Enishte thinks these portraits represent a powerful magic that the Sultan should use. Enishte and the Sultan argue about the possibility of having the Sultan's portrait made in this style, but compromise that the only way to do it without creating a false idol is to conceal the portrait in a book as part of a story. The Sultan plans to offer the book to the Venetians as a gift of peace. Enishte shows Black all the illustrations, except the final one, which he cannot seem to finish. The illustrations are of a tree, a dog, a gold coin, Satan, a horse and a depiction of Death. Enishte also relates the stories that he wants to accompany the illustrations, which he would like Black to write. Enishte and Black spend the day together talking. Black thinks about the story he must write for these strange illustrations in order to win Shekure.

Shevket and Orhan bring a tray of coffee and food to observe Black as a man who might become their father. Black compliments the boys. Black pretends to be interested in Enishte's stories, but instead he wonders where Shekure is. He feels her watching him and sizing him up as a future husband. Shevket comes back and gives Black a blank, perfumed sheet of paper. Later, Shevket corners Black outside the outhouse and invites him to the house of a hanged Jew to see a dead cat. Black tries to impress Shevket with stories of his travels. Black and Shevket talk about Shevket's missing father, who Shevket now accepts as dead after his mother's dream.

When Black leaves, Enishte and Shekure stand in the dark room and talk about the possibility of her marrying Black. She only wants to please her father, and they come to an agreement that she will marry Black after he helps her father finish the book. Enishte wonders if Shekure and Black are communicating, and she lies. As they embrace, Enishte realizes that she and Black have exchanged letters.

The murderer is working on another moonlighting project when his restlessness forces him out to walk again. He goes to an abandoned dervish lodge. He prays and cleans to find a little peace. He is not afraid of earthly judgment, but he is afraid. He rationalizes and justifies Elegant's murder by assuming Elegant is manipulative and slandering. As the murderer walks again, he doubts his justifications and wonders if Elegant's last words are truthful. After noticing the bizarre positioning and sizing of the final picture, which has always been partly concealed, the murderer knows there is something troubling about that final picture. He finds himself spying on Enishte's home, trying to imagine where Shekure is. He watches Black leave and thinks about murdering Black.

The coffeehouse storyteller tells a story as Death. Death's story is of an aging old man and a young miniaturist. The old man tempts the artist with fine materials and money to draw Death's portrait. The artist is reluctant, but his curiosity eventually overcomes his



religious objections, and he eagerly draws a terrifying picture of Death, while the old man reads about Death from different books. The artist later regrets the drawing because it is imperfect, disrespectful and dishonorable to the old masters.

Chapters 20-24 Analysis

Chapter 20 expands on the theme of art as idolatry. Enishte is in awe of the power and mystery of having a realistic-looking picture like those he sees in Venice. Enishte wants to be represented by such a portrait in order to feel complete, but this thought frightens him with its religious implications. He gets around this by thinking that the magic could be used to serve their religion. Enishte tries to convince the Sultan. The Sultan reminds Enishte of the problem of the illustrations becoming a false idol. The Sultan and Enishte come to the compromise because the Sultan secretly does want his portrait made in this style.

The illustrations for the book include various items to depict certain things in the Sultan's world, such as a tree for peace. Enishte goes into detail about the meaning of the book because he wants Black to write the text for the illustrations, which are all done except the last. Enishte realizes that Black is somewhat offended by the new style, but is just humoring him because he wants to marry Shekure. Enishte imagines that Black wants to kill him, because of his anger that he could not marry Shekure twelve years ago, and because of this transgression of style. Enishte knows that all the illustrators also make fun of him and the book behind his back, and only work for him for the money.

The scene between Shekure and her father is important in advancing the relationship between Shekure and Black. Shekure does not want to do anything to anger her father, but she is also a woman with her own mind. Enishte is beginning to accept the idea of giving Shekure to Black, but he wants Black to finish the book no matter what happens. He is starting to think that someone will kill him over the book, foreshadowing future events.

From Black's perspective, the day is filled with Shekure's presence, even though he never gets a glimpse of her. He can barely be polite to Enishte, he is so aware of Shekure's presence. Shekure sends her boys in with food, as a test for Black and to get her sons' approval of Black. Shekure is playing games with Black. Shevket shows Black the house of the hanged Jew, perhaps put up to it by his mother, and Black and Shevket talk about wandering spirits.

Chapter 23 introduces the setting of the abandoned Kalenderi dervish lodge, important in the climax of the novel. The murderer's conscience is in turmoil. He justifies his murder by accusing Elegant of slander, but he has doubts. The murderer fears retribution from the Erzurumis, as well as the implications of having taken part in blasphemy. While spying, the murderer has insight about the future, with Black taking his place as the one to finish the book and marry Shekure. This makes him feel sure the book is indeed blasphemous.



The artists draw copies of their illustrations for Enishte's book and share details about the project and their involvement with it for the storyteller. This is how the storyteller can tell stories with such insight about the secret book project. Death tells the story of Enishte and the artist's arguments about doing these pictures in the Venetian style. Enishte has to convince the illustrators to do something they feel is wrong, but the money, the fine materials and the curiosity win. Death's story provides more details about the conflict between the old and new styles of illustrating and the religious artists' resistance.



Chapters 25-27

Chapters 25-27 Summary

Hayriye arrives with a letter from Shekure to deliver to Black. Esther first takes it to Hasan, who reads it aloud to her. Shekure gives Black hope, but she insists that he finish the story for her father's book. Hasan and Esther gossip about the book and the murder. Esther refrains from pitting Black against Hasan. She delivers the letter to Black and waits for his response. She returns to Hasan to show him the letter, in which Black asks Shekure to meet at the house of the hanged Jew. Hasan and Esther discuss the letter.

Shekure is spying on Black again, waiting for his response to her letter, as well as the daily letter from Hasan. When Esther arrives, Shekure reads Black's letter first, which invites her to meet at the house of the hanged Jew. In Hasan's letter, he threatens to involve a judge to force Shekure back to her husband's house. Shekure tries to get more information from Esther, who offers nothing new from either suitor. Shekure encourages Esther to leave with her silence. Shekure listens to her sons bickering upstairs and eavesdrops on her father and Black in the next room. She is attracted to Black and feels aroused thinking and daydreaming about him.

Shevket and Orhan come in and Shekure must stop spying. Shekure writes a response to Black's letter, agreeing to meet. She does not respond to Hasan, not really fearing his threat, at least not yet. She considers how things might be better with Hasan, now that he is making good money. She suspects Esther of letting him read Shekure's letters to Black and decides not to let Esther deliver the letters anymore. She asks Shevket to deliver her letter to Black, the way he had taken the blank paper the day before, but Shevket will not. Shevket believes Black is the one who killed his father. Shekure slaps Shevket for blaming Black and later for wanting to return to live with Uncle Hasan. Shekure and her sons then all cry together in their grief, finally accepting the death of the boys' father.

Shekure has Orhan deliver the letter to Black and arranges for Hayriye to take the boys out for the rest of the afternoon. She carefully chooses what to wear, then leaves silently to give the impression that she went out with the boys. She waits alone at the empty house. When Black comes, they embrace. Black is overcome with lust, but Shekure does not indulge him. This rejection opens the way for communication, especially about the children. Shekure also wants Black to protect her from Hasan. Since Black has been traveling, he could serve as witness for Shekure's husband's death. They also talk about the rumors about the secret book, as well as Shekure's married life. Shekure asks Black calculated questions about his love for her and their future together. Black asks why she has returned the illustration and sees her love for him. They embrace again and part in darkness.



Chapters 25-27 Analysis

Chapter 25 advances the plot, especially the romance between Black and Shekure. Hasan pays Esther to deliver any correspondence to or from Shekure to him first. He feels he has a claim on her because they have already lived in the same house together as in-laws. Esther feels sorry for Shekure and wants the best for her, but she also makes money by being involved in the affairs. The appearance of the blind beggar is symbolic, but in Esther's point of view, he has no special religious significance. Hasan's home is dark, like a crypt, symbolic of his disposition. Hasan becomes crueler as his desperation to win over Shekure increases. He learns that she has accepted her husband's death, and since she is not in love with Hasan, he will lose her. He frightens Esther with his anger.

Shekure knows how to play the game of love. She knows that she does not have long to win Black before he loses interest and marries someone else. She also finds something in Hasan to love. She recognizes that both Hayriye and Esther have great influence on her circumstances and does not trust either of them to help her marry again. Shekure is surprised, when listening to her father and Black, by how much her father identifies with the Venetian gentlemen with their own portraits. She sees Black pale, and wonders if it is indulging the old man's ravings, or from not sleeping thinking about her. She thinks he has attained perfection in his looks. She wonders if she would be sexually compatible with him.

Shekure understands that Shevket is grieving for his father because of the "dream" she told her father. The dream is a way to tell Enishte about her desire to be declared a widow so she can remarry. Shekure pits her sons against each other to get them to do what she wants. She grows angry quickly with their resistance to her plans. As she watches Orhan deliver her letter to Black, she is sure Black has earned the right to become father to her sons. She makes arrangements so she can meet Black alone, without her father knowing about it.

Shekure waits for Black in the shadows, which symbolizes the progressive style of art. Black brings up the Hüsrev and Shirin story, another symbol of the artistic conflict. When Shekure refuses to perform oral sex, Black is embarrassed by his lust and feels rejected. However, he is also pleased that he keeps his temper, and that she keeps her honor. He is impressed that she has thought about him and his travels so much. Shekure explains the challenges to their marriage, including Hasan's threats and her father's fears of abandonment. She has an agenda for Black and quickly covers all the items. When she feels assured that everything is moving smoothly toward their marriage, they part, now in darkness, a symbol for the uncertainty about how they will solve the impediments to their union.



Chapters 28-29

Chapters 28-29 Summary

The murderer goes to Enishte's home and walks in as he had during the nights of working on the secret book. He thinks no one is home. He goes to Shekure's room first and snoops through her things until Enishte hears him. The murderer goes to Enishte in the darkening room. Instead of being straightforward about his agenda, the murderer tells the story of Sheikh Muhammad of Isfahan, who is a wonderful artist for thirty years, but then spends the next thirty years seeking and destroying his previous art. He has decided the art is ungodly and profane. The murderer discloses his main concern, that the book is no longer secret and that it has enemies. To reassure his soul, he wants to see the last illustration in its entirety. The murderer and Enishte talk about whether their art could be blasphemous. Enishte tells the murderer that the love of art by its patrons falls into three predictable stages, and that their Sultan is in the third stage, no longer seeking respect or immortality, but thinking about his approaching death and fearing that his books would bar him from Heaven.

The murderer and Enishte talk about Elegant's assumptions after seeing the last painting and the trouble Elegant might have caused for the artists. Enishte reminds the murderer that no art is pure, and that the illustration techniques that they hold sacred are a blending of Persian, Arabic, Mongol, Chinese and Turkish styles. He reminds the murderer that God rules over the East and the West, and that this blending is vital to art. Enishte reminds the murderer of the rest of the story of Sheikh Muhammad of Isfahan. As the Isfahan artist seeks his former paintings, he finds that he has influenced so many other artists that his work had become a standard for how everyone saw the world. The murderer responds to Enishte's continuation of the story with love and respect, and they talk more about the enemies of the book. Enishte does not fear what the enemies may do to the book or workshop because he does not fear death.

The murder continues to try to convince Enishte to show him the last illustration, giving details about Elegant's murder a little bit at a time. The murderer hopes that if Enishte fears him, he will show the murderer the last illustration. The murderer reads each of Enishte's body signals, feeling encouraged that he will soon get what he wants but also realizing that he loves and respects Enishte more than the other miniaturists do. The murderer wants to get back to work on the book, but Enishte responds that Black is finishing the book because of the murder.

The murderer picks up the Mongol ink pot Black gave to Enishte as a gift, and he confesses his crime, hoping that it would convince Enishte to show him the last illustration. Enishte feels grateful to the murderer for preventing problems from the Erzurumis. Enishte also but knows that the murderer is going to kill him. He feels he has to say the right thing to get out of the situation, guiding the murderer to examine his true feelings about his art. The murderer is more concerned about the sin of the illustrations they have made. Enishte asks about more details of Elegant's murder to buy time.



The murderer asks about style and the character of an artist's talent. Enishte explains how a workshop's style comes into being, not from the influence of a painter's desire but from the mingling of the artists who come to work together for one cause. The murderer asks if he has a style, and Enishte attempts to praise the murderer's talent enough to get him to put down the ink pot. The topic turns to the ink pot itself. The murderer wonders who will appreciate his talent, and Enishte is honest in his answer that it will probably never happen. Enishte says that even if the artists reject the fear of being labeled imitators of the Franks and draw portraits of everyone, it will amount to nothing. In time, all their work will be forgotten. The murderer strikes Enishte on the head with the inkpot, and once he starts, he becomes committed to killing Enishte. Enishte describes his death in colorful detail and leaves his body to go to another realm where his entire life is happening all at once, spread out over eternity.

Chapters 28-29 Analysis

These two chapters represent the midpoint of the novel. The conversations between the murderer and Enishte touch on all the central themes of the novel. The recurring symbol of dogs (as well as a design in the carpet that looks like a wolf) appear several times in these two chapters, following the murderer and his guilt. The symbol of darkness or blackness also appears several times in these chapters.

When the murderer answers to Enishte, who is there in the other room, a silence foreshadows Enishte's death. The murderer goes to see Enishte to calm his restless soul and to determine if Elegant's murder is just. He wants to see the last illustration to decide for himself if the art is blasphemous. Like the artist in his story from long ago, he would destroy the painting and the book, rather than have to answer for it on Judgment Day. He is becoming exactly what he feared in Elegant that caused him to murder Elegant. The murderer is determined to see the last illustration in its entirety and keeps trying to convince Enishte to show it to him, both through flattery and by trying to frighten him.

The murderer fears change. He realizes that Master Osman's style has no future, but he desperately wants everything to continue as it always has. He starts to believe that Enishte is an evil old man and justifies his intent that he will murder Enishte if he does not get to see the last illustration. In the same way, when Enishte realizes that the murderer will kill him, he attempts every argument and reason to change his mind, but perhaps subconsciously, also enrages the murderer enough to kill him.

As Enishte dies, all colors in his experience become red, the color of blood, as the colors of his memories are bleached away and turn white. He thinks of a story in which a man escapes a visit from Death by blowing out a candle in the night and calling it a dream, but Enishte realizes he really is going to die. He regrets that he will not get to see Shekure again and fears the murderer will harm her as well. The murderer searches for the last illustration among Enishte's things. Enishte is tempted by Satan, but believing he has done no wrong in his work, resists the temptation. When Enishte's soul finally leaves his body, he is once again drenched in color.



Chapters 30-33

Chapters 30-33 Summary

As Shekure and Black part, she realizes that whatever happens, she will decide by noon the next day who she will marry. She comes home to find her things in her room ransacked. She hears noises in the summer workshop and then finds her father's body in the room with the blue door. Shekure drags her father to the summer painting room and wonders who has killed him, while she mops up the trail of blood. When Hayriye and the children come home, they tell about their outing. Shekure tells them to go to the bedroom, and when Shevket resists, Shekure threatens her young sons, telling them there is a jinn still in the house. With the boys settled, Shekure tells Hayriye what has happened. Shekure threatens the boys again when they try to leave the room. Hayriye goes to see Enishte's body. Shekure and Hayriye make plans because Enishte's death complicates matters for Shekure to get married. They eat dinner, put the children to bed for the night, clean up the house as much as possible, clean Enishte's body and dress him in clean clothes and go to bed.

The color red narrates what it is and everywhere it has been. It attempts to answer the question of what it is like to be a color. It reflects on the master artist and the steps for preparing the red paint. Red recounts a conversation between two blind masters about knowing what a color is and the meaning of red.

Shekure sends a note to Black and makes it look like Enishte is out for the morning. She meets Black at the house of the hanged Jew again, as if it is a business meeting. They come to a prenuptial agreement, and Shekure gives Black a list of things to do before they can marry that evening. They embrace comforts her as they part.

Black goes home for his money, makes change at the moneychangers and asks the Imam where to testify. The Imam is sympathetic, since everyone in the neighborhood has been worrying about the fate of Shekure for some time. He suggests his brother as a second witness. They all three travel to the court, bribing the judge to get the proxy, who grants divorce more easily. The Imam and his brother convince the judge of the necessity of Shekure's divorce, but he still needs the guardian's approval. It is a tense moment when the proxy judge learns that Black represents the guardian and is the prospective new husband. The judge finally agrees to the divorce and makes it legal.

Black runs back to plan the wedding, trying to make it secret to protect them from Hasan and his men, who might nullify the marriage. Shekure sends Shevket to the barber where Black is getting ready, with a note refusing to get married if they do not have a wedding procession. Black agrees, and hastily assembles a meager procession. Black and Shekure ride on white horses around the neighborhood for the procession. Children trail the procession expecting the silver coins, protecting the procession in case Hasan and his men arrive with threats. Hayriye airs out the house so it will not smell of death, and the procession returns. Black and Shekure marry in the darkened



room where Enishte lay as if sick instead of already dead. Black talks to Enishte and makes it look as though Enishte whispers back something of his approval and marriage advice. Black asks everyone to leave the sickroom. After the reception, Black and Shekure are back in the room with Enishte's corpse, embracing and happy that they succeeded in overcoming all their obstacles.

Chapters 30-33 Analysis

Shekure knows that one of the artists is behind her father's murder. She stays calm and sure of herself. She must think of the children and protect them, though in her fear, she threatens them harshly. Her father's death both simplifies and complicates the issue of her situation. She has already decided to get remarried and is pretty sure she's going to choose Black, but it will be harder to be declared a widow without her father. Shekure tells the boys a bedtime story about the prince who falls in love with a woman from seeing her portrait. This story is an important symbol about the power of art. This chapter also includes several references to silence, darkness and blackness.

Chapter 31, provides a rich description of art in the setting of the novel. Red is strong and always noticed. The conversation between the blind masters is important in reinforcing the theme of the joy of sight being more important to artists than the joy of living.

Chapters 32 and 33 present the narrative of a hasty divorce and wedding. It provides an interesting viewpoint of complicated marriage rules. Shekure sets the tone of the relationship with Hayriye, who acts as if she would have become lady of the home, since she had been sleeping with Enishte. Shekure sets her in her place as a servant. Shekure is very businesslike with Black, perhaps to keep from crying. They are both forced into the marriage sooner than they would have liked, without any time to grieve for Enishte. Shekure does not refrain from showing her intelligence, and the meeting sets the tone of their marriage, with her as an equal. Shekure admonishes the eager Black about marriage. She knows marriage is not about love, but contentment and togetherness. A beam of light shining on them in the empty house is like a beacon of hope in their darkness.

Black narrates the process of getting the divorce as if describing the illustrations that would accompany the story, which would never be taken seriously enough to be presented in calligraphy, much less in a book with illustrations. He thus shows how his mind is linked with art and illustrations and provides a concrete example of unacceptable subject matter for Islamic art, contrasted with the lure of representing such a story visually. He uses a terrifying fish in deep waters to symbolize his fears and his intense happiness. He shows the judges turning away from their normal values for a bribe—the Üsküdar judge leaving the court so his Shafii proxy could grant the divorce. The Üsküdar judge would not grant a divorce in these circumstances, but the Shafii proxy would, since he is bothered that so many women are being abandoned by the wars.



Chapters 34-37

Chapters 34-37 Summary

Shekure instructs her sons to respect their new father, at the same time telling Black to be patient and forgiving with the boys, who have grown up without a father. As the boys get ready for bed, Shekure looks at the remaining nine pictures from her father's book. The murderer has stolen the tenth and final illustration. She leaves the boys to sit with Black in the workshop on their wedding night. They look at the pictures in silence, and finally talk about the circumstances. Shekure hears someone go into her father's room and runs to check on him. She returns to Black, playing another game of love. She openly rejects him, but secretly wants him to continue with his kisses. Shekure says she will not sleep with him until the murderer is caught.

Shekure falls into a fitful sleep in the bed she shares with her sons. She wakes in a panic, not knowing whether she heard sounds in her dreams or if the sounds are really happening. She goes out into the courtyard, where the gate is open. She sees Black talking to someone and realizes it is Hasan. Hasan threatens the security of the new marriage. While Black and Shekure argue with Hasan, Shevket cries out when he discovers that his grandfather is dead. Hasan accuses Black and Shekure of murder. Black replies that Hasan is more of a suspect for revenge and to prevent the marriage. Shekure pleads with both of them not to go to the judge. Hasan hopes to be tortured to prove his innocence and leaves.

The horse is another of the coffeehouse storyteller's props. The horse's narrative presents a story of a proposed marriage between a king and Venetian Doge's daughter. The king sends an artist to paint a portrait of the woman. The portrait that arrives is so lifelike that one of his horses tried to mount the horse in the picture. The horse then philosophizes about realistic pictures and tells another story about a prince confined to a cell for his whole life. The prince has all the kingdom's horses destroyed but then is not prepared for battle with his enemy.

Black sits up late into the night looking at the illustrations, not feeling motivated to finish the book, but knowing he must truly win Shekure. In the morning, Hayriye and Shekure shriek and wail to announce Enishte's death to the neighborhood, and Black joins them, finally grieving for Enishte. Black goes to the neighborhood mosque to tell the preacher of Enishte's death. The preacher suggests the same brother that served as a divorce witness the day before, as well as his half-blind brother, to prepare the body. Black arranges to report the murder to the Head Treasurer.

At the Head Treasurer's chamber, Black tells the clerk the situation, knowing that he may be condemned for the murder himself if things do not go well. The Head Treasurer summons Black. Black cries as he explains everything that has happened since his return to Istanbul six days ago. The Head Treasurer tells Black to announce the death to the workshop because he wants all the artists to attend the funeral. Black mentions



Enishte's belief that Elegant's murderer is one of the artists. Black also suggests that the same person is Enishte's murderer. The Head Treasurer asks about the unfinished book. Black gives the Head Treasurer an update. The Head Treasurer is baffled about the progress of the book, but he seems to believe Black's story and allows Black to leave.

Enishte's soul returns to see his funeral. He describes his ascension after his death as happening just as his favorite authors had written about it. He asks God about the illustrations he made in the infidel style, to which the answer comes in his thoughts that both East and West belong to God. Enishte also asks about the meaning of the world and is not sure whether the answer is mystery or mercy. Before he goes to wait in Berzah for the Day of Judgment, he returns to his body for the burial. He watches the procession and funeral as if atop a minaret. From this vantage point, and in his state of being, he can see everything at once, past and present.

Chapters 34-37 Analysis

Shekure works hard to make sure her new family gets off to the right start in spite of the circumstances. She fears Hayriye, who might take advantage of the situation to increase her status. While Shekure looks at the illustrations, she notes the "odd and suspicious Red" (p.208), as if it was the murderer. Red is capitalized twice in this scene, personifying it. Shekure sits in silence with Black looking at the illustrations, tense about the discovery of Enishte's death.

Shekure's dream of the murderer combines her fear of the murderer with her fear of her father's spirit and the noises that Hasan makes throwing stones at the house. Hasan complicates their situation, both because his claims are true, and because Shekure knows she loves him, too. In addition, because of the way Shevket discovers and announces Enishte's death while Hasan argues, Shekure and Black can no longer pass off the death as a natural one. Hasan does not fear the threats of torture, leaving them to wonder what he will do next.

Chapter 35, is a rhetorical question for the reader about realistic pictures. The horse notes that praise of pictures is truly praise of the artist, not idolatry of the subject matter. He argues that the artists who attempt to draw from memory, without looking and depicting the world that they see, are committing the sin of trying to create as Allah does. The horse argues that the Frankish style is more in keeping with the faith than the endless illustrations of horses that are nothing like what horses actually look like.

Black cannot think of a story to go with the illustrations. Now that Enishte is dead, he does not feel motivated to write it, anyway; however, he knows Shekure will make him finish it. When the household begins the public mourning of Enishte, Black joins them, glad to grieve but also worrying about appearances. When Black and Shekure open the stuck shutters, sunlight shocks them, as opposed to the recurring images of darkness and blackness thus far in the novel.



Black knows he must report the murder, but withholds the details from the preacher. Black must tell the Head Treasurer, who is the person closest to the Sultan because of the funds appropriated and entrusted to finish the secret book. Black hopes that by being completely honest, omitting nothing, the Head Treasurer and Sultan will have mercy on Black. The Head Treasurer's questioning about the book shows that he is surprised Enishte had illustrations made without a story in place, as opposed to the usual way of making a book.

Enishte provides the insight to the afterlife that Elegant, being dumped in a well, could not narrate. Enishte is pleased that everything after his death has progressed just the way he expected from his favorite books. This reinforces the importance of books and their meaning to Enishte. Being able to see God is important to Enishte. What he sees is an approaching red, containing all the images of the universe. Enishte feels joy, but a sudden guilt over his work developing the secret book. He asks about it and is relieved to find it is not a sin.

Enishte's viewpoint recalls the story of Ibn Shakir, the calligrapher-turned illustrator who changed Islamic art by illustrating the view of war with a Godlike view from atop a minaret. Red is the omnipresent and infinite color of God. It also appears in the blood in which Enishte is still covered and in the laundry and missing belt from his past. As Enishte sees the entire world, he gains an understanding of memory as different from experience. This is an important realization in the theme of the joy of seeing versus the joy of living.



Chapters 38-39

Chapters 38-39 Summary

Master Osman is working on the Book of Festivities when the imperial pageboy summons him to the Head Treasurer. As Master Osman follows the pageboy, he realizes they are going to the Sultan's Private Garden, instead of the Divan Chamber where they usually met. Master Osman arrives to find both the Head Treasurer and Commander of the Imperial Guard. The Head Treasurer apologizes for the secret book not being assigned to Master Osman before questioning Master Osman about Enishte's death. Master Osman learns about Black's known and suspected details in the mystery of Enishte's death. The three officials discuss the plan to search all the artists' home for the missing illustration, which contains most of the gold leaf requisitioned for the secret book. Master Osman doubts that his miniaturists, who are like children to him, are capable of murder. However, he is now also a suspect. Osman wonders about the torture planned for the suspects. He looks at the nine illustrations from the secret book until the Sultan arrives.

Esther cries at the funeral, but she is always glad for a social gathering. In small talk to Hayriye, she satisfies her curiosity about the rumors surrounding Enishte's death and reassures Hayriye about her (Hayriye) future. As Hayriye tells Esther which friend sent which pot of food for the funeral, Shekure interrupts. Shekure wants Esther to find out why Kalbiye, Elegant's widow, did not send any condolences. Esther has a letter from Hasan, and although Shekure says she will not read his letters anymore, she reads it immediately. Esther goes to talk to Kalbiye. Esther finds out Elegant's feelings about the secret book before he died. Esther seeks to find any similarity in the two murders, and Kalbiye gives her the illustrations that Elegant had on him when he died.

Chapters 38-39 Analysis

Master Osman accepts the truth that everything in his workshop is changing. He knows that he is old and does not like change. He looks forward to blindness and death as gifts from God. He explains how much he hates Enishte for having had to imitate the European masters. Master Osman, like the Head Treasurer and Commander of the Imperial Guard, suspect either Black, or perhaps the Erzurumis, as the perpetrator of the murders, rather than his beloved illustrators. He knows all the artists face torture, and he wants to make sure their eyes and fingers remain intact so they can continue working.

Esther uses her sharp wit to learn the truth about rumors from Hayriye and to get Kalbiye to talk to her. Kalbiye notes that Elegant had not worked on the book out of greed but because it was a work sanctioned by the Sultan. Esther delivers her message from Shekure, but uses it as an opportunity to play detective. Elegant had illustrations of

horses on his corpse, even though he was a gilder and never drew horses. These illustrations are important to the developing plot of solving the murder mystery.



Chapters 40-42

Chapters 40-42 Summary

When Black returns from the funeral, a royal page summons him to the palace. He waits in darkness, not knowing what fate awaits him. The Commander of the Imperial Guard strips and tortures Black, but does not really hurt him. Black passes the test. The Head Treasure and Commander assign Black and Master Osman the task of examining the clues and determining the identity of the murderer. Black and Master Osman have three days to examine all the pages subpoenaed from the artists' homes. Master Osman tells a parable about a jealous shah who locks away his daughter for her beauty. Her beauty escapes like a spirit and finds its way into an illustration. When the shah sees the illustration, he determines the guilty artists by the way he drew the ears, opening a conversation about style and signature. Master Osman and Black then begin the same "courtesan method" to try to find the murderer. They carefully compare the pages of the Book of Festivities to the nine illustrations from the secret book to determine which artist drew each. Looking for clues, Master Osman gives a detailed description of each of the three suspects.

While Master Osman and Black are comparing the various confiscated illustrations to the ones from the secret book, one of the Commander's men delivers a letter from Shekure and the illustrations found on Elegant's body. The illustrations of horses, though smeared, reveal that the murderer must be the artist that drew the horse in Enishte's book. However, Master Osman and Black cannot identify the artist from that picture. They discover a small flaw, or perhaps a signature, in the nostrils of the horse in Enishte's book. They look through many of the Sultan's most recent books looking for another horse with that flaw, but all the horses follow the form of the old masters. Master Osman and Black cannot determine the creator of that horse. The Sultan arrives to ascertain the progress in the investigation. Master Osman suggests that the Sultan hold a contest between the three artists to draw a horse without a story in mind.

Chapters 40-42 Analysis

After Black passes the test of torture, he must work with Master Osman to look for clues. In Master Osman, Black finds a replacement for the father figure that Enishte had been to him. However, Master Osman belittles Enishte's work, and this is an obstacle to Black and Osman's relationship. They are able to work together and determine that all three artists had worked on parts of all the illustrations. In the parable of the jealous shah, Master Osman omits the true punishment of the artist, blindness, which he views as a gift from God. The true punishment foreshadows future events in the novel. Master Osman gives in-depth characterizations of Olive, Stork and Butterfly, leaving clues for both Black and the reader to try to determine the identity of the murderer. Master Osman has a hard time believing any of them guilty but secretly hopes it is Stork. He would like Stork out of the way, so that Butterfly can become the next Head Illuminator.



Chapter 42 provides an important clue in solving the mystery of the murders. The clue itself returns to the theme of style of signature and the purpose of art. Master Osman is old school and sees any such change from the accepted forms as a mistake or flaw. He insists that true artists draw from memory rather than trying to depict what they see by trial and error. The horse's strange nostrils are similar to the ears in the parable of the jealous shah and his daughter.



Chapters 43-47

Chapters 43-47 Summary

The Sultan's guards visit Olive, Stork and Butterfly to have each artist draw a horse for a "contest." Olive is suspicious and very apprehensive but manages to get his mind into the proper state to render the perfect horse. Butterfly is disappointed that the drawing must be in black and white but is excited about the possible prize money. He becomes like an old master when he renders the horse, wanting to please Master Osman and the Sultan. Stork has to restrain himself from being belligerent to the guard. He would rather not do the drawing unless he is going to be paid. Stork draws a horse according to the formulas and models, but he does not turn in that drawing. Instead, he traces a more creative horse from his notebook and bribes the guard to accept it and keep quiet about it.

After drawing the horse for the contest, the murderer leaves home to wander. He stops for dinner and tells a fellow diner, who knows nothing of art, that he is Bihzad. The murderer is annoyed with the diner's education and leaves to wander again. He stops at the abandoned dervish lodge for his ritual cleaning. Then he attempts to do a self-portrait on the last illustration. The murderer becomes frustrated that he cannot do it and erases his work before wandering again. He goes to the coffeehouse and reluctantly mingles with the other artisans. The murderer tells his companions two stories to ease his loneliness. The first story is about a miniaturist who has lost both his eyes and his hands. Believing that his vision is now perfect, he dictates what he sees to an apprentice, who collects the information into three books. Those books are widely used before being destroyed and forgotten. The murderer points out that some of the illustrations reappear in other books, and that the forms are still often used. The second story is about a miniaturist who could apparently see God's vision without going blind. His fate was to be blinded before being killed.

At the coffeehouse, the storyteller takes on Satan's voice to narrate the story of Satan's place and duties in God's plan. Satan philosophizes on good and evil and comes to the subject of figurative painting. According to the Erzurumis, Satan is behind figurative painting, but Satan denies this claim. Satan reminds the coffeehouse crowd that he would not bow before man and that was the start of his fate, so it makes no sense that he would have thought of painting a realistic portrait of a man placed in the center of the page as if an idol.

Chapters 43-47 Analysis

Chapters 43-45, provide more information about the characters Olive, Butterfly and Stork, as well as clues to the murderer's identity. Olive sees through the contest as a ruse to detect the murderer, but intuitively draws the best horse, trying to repress the old masters because of his fear. His intuition takes over, and he becomes the horse he



draws. Butterfly thinks primarily of what Master Osman and the Sultan want, hoping to please them and be taken seriously and therefore win the prize money he covets. Cynical Stork knows that instead of the most beautiful horse, what the contest is really for is to draw the horse according to old formulas and models. Angry that he is not getting paid for his work, or that he cannot truly draw the way he wants, he bribes the guard so he can take another shot at the assignment. He traces a drawing from his notebook. Each chapter ends with a single statement summing up the way each artist feels about his art. These chapters are important reinforcements to the theme of the meaning and power of art. None of the artists completely believe that they are creating idols.

The murderer philosophizes on the purpose of art in Chapter 46. He idolizes the old masters for the paintings they created that were real to the mind. Secretly, he also wants to be able to paint like the Venetians, but his attempts frustrate him. Perhaps his apparent opposition to the infidel methods lies simply in this frustration. The stories that the murderer tells provide insight into the aspirations of miniaturists to become blind, but the murderer says that the great master Bihzad had induced his own blindness only because he did not want to paint in a new style for a new king. The blessed and talented miniaturist in the story foreshadows the murderer's fate.

Just as in the chapter in which Enishte dies, Satan mentions that everything that has happened to him happened the way it is described in books. Satan is proud of his style. In fact, pride is his signature. He attempts to set the listeners straight about the silly things he is not behind, including the Frankish way of painting, providing some humorous images along the way.



Chapters 48-50

Chapters 48-50 Summary

Shekure wakes Black and tells him that her father told her in a dream that Black was the murderer. As they talk, she threatens Black and tries to scare him with Hasan's red sword; however, she is also reassured by his love. She still seeks to prove that he is in no way connected to the murders.

Black and Master Osman go to the Sultan's Private Garden again. They look at the three horses drawn for the "contest," but none have the strange nostrils. Master Osman knows that the horse for Enishte's book has come from somewhere deep in the artist's past and asks to see the books in the Treasury to try to figure it out. The Sultan grants Black and Master Osman access to the Inner Treasury with Jezmi Agha, who knows his way around all the books better than anyone else. Locked in the Inner Treasury, they look at books all day without finding another horse like the one drawn for Enishte. In the evening, when the Treasury door is opened to let Black and Master Osman go home for the evening, Master Osman asks to stay all night, and Black finds himself staying as well.

The coffeehouse storyteller gives voice to the drawing of two dervishes. A Venetian has drawn them for a few Venetian coins to take back to his country. The drawing, which eventually makes its way back to Istanbul, encounters the preacher from Erzurum, who the storyteller is not supposed to discuss again. The preacher condemns the dervishes for all of their faults, but the dervishes know he is no better. The dervishes freeze to death, but because they are in a picture, they are virtually immortal.

Chapters 48-50 Analysis

Shekure addresses the possibility that Black is the murderer, even though he was with her when her father died. In her insecurity and reluctance to open up to him, she threatens and tries to scare him and later pushes him away as if she has heard someone in the house. She finds it ironic that Master Osman, her father's sworn enemy would be the one to try to find the murderer. The red sword foreshadows the ending of the novel.

Master Osman quickly replaces Enishte as Black's guru. This chapter presents much of Master Osman's philosophy on style and painting. Master Osman represents the viewpoint that art is not idolatrous as long as it follows all the rules. This chapter also presents a rich historical background for Islamic art.

Chapter 50, intensifies the underlying conflict between the miniaturists' coffeehouse regulars and the Erzurumis. This conflict is the crux of the theme of art as idolatry. The Venetian artist is taking advantage of the dervishes to make fun of them back home.

However, the dervishes think it is a great joke that the Venetian has drawn them blind, when they were just high and enjoying the view from their own minds instead.



Chapters 51-52

Chapters 51-52 Summary

Master Osman tells stories behind these precious and legendary books in the Inner Treasury as he drinks up their images and tries to determine the artist and purpose of each book. He tries to share his astonished joy with Black and the dwarf, but they do not appreciate the art nor the history the way he does. While seeing the great work of Bihzad, Master Osman senses that he will soon also be blind. He complains about everything ending. Black reminds Master Osman that they are looking for clues to the murders. Deep in the night, Master Osman finds Shah Tahmasp's Book of Kings, a huge and heavy book he had briefly viewed in his youth. He is grateful for the chance to linger over it now. However, Master Osman cannot give it his full attention because of gossip from years past, because he is looking for a sign that Bihzad had worked on it instead of going blind (or while he was blind), and because he is looking at the horses' nostrils. Master Osman does not find any clipped horse nostrils, nor does he find any sign that Bihzad worked on this book. In addition, he regrets that the style of his workshop has never come close to these magnificent pictures.

Master Osman recalls a list of gifts given along with this book, including Bihzad's plume needle. Master Osman asks Jezmi Agha where he had found the Book of Kings. Master Osman goes to that cabinet, finds the plume needle and takes it back to his seat. He sits and looks at the needle, asking himself many questions, but he has already made up his mind. Master Osman picks up the mirror he noticed earlier. He does not hesitate as he pokes the needle into each of his eyes.

Black notices that something is different about Master Osman. Master Osman tells about Master Bihzah's plume needle. Black takes the needle to examine it more closely in another room. While there, Black looks at the less-reputable books that have been confiscated from pashas who were executed. He finds a horse with the strange nostrils. Master Osman provides his insight about the book as he tells about the Mongol custom of cutting open their horses' nostrils to help them breathe as they traveled farther. Master Osman explains how when the Mongols invaded, calligrapher-turned-illustrator Ibn Shakir fled the city in the opposite direction. Shakir studied horses as he traveled north but probably never saw a horse with clipped nostrils.

Black begins to suspect self-induced blindness in Master Osman. Black knows that Master Osman knows who the murderer is when Black first asks. Black flatters Master Osman about the workshop style he has defined. Black asks again about Master Osman's conclusions about the murderer. Master Osman knows that Olive is the artist of the horse in Enishte's book, and the artist of the horses found on Elegant's corpse. However, Master Osman does not believe Olive has any motive to kill Elegant, and, instead, blames Stork for Elegant's murder and the Erzurumis for Enishte's murder. When Master Osman details the grudge he feels toward Enishte, Black realizes that Master Osman would give up any artist to torture and death as punishment for betraying



Osman and his artistic tradition with their contributions to Enishte's book. Black suspects that Master Osman himself may be the murderer. His love for Master Osman starts to dissolve. Black tells Master Osman that he wants to leave the Inner Treasury at the next opening, so that he can be with his new wife. Master Osman and Jezmi Agha stay, and the officers fail to search Black, who steals the plume needle. He goes home and finds no one there.

Chapters 51-52 Analysis

Master Osman believes he has gotten this opportunity to view all these old books as God's acknowledgment of his status as a true artist. To this end, like all good miniaturists, he now expects Allah to reward his years of hard work with blindness and the memory or vision of the world as God sees it. Master Osman is full of wonder looking at these images, knowing they are the last he will see and the most beautiful he's ever seen, but he is also filled with melancholy. He realizes that he has lost his passion for painting while working for the Sultan. He scratches out the eyes from several people in a few pages of the Book of Kings. He pierces his eyes with Bihzad's plume needle, hoping to blind himself to keep from having to change his style because he knows the workshop will change, whether through the influence of the Venetians and Enishte's book, or because of a new ruler when the Sultan dies.

Chapter 52 provides detailed insights about motives. Black is motivated to finish their investigation so he can go home to his wife. He realizes that Master Osman only wants to look at these books in the Treasury and will give up any artist to torture and death. Master Osman feels betrayed that each of them worked on Enishte's book, a betrayal he feels is worthy of death. Master Osman does not care about the murder investigation at all. Osman most wants to punish Stork for his greed and to ensure that Butterfly succeeds Master Osman as Head Illuminator. Black sees that Master Osman himself is motivated enough to orchestrate the murders. Master Osman gives his view of Stork's motives and Olive's lack of motive. This chapter also provides more historical context for the environment where these artists live and work. Master Osman's pride and dignity are important in this chapter, and Osman provides a vehicle for more about the theme of style and signature.



Chapters 53-54

Chapters 53-54 Summary

Black goes to Esther for help finding Shekure and the children. Esther tells Black about Hasan convincing Shevket that his father is returning that afternoon. Shevket runs off to his former home to wait. Shekure and Orhan wait alone through the night for Black to come home. Still waiting for Black, they join Shevket at Hasan's home the next day.

Black takes Esther to get reinforcements before he goes to Hasan's home. Black finds out from the blind beggar that Hasan is not home. Esther delivers messages to Shekure's father-in-law and Shekure. Esther returns with messages for Black, then goes back into the house. Esther tries to convince Shekure to leave while Black and his men attack the house.

In fear of revenge from Hasan, Esther has Black stop the attack and Orhan opens the door. Shevket still does not want to leave until he is allowed to take Hasan's ruby-handled dagger. The group of men protects Shekure, Hayriye, Esther and the children as they walk through the back streets. They do not go home. Black is taking them to a hideout that Esther does not know about. They bump into a coffeehouse raid, and Black sends a man to take Esther home.

At the coffeehouse, the storyteller takes the voice of a woman, telling his own meager experiences with women and his initiation into cross-dressing. He brings up the Erzurumi preacher and Shekure's predicament before telling the story he had promised to the coffeehouse. He tells of Chelebi, who falls in love with a woman he has seen at an open window. The situation is hopeless, and he begins to drink to drown his sorrows. As he turns his misery inward, the neighborhood mysteriously falls apart, and the woman and her husband lose their love and happiness.

Chapters 53-54 Analysis

Esther walks a fine line. She fears getting involved, but she can gain more money from Shekure's circumstances if Hasan stays involved. Shekure is in a difficult situation. For the people who discredit her marriage, returning to her former husband's home gives them credibility, which gives Hasan hope. If Black takes her back by force, or even if Shekure just leaves, Hasan will seek revenge. Esther's solution to have Orhan open the door appeases everyone's conflicting interests. The ruby-handled dagger they use to bribe Shevket to go home foreshadows later events. It is now out of Hasan's possession.

The storyteller's humorous tale represents the pride of Hayriye, who is too beautiful to do the chores of a slave. The love story he tells is important as foreshadowing of how things change. Chelebi's hopeless sorrow changes the neighborhood so much, that the

woman he loves, falls out of love with her husband and is never happy again. This mirrors how Master Osman feels about having to change his art.



Chapters 55-57

Chapters 55-57 Summary

Butterfly escapes the coffeehouse raid when the Janissaries chase off the Erzurumis. He and Black enter the deserted coffeehouse and find the storyteller dead. They search for the illustrations the storyteller uses to tell his stories; they are gone. Black and Butterfly leave together. Black threatens Butterfly with his dagger so that Black can search Butterfly's home for the missing illustration from Enishte's book. While Black searches, Butterfly explains that he drew pictures for the storyteller and went to the coffeehouse so the other miniaturists would not turn against him and label him an Erzurumi. Black shares what Master Osman has said about Butterfly. Butterfly goes into the room where his wife is hiding. He comes back hiding his sword. Butterfly pulls his sword and gets on top of Black, nearly cutting Black's throat. Black accuses Butterfly of betraying Master Osman because of the master's cruelty. When Black tells Butterfly that Master Osman is prepared to turn all of them over to the executioner, they leave together to search Olive's house. Olive is not home. They search through his dingy things, and think that Olive does not know how to be happy. Black finds the illustrations the storyteller had used, which are the same illustrations in Enishte's book. Butterfly blames Stork for the horse drawings.

Butterfly and Black ask Stork about the storyteller's illustrations, and since Stork has gone to the coffeehouse every night, he remembers who drew each illustration. As Black and Butterfly look through Stork's things, Stork confirms that Olive was at the coffeehouse before the raid. Stork puts on his armor, and Butterfly begins to strike it, first as if to test the armor's strength, then more and more as if he wants to hurt Stork. Stork announces that Olive is probably hiding the stolen last illustration from Enishte's book, as well as himself, at the Kalenderi dervish house. Stork grabs Butterfly from behind and convinces him to find Olive so that they can stand together against the enemies of their art. The three of them travel to the dervish house, where Stork sees a man praying.

Olive finishes his prayers, though distracted, before he lets in Butterfly, Stork and Black. They discuss who drew the storyteller's pictures again, but no one claims the horse. Black tells Olive that Master Osman says Olive does have a style. It is not an individual style, but the style of the whole workshop. Black, Butterfly and Stork search for the missing last illustration. Olive seeks to gain favor with Black and Stork and shows them his hidden treasure of coins and a few nice things hidden here in suspicion of another raid. Black and Stork begin to trust Olive a little more, and the four of them search for a consensus if they are tortured. Instead, they start talking about what they would most like to illustrate, if it could be anything. Olive begins to cry, and Butterfly comforts him. They all reminisce about their childhoods as apprentices and the pasha's wife they all loved. Olive remembers Butterfly as a beautiful young apprentice who gazed briefly into Olive's eyes.



Chapters 55-57 Analysis

Chapter 55 advances the plot in the search for the murderer. Butterfly is hoping to become Head Illuminator after Master Osman. He is true to the style of the old masters but is very concerned about what others think of him. This chapter gives more insight into the relationships between the master and apprentices, and Black realizes how Butterfly might have been motivated to deny his own values to do the work for Enishte or the storyteller. When Butterfly gets on top of Black, it foreshadows the treatment of the murderer later in the novel. When Black and Butterfly break into Olive's home, the setting convinces the reader of Olive's guilt. Butterfly would like to get Stork out of the way and blames him for the drawings of horses they find.

Stork provides insight into Butterfly's character. Butterfly is more talented but concerns himself with pleasing others. Stork is jealous of the intimate relationship between Master Osman and Butterfly. Stork senses his danger in this plot from Butterfly and Master Osman, who both see Stork's jealousy as dangerous. They would turn him in as the murderer, even if they do not believe he is guilty. Stork is the artist most open to change; Stork believes he is talented enough to gain superiority over the others. The conversations about art strengthen the theme of art's place in religion.

Olive, like Master Osman, senses a great change about to happen to the workshop. Whether the workshop adopts the Frankish style or they are all executed for the crimes, things will never be the same. He is cleaning the dervish lodge, giving himself away to the reader as the murderer. He shows off the money he has collected as a miser and the gold leaf he has stolen from the workshop over the last few months, but he does not reveal the final illustration. The camaraderie they gain through looking at Olive's obscene pictures allows them to share their deepest wishes about their art, touching on the theme of individuality versus collectivism.



Chapter 58

Chapter 58 Summary

As Black and the artists reminisce, they talk about how it was wrong of the Sultan to have them work alone. They talk about their favorite pictures and stories, as well as their favorite scenes of death. The murderer suggests killing Master Osman before Master Osman turns them over to torture and execution. Black and the other artists pin the murderer to the ground, slapping him and pressing the dagger against his throat. Black asks him for the missing picture. One of the artists kisses the murderer passionately and then begins to beat the murderer until the others restrain him. Black takes out the plume needle. The murderer tries to persuade him not to use it. After a struggle, one of the artists pierces the murderer's eyes with the needle.

They let the murderer get up and Black convinces him to recount the night of Elegant's murder. As the murderer gives his monologue about his motives, he confesses to murdering Enishte as well. Black asks for the missing picture again and follows the murderer as he goes to retrieve it from its hiding place in the deserted lodge. They all look at the picture, on which the murderer has drawn an unskilled self-portrait. The murderer begins to name the other artists, revealing that he is Olive. Olive takes Black's dagger and the stolen plume needle. He plans to answer the summons for the best miniaturists to go to Agra to work on an important book. As Olive leaves, Black jumps on him but misses. Olive stabs Black's nostril. While giving the appearance of letting Black go, Olive brings down the dagger, which misses and strikes Black in the shoulder.

As Stork runs, Olive follows him but gives up in fear of the darkness. Olive kisses Butterfly with tears in his eyes and leaves. As Olive flees toward the ship he plans to take to Agra, he remembers all of his life in Istanbul. He follows the same path he took for years when following Master Osman to the workshop. At the workshop, Hasan accuses Olive of helping Black steal Shekure, since Olive is carrying the ruby-handled dagger. Hasan takes out his red sword and beheads Olive.

Chapter 58 Analysis

Chapter 58, reveals the identity of the murderer as well as the value he places on brotherhood and camaraderie. Olive is sure that the workshop is coming to its end. Like Master Osman, he does not want to change. However, he is so proud of his talent and who he is, that he would rather flee, like Ibn Shakir, the father of their modern artistry, than blind himself like Bihzad and Master Osman. This pride is Olive's weapon to try to scare Elegant into keeping quiet about the book around the Erzurumis. It is the same pride, which when he recognized it, angered him into killing Enishte.

Chapter 58 also ties together the ideas of individuality and memory. Olive is afraid of being forgotten, and thus losing his individuality, which for him is dependent on the



group of the miniaturists and other artisans. He has a pipe dream of working in the other workshop to try to keep things the way they have always been for him, to keep to a workshop style rather than an individual style and to keep making illustrations. Olive says that he has not yet made the illustration by which he wants to be remembered. The dialog in this chapter provides a final explanation of the difference between Muslim painting and the more representative art in the West, explaining the theology behind whether Enishte's book really represented blasphemy and idolatry or not. Since they were not planning to display the art, the illustrations could still be seen as an extension of ornamentation to the beauty of the book. The religious notion of remaining pure is important to the murderer, even though he has done murder and drawn the self-portrait with himself at the center of the world.

When Olive stabs Black with Hasan's ruby-handled dagger, it foreshadows Hasan's other weapon later in the chapter. While the dagger misses, perhaps since Olive did not seem intent on killing Black, Hasan's red sword never misses. In fact, Hasan feels the right to seek revenge.



Chapter 59

Chapter 59 Summary

Shekure has trouble sleeping at the relative's home, where she and the children are hiding from both Hasan and the murderer. She sees Black, as if returning from battle, as she had always hoped her husband would return. Black, Shekure, Hayriye and the children all return home, since they no longer have anything to fear from the murderer. Black regrets that Olive has escaped punishment.

Once home, Shekure cleans her husband's wounds. Esther arrives with the news that Hasan has killed Olive and fled. Olive is found guilty of the murders by the illustrations found with his body. Shekure returns to Black and gives herself to him, knowing she will grow attached to him. Though Black remains melancholy and never completely heals from his wounds, they make love every day for the next 26 years and share a marital happiness together.

Enishte's book is never finished because the pictures found on Olive's body are bound with other random illustrations and forgotten. The next sultan rejects all artistry, and Black's love of books becomes a more secretive activity. Later, the Queen of England sends a magnificent, intricate clock to the Sultan. The clock inspires awe and wonder, but the sultan of that time smashes it in the night because of the sin of mimicking Allah's creation. This destruction is the final blow on illuminations and miniatures in Islamic art.

Chapter 59 Analysis

When Black returns to Shekure they way she has always dreamed her first husband has, she finds her love for him. Black impresses the children with tales of the battle and earns his place as their father, but since he did not kill Olive, he remains melancholy. However, Shekure's love and care for him allow them to have a happy marriage.

The Queen of England's clock is the ultimate end to illustration in Istanbul. It is not only an affront to their religious tenets, but it shows that the westerners have a power (in technology) that Istanbul does not share. Smashing the clock is the ultimate rejection of the western influence in Ottoman art.

Shekure's secret wishes for two paintings reveal that she, too, clings to the desire to be an individual and to have time stop. However, she realizes that neither painting can ever be made, and that the happiness of life is much more important anyway.



Characters

Black

Black is the main character of the novel. The plot usually follows his actions, and he has the narrative voice in several chapters. Black grows up with an absent father and ambitious mother. He learns his love of books from his uncle, Enishte. He is banished when he declares his love for 12-year-old Shekure. During his twelve-year absence, he travels and works various jobs. He laments that he has forgotten Shekure's face.

Black's Uncle Enishte invites him to return to Istanbul after hearing of the books Black arranged. Black returns more mature and more handsome with his tall, lanky look and curly hair. He loves Istanbul, but it has changed since he left. He nervously anticipates seeing Shekure's face again. Black is happy to help his Uncle Enishte, but their relationship is not as close as it once was. This is partly because of his interest in Shekure and partly because of the aging old man's strange obsession with Venetian art. While Black may find Enishte's book unconventional, he secretly wishes for a realistic portrait of Shekure. He agrees to write the text for the book, hoping to win his lost love. Black still loves books, stories and illustrations as much as he did learning about them with Enishte, especially the story of Hüsrev and Shirin.

Black agrees to investigate the master artists, motivated by Shekure's contradictory letter and his renewed love for her. He is impressed with Master Osman's eloquence, though Enishte thinks of his rival as senile. Out of respect for Osman, Black asks each artist Master Osman's questions as part of his investigation. He also wants Shekure to know about his efforts. Black gains confidence as the romance unfolds, and he accomplishes the insurmountable task of obtaining Shekure's divorce and marrying her before anyone knows of Enishte's murder, knowing that is the only way he can marry her at all. He stands up to Hasan and insists that Master Osman focus on the murder investigation, but he is not able to kill the murderer when the time comes. He and Shekure have a long, happy marriage. However, Black never recovers from his wounds, not only the physical one but also the mental wound for failing Shekure regarding the murderer and her father's book.

Shekure

Shekure is honorable and intelligent. She is also shrewd and independent. As a girl, she thinks Black is too impetuous. She later thinks that if he had played the game of love properly, he might have been able to marry her. She mostly forgets about him when he leaves, though she keeps the illustration he made for her, concealing the identity of herself and Black. She seeks the attentions of a soldier and threatens to kill herself if her father does not let her marry him. She has a happy marriage with him and bears two sons. She retains her honor while he is missing, in spite of Hasan, her brother-in-law. He treats her like a slave. Shekure uses his inappropriate advances to escape back to



her father's home with her children. Shekure knows that though she feels affection for Hasan, he will not treat her well.

Shekure knows that she must get married again before her father dies; otherwise, she will be stuck with Hasan on his terms instead of hers. When Black returns after his long absence, she puts on her best clothes, showing her interest in him, even though she does not let him see her. She makes him play the game of love and has a very specific agenda for him. Her first priority is to find a good father for her children, and if Black can pass that test, she can love him.

Shekure wants her story told and her portrait made. She is not afraid of being intelligent, but also knows that she is so beautiful that everyone falls in love with her. She hates the way women are depicted in illustrations, always looking down. Shekure also hates that women hardly know what to think for themselves, but she, too, is uncertain of her own mental powers at times and fearful when left alone. However, she has no difficulty telling Black exactly what to do to obtain her divorce and marry her. She calculates the best way to start her new family, and she gets everything she wants, except revenge for her father's murder and the completion of his book. She forgives these faults in Black, perhaps out of pity. In spite of Black's enduring melancholy, Shekure gets the happy life she has wanted.

The murderer/Olive

Olive is one of the master miniaturists in the Sultan's book-arts workshop. He is so proud of his work that he assumes he is the best artist in the workshop. He believes the other artists in the workshop are jealous of him. Olive has two voices in the novel to separate his artistry from his criminal behavior, keeping the mystery of the murderer's identity until the end of the novel. The murderer's voice slowly grows stronger throughout the novel. Olive's voice attempts to maintain the secrecy, but he drops more and more clues as the novel progresses. Enishte is impressed with Olive's good will at Elegant's funeral. Enishte also knows Olive is the artist most supportive of the secret book; however, these are both deceptions to gain Enishte's favor. Olive simply wants recognition as the best artist, and he knows that Enishte presently carries more favor with the Sultan than Master Osman.

The murderer is restless, walking the streets and going to the abandoned Kalenderi dervish lodge, where he cleans compulsively. The murderer is paranoid of being discovered as a murderer and terrified of the Erzurumis. He goes to the coffeehouse and draws pictures for the storyteller so his fellow artists will not think he is conceited. He laughs along with everyone as the coffeehouse storyteller makes fun of the fundamentalist group, but he fears they will destroy the workshop. He murders Elegant to keep him from telling the Erzurumi congregation that Enishte's secret book is heretical. The murderer does not feel that committed to the book, but he is afraid for his own life and does not want the workshop to end. However, given the current circumstances, he considers an offer to join the workshop at Hindustan, which provides an escape route to leave his fellow artists at the climax of the novel.



Olive is religious and spiritual, but since he aspires to be a Kalenderi dervish, he is also a little bit of a "bad boy." He respects the old masters of Shiraz and Herat in a way that borders on idolatry. He is sure that he does not have his own signature or style, either in his art or his murder. Olive is in love with Shekure. He hopes to marry Shekure, but his letters to her are barely mentioned in the novel, and he acts more like a stalker than a lover. He walks by her house to spy on her. When he goes to confront Enishte about the last illustration in the book, he goes through her things when he finds that Shekure is not at home. The murderer is jealous of Black, both for the likelihood that he will marry Shekure, and for the attention Enishte gives Black.

Olive needs to see the last illustration. Enishte has given the project an air of mystery by concealing all but the portion each artist is currently illustrating; therefore, Olive cannot be sure about Elegant's assertions. If Elegant had been telling the truth, then Olive has the problem of having murdered for no good reason. If Elegant was trying to scare or manipulate Olive, then he feels the murder is justified, but that scenario has new problems. Olive is troubled by the possibility that he sinned by contributing to the illustration, as well as the likelihood that the Erzurumis will destroy the workshop.

Olive is tempted by the last illustration. He attempts to draw his self-portrait in the space meant for the portrait of the Sultan, showing him at the center of the world. Olive is frustrated that he is not able to achieve realism similar to what Enishte describes of the Venetian portraits. The murderer's anguish over this portrait highlights the theme of the meaning of art and the difficulties representative art faces in an Islamic society. He laments that it will take centuries to catch up to the Venetians in this art form. However, Olive knows that will never happen, and it damages his pride to think that the Venetians are better than the Ottomans in any way.

Enishte

When Black learns the book-making arts from his uncle as a child, all the workshop apprentices begin calling Black's uncle Enishte. In addition to assisting with book making, Enishte works as an ambassador to Venice for the Sultan. On one trip to Venice, he is almost killed. On another trip, he becomes enamored with the portraits and other artwork that is flourishing everywhere in that city. He returns to Istanbul certain that the Sultan should have his portrait made. Enishte arranges for a Venetian to paint the Sultan's portrait, which the Sultan then has Master Osman copy. Enishte and the Sultan compromise with the idea of concealing a new portrait and other illustrations in a book. The book is intended to celebrate the one-thousandth year of the Muslim calendar, Hegira. The Sultan allots plenty of money for the creation of this book, which must be kept secret. The artists work at home, so they can secretly visit Enishte and work on the illustrations for the book. Enishte knows the artists make fun of him and the way he talks endlessly about portraiture and perspective.

Enishte is not rich, but a well-to-do, middle-class man. He has enough money to build one of the first two-story houses in Istanbul but does not brag about it. He has built it as a remedy for his arthritis. Enishte adores his daughter and grandsons. He does not



approve of anyone for his daughter, so Shekure threatens to kill herself to be allowed to marry the soldier. He is delighted when she returns home. Enishte is not motivated to help Shekure obtain a divorce because he does not want her and her children to leave him. Enishte gives conditional approval of Black before he dies. Black must finish the book.

Enishte does not believe the art he is creating is problematic. He knows that things are going to change, one way or another. Enishte explains to the murderer that art is a blending of styles of different artists and different cities, and that this is a vital part of what art is. His pride encourages him to take advantage of the current relaxed climate to create the book he desires. When he visits Heaven after his death, he retains a clear conscience about his work. God confirms to Enishte that He rules over the East and the West.

Master Osman

Master Osman is the Head Illuminator of the Sultan's book-arts workshop. He is old and does not like change. He despises Enishte for convincing the Sultan to make Osman copy a Venetian's portrait of the Sultan and for convincing the artists to betray Osman by working on the secret book. He looks forward to blindness as his reward for a lifetime of hard work. Master Osman senses that the workshop to which he has devoted his life is ending. He relishes the opportunity to spend hours on end in the Inner Treasury, quickly forgetting about the objective of looking for clues to the murderer's identity. He looks upon the legendary art of the old masters as if it is the last thing he will see, which, of course, it is.

Master Osman decides to blind himself for several reasons. While looking at the old books, he realizes that his workshop never came close to the artistry of the old masters. He has lost his passion for painting while working for the Sultan. Master Osman also feels betrayed by his artists, who not only worked on Enishte's book for a few coins or to gain favor but also degraded their artistry by taking on other, less pure projects to earn more money. Master Osman is also so inspired by the art of the old masters, to which he has dedicated his entire life to imitate, that he does not want to see anything after viewing the old masters' works. He wants to be like his hero, Bihzad, and retain his honor instead of changing his style.

Butterfly

Butterfly is one of the Sultan's master miniaturists working under Master Osman and with Enishte on the secret book. He is very passionate about illustrating in any form he can. He believes that by being so talented, he is entitled to fame and fortune. Butterfly works to prove he loves illustrating more than the other master artists and is very proud. He is not opposed to the Erzurumis, but he does not necessarily agree with the group, either. Butterfly is hotheaded and jealous over who would assume leadership of the workshop after Master Osman, providing enough motive that he is a likely suspect for



the murder. His primary motive, however, is to please others. This influences his art so much that he thinks of his audience and the old masters when he illustrates rather than the illustration itself.

Stork

Stork is another of the Sultan's master miniaturists. He is the only one of the artists to have seen battle. Stork respects the old masters, but he is willing to draw anything for a few coins, including the work on Enishte's book. He also has motive enough to be a likely suspect for the murder. Stork has convinced Enishte that Elegant's work was inferior. Although Enishte agrees, he knows there is no one else available to do the work. Stork is political, aware of the games he must play and expects to become the next Head Illuminator.

Elegant

Elegant is the Sultan's artist who does the gilding. He only works on border ornamentation and decoration, not illustrating. He becomes involved with the Erzurumis, and this affects his relationship with the other artists. Elegant is the first to see the last illustration of Enishte's book, although it is not complete. He is horrified by what he sees, believing it sinful. He fears going to Hell for it. He confides in Olive, seeking consolation and an ally to turn against the book. When he is killed instead, he believes there is a conspiracy against his long-standing traditions, the way he sees the world, and even the whole religion.

Esther

Esther is a large, older Jewish woman who sells fine linens and other clothing and goods as a disguise for her more interesting work as a letter carrier and matchmaker. Esther loves to deliver news. She is illiterate, but she is also excellent at reading people. This has made her successful as a matchmaker, and the women she matches treat her well. Hasan pays Esther to not only deliver his daily letters to Shekure, but also to first bring him any other letters from or to Shekure. Esther has him read the letters to her in return, which helps her stay involved in things so she can exercise her influence. However, Esther starts to doubt whether she is doing the right thing when Hasan starts making threats to force Shekure to return to her first husband's home. She takes pride in playing her part in helping Shekure.

Hasan

Hasan is Shekure's brother-in-law and Uncle to Orhan and Shevket. As time passes and his brother does not return, Hasan desperately wants to take his brother's place as Shekure's husband; however, he acts inappropriately toward her while they share the same home. When money gets tight, he dismisses their slave and makes Shekure do



all the housework and shopping. This treatment ensures that Shekure can never truly love him back. After Shekure leaves to live with her father, Hasan sends love letters to her every day and often threatens her to force her to return. Hasan presents a legitimate threat to Shekure and Black's marriage. Hasan is thrilled when Shekure returns to his home, despite her better judgment. The circumstance under which she leaves enrages Hasan, and he intends to get revenge.

Hayriye

Hayriye is a slave for Enishte, Shekure, Orhan and Shevket. She does the cooking, takes the children to the public baths, goes to the market and does other errands. After Enishte begins taking her into his bed, she begins to entertain the notion that she can become the lady of the house.

Orhan

Orhan is Shekure's youngest son. He is six years old. Orhan is young enough that he does not remember his father. Shekure uses him to test Black as a potential father. Black frightens Orhan somewhat. However, he warms to his new father, impressed by Black's wounds.

Shevket

Shevket is Shekure's oldest son. He is seven years old. He still remembers his father and would much prefer to stay with his uncle Hasan. Shekure uses Shevket as well, encouraging him to show Black the house of the hanged Jew and having him deliver the scented, blank sheet of paper as part of her love game. Shevket does not like Black. When his mother finally accepts that her husband is dead, Shevket blames Black for his father's death. When Shekure returns to Hasan's home out of fear, Shevket will not leave until he is allowed to take Hasan's ruby-handled dagger with him.

The Sultan

Sultan Murat III is the ruler of the Ottoman Empire. He is at a stage in his life past seeking respect and immortality by making splendid books and is beginning to regret the illustrations. However, he lets Enishte talk him into the secret book in order to give it to the Venetians as a symbol of his power.

Head Treasurer

The Head Treasure is in charge of the Sultan's expenses. He is also the person closest to the Sultan.



Commander of the Imperial Guard

The Commander of the Imperial Guard performs the Sultan's executions. He administers tortures and interrogates suspects.

Storyteller

The Storyteller capitalizes on the coffeehouse crowd laughing at a copy of one of the illustrations for Enishte's book. He begins to have the artists make a rough drawing and provide a few details every night. He uses the drawings and details to weave entertaining stories in which he denigrates the fanatical religious sect led by Nusret Hoja of Erzurum.



Objects/Places

Erzurumis

Nusret is a preacher from Erzurum, who claims he is descended directly from Muhammad. He has made his name during the difficult war-torn and inflationary times by blaming Istanbul's catastrophes on the deplorable behavior of the people of Istanbul. He rebukes his audiences for disregarding the Koran, showing tolerance toward Christians, drinking coffee, selling wine, playing musical instruments and all manner of depravity. He is a gifted orator inciting his followers to extreme actions. The Erzurumis are a threat to the workshop, especially with the rumors of what the artists are doing for Enishte's book. The Erzurumis destroy the coffeehouse and kill the storyteller.

Coffeehouse

Men often gather at the coffeehouse to listen to the storyteller, who uses hastily-drawn illustrations to enhance his tales. Most of the miniaturists go there every night, even though coffee is condemned as evil by the Erzurumis.

Storyteller's Illustrations

The storyteller has the artists make rough illustrations for his storytelling performances. The artists copy the drawings they make for Enishte. The illustrations of a dog, a tree, a gold coin, Death personified, a horse, Satan, two dervishes, a woman and a page splattered with red all become props in different stories the storyteller performs at the coffeehouse throughout the novel.

Book of Festivities

The Sultan's book-making workshop is preparing this book to recount the 52-day circumcision ceremonies of his son. The book contains over 200 illustrations, and in all but one, the Sultan is illustrated in his royal enclosure, sitting, watching the festivities. In one illustration, he stands to evoke surprise.

Enishte's Secret Book

Enishte is having a secret book made, the purpose of which is to conceal a portrait of the Sultan in the Frankish style. The book is intended for the Venetian Doge in the thousandth year of the Hegira to show the power of the Islamic Sultan.



Murder Picture From The Story of Hüsrev and Shirin

The murderer describes a picture that depicts Shiruye finding his way in the dark to kill his father. Shirin sleeps peacefully while her husband's blood flows.

Black's Illustration to Shekure

As a youth, Black copies an illustration from the story of Hüsrev and Shirin depicting the scene in which Shirin sees Hüsrev's portrait and falls in love with him. Black replaces the figures of Hüsrev and Shirin with himself and Shekure (although no one but she would know) and places their names below the figures. Shekure keeps the illustration, but blots out the names to make it look like dribbled ink and flowers. She returns the illustration to Black after his long absence from Istanbul, thus renewing his love for her.

Mongol Ink pot

Black gives Enishte a gift of a Mongol ink pot when he returns to Istanbul. Black says it is only for red ink.

House of the Hanged Jew

The house of the hanged Jew is a deserted house across from Enishte's home.

Hasan's Red Sword

Hasan has a red sword, which is rumored to sever anything it touches. The weapon beheads the murderer.

Hasan's Ruby-Studded Dagger

Hasan also has a ruby-handled dagger. Shevket will not leave his uncle's home without it. Black borrows it to confront the murderer but gets wounded with it instead. The murderer escapes with it. Hasan sees his dagger on the murderer and believes the dagger is evidence that Olive helped Black steal Shekure.

Hasan's Home

Hasan's home is the two-room house he shared with his brother, Shekure, the children and his father. After Shekure leaves, it becomes a dark crypt.



Enishte's home

Enishte builds a big, two-story home to help with his arthritis. There are four rooms upstairs and a large courtyard. Shekure shares a room with her sons. Enishte has the room with the blue door.

Book of Kings

Many different versions of the Book of Kings influence the characters of the novel. However, Safavid Shah Tahmasp sends a spectacular copy containing over 200 illustrations about 25 years before the beginning of the novel. The Sultan's artists, including Master Osman get a peek at the copy before the Head Treasurer locks it away in the Inner Treasury.

Infidel Artists

Because idols and idolatry are forbidden in the Koran, representative imagery in Islamic countries is restricted to only certain contexts. Most of the artists in the novel insist that to be appropriate in their religious context, their figurative art must accompany and represent a specific story. The Infidel artists (from Europe), on the other hand, do not feel the same religious restriction and draw whatever they like from whatever point of view they like. To the Islamic artists, this is the path to idolatry. However, the characters in the novel are aware of the power and beauty of such realistic art.

The Golden Horn

The Golden Horn is the area of Istanbul that serves as a harbor.

Bosphorus

The Bosphorus is the river that flows into the Golden Horn harbor.

Courtesan Method

Black and Master Osman use this method to look for hidden signatures or style (or flaws) in the illustrations the master artists made for Enishte's book to determine the identity of the murderer.

Abandoned Kalenderi Dervish Lodge

The Kalenderi Dervish lodge has been closed for many years. The murderer goes there when he feels restless because he identifies with the Kalenderi Dervishes.

Themes

Art as Idolatry

As art flourishes in Europe during the Renaissance, its influence begins to reach the Ottomans. Some, such as Enishte, find the beautiful life-like images irresistible. Others, however, recognize these images as idolatry, which is forbidden by the Koran. As a compromise, for a time, Islamic illustration is a natural outgrowth of the intricately decorated borders of books. The stories, text and calligraphy are the most important aspects of book making, but miniatures depicting the scenes of the stories add to the beauty of the book. Intent is very important. Illustrations hiding in books are different than portraits on the walls and ceilings, as if poised for worship.

The miniatures, though still hidden in books, become more and more intricate and realistic, evoking an emotional response beyond the stories they illustrate. The artists also feel driven to illustrate the world as God sees it. Some book lovers begin to understand the power of art to influence how people view the world. For example, Enishte says, "A great painter does not content himself by affecting us with his masterpieces; ultimately, he succeeds in changing the landscape of our minds." (Chapter 28, *I Will Be Called a Murderer*, p. 161). This power can be dangerous, tempting the artist away from a true religious path.

A safer path is to strictly follow the forms artists have been imitating for years. These types of illustrations show no hint of the identity of the artist. Artists must conscientiously stick to the meaning of the accompanying text and follow the accepted forms to keep from crossing the line between embellishment and representative art. Crossing that line intentionally is a certain path to Hell, at least according to the most fundamental Islamic religious followers. However, the line is not well defined and is open to interpretation. The novel makes a case for representative art not being idolatry when Enishte dies and meets God. Enishte asks the question that has started to trouble him, but God's answer is final. God rules the East and the West. This implies that both types of artistry are acceptable.

Some artists might argue that the safe path is not really art. True talent does not come from perfectly depicting a story, rather, it comes from introducing something undefined into the picture's subject matter. Master Osman has lost his passion for painting by sticking to the safe path. He understands that the illustrations created by his workshop do not invoke the intense emotional response that the illustrations locked away in the Inner Treasury do. Master Osman also resigns himself to God's justice, thinking that if his passion for art is wrong, he will just have to take his medicine for it.

Olive believes that drawing his self-portrait with its positioning and perspective is worse than murder; however, he could not resist the temptation. He wanted to see himself at the center of the world. He wanted people who might see the picture to bow down before him. Giving into this temptation with this intent is what truly makes him evil, the



act for which he can find no redemption. The murderer summarizes this problem when he says, "Elegant ... believed correctly that portraiture was the greatest of sins, and would be the downfall of Muslim painting." (Chapter 58, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 391).

Joy of Seeing as a Substitute for Joy of Life

Miniaturists work hard to master their craft, starting at a young age and enduring beatings, long hours, dim light and other tortures. Many go blind from of their habits. Suggested remedies, such as avoiding sunlight, gain wide acceptance as preventative measures, but nothing seems to work. Master Bihzad's mentor, Seyyit Mirek stumbles upon an approach to blindness that artists find consoling. Blindness, he argues, is the only way to finally discover Allah's vision of this realm. A miniaturist could only share that vision after a lifetime of training his hands and memory.

The reward that Mirek receives for his lifetime of hard work is access to his sultan's treasury, where he stares at the legendary Herat masterpieces for three days and three nights straight. He goes blind during this orgy of looking at art and never speaks or paints again. Master Osman mirrors that fate, joyously viewing the Sultan's treasured books as if nothing else is worth seeing. However, Master Osman blinds himself intentionally, like Master Bihzad, because he does not want to face change. Before he blinds himself, however, Master Osman reflects on how painting could transform intense desire into a love of God and how God sees the world. This suggests that the desire is too intense and too frightening, and he shies away from experiencing it.

The chapter for which the novel is titled, "I Am Red" addresses the theme of seeing versus living as well. In the story told in this chapter, two blind artists argue about what it means to be a color. Having experienced a lifetime of sight before going blind, the blind artists understand the color red. They wonder how someone born to blindness could comprehend a color. The answer is that one can experience color through a variety of senses. The artist who says this recognizes that this is the experience of life. They largely ignore experience during their lives, but after losing the sense they found most important, they start to realize the importance of other sensual experiences.

The blind artists discuss a quote from the Koran that appears several times in the novel. The quote is "The blind and the seeing are not equal." (Koran, "The Creator," 19, in the novel on p. viii). The novel suggests that through work and lack of love and passion, the artists fail to live life to the fullest. Once deprived of sight, blind miniaturists realize what they have missed. Shekure says that painters substitute the joy of seeing for the joy of living because they can draw a smile, but they are incapable of depicting the happiness in life. She suggests that art can never truly represent what is most important in life.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Style and signature are recurring topics of conversation in the novel. The murderer asks early in the novel, "Does a miniaturist, ought a miniaturist, have his own personal style?"



A use of color, a voice all his own? (Chapter 4, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 17). Answering this question is one of the main ideas that drive this novel. Butterfly answers Master Osman's test of a true miniaturist with what he believes is the "right" answer or at least the answer that would make his Head Illuminator proud. Butterfly says that style and signature are equivalent to vulgarity and greed. Artists learn that signatures and personal style are nothing more than flaws. One of Butterfly's stories expands on the idea of a flaw in an otherwise perfect painting. The sultan viewing the painting in question seems to see reality itself in the illustration, and this possibility terrifies him. To avoid this terror and other uncomfortable emotions, artists for generations repeat the maxim that imperfection begets style. Therefore style and signatures are abominations.

There is a practical reason for the miniaturists not to have personal style. If each artist contributing to a book draws a completely different style of illustration, the reader would be distracted by the inconsistency. In addition, the illustrations would begin to cross the line from simple decorative border ornamentation to representative art, which is a problem in Islam. The workshop must therefore insist on a collective approach to art. Since there is no purpose for illustrations other than to decorate the books of histories and stories commissioned by the Sultan and other wealthy patrons, no one creates art alone. It must be a group effort, because no one could complete a book alone in a reasonable amount of time.

The Sultan separates and isolates Olive, Stork, Butterfly and Elegant from the other workshop artists so they can more readily work on the secret book. This removes the context in which they can share their art. Being isolated also heightens jealousy and feelings of envy and favoritism. All of these reasons destroy the collective nature of the workshop necessary to achieve a consistent style.

As European art gains realism and its influence stretches throughout the world, a new dimension arrives in the issue of style and signature. European art includes personal characteristics, providing the ability to distinguish a particular person, tree or dog from others with the help of a painting. This is recognition of individuality. Individuality is repressed for generations for religious and cultural reasons, both in painting content and technique. Artists must stick to the meaning of the stories they illustrate and the workshop style or suffer beatings, or worse fates such as banishment, blinding and death. Yet, this type of painting lures artists with its passion and power. This individuality represents a key difference between most cultures of the East and West. Istanbul, and by extension, the Ottoman empire, is caught in the middle.

Style

Point of View

This novel is presented in first person, but the narrator changes with every chapter. Black is the most frequent narrator. Shekure, the murderer and Enishte are all also frequent narrators. The illustrations, as given voice by the storyteller, also appear as narrators. The different narrators are like individual dabs of paint in a painting, each providing one piece of a bigger picture. The effect is something like looking at a picture of the world in the novel. The point of view is not quite omniscient, but because the point of view sometimes shifts within one scene, it is nearly omniscient, showing different character's emotions for the same situation. This point of view also provides two different looks at the afterlife, which provide important reinforcement of the religious significance of the novel.

The novel includes long passages of dialog. The main themes are presented as discussions between the characters. Using many different narrators provides a more complete story, with each person presenting a different piece of the back-stories, as well as their perspective of the plot. This style of narration allows the intimacy of first person narration, providing the details of each narrator's emotions and assumptions about the events in the novel. The perspective provided by the different narrators mirrors the theme of art. It is a different technique to show different perspectives, similar to what Enishte wants to try visually in his book.

Setting

The novel is set in Istanbul in the winter of 1591. The Ottoman Sultan Murat III is more interested in miniatures and books than previous or later sultans. Under his patronage, the artistic community in Istanbul flourishes. The artists of the Timurid Dynasty, as well as the great Persian masters of the Safavid Empire, heavily influence most of these artists. The Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp sends the Ottomans a gift of a magnificent rendition of the Book of Kings, which continues to influence the Sultan's artists long after they see it.

Many different locales in the streets of Istanbul serve as settings for different scenes in the novel. A wide variety of different locations provides a detailed look at Istanbul of the times, ranging from the dry well at the fire-ravaged area where Elegant is murdered, to Black's barber shop, to the streets and the courts where Black obtains Shekure's divorce.

The coffeehouse is the setting where the storyteller presents his stories. The murderer returns to the coffeehouse frequently as well, hoping to remove any suspicion his fellow artists may feel toward him. The entire workshop of artisans frequent the coffeehouse for the stimulating drinks and company. The storyteller's stories incite the Erzurumis,



who are already inclined to think coffee drinking is evil. The coffeehouse is the setting where Black begins his quest to confront Olive before Master Osman can spoil the murder investigation.

Enishte's house is the setting for much of the novel. The artists visit Enishte at his home and work on their secret illustrations there. When Black returns, he spends his days in Enishte's room, which has a blue door. Shekure spies on Black from a closet in the adjoining room. Esther visits Shekure in the kitchen of the home. Shekure cuddles with her sons in her room. In the summer, a downstairs room serves as the painting room. This is where Shekure hides Enishte after his murder to keep her sons from discovering the crime until after she and Black marry. The home has a large courtyard with a gate, where Black and Hasan argue. In the courtyard, a lone pomegranate tree shades the window to Shekure's room, the setting of Black's first glimpse of Shekure's face after his absence. The house of the hanged Jew is across from Enishte's house.

The murder investigation takes Black to the Sultan's palace, including the Sultan's Private Garden and the Inner Treasury. The Inner Treasury is a building with many rooms, stuffed with books and an enormous collection of other gifts and treasures. The room where Master Osman and Black look through the old books has a strange light with a reddish hue. Olive meets his fate outside the beloved book arts workshop of the sultan.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel changes depending on who is the current narrator. Most of the language includes a rich vocabulary and sentence structure that is often complicated. On the other hand, the dialog between the characters is generally straightforward. The Dog in chapter three reminds the reader about the suspension of disbelief, alluding to the voice of a corpse and Black using words he "couldn't possibly know." (Chapter 3, I Am A Dog, p. 11). The language gives the historical context of the novel credibility.

The author makes liberal use of metaphor and artistic descriptions to add to the beauty of the novel. This language contributes to the impression that the novel is one big painting showing the world of late 16th century Istanbul, at the end of the time of illuminations and miniatures. Color, light and darkness all have a significant place in the novel, enhancing the settings and reinforcing the theme of the meaning of art. The color red has a special significance. It is woven through the fabric of the novel like an elaborate ornamental design of a Persian rug. This has religious significance if one considers that Islamic art is known for repetitive patterns, which pay homage to the infinite nature of Allah.

Structure

The novel contains fifty-nine chapters, most of which are only two or three pages. The frequent chapter breaks allows for changes in narration to give a point of view similar to,



but not exactly omniscient. The short chapters keep the novel fast paced. These frequent chapter breaks also allow the reader to follow the different threads of the plot all at once. However, the novel is so rich with detail that it moves slowly at times as the reader absorbs all its beauty.

The chapters representing the coffeehouse storyteller's stories intensify the tension between the artists and the Erzurumis. Esther's chapters provide an outside point of view to the developing romance between Shekure and Black, but they also introduce the problem of Hasan, who does not get a chance to narrate his point of view. Some of the chapters include the letters between Shekure and Black, which gives the novel even more realism.

The plot is divided between the developing romance between Shekure and Black, and the mystery of solving Elegant's murder. Black is involved in both plots, which intersect with the second murder, that of Enisthe, because Shekure must get married before anyone discovers her father's death. The two plots intersect again when Black fails to return home because of the murder investigation, and Shekure flees to Hasan. Hasan's attempts to get Shekure back to his house represent a subplot. After Shekure goes to his house, then leaves after Black's attack on the house, Hasan is motivated to seek revenge and finds it by beheading the murderer. This subplot helps complete the murder mystery and paves the way for Shekure and Black to have a happy marriage.



Quotes

"My death conceals an appalling conspiracy against our religion, our traditions and the way we see the world. Open your eyes, discover why the enemies of the life in which you believe, of the life you're living, and of Islam, have destroyed me. Learn why one day they might do the same to you."

Chapter 1, I am A Corpse, p.5

"Over time, jealousy becomes an element as indispensable as paint in the life of the master artist."

Chapter 4, I Will Be Called a Murderer, p. 17

"The indifference of the painting's beauty and of the world to your death, the fact of your being totally alone despite the presence of your wife, this is the inescapable meaning that strikes you."

Chapter 4, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 18

"Painting is the silence of thought and the music of sight."

Chapter 11, p. 59

"Before the art of illumination there was blackness and afterward there will also be blackness. Through our colors, paints, art and love, we remember that Allah has commanded us to 'See!' To know is to remember that you've seen. To see is to know without remembering. Thus, painting is remembering the blackness. The great masters, who shared a love of painting and perceived that color and sight arose from darkness, longed to return to Allah's blackness by means of color. Artists without memory neither remember Allah nor his blackness. All great masters, in their work, seek that profound void within color and outside time."

Chapter 14, I Am Called "Olive", p. 76

"It's not experience of subject matter that makes us masters, it's never having experienced it that makes us masters." (Spoken by the miniaturist drawing Death)

Chapter 24, I Am Death, p. 126

"Is the measure of a miniaturist's talent the ability to depict everything with the same perfection as the great masters or the ability to introduce into the picture subject matter which no one else can see?" said the sure-handed, stunning-eyed, brilliant illustrator, and although he himself knew the answer to this question, he remained quite reserved."

Chapter 24, I Am Death, p. 126

"So that my feelings and desires might be rightfully understood, I must presently lay bare the meaning of this distinction between truth and sincerity that I've come to know for the first time: How expressing one's reality in words, as truthful as they might be, goads one to insincerity."

Chapter 27, I Am Called Black, p. 152



"I recounted this tale as an example of how a miniaturist could suffer great agony for unwittingly forsaking his faith under the spell of his art."

Chapter 28, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 157

"Over long years, as we gaze at book after book and illustration after illustration, we come to learn the following: A great painter does not content himself by affecting us with his masterpieces; ultimately, he succeeds in changing the landscape of our minds. One a miniaturist's artistry enters our souls this way, it becomes the criterion for beauty of our world..." (Enishte to murderer)

Chapter 28, I Will Be Called a Murderer, p. 161

"What attracts us to writing, illustrating and painting is bound up in this fear of retribution. It's not only for money and favor that we kneel before our work from morning to evening, continuing by candlelight through the night to the point of blindness and sacrifice ourselves for pictures and books, it's to escape the prattle of others, to escape the community, but in contrast to this passion to create, we also want those we've forsaken to see and appreciate the inspired pictures we've made - and if they should call us sinners? Oh, the suffering this brings upon the illustrator of genuine talent! Yet, genuine painting is hidden in the agony no one sees and no one creates. It's contained in the picture, which on first sight they'll say is bad, incomplete, blasphemous or heretical. A genuine miniaturist knows he must reach that point, yet at the same time, he fears the loneliness that awaits him there. Who would accede to such a frightful nerve-wracking existence? By blaming himself before anyone else does, the artist believes he'll be spared what he's feared for years..." (Enishte to murderer)

Chapter 29, I Am Your Beloved Uncle, p. 166

"To deny God's existence, victims of Satan maintain that God is not visible to us,' said the blind miniaturist who'd rendered the horse.

'Yet, He appears to those who can see,' said the other master. 'It is for this reason that the Koran states that the blind and the seeing are not equal.'"

Chapter 31, I am Red, p. 188

"Love isn't suffering for the sake of suffering, but a means to reach You, is it not?"

Chapter 34, I, Shekure, p. 214

"My paintings reveal what the mind, not the eye, sees. But painting, as you know quite well, is a feast for the eyes. If you combine these two thoughts, my world will emerge.

That is:

ALIF: Painting brings to life what the mind sees, as a feast for the eyes.

LAM: What the eye sees in the world enters the painting to the degree that it serves the mind.

MIM: Consequently, beauty is the eye discovering in our world what the mind already knows."

Chapter 46, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 281



"If all men went to Heaven, no one would ever be frightened, and the world and its governments could never function on virtue alone; for in our world evil is as necessary as virtue and sin as necessary as rectitude."

Chapter 47, I, Satan, p. 288

"I was about to tell myself that regardless of whether the illustration was made today or a hundred years ago, whether it's a depiction of war or love, what the artist of absolute faith actually paints and conveys is a battle with his will and his love for painting; I was going to declare further that the miniaturist actually paints his own patience..."

Chapter 49, I Am Called Black, p. 301

"There was a time when Allah looked upon the world in all its uniqueness, and believing in the beauty of what he saw, bequeathed his creation to us, his servants. The duty of illustrators and of those who, loving art, gaze upon the world, is to remember the magnificence that Allah beheld and left to us. The greatest masters in each generation of painters, expending their lives and toiling until blind, strove with great effort and inspiration to attain and record the wondrous dream that Allah commanded us to see."

Chapter 49, I Am Called Black, p. 303

"To see that the pictures in the second of the legendary books, made when he was blind, were simpler and purer, while the colors in the first volume were more lively and invigorating, reminded me that the memory of the blind exposes the merciless simplicity of life but also deadens its vigor."

Chapter 51, It Is I, Master Osman, p. 312

"Had he sent this needle so all would know that the great artist was blinded of his own volition or, as was rumored for a time, to make the statement that whosoever beheld the pages of this book even once would no longer wish to see anything else in this world?"

Chapter 51, It Is I, Master Osman, p. 323

"'Men like us have no choice but to try to see the world the way God does and to resign ourselves to His justice,' he said. 'And here, among these pictures and possessions, I have the strong sensation that these two things are beginning to converge: As we approach God's vision of the world, His justice approaches us.'" (Master Osman to Black)

Chapter 52, I Am Called Black, p. 325

"'If we, the society of miniaturists, learn to serve foremost our own talent and art instead of Our Sultan who provides us with work, we shall have earned entry through the Gates of Heaven.'" (Master Osman to Black)

Chapter 52, I Am Called Black, p. 335

"'Because,' I added, 'the art of painting only ends up condemning and punishing itself when it derives its strength from the desire to condemn and punish the evils of life rather than from the painter's own skill, love of his art and desire to embrace Allah...regardless of whether it's the preacher from Erzurum or Satan himself that's denounced.'" (Butterfly



to Black)

Chapter 55, I Am Called "Butterfly", p.359

"It is nothing that could be accepted by Our Sultan, illuminators like us bound to the old masters or by Muslims bound to their faith,' I said and fell silent." (Olive to Black)

Chapter 57, I Am Called "Olive" p 377

"Thanks to your Enishte, we've all learned the meaning of portrait," I said. 'God willing, one day, we'll fearlessly tell the story of our own lives the way we actually live them."

(Olive to Black)

Chapter 58, I Will Be Called a Murderer, p. 397

"The old masters of Herat tried to depict the world the way God saw it, and to conceal their individuality they never signed their names. You, however, are condemned to signing your names to conceal your lack of individuality." (Olive to Stork, Butterfly, and Black)

Chapter 58, I Will Be Called a Murderer, p. 400

"It seemed as if this moment of observation went on and on and I realized seeing had become a variety of memory. I was reminded of what I thought when staring for hours at a beautiful picture: If you stare long enough your mind enters the time of the painting."

Chapter 58, I Will Be Called A Murderer, p. 405

"In actuality, we don't look for smiles in pictures of bliss, but rather, for the happiness in life itself. Painters know this, but this is precisely what they cannot depict. That's why they substitute the joy of seeing for the joy of life."

Chapter 59, I, Shekure, p. 413



Topics for Discussion

Discuss storytelling in the novel. The novel is full of legends, both of the master artists of the previous two hundred and fifty years and of the stories that have been passed down for generations. The storyteller's performances are also an important part of the novel. How is storytelling an art form? How does it relate to other art forms? What is the religious significance of storytelling in the novel?

Discuss the shifting point of view in the novel. How does this technique contribute to the meaning of the novel? How might the novel be different if the author had used a third-person omniscient point of view?

How are women treated in the novel? How does Shekure make that work for her (or not) to get what she wants? How are Esther and Hayriye, the other two women in the novel able to get what they want, considering their status as women?

Discuss the use of the color red in the novel. What is the symbolic use of red? Darkness and light also frequently appear in the novel? How are they used as colors? How are they used as symbols?

Discuss the repeated references to blindness, both in legends and in the events of the story. What point is the author making regarding vision? In what ways are the blind and sighted not equal? Does the author suggest that one is better than the other?

Discuss the meaning of art in the novel. Elegant says at the beginning of the novel that this story is like the Koran in that it would be impossible to depict it with illustrations. Why would he think that? Would it be possible to create illustrations for this story? What kinds of things are appropriate to illustrate, according to Elegant and the other followers of the Erzurumis? What are the other characters' beliefs about the meaning of art? What is its place in life? What is its place in religion? What about art as a career? Can creating art for a living truly be art, or does the need for money degrade the artistic process?

Discuss the methods the master artists used to train the apprentices. How did the combination of beatings and love contribute to artistic talent? How do these methods create a workshop style?

Discuss the preference of the novel's artists to use standard forms for their drawings. How does this mitigate the religious prohibition of idols? Is it still artistic? Name some examples of art in modern-day western culture that use standard forms. What is the purpose of this type of art in modern times?

Discuss how time is used in the novel, especially remembered time and frozen time. How does this relate to memory? What is the importance of memory in the novel? How does this relate to storytelling?



How are the characters of the novel influenced by greed? Name three characters who are not motivated by greed. Name three characters who are motivated by greed? In what ways does greed affect these characters' actions?

Discuss style and how it relates to individuality. How do the characters of the novel solve this issue? What are other possible solutions that address all the complications?