

How do descriptions of setting contribute to your understanding of the character's situation in this passage?

His feet were cold, and each time he moved his numbed legs a little he heard the desolate grating of pebbles under his shoes. But the sense of desolation was really inside him. Never before had he stayed motionless for so long, lying in wait behind a ridge that overlooked the highway.

Daylight was fading. Fearful or simply troubled, he brought the rifle's stock to his cheek. Soon it would be dusk, and he would not be able to see the sights of the weapon in the fading light. "He's sure to come by before it's too dark to take aim," his father had said. "Just be patient and wait."

Slowly the gun barrel swept over some patches of the half-thawed snow towards the wild pomegranates scattered through the brush-covered space on both sides of the road. For perhaps the hundredth time he thought that this was a fateful day in his life. Then the gun barrel swung back again to where it had been. What in his mind he had called a fateful day was no more than those patches of snow and those wild pomegranates that seemed to have been waiting since midday to see what he would do.

He thought, soon night will fall and it will be too dark to shoot. He wished that dusk would come swiftly, that night would race on after it, so that he could run away from this accursed ambush. It was the second time in his life that he had lain in wait to take revenge, but the man he must kill was the same one, so that this ambush was really an extension of the other.

He became aware again of his icy feet, and he moved his legs as if to keep the cold from rising in his body, but it had long since reached his belly, his chest and even his head. He had the feeling that bits of his brain had frozen, like those patches of snow along the sides of the road.

He felt that he could not shape a clear thought. He had only a vague animosity for the wild pomegranates and the patches of snow, and sometimes he told himself that were it not for them, he would have given up his vigil long ago. But there they were, motionless witnesses that had kept him from going away.

How is conflict developed in this passage?

All these memories that he forced himself to entertain wearied him, and he tried not to think of anything. On either side of the road stretched long strips of fallows, and again nameless waste lands. Somewhere on the right he saw a watermill, then, farther off, a flock of sheep, and a church with its graveyard. He passed by them without turning his head, but that did not prevent him from remembering the portions of the Code that dealt with mills, flocks, churches and graves. "Priests have no part in the blood feud." "Among the graves of a family or a clan, no stranger's tomb may lie."

He was tempted to say, "That's enough," but could not find the strength to say it. He lowered his head and went on walking at the same pace. In the distance he could see the roof of an inn, further on a convent, then another flock of sheep, and beyond, smoke and perhaps a settlement; there were centuries-old laws for all these things. There was no escaping them. No one had ever succeeded in escaping them. And yet. . . . "Priests have no part in the blood feud," he repeated, citing one of the best known clauses of the Code. He was thinking of that as he was going along the stretch of road from which the convent was clearly visible, and the thought that only if he had been a priest would he have been spared by the *Kanun* got mixed up with thinking about nuns and the relations that

people said they had with the young priests, and with the idea of possibly having an affair with a nun himself, but he suddenly remembered that nuns cropped their hair and he dismissed that fantasy. But I would have had to be a priest, he thought, so as not to be subject to the *Kanun*. But other sections of the Code were in fact applicable to priests, who were exempt only from the provisions that regulated the blood feud.

For a moment he felt as if he were trapped in bird-lime by the bloody part of the *Kanun*. Truly, that was the essential thing, and it was useless to console yourself that everyone was shackled by the same chains. Besides priests, there were numerous other people who escaped the rule of blood-law. He had already thought of that on another occasion. The world was divided into two parts: the one that fell under the blood-law, and the other that was outside that law.

How does this passage convey ideas about the culture of the High Plateau and its effect on the people who live there?

"Gjorg, you're putting it off," his father went on. "Our honor, but yours especially. . . ."

"Two fingers-breadth of honor have been stamped on our forehead by almighty God." In the weeks that followed, Gjorg repeated to himself hundreds of times the words of the Code that his father had recited to him that day. "Whiten or further besmirch your dirty face, as you please. It is up to you to be a man or not."

Am I free? he asked himself as he went upstairs to think about it alone on the *kulla's* second storey. The punishments his father could subject him to for this or that infraction were nothing compared to the risk of losing his honor. Two fingers-breadth of honor on our forehead. He touched his forehead with his hand, as if to find the exact place where his honor might be. And why should it be just there? he wondered. It was only a phrase that went from mouth to mouth and was never quite swallowed. Now at last he had fathomed its meaning. Honor had its seat in the middle of your forehead because that was the place where the bullet must strike your man. "Good shot," the old men said when someone faced his man squarely and hit him right in the forehead. Or "Bad shot" when the bullet pierced the stomach or struck a limb, not to mention the back.

Whenever Gjorg climbed to the upper storey to look at Mehill's shirt, he felt his forehead burning. The bloodstains on the cloth faded more and more. If warm weather came, they would turn yellow. Then people would begin to hand his coffee cup to him and to his kin under the leg. In the eyes of the *Kanun*, he would be a dead man.

There was no way out. Bearing the punishments, or any other sacrifice, would not save him. Coffee below the knee—that frightened him more than anything else—was waiting for him somewhere along the way. Every door was closed to him, except one. "The offense can be atoned for only through the Code," the Code itself said. Only the murder of a member of the *Kryeqyqe* clan could open a door to him. And so, one day last spring, he decided to lie in ambush for his man.

From that moment the whole house sprang to life. The silence that had stifled it was suddenly filled with music. And its grim walls seemed to soften.