

Chronicle of a Death Foretold



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Gabriel García Márquez grew up in the tiny rural town of Aracataca, Colombia, in the hinterlands of northeastern Colombia. He and his parents lived in his maternal grandparents' large ancestral house. His grandfather, Nicolás Márquez, was a colonel who had fought in the War of 1,000 Days, a civil conflict that divided Colombia around the turn of the century, and he often regaled young Gabriel with stories from his past. When Nicolás died, the family moved to Barranquilla, a river port on the coast of the Caribbean. Márquez received a top-notch education, eventually graduating from law school. He became a journalist, reporting for various newspapers as a foreign correspondent. The work took him all over: he lived in Rome, Paris, Barcelona, Bogotá, Caracas, New York City, and Mexico City. Alongside his journalistic efforts, he wrote a handful of short stories and three novels, but it wasn't until 1967—with the publication of his masterpiece, *100 Years of Solitude*—that his fiction won widespread literary acclaim. That novel, a multi-generational epic that crams the entire history of Latin America into the story of Macondo, a small, fictional town, was an instant success, and inaugurated a veritable literary boom in Latin America. (This boom included authors such as Mario Vargas Llosa, Carlos Fuentes, Isabel Allende, and Roberto Bolaño.) After 1967 Márquez turned most of his attention to fiction writing. He went on to publish seven novels—including *Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975) and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985)—two short story collections, and seven nonfiction books. During this latter half of his life he lived in Spain, Mexico City, Paris, and Havana. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. He died in 2014.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical event most relevant to *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is the one on which the novel is based. In 1951, in the small town of Sucre, Colombia, Cayetano Gentile Chimento was murdered by two brothers, who alleged that he had deflowered their sister before her marriage to another man (the man had returned the sister to her parents after discovering, on their wedding night, that she was not a virgin). Cayetano was a friend of the Márquez family; his mother had been a godmother to Gabriel's brother. Márquez immediately became transfixed by the story. However, at the behest of his mother, he vowed not to write about it until Cayetano's mother died. But besides this one murder—a tiny blip in the scheme of

Colombian history—there isn't one historical event that can be singled out as crucial to understanding *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The novel's ahistorical quality is in fact typical of Márquez's work, whose ambiguous settings and magical elements produce a vision of Latin American history that is mythic and universal, rather than strictly factual. With that said, there are a few general historical conditions that warrant consideration. Colombia's long history of social stratification and wealth disparity—vestiges of colonial rule—comes into full view with the arrival of Bayardo San Román, whose wealthy, urban upbringing (not to mention his conservative-war-hero father) makes him an alien to the rural townspeople. Further, the widespread influence of Catholicism in South American culture is important to remember while reading this novel.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The stories and novels of German author Franz Kafka convinced Márquez to abandon poetry in favor of fiction, and you can certainly see Kafka's influence in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. Santiago Nasar's utter helplessness in the face of a fate decided by arbitrary logic—and his obliviousness to the nature of the crime he is said to have committed—is similar to the situation in which Josef K., the protagonist of Kafka's famous novel *The Trial* (1925), finds himself. Márquez was also greatly influenced by Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, who some consider the first person to write “magical realism.” (In fact, Carpentier coined the term.) One of his best known works, “Journey Back to the Source” (1944), tells the life story of a man in reverse chronological order, beginning with his death and ending with his birth. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* seems to borrow from this unusual structure, opening with a sentence that announces the coming death of the main character, Santiago Nasar. Postmodern detective novels like *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*—which is to say, novels that borrow from the conventions of detective fiction in order to subvert them—make up a veritable genre unto itself in 20th century literature, especially 20th century South American literature. Examples of works in this genre include Jorge Luis Borges' story “Death and the Compass” (1942), Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004). Márquez's own masterpiece *100 Years of Solitude* (1967) has some bearing on *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. The two books appear to take place in the same universe: in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the narrator fleetingly mentions one Colonel Aureliano Buendía, a legendary guerilla fighter and an opponent of Bayardo San Román's father. This mysterious Aureliano is in fact one of the central characters of *100 Years of Solitude*. Finally, Santiago Nasar's fated murder has the quality of an ancient Greek tragedy. See Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* and

Aeschylus's *Oresteia* for particularly pertinent examples.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Chronicle of a Death Foretold
- **When Written:** 1981
- **Where Written:** Colombia
- **When Published:** 1981
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary, Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Detective/Crime Novel, Magical Realism
- **Setting:** The Caribbean coast of Colombia
- **Climax:** The Vicario twins murder Santiago Nasar at the door of his mother's house.
- **Antagonist:** Pedro and Pablo Vicario
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Legal battle. After publishing *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Márquez was sued by Miguel Reyes Palencia, on whom Márquez had (loosely) based the character of Bayardo San Román. Palencia alleged that Márquez had unlawfully misappropriated Palencia's life. The legal dispute lasted for 17 years, with a Colombian court eventually ruling in Márquez's favor.

Real surrealism? For many, it is impossible to describe the work of Gabriel García Márquez without uttering the words "magical realism." But Márquez insisted that he never introduced magical elements into his fictions; rather, he wanted his fictions to remain faithful to life, and surrealism resulted from this. As he told one interviewer: "Surrealism runs through the streets. Surrealism comes from the reality of Latin America."



PLOT SUMMARY

In a small town on the northern coast of Colombia, on the morning after the biggest wedding the town has ever seen, Santiago Nasar, a local man and mostly upstanding citizen, is brutally murdered outside his own front door. The culprits are Pablo and Pedro Vicario, twins and older brothers to the bride, Angela Vicario. Just hours before the murder, Angela was returned to her parents by her husband, the dashing Bayardo San Román, when he discovered she wasn't a virgin as he had anticipated. Pablo and Pedro intimidate Angela into giving them the name of the man who deflowered her. She—perhaps on an impulse, or perhaps sincerely—tells them it was Santiago Nasar. To defend their sister's honor and the honor of the family, the twins resolve to kill him. They go about town announcing their intentions to all who will listen, such that Santiago is one of the last people to learn that his life is in danger. Some of the

townspeople try to prevent the murder but fail, others are too frightened to do so, and still others want Santiago dead. Most people simply don't take the threat seriously—until it is too late.

The murder is now decades into the past. The Narrator, an old friend of Santiago's and a distant relative of the Vicario family, has returned to the town to make sense of it all. He collects the testimonials of eyewitnesses and other townsfolk, in the hope of recreating a clear picture of the events that led up to the mysterious and apparently senseless murder. The chronicle he presents does not, in fact, unfold in chronological order. Instead, the Narrator leaps between the events of the murder, the events that led up to it, and the years that followed.

The Narrator begins by describing Santiago's last few hours alive. He awakes early on the morning of his murder because **the Bishop** is visiting the town, and Santiago, along with many of the townspeople, want to receive him. He is apparently oblivious to the eminent danger he is in. Though he encounters a number of people—including his cook and her daughter—who have heard the Vicario twins are out to kill him, none of them warns him. The Bishop passes by on the river without stopping. As Santiago makes his way home, the Vicario twins pursue him and stab him to death at his front door.

However, before he explains the murder in detail, the Narrator recounts how Angela and Bayardo met and came to be married. Bayardo is an outsider to the community; he appears out of nowhere one day, delivered on a boat travelling upriver. He is dashing, charming, and extremely ostentatious with his money, of which he clearly has a lot. One day he spies Angela Vicario, a young woman from a poor, extremely conservative family, and immediately announces his intentions to marry her. After some trepidation the Vicario family accepts his proposal. They accept more or less on behalf of Angela, who has no say in the matter and does not love Bayardo. Little does her family know that, despite her strict, Catholic upbringing, Angela is not a virgin. The wedding day comes, and Bayardo, who funds the whole thing, pulls out all the stops. The entire town descends into the most raucous, debauched party anyone has ever seen. Santiago and the Narrator both attend. As the party blazes on into the night, Bayardo takes Angela off to their new house, where he discovers she is not a virgin. Enraged, he returns her to her parents in the early hours of the morning. Angela's mother, Purísima del Carmen, beats her savagely, and calls her brothers, who are still out partying, back to the house. They interrogate her, and she tells them that Santiago Nasar took her virginity.

Pedro and Pablo Vicario resolve to kill Santiago in order to defend the honor of their family. They take the two best knives from their pigsty and bring them to the local meat market, where they proceed to sharpen them in full view of all the butchers setting up shop. They announce to everyone that they are going to kill Santiago. However, the butchers mostly ignore them, thinking them drunk. From the meat market the twins go

to Clotilde Armenta's milkshop to keep watch over Santiago's house, which is across the street. They announce their intentions to everyone in the shop, including Clotilde. Almost no one takes them seriously, but when Colonel Lázaro Aponte hears of their plan he confiscates their knives. The twins simply retrieve new knives and return to Clotilde's store. They wait for a light to come on in Santiago's room, but this never happens. The Narrator explains that Santiago returned home and fell asleep without turning on the light.

The Narrator leaps ahead to the days following Santiago's murder. He explains in gruesome detail the autopsy haphazardly performed on Santiago's body. He recounts how the Vicario twins were arrested and awaited trial for three years, unable to afford bail, before finally being found innocent based on the "thesis of homicide in legitimate defense of honor." The Vicario family left town, while Bayardo was dragged off by his family in a drunken, half-dead stupor. The Narrator lingers longest on Angela Vicario. He explains that, after Bayardo rejected her, she found herself falling deeply and mysteriously in love with him. For years, living her life as a seamstress, she wrote to him nearly every day. Her letters went unanswered until, finally, Bayardo, old and fat, showed up at her doorstep.

The Narrator completes his story with a full description of the murder. He explains his belief that Santiago had nothing to do with Angela, despite her insistence that he took her virginity, and so never understood his own death. After watching the Bishop pass, Santiago runs into his friend Cristo Bedoya, with whom he chats for a while. The two part ways and a friend informs Cristo Bedoya of the threats being made against Santiago's life. Cristo runs off in search of Santiago but cannot find him. The Narrator explains that Santiago has ducked into his fiancée Flora Miguel's house. There, Flora's father Nahir explains to Santiago the danger he is in. Santiago runs into the main square, where a crowd has gathered. Confused, Santiago runs in circles until finding his way to the front door, pursued by the Vicario twins. Santiago's mother, Plácida Linero, thinks her son is already inside the house, so she locks the door. The Vicario twins trap Santiago at the locked door and stab him multiple times before running off. Santiago stumbles through the neighbor's house to get to his back door, walks into his kitchen, and falls dead on the floor.

though his ethnicity draws some suspicion from conservative townfolk. He raises livestock, rides horses, owns many firearms, and enjoys **falconry**. While not overtly religious, he enjoys the pomp of Catholic ritual. He is an unrepentant womanizer—he frequents María Alejandrina Cervantes's brothel and attempts to seduce the young Divina Flor—and is engaged to Flora Miguel, whom he is devoted to but does not seem to love. Despite this, his good friend the Narrator is convinced that Santiago had nothing to do with Angela Vicario, and indeed all the available evidence supports this claim. By the end of the novel Santiago remains something of a mystery—the Narrator never discloses much about his inner life, saying only that he was "merry and peaceful, and openhearted."

The Narrator – The Narrator is a good friend of Santiago Nasar, and also a local. Though he didn't directly witness Santiago's murder at the hands of Pedro and Pablo Vicario, he remains haunted by the crime for many years. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* finds the Narrator returning to the town decades after the fateful morning of the murder, trying to make sense of all that transpired—in particular, how the townspeople, almost all of whom knew about the Vicario twins' intentions, failed to prevent the crime. At the time of the murder the narrator is in love with María Alejandrina Cervantes, but eventually ends up marrying Mercedes Barcha. Beyond this the narrator reveals almost nothing about his own life.

Angela Vicario – Angela Vicario, who happens to be the Narrator's distant cousin, is the youngest daughter of Poncio Vicario, a poor man's goldsmith, and Purísima del Carmen, a retired schoolteacher. Her family is of modest means and extremely conservative. Angela's twin brothers, Pedro and Pablo, are taught "to be men," while Angela and her sisters are brought up "to be married"—they are trained only in household crafts, such as embroidery and making paper flowers. As a young girl she displays a certain "poverty of spirit" and seems somewhat helpless. Accordingly, her parents are excited and relieved by the arrival of the dashing, enormously wealthy Bayardo San Román, who becomes obsessed with Angela and quickly asks for her hand in marriage. Angela dreads the marriage, in part because she fears what Bayardo will do when he discovers that she isn't a virgin, but mostly because she does not love him in the first place. However, following the murder, she finds herself strangely fixated on Bayardo. Over the course of decades she writes thousands of letters to him, and eventually they are reconciled to each other. Despite the Narrator's suspicions, she remains adamant that Santiago Nasar took her virginity.

Bayardo San Román – Bayardo San Román is a wealthy outsider to the town, and his reasons for coming to the town remain mysterious to the last. He is the son of General Petronio San Román, a hero of "civil wars" that occurred in the past and are never explained in depth. He is also a member of the ruling



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Santiago Nasar – Santiago Nasar is the protagonist of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, the hapless victim of a brutal murder. He is the child of a "marriage of convenience" between Plácida Linero, a local woman, and Ibrahim Nasar, an Arab immigrant turned rancher. He is wealthy by the town's standards, and seems to be a fairly respected member of the community,

conservative regime. Bayardo is dashing, and something of a dandy—he wears only the finest clothes. Though he is well-mannered, he can be impulsive and ostentatious with his money. The Narrator believes him to be a fundamentally sad individual. Bayardo falls in love with Angela Vicario, but after discovering her lack of virginity on their wedding night he returns her to her family and falls into a deep depression. He disappears from the town, only to return decades later to Angela's doorstep.

Pedro Vicario – Pedro Vicario is the younger of the Vicario twins by six minutes. By the Narrator's reckoning, he is more sentimental than his brother, Pablo, but also more authoritarian. He served in the military for a few years, where he picked up a bossy nature and a wicked case of gonorrhea. When the twins learn of their sister Angela's lack of virginity, Pedro is the first to suggest that they kill Santiago Nasar.

Pablo Vicario – Though technically older, Pablo behaves much like a younger brother to Pedro, following his commands and displaying overall a more "imaginative" character. When Pedro served in the military, Pablo remained at home, caring for the family and working as a butcher. But despite his submissive tendencies, it is Pablo, not Pedro, who suggests the brothers persist in their murderous intentions after Colonel Lázaro Aponte takes away their knives.

The Visiting Magistrate – Lázaro Aponte, feeling overwhelmed, invites this unnamed magistrate—recently graduated from law school—to investigate the murder. The magistrate is struck by the number of fateful coincidences that led to the killing of Santiago Nasar, and has a penchant for describing everything in terms of literature. In writing his chronicle, the Narrator relies heavily on the Magistrate's report.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Cristo Bedoya – Cristo Bedoya, a medical student, is Santiago Nasar's best friend. He is with him on the morning of the murder, but doesn't learn of Pedro and Pablo Vicario's plan until he and Santiago have parted ways.

Plácida Linero – Santiago Nasar's mother and Ibrahim Nasar's widow. She claims to have the gift of foresight, and is a skilled interpreter of dreams. However, she fails to foresee her son's murder. She is left completely bereft after his death.

Ibrahim Nasar – Santiago Nasar's late father. He was an Arab immigrant who became a fairly successful rancher—he was responsible for teaching Santiago how to raise livestock, use firearms, and train **falcons**. He died suddenly when Santiago was younger.

Victoria Guzmán – The cook for the Nasar household, originally hired by Ibrahim Nasar. Ibrahim seduced her when she was young, and now she is determined to keep her daughter, Divina Flor, from being seduced by Santiago Nasar.

She knows about Pablo and Pedro's intentions but declines to warn Santiago.

Divina Flor – Victoria Guzmán's daughter, she works with her mother in the Nasar household. At the time of the murder she is just an adolescent, and terrified of Santiago Nasar.

Purísima del Carmen Vicario (Pura Vicario) – Angela Vicario's mother. She is extremely conservative and rigorous in her parenting, especially when it comes to her daughters.

Poncio Vicario – Angela Vicario's father. He is a retired goldsmith and, by the time of the events described in the novel, he has gone almost completely blind. Accordingly he wields very little influence with his family, and indeed has little idea what is going on most of the time.

María Alejandrina Cervantes – A local woman who owns a brothel. The Narrator claims that she singlehandedly "did away with [his] generation's virginity." She is both the Narrator's and Santiago Nasar's first love. The Narrator is sleeping in her bed when Santiago is murdered.

General Petronio San Román – Bayardo San Román's father. He is a famous war hero—a veteran of the civil wars—and an important member of the ruling Conservative regime. He is extraordinarily wealthy.

Alberta Simonds – Bayardo San Román's mother and General Petronio San Román's wife. She is from Curaçao, and was once known as the most beautiful woman in the Antilles.

Clotilde Armante – The proprietor of a milk shop on the main square of the town. It is in this shop that Pablo and Pedro Vicario wait for Santiago Nasar to appear from his house across the square.

Margot – The Narrator's sister. She has something of a crush on Santiago Nasar, and invites him over for breakfast on the morning of the murder, not yet knowing that he will soon be killed.

The Narrator's Sister the Nun – The Narrator's other sister, a nun.

Flora Miguel – Santiago Nasar's fiancée. She is the daughter of Nahir Miguel, the wise man in the local Arab community. She is the one to finally warn Santiago that Pablo and Pedro Vicario are out to kill him.

Colonel Lázaro Aponte – The mayor of the town. He tries to stop Pedro and Pablo Vicario by confiscating their knives, but the twins simply return home to get new ones.

Father Carmen Amador – The local priest. He is the first person to whom Pedro and Pablo Vicario confess. He also performs Santiago Nasar's autopsy.

The Narrator's Mother – She is both Santiago Nasar's godmother and a relative of Angela Vicario. She attempts to warn Santiago's mother, Plácida Linero, about the impending murder, but fails to reach her in time.

Yamil Shaium – An old friend of Ibrahim Nasar and a counselor to the Nasar family. He tries to protect Santiago Nasar but fails. After the murder, he chases after Pedro and Pablo Vicario, leading a group of Arabs.

Nahir Miguel – Flora Miguel’s father and the wise man of the local Arab community.

The Widower Xius – An old man who lives in the most beautiful house in town, which he reluctantly sells to Bayardo San Román.

Mercedes Barcha – The Narrator’s wife. She is just a young girl at the time of the murder.

Don Rogelio de la Flor – Clotilde Amante’s husband.

Dr. Dionisio Iguarán – The local doctor, he is meant to perform the autopsy of Santiago Nasar, but is away on vacation.

Officer Leandro Pornoy – The police officer who first informs Colonel Lázaro Aponte that Pablo and Pedro Vicario are planning to kill Santiago Nasar.

Faustino Santos – A local butcher, and a friend of Pedro and Pablo Vicario.

Hortensia Baute – A local woman.

Luis Enrique – The Narrator’s brother.

Jaime – The Narrator’s younger brother.

Prudencia Cotes – Pablo Vicario’s fiancée.

Aura Villeros – A local midwife.

Meme Loiza – A local woman.

Polo Carrillo – Owner of the local electric plant.

Fausta López – Polo Carrillo’s wife.

Indalecio Pardo – One of Santiago Nasar’s good friends. He has a chance to warn Santiago on the morning of the murder, but loses his nerve and says nothing.

Escolástica Cisneros – A local woman.

Sara Noriega – The owner of a shoe store in the town.

Celeste Dangond – A friend of Santiago Nasar.

Próspera Arango – A local woman.

Poncho Lanao – Santiago Nasar’s neighbor.

Argénida Lanao – Poncho Lanao’s eldest daughter.

Wenefrida Márquez – The Narrator’s aunt.



FATE VS. FREE WILL

The concept of fate is embedded in the very title of the novel, and introduced again in its first sentence: “On the day they were going to kill him, Santiago

Nasar got up at five-thirty in the morning to wait for the boat the bishop was coming on.” Santiago Nasar’s death is “foretold” in two senses. First, Pablo and Pedro Vicario announce their intentions—literally “foretelling” the death—to anyone who will listen, and soon nearly everyone in the village knows that Santiago is doomed. Second, in another, more cosmic sense, Santiago’s death seems predestined from the start, the result of a tragic alignment of chance occurrences.

Looked at one way, Santiago’s murder is a clearly intentional act, committed (and enabled) by people in the world. Certainly the Vicario twins choose to kill him, one can argue. Further, many characters—such as Victoria Guzmán, Santiago’s cook, and her daughter, Divina Flor—have the chance to warn Santiago but choose not to, either not understanding the seriousness of the threat or actively wanting Santiago dead. To put it simply: the Vicario twins and their enablers act with free will. Indeed, some of the Narrator’s language supports this interpretation of the tragedy, notably his insistence on calling the murder a “crime.” At other points he even suggests that the entire community, not just the Vicario twins, is culpable.

However, looked at another way, Santiago’s death can be explained only if it is understood as predestined. As the narrator collects the testimonies of the townspeople, he perpetually is mystified by the incredible number of chance occurrences that, in total, created the perfect conditions for Santiago’s murder. The examples are nearly countless, but some of the most prominent include the anonymous note of warning that Santiago fails to notice, Cristo Bedoya’s difficulty finding Santiago, and Plácida Linero’s locking the front door of her house in flight. Further, it becomes clear that the Vicario twins, while acting of their own free will, were also not entirely enthusiastic about killing Santiago, and in some ways *tried* to be stopped. Then there’s the ultimate mystery: why Angela Vicario offered up Santiago’s name, when all of the available evidence suggests she had nothing to do with him. Some of the narration supports *this* interpretation of the tragedy as predestined, such as the narrator’s interest in establishing possible portents of the crime—the weather, or Santiago’s dream the night of the wedding. (Perhaps tellingly, these attempts fail.) More explicitly, the narrator throws around words like “destiny,” “fate,” and “sentence,” just about as much as he does “crime.” Finally, the structure of the novel, which announces the death of the main character in its very first sentence, does not allow the reader to imagine any outcome other than the one described at the start.

This coexistence of divine fate and earthly free will is an ancient paradox, central both to Greek tragedy and, more recently and relevantly, the Catholic faith. Is free will just an illusion? If one’s fate is sealed from birth, how is it that a person can act with



THEMES

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free will? How can one be held morally accountable for her actions if her future is always already determined? Márquez—operating very much within Catholic modes of thought—seems to answer that fate and free will are somehow, mysteriously, *not* mutually exclusive. So long as we feel that we have free will, we must bring ourselves to act morally.



FACT, FICTION, AND MEMORY

If the primary drama of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is the murder of Santiago Nasar, the secondary drama is the Narrator's work of researching,

recollecting, and representing the murder. His narrative style is journalistic: after many years, the narrator is attempting to put together a comprehensive account of Santiago Nasar's murder. Structurally the novel resembles a documentary film: a dramatization or reconstruction of the murder is framed and informed by a huge number of witness testimonials, which are presented to the reader as direct quotes, or "talking heads."

Though the narrator casts a wide net of discovery, he struggles at times to pin down the facts of the case—no two witnesses can agree on every single detail. A haze hovers over the events of the murder, partly because so many years have passed, and partly because everyone in town was exceedingly drunk on the night of the wedding. Instead of representing only those facts that strike him as true, the Narrator presents as many accounts of the fateful morning as he can, and refuses to polish over the contradictions they pose. Through these many contradicting accounts—one notable example being the widespread uncertainty about the weather on the day of the murder—the narrative demonstrates that memory is fallible, and that sometimes remembering is more like fiction-making than fact-finding. Most facts are lost to the past, and memory is just a story we tell ourselves.

Furthermore, while memory can make fiction out of facts, sometimes the facts themselves can seem stranger than fiction. The uncertain border between fact and fiction is explicitly remarked upon by the Narrator and a number of the characters, most notably in the final third of the novel, when the Magistrate investigating the case becomes increasingly perplexed by the idea that "life should make use of so many coincidences forbidden literature." This observation that life sometimes reads as bad fiction takes on a new complexity when one considers that a) the murder of Santiago Nasar is *of course* fictional—this is a novel!—and b) the novel is based loosely on true events.

Overall, Márquez seems to suggest throughout his novel that the border between fact and fiction cannot so easily be drawn—experience, especially traumatic experience, and especially traumatic experience seen through the lens of memory, is as much *experienced* as it is *constructed*.



THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

Chronicle of a Death Foretold is impressive for the way it depicts a world in which religious seriousness commingles with out-and-out

debauchery. Nearly every character in the novel moves freely between these two opposite poles of experience, poles that might be labeled as the "sacred" and the "profane."

God seems to have left the village in which the novel takes place. **The Bishop**, whom everyone is eager to see on the morning of the murder, won't set foot in the town, choosing instead to pass by on his boat and deliver his blessing from afar. Everyone takes part in the wedding festivities; even the Narrator's sister, a nun, gets drunk. The Narrator has been frequenting a local brothel for his entire adult life. Santiago Nasar, though described as "peaceful" by the Narrator, gropes the teenaged Divina Flor whenever he gets the chance. Pedro Vicario returns from the military sporting a nasty case of gonorrhea.

And yet, most members of the community are deeply Catholic—as demonstrated by their enthusiasm over the Bishop's visit—and cling dearly to traditional ideals of purity and honor. As soon as Angela Vicario accuses Santiago Nasar of deflowering her, her brothers Pablo and Pedro Vicario set out to murder him as a matter of course: by their logic, he has stolen the honor of their sister, of their whole family, and so must repay them in blood. By that same token, a fair number of the townspeople accept Santiago's doom as a foregone conclusion: nothing can or should be done to save him. Angela Vicario's purity is seen by nearly everyone—including Angela herself—as a matter of life and death. The community's draconian values find fullest expression in the verdict delivered three years after the murder. Despite the gruesome and public nature of their crime, and despite the apparent innocence of their victim, the Vicario brothers are found innocent "by the thesis of homicide in legitimate defense of honor."

It would seem, then, that the town is filled with hypocrites. Not one character in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is pure or particularly honorable—blood, sex, and excrement abound—and yet so many of the characters see purity and honor as akin to godliness. Of course, Márquez is up to something a bit more complicated than simply exposing the hypocrisy of his characters. More nearly he seems to suggest that the townspeople's devotion to sacred ideals is full of impossible hope, and is all the more tragic for that reason. Pedro and Pablo Vicario, hoping to abide by some abstract code of honor, end up committing murder—which is, at last, the most profane act of all.



GENDER, CLASS, AND SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS

Throughout *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Márquez

subtly scrutinizes the underlying rules of social relations, questioning how the circumstances of one's birth structures and determines the course of one's life. Márquez is especially interested in the ways in which widely held notions of gender might govern one's position in society. In the Narrator's hometown, one's gender sharply delineates the borders of his or her experience. To put it bluntly, the community is inherently sexist. If you are born with male features, you are educated and grow up to work. The question of your virginity has no moral bearing on your character—in fact, you are more or less expected to be having sex from a young age. On the other hand, if you're born with female features, your virginity is of the *utmost* importance. You grow up cloistered and are taught only to be a good wife. Angela Vicario and her sisters are raised this way, as is Flora Miguel. Most of the female characters—Plácida Linero, Victoria Guzmán, and the Narrator's Mother—while powerful in their own, private ways, exert very little control over their station in life.

Of course, gender is not the only social determinant in this community. Not unrelatedly, wealth and social class are additional factors that structure and determine the lives of the characters. This is most apparent in Angela's engagement to Bayardo San Román. Bayardo, an outsider who is “swimming in gold,” is betrothed to Angela against her will. The marriage is arranged by Angela's parents, who come from a more modest background than Bayardo. Such an arrangement is seen as normal in the town, where social class is extremely important and “marrying up” is common practice. Further, ethnicity plays a less prominent but still important social role: the minority group of Arabs—to which Santiago Nasar belongs—are relegated to a kind of community within the community, one that is looked on with some suspicion by the non-Arab majority. For Márquez, character is not necessarily destiny. However, the *accidents* of one's character—one's gender, one's social class, one's race—can have a tremendous, often oppressive effect on one's life. One could even argue that, more than destiny or the perverse will of a few criminals and their enablers, it is the overarching structure of society that kills Santiago Nasar. After all, Pablo and Pedro Vicario are in some ways moved to murder by social forces beyond their control. They understand their crime as duty, one foisted upon them by their religion and the culture in which they live, and they in some ways do their best to escape it, but to no avail.



VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND COMMUNITY

Violence, of course, is a persistent theme throughout this crime story. The violence that Santiago Nasar suffers is—for Márquez and his characters—both familiar and entirely alien. The Narrator, and through him Márquez, asks dogged questions pertaining to violence: What does violence do to its victim? What does violence do to its perpetrator? More pressingly, what is the

place of violence within a community? How can a community knowingly allow violence to occur, and, further, treat it as a public spectacle?

The apparent incompetence and, worse, the complacency of his community in the face of impending violence haunts the Narrator throughout his investigation of the crime. By the time Santiago Nasar is pinned to his own front door and stabbed before a crowd of spectators, nearly the entire town knows what's coming. Pablo and Pedro Vicario have announced their plans to all who will listen. Some people, like Cristo Bedoya and Clotilde Armante, try but fail to warn Santiago. Others, like Divina Flor and Indalecio Pardo, have the opportunity but are too frightened to do so. Others still, like Victoria Guzmán, refuse to warn him out of spite. However, the vast majority of the townsfolk—including Colonel Lázaro Aponte, who of all people wields the authority to prevent the murder—simply don't take seriously the Vicario twins' threat, chalking it up to hyperbole, or just the ravings of a couple of drunks. Márquez thus demonstrates that violence, even while it is considered by most to be beyond the pale, is never very far off. The barrier between everyday life and the most unimaginable bloodshed is delicate, and in fact easily overcome. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* thus demonstrates how the possibility of violence can become—suddenly, shockingly—permissible.

And despite the ease with which violence is committed, violence is also utterly transformative, for all parties involved. Márquez lingers gruesomely on the transformation of Santiago Nasar from a walking, talking, smiling citizen to a confused, helpless animal, and finally to a piece of dead meat indistinguishable from the rabbits that Victoria Guzmán spends the morning disemboweling. The violence is also transformative for its perpetrators, Pablo and Pedro Vicario, who are in some ways left traumatized by their own crime. This trauma manifests itself physically: in jail they both become entirely sleepless, Pedro's venereal disease worsens, and Pablo falls deathly ill. After Santiago's death, Angela Vicario finds herself mysteriously falling in love with Bayardo San Román, whom she had all but hated before. Santiago's death is transformative, at last, for the community at large, which is left frozen and traumatized after witnessing their collective crime.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold demonstrates that the conditions within a community that allow violence to occur are not so difficult to meet—they arise almost spontaneously—and yet the fallout following a public murder is immense. Violence is easily committed and its effects are irreversible. Only vigilance and moral courage can prevent it.



RITUAL

So much of daily life in the Narrator's community is governed by ritual and routine. In a simple sense, the population consists mostly of tradespeople, whose lives consist of repetitious tasks: Clotilde Armante sells

milk to the same people every morning; Pablo and Pedro Vicario raise and slaughter their pigs. Time has a cyclical, repetitive quality in the town: every day, the same steamboats pass on their way upriver.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the townsfolk depend on ritualized behavior to express their hopes and despairs, to make their private lives visible to the wider community: feelings of love, spiritual devotion, and anger are all mediated through public ritual. In many cases, it is not the sincerity of the ritual that matters to the townspeople, it is the ritual itself—its mere *gesture*. In the years before Angela Vicario's engagement to Bayardo San Román, the Vicario women dress only in black, "observing a mourning that was relaxed inside the house but rigorous on the street" (the middle daughter has died). Santiago Nasar wakes up early for **the Bishop** not out of any spiritual conviction but because he enjoys the "pomp" of Catholic ritual. Indeed, there is something clearly detached about the Bishop's visit—he never sets foot in the town. Angela Vicario's friends reassure her that the expectation that she'll still be a virgin on her wedding night is mostly empty talk, and that the common ritual of publicly displaying the newlyweds' bloodied sheets is often faked.

The murder of Santiago Nasar is an extension—and a perversion—of this culture of ritual. Pedro and Pablo Vicario's vow to kill Santiago is an empty gesture that suddenly becomes all too real. It seems that no one, not even the brothers themselves, believe they will actually follow through their plan—until, of course, it is too late. The Vicario brothers' pronouncements and showy knife-sharpening have the quality of performance. They are, in a sense, "faking it"—but somehow, in faking it, they find it within themselves to kill, or, to put it another way, they find themselves forced to follow through with the role they've taken on.

At last, there is something ritualistic about the Narrator's engagement with his story. His efforts to ascertain the facts of the murder so many years after it transpired have a mournful and obsessive character: it seems his determination to tell the story is above all an act of remembrance, of devotion. His nonlinear account of the murder make it so events play and replay before the reader, as if in an endless loop. Ritual, then, serves as both a protection and a trap, as something comfortable that structures daily life, but also as something that has more power than those acting it out perhaps realize, until they find themselves within a ritual they can't escape.



THE BISHOP

On the morning of Santiago Nasar's murder, the Bishop is visiting the town to deliver his blessing.

He is less a character than he is a stand-in for some sort of abstract, unattainable holiness. He never sets foot in the town, choosing instead to deliver his blessing from afar, waving from the deck of his steamboat as it churns ominously upriver. The snub seems to be a snub from God himself, and in his wake town is left to moral decay.



THE RIVER

In one sense the river, which runs right through the town, is a figure for time in the novel—it forges interminably ahead while simultaneously appearing to recur. Further, the river is the town's only connection to the outer world, and it is a meager connection at that. While it used to be that seafaring ships passed through regularly, changes in the river's course have made that impossible—and as a result the town is left isolated from the wider world and struggling economically. When Bayardo San Román arrives on his steamboat, it's as if he has come from another planet.



FLOWERS

Flowers appear in many forms throughout the text, though their meaning remains somewhat ambiguous. Many of the characters have names that include the Spanish word for flower, "flor": there's Divina Flor, Flora Miguel, and Don Rogelio de la Flor. Angela Vicario occupies herself by making flowers out of paper and cloth, and Pablo and Pedro Vicario give their pigs flower names rather than human names, so as not to feel guilty when they have to slaughter them. Indeed, flowers are most often connected with death in the novel. The night of the wedding, Santiago Nasar makes the chilling observation that the floral decorations in the church "equal in cost to those of fourteen first-class funerals." He goes on to say that the smell of closed-in flowers always brings death to mind.



BIRDS

Like **flowers**, birds and references to birds appear throughout the text, often to a somewhat ambiguous effect. Santiago Nasar dreams of birds the night before his murder, and Plácida Linero fails to recognize this as a bad omen. The connection between birds and omens situates the novel within the tradition of Greek tragedy, in which augurs, or prophets, read the future by watching birds move across the sky. Notably, Santiago also raises falcons. The epigraph of the novel, a quote from Portuguese playwright Gil Vicente, tells the reader that "the pursuit of love is like falconry." It might be said



SYMBOLS

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

that the figure of birds, like the figure of flowers, is meant to both emphasize and bridge the disparate—but perhaps not so disparate—realms of love and violence.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* published in 2003.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ She had watched him from the same hammock and in the same position in which I found her prostrated by the last lights of old age when I returned to this forgotten village, trying to put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards. She could barely make out shapes in full light and had some medicinal leaves on her temples for the eternal headache that her son had left her the last time he went through the bedroom. She was on her side, clutching the cords at the head of the hammock as she tried to get up, and there in the half shadows was the baptistry smell that had startled me on the morning of the crime. No sooner had I appeared on the threshold than she confused me with the memory of Santiago Nasar.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Santiago Nasar, Plácida Linero

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

In this paragraph, which appears early in the first chapter, the Narrator reveals just how much time has elapsed since Santiago's murder. And yet for the Narrator and the inhabitants of the "forgotten village," the crime is at once lost to the past and ever present: it cannot be returned to, but neither can it be left behind. The Narrator finds Plácida, Santiago's mother, in the same exact position she was when she last saw her son, as if his death left her frozen in place. Her memory of Santiago is so intense that it imprints itself on reality, and she confuses the Narrator for her late son.

For the Narrator, memory is more often a communal experience than a private one. His lyrical statement of purpose—"to put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards"—is in fact an apt description of his project. He has returned to the village to collect testimonials from the many witnesses to the crime. There is no one singular, definitive account of Santiago's

death; instead, it has been scattered and refracted through the lives of the townspeople.

☝ But she couldn't avoid a wave of fright as she remembered Santiago Nasar's horror when she pulled out the insides of a rabbit by the roots and threw the steaming guts to the dogs. "Don't be a savage," he told her. "Make believe it was a human being." Victoria Guzmán needed almost twenty years to understand that a man accustomed to killing defenseless animals could suddenly express such horror.

Related Characters: Santiago Nasar, The Narrator (speaker), Victoria Guzmán

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 10



Explanation and Analysis

On the morning of his murder, Santiago enters his kitchen to find the cook, Victoria Guzmán, disemboweling rabbits. The image, with a kind of brute force, grimly foreshadows the violence that will befall Santiago. As the reader later learns, Santiago is disemboweled by the Vicario twins, and after the autopsy his intestines end up in the trash. Victoria's ritualistic, mechanical dismemberment of the rabbits mirrors the twins' ritualistic, mechanical fulfillment of their "duty."

But this passage isn't just a shocking preview of the violence to come. On a subtler level, Victoria's befuddlement over Santiago's disgust raises an important question, one that vexes the entire novel: can violence ever be dignified? What might it look like to disembowel a rabbit as if it were a human being? When they kill Santiago, the twins will claim to have done so in defense of their family's honor and dignity. And yet the reality of Santiago's death, which is appalling and brutal, seems to overwhelm any claim to moral purity that the twins can make.

☝ No one could understand such fatal coincidences. The investigating judge who came from Riohacha must have sensed them without daring to admit it, for his impulse to give them a rational explanation was obvious in his report. The door to the square was cited several times with a dime-novel title: "The Fatal Door."

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Visiting Magistrate

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 12



Explanation and Analysis



The Narrator is referring here to Santiago's unusual decision, on the morning of his death, to exit his house through the front door, thus inviting the attention of the Vicario twins (who are waiting across the street) and thereby sealing his fate. It is one of the many "fatal coincidences" that lends the murder a sense of cosmic inevitability. The whole universe, it seems, conspires to kill Santiago.

Those same fatal coincidences are particularly troubling to the Narrator and the investigating judge, both of whom want to understand the murder in rational terms. Searching for a single, clear cause, they find instead a mess of circumstances that, working in perfect concert, result in the death of Santiago Nasar. To the investigating judge, the death seems to have come straight out of a bad piece of pulp fiction (or a "dime-novel"), a suspicion he gives voice to when he melodramatically refers to Santiago's door as "The Fatal Door." This insistence on the weirdly fictional quality of Santiago's death is, at last, a kind of literary "wink." Of course, Santiago's death is fictional—it happens within the confines of a novel, Márquez's novel. Furthermore, the title "The Fatal Door" is not that much more melodramatic or pulpy than the title "Chronicle of a Death Foretold." In winking at the reader in this way, Márquez blurs the line between fact and fiction. Not only does fiction imitate life, life can sometimes imitate fiction.

☞ What happened, according to her, was that the boat whistle let off a shower of compressed steam as it passed by the docks, and it soaked those who were closest to the edge. It was a fleeting illusion: the bishop began to make the sign of the cross in the air opposite the crowd on the pier, and he kept on doing it mechanically afterwards, without malice or inspiration, until the boat was lost from view and all that remained was the uproar of the roosters.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Margot

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis


Just moments before Santiago Nasar is murdered, the Bishop, whose arrival the whole town—including Santiago—has been eagerly awaiting, passes by on his boat without stopping. Here the narrator recounts what he heard of the snub from his sister Margot, who was there to witness it. The symbolism of the scene is hard to escape: it is as if God, as represented by the Bishop, has determined that the town is not worth his attention, is not worth saving. The Bishop's blessing is a gesture without any substance, an empty ritual—it is "without malice or inspiration" and continues on mechanically even after he passes the crowd. It can do nothing to rescue the town from its impending trauma.

Tellingly, as soon as the Bishop disappears upriver, all the townsfolk who had gathered for his arrival begin to gossip about the scandalous news: Angela Vicario has been returned to her parents, and her brothers are out to kill Santiago Nasar. It is as if the Bishop's indifference permits them, and, furthermore, condones the violent spectacle that is about to unfold.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ I met him a short while after she did, when I came home for Christmas vacation, and I found him just as strange as they had said. He seemed attractive, certainly, but far from Magdalena Oliver's idyllic vision. He seemed more serious to me than his antics would have led one to believe, and with a hidden tension that was barely concealed by his excessive good manners.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Bayardo San Román

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 28



Explanation and Analysis

Here the Narrator remembers meeting the outsider Bayardo San Román for the first time, after hearing his mother sing the man's praises for months. The Narrator has already heard how impressive Bayardo is to the townspeople—how wealthy and charming and ostentatious. For the Narrator, however, Bayardo leaves a different, quite darker impression. The disconnect between Bayardo's theatrical "antics" and his profound seriousness, his "hidden

tension,” makes Bayardo seem unpredictable to the Narrator, perhaps dangerous. When someone’s public self does not match up with his private self—his secret prejudices and convictions—there’s no telling what he may do. Of course, Bayardo is not the only one in the community who suffers from such a disconnect. In a town so caught up on ritual and custom, nearly everyone experiences a gap between their internal life and the social role they are expected to fulfill.

●● The parents’ decisive argument was that a family dignified by modest means had no right to disdain that prize of destiny. Angela Vicario only dared hint at the inconvenience of a lack of love, but her mother demolished it with a single phrase: “Love can be learned too.”

Related Characters: The Narrator, Purísima del Carmen Vicario (Pura Vicario) (speaker), Angela Vicario

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Bayardo has sprung a marriage proposal on Angela Vicario. Actually, to be more precise, he has sprung the proposal on her parents. Angela barely knows the strange, rich man, and certainly doesn’t love him. Her parents, however, insist that she accept. Their reasoning reveals two important aspects of the conservative, class-conscious culture in which they live. Firstly and most obviously, Angela’s lot at birth—her gender and her social status—have determined the path that her life will follow. When her parents assert that she has no choice in the matter, they aren’t exactly saying that they themselves are forcing her; instead, they’re saying that, in the society in which they live, a poor family like theirs has “no right” to turn away a rich man like Bayardo. Secondly, Angela’s mother’s assertion that “love can be learned too” gives voice to the belief that passion is not a prerequisite for ritual—in this case, marriage—that ritual is valuable for its own sake, and that ritual can in fact produce passion in its participants. To put it simply: you can fake it until you make it. It is this assumption that “demolishes” Angela’s protests once and for all. And, finally, it is the same assumption that brings Pedro and Pablo to kill Santiago, an act they commit not out of any apparent passion, but out of a sense of duty.

●● They insisted that even the most difficult of husbands resigned themselves to anything as long as nobody knew about it. They convinced her, finally, that most men came to their wedding night so frightened that they were incapable of doing anything without the woman’s help, and at the moment of truth they couldn’t answer for their own acts. “The only thing they believe is what they see on the sheet,” they told her. And they taught her old wives’ tricks to feign her lost possession, so that on her first morning as a newlywed she could display open under the sun in the courtyard of her house the linen sheet with the stain of honor.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Angela Vicario, Bayardo San Román

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Angela Vicario’s closest confidants try to coach her on how to conceal her lack of virginity from Bayardo, and reassure her in no uncertain terms that the town’s obsession with virginity is merely a performance. According to Angela’s friends, just keeping up the appearance of virginity is really all that is expected of a new bride. Even in the unlikely event that her husband is perceptive enough to notice her lack of virginity, he won’t say anything for fear of public embarrassment. In fact, it seems that public opinion is far more important than the private truth in this town, as illustrated by the custom of hanging the bloody wedding sheets outside in the sun, for all to see. The Narrator’s reference to “the stain of honor” also draws an intimate connection between Angela’s virginity (or lack thereof) and the violence that eventually befalls Santiago. Santiago’s bloody, public demise is in some ways a substitute for the bloody sheet, which, of course, Angela never puts on display.

●● She only took the time necessary to say the name. She looked for it in the shadows, she found it at first sight among the many, many easily confused names from this world and the other, and she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Santiago Nasar, Angela Vicario

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Here the Narrator attempts to imagine how Angela Vicario came up with Santiago's name when her brothers asked her who deflowered her. The Narrator's description betrays his suspicion that Santiago had nothing to do with Angela, and that she offered his name at random, perhaps to protect the true culprit. Angela later denies this accusation, so what the Narrator writes here is pure speculation. His final, lyrical words, "she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written," convey quite clearly his deterministic view of the crime. To him it seems that Santiago is simply the victim of fate, innocent and yet destined to be murdered. His use of the word "sentence" is another one of Márquez's sly winks to the reader: Santiago seems to be living out a sentence—a punishment—but he is also living in sentences, as he is ultimately the fictional subject of a novel.

their sister's lost honor" serves to illustrate the futility and the uselessness of the twins' mission. Angela's "honor"—whatever that may mean—cannot really be found, and killing Santiago certainly does nothing to find it.

●● Santiago Nasar had an almost magical talent for disguises, and his favorite sport was to confuse the identities of the mulatto girls. He would rifle the wardrobe of some to disguise the others, so that they all ended up feeling different from themselves and like the ones they weren't. On a certain occasion, one of them found herself repeated in another with such exactness that she had an attack of tears. "I felt like I'd stepped out of the mirror," she said.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Santiago Nasar

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

The Narrator presents this mysterious description of Santiago's wily antics when he is recounting their time at María Alejandrina Cervantes' brothel. It is one of the few direct descriptions of Santiago's character—his hobbies and his sensibilities—that appears in the novel. There is something ominous, almost menacing about Santiago's habit of confusing the identities of brothel girls. But it also establishes the brothel as a space that is somehow safe from the restrictions of society, a place where one's carefully constructed social identity might entirely dissolve. With this brief, cryptic passage, Márquez seems to suggest that one's identity is not in any way innate or essential—it can be easily erased, confused.

●● "The truth is I didn't know what to do," he told me. "My first thought was that it wasn't any business of mine but something for the civil authorities, but then I made up my mind to say something in passing to Plácida Linero." Yet when he crossed the square, he'd forgotten completely. "You have to understand," he told me, "that the bishop was coming on that unfortunate day." At the moment of the crime he felt such despair and was so disgusted with himself that the only thing he could think of was to ring the fire alarm.

Related Characters: The Narrator, Father Carmen Amador (speaker), Plácida Linero

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● So he put the knife in his hand and dragged him off almost by force in search of their sister's lost honor. "There's no way out of this," he told him. "It's as if it had already happened."

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Pablo Vicario

Related Themes:   


Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

After their knives are confiscated and their plans foiled by Colonel Lázaro Aponte, the Vicario twins have a disagreement over whether to get new knives and continue on. Pablo, otherwise the more passive of the two, manages to convince Pedro to try again with these words and actions. His assertion that the murder has "already happened" speaks to his worldview, in which he sees the murder as a terrible duty that has befallen him, a duty he has no choice but to fulfill. It also speaks to the larger theme of fate and free will in the novel: from a certain angle, it seems as though Santiago is destined to die, and, consequently, that Pablo and Pedro are destined to kill him. In this sense, Pablo's claim that he and his brother must kill Santiago because it is destined to happen is a thorny paradox.

In addition, the Narrator's use of the phrase "in search of

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

The Narrator presses Father Amador to explain why he did nothing to prevent the crime when it was completely in his power to do so, and this is the answer Father Amador offers. His complacency in the face of impending violence is shocking, especially given that he is the supposed spiritual leader of the town. Unfortunately, it is also typical—his feeling that the murder “wasn’t any business” of his is common among the townspeople who failed to prevent the crime. Further, by using the Bishop’s arrival to explain his distractedness, Amador adds a layer of irony to his excuse: he was so caught up in organizing a grand display of sacredness that he failed to prevent something evil and profane from occurring right under his nose.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝ They gave us back a completely different body. Half of the cranium had been destroyed by the trepanation, and the lady-killer face that death had preserved ended up having lost its identity. Furthermore, the priest had pulled out the sliced-up intestines by the roots, but in the end he didn't know what to do with them, and he gave them an angry blessing and threw them into the garbage pail.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Santiago Nasar, Father Carmen Amador

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

The Narrator offers this description of Santiago’s body after Father Amador has completed his clumsy autopsy. The passage shows in gruesome detail the transformative quality of violence—how it reduces Santiago to a mere thing, or collection of things, and entirely erases his identity as a human being. Father Amador’s exasperated decision to toss Santiago’s intestines in the trash is a kind of perverted ritual, a clash of solemn, Catholic sensibilities and the absolutely profane reality of violence. This also echoes the earlier scene of Victoria Guzmán disemboweling the rabbits, where Santiago urged her to not be a “savage,” but

to pretend that the rabbits were human. Here we see that indeed such violence is inherently savage and profane, whether it is a cook gutting rabbits or a priest “blessing” a murder victim’s organs.

☝ For the immense majority of people there was only one victim: Bayardo San Román. They took it for granted that the other actors in the tragedy had been fulfilling with dignity, and even with a certain grandeur, their part of the destiny that life had assigned them.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Bayardo San Román

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Here the Narrator explains that, in the days following the murder, Santiago’s burial, the arrest of the Vicario twins, and the flight of the Vicario family, the townspeople reserve all of their pity for Bayardo, who is arguably left the most unscathed by the tragedy. Their concern for him illustrates their bizarre, arguably backwards value system, and their obsession with honor and dignity at the expense of common humanity. To the townspeople, Angela, Santiago, and the Vicario twins are actors, and they are to be congratulated for how well they played their roles—never mind if the performance essentially cost all of them their lives.

☝ She became lucid, overbearing, mistress of her own free will, and she became a virgin again just for him, and she recognized no other authority than her own nor any other service than that of her obsession.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Angela Vicario

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 93

Explanation and Analysis

After Santiago’s murder, Angela Vicario falls mysteriously in love with Bayardo, and she begins writing to him every day. Here the narrator explains that her obsession allows her to transcend, in a certain sense, the social restrictions that had

determined the course of her life up until her disastrous marriage. The Narrator's claim that Angela succeeds in "becoming a virgin again" emphasizes that virginity is more of an imaginary social construct than a physiological fact. Furthermore, Angela's obsessive letter writing is a kind of ritual for her; however, unlike most rituals in the novel, it is highly personal, emerging from a private conviction rather than some kind of external pressure or need to perform.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ For years we couldn't talk about anything else. Our daily conduct, dominated then by so many linear habits, had suddenly begun to spin around a single common anxiety. The cocks of dawn would catch us trying to give order to the chain of many chance events that had made absurdity possible, and it was obvious that we weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:    



Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this paragraph, which opens the final chapter, the Narrator explains the lasting effects of Santiago's murder, and the community's methods of confronting their own complicity in it. While their lives before the murder had been driven by daily rituals, "linear habits," now their lives are dominated by a single, cyclical ritual: attempting to make sense of the senseless and apparently highly preventable crime. The townsfolk's anxiety over the murder is essentially existential: everyone feels they were "assigned" a role in the tragedy by fate, and yet they are also forced to reckon with their own choices that, in total, resulted in Santiago's death.

☝ He was so perplexed by the enigma that fate had touched him with, that he kept falling into lyrical distractions that ran contrary to the rigor of his profession. Most of all, he never thought it legitimate that life should make use of so many coincidences forbidden literature, so that there should be the untrammelled fulfillment of a death so clearly foretold.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), The Visiting Magistrate

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Here the Narrator describes the young, exuberant Magistrate who comes to investigate the murder. The Magistrate's tendency toward "lyrical distraction" and his habit of interpreting the murder through the lens of literature is another one of Márquez's winks at the reader. Of course, in one sense it is not really life that "makes use of so many coincidences forbidden literature," it is Márquez's novel that does so. (But it's also worth noting that the novel is loosely based on a true story.) This self-conscious joke simultaneously highlights the tragic nature of fate in the novel, makes light of the sheer improbability of the novel's events, and also preempts any accusations of improbability that a reader might make.

☝ They were sitting down to breakfast when they saw Santiago Nasar enter, soaked in blood and carrying the roots of his entrails in his hands. Poncho Lanao told me: "What I'll never forget was the terrible smell of shit." But Argénida Lanao, the oldest daughter, said that Santiago Nasar walked with his usual good bearing, measuring his steps well, and that his Saracen face with its dashing ringlets was handsomer than ever. As he passed by the table he smiled at them and continued through the bedrooms to the rear door of the house.

Related Characters: The Narrator, Poncho Lanao (speaker), Santiago Nasar, Argénida Lanao

Related Themes:    

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Explanation and Analysis

After he is brutally stabbed by the Vicario twins, Santiago passes through his neighbor's house in order to reach his own back door. He does this automatically, as it is a kind of ritual he performed often. However, this iteration of the ritual is grotesque, perverse—an otherwise neighborly exchange transformed into a violent and traumatic disruption. Poncho Lanao's remark on "the terrible smell of shit" underlines just how profane this kind of death is, despite the supposedly "honorable" reasons that inspired it. At the same time, Argénida Lanao's contradictory memory

of Santiago's passing again highlights how fictionalized this

act has become in the town's collective memory.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

On the morning of his murder, Santiago Nasar wakes up at 5:30 AM, hungover from the wedding the night before and apparently unaware of the danger he is in. He is excited to see **the Bishop**, who is supposed to visit the town that morning on his riverboat. Santiago has had a pleasant dream about walking through a grove of trees, but upon waking he feels “spattered with **bird** shit.” His mother, Plácida Linero, a skilled interpreter of dreams, later recalls to the Narrator that she saw nothing ominous about the dream. The Narrator adds that the people who saw Santiago that morning remember finding him in a cheerful mood, telling those he met that it was a beautiful day. Despite this detail, however, not everyone can agree on what the weather was like on the fateful morning. Some think it was radiant day, while others remember it as overcast and funereal.

Santiago rises and dresses in a formal outfit of white linen. When Santiago is working in the country, the narrator informs us, he carries a gun, but he leaves it behind today. In fact, his house is filled with guns, but he keeps them under lock and key, a safety precaution his late father, Ibrahim Nasar, taught him. He goes searching for aspirin and wakens Plácida Linero in the process. He tells her about his dream, and she informs him that anything involving **birds** is a good omen. He waves goodbye to her casually and heads to the kitchen. It's the last time Plácida Linero sees her son alive.

In recounting Santiago's final encounter with Plácida Linero, the Narrator tells of his own encounter with her, decades after Santiago's murder, when he decides to interview her about the incident. The Narrator finds her in the exact same spot Santiago found her on that fateful morning. Now, the Narrator explains, she is alone, deeply aggrieved, and suffering from an “eternal headache.” She mistakes the Narrator for Santiago as he walks through the door.

A lot is happening in this first paragraph. The Narrator seems to seal Santiago's fate in the first sentence, immediately imparting the coming events with gravity and a sense of predestination. The subsequent speculation about Santiago's dream—whether or not it contained an omen—further emphasizes the seemingly fated nature of his murder. Santiago is fighting through a hangover in order to see the Bishop, an irony that will prove important, taking different forms throughout the novel. Finally, the uncertainty regarding the weather, and the chorus of voices that generate that uncertainty, establishes two important details: one, Santiago's murder happened long ago, and memories of it are almost absurdly conflicting; and two, it left an entire community reeling.



Santiago's bright white outfit seems to mark his fate—it is almost destined to be stained by blood. The Narrator's exhaustive description of Santiago's arsenal underscores, mournfully, what might have been. Plácida's failure to detect an omen in Santiago's dream has the same effect—the Narrator seems to linger on all the many things that could have prevented Santiago's murder.



Though it's hinted at before, the full extent of the trauma that Santiago's death has caused is first made visible here. It is almost as if Plácida has remained frozen in place ever since the murder. Her memory of Santiago impresses itself upon reality; time seems to recur.



The Narrator returns to the day of Santiago's death. In the kitchen, Victoria Guzmán, the cook, and her teenaged daughter, Divina Flor, are hard at work. Victoria is gutting rabbits. Divina Flor serves Santiago coffee with a shot of cane liquor. When she comes to collect the empty mug he grabs her by the wrist and tells her she must be tamed. Victoria Guzmán, waving a bloody kitchen knife, tells Santiago to keep his hands off her daughter. The narrator explains that Ibrahim Nasar seduced Victoria when she was younger, and that Santiago has plans to do the same to Divina Flor. Victoria, now angry, proceeds to gut the rabbits with ferocity, which she knows disgusts Santiago.

Santiago, having finished his breakfast, walks to the front door of the house, accompanied by Divina Flor. The Narrator describes the house: it is a huge, converted warehouse, originally bought by Santiago's father, Ibrahim Nasar. The front door of the house opens onto the town square, while the back door opens onto the docks, where the **Bishop** is meant to arrive. Santiago exits through the front door. Given that he is going to see the Bishop, this is unusual and, as the Narrator explains, later causes the Visiting Magistrate to give the door the pulpy title "The Fatal Door." There is a simple explanation for his action, though: Santiago always exited through the front door when he was dressed up. Before he exits, he grabs Divina Flor's "whole pussy," something he does often. Against her mother's instructions, Divina leaves the door unlocked "in case of emergency."

As it turns out, the Narrator explains, both Victoria Guzmán and Divina Flor know that Santiago Nasar is about to die—earlier, a beggar had stopped by and told them the news. Victoria later explains that she didn't warn Santiago because she thought the threats were just drunkard's talk. Divina Flor, however, confesses that her mother wanted Santiago to die. For her part, Divina explains, she was too terrified to say anything. When Santiago grabbed her wrist, she says, his hand felt "frozen and stony, like the hand of a dead man."

Across the square, in Clotilde Armante's milk shop, Pedro and Pablo Vicario, twin brothers, lie in wait. They are the men who are going to kill Santiago Nasar. Each clutches a knife wrapped in newspaper. Seeing Santiago leave his house, they begin to get up, but Clotilde, who knows their plan, begs them to leave him for later, out of respect for **the Bishop**. Miraculously, they listen, and sit back down.

In a basic, brutal way, Victoria's butchering of the rabbits foreshadows the violence that will later befall Santiago. When she proceeds to brandish a bloody knife at Santiago, the gesture reads as an omen or a curse, as if fate is taunting the doomed man. Further, the exchange reveals that Santiago is not exactly a saint, despite his name: he has often abused impressionable Divina Flor. His abuse of her is oddly ritualistic, in the sense that repeats a pattern established by his father.



The narrator's obsession over minor but apparently crucial details—Santiago's use of the front door is one example of many—is something of a detective-novel trope, and works to underline the strange inevitability of the murder. Márquez is self-aware when it comes to his use of trope, though, and inserts a kind of joke with the Magistrate character: "The Fatal Door" is no more dramatic or pulpy a title than "Chronicle of a Death Foretold"! Separately, Santiago's habit of sexually assaulting Divina Flor, seen here in graphic detail, further establishes him as a depraved character.



Victoria and Divina are the first characters with the opportunity to warn Santiago, and the first to decline that opportunity. Their reasons for doing so, which include fear, incredulity, and hatred, present the reader with our first insights into the greater community's complicity in the crime. Divina's eerie feeling that Santiago is already dead further emphasizes the inevitability of his murder.



This first introduction to the killers portrays them not as particularly scheming or bloodthirsty, but as oddly casual, open, and even vulnerable. They are waiting for Santiago in a public setting, and the fact that they obey Clotilde's plea suggests they are not as enthusiastic about killing Santiago as one might expect.



The docks are crowded with people waiting for **the Bishop**. Many have brought gifts: **roosters**, because the Bishop loves cockscomb soup, and loads of wood. Despite the excitement, the Bishop passes by on his steamboat without stopping, delivering a blessing from afar. Santiago, who is at the docks, feels a little cheated, because he contributed to the loads of wood and helped pick out the best roosters. However, Margot, the Narrator's sister, recalls finding Santiago in a good mood when she ran into him at the docks. She finds him walking arm in arm with his friend, Cristo Bedoya, with whom he had been carousing at the wedding the night before. They are speculating about the costs of the wedding, which they agree must have been astronomical.

Margot, who has a slight crush on Santiago Nasar, invites him to breakfast. Santiago agrees but says he must go home first, to change clothes. Margot insists that he must come at once, without returning home first. Santiago waves her off. Cristo Bedoya remembers Margot's insistence as strange, and later wonders if she knew he was in danger. Margot tells the Narrator she had no idea, however.

The Narrator admits it strange that Margot didn't know Santiago was in danger, as so many townspeople knew by then. The Narrator finds it even stranger that his mother didn't know. Though she is a homebody, the Narrator's mother always seems to maintain secret threads of communication with the other townspeople.

Margot heads home by walking along the riverbank, where crowds of people have brought out food to offer up to **the Bishop**—in vain, however, as the Bishop passed by without stopping. Now no longer distracted by the bishop's arrival, the townspeople begin to discuss the other great news of the hour: Angela Vicario, the bride who was married the night before, has been returned to her parents by her husband, the dashing Bayardo San Román, after he discovered that she was not a virgin. Now Pablo and Pedro Vicario are out to kill Santiago Nasar, who they allege is responsible for deflowering their sister. Margot overhears their conversations and rushes home.

Back home, Margot sees that the Narrator's Mother has set an extra place at the breakfast table for Santiago Nasar. Margot, confused and distraught, tells her to take it away, and then begins to explain the terrible news she's heard. Her mother seems to know what Margot is saying before she's even said it, and flies into a panic. Hoping to warn Plácida Linero, she rushes out into the street, trailing Jaime the toddler and cursing under her breath about "lowlifes." She hears a great commotion coming from the direction of the square. A passerby tells her that it's too late: Santiago is dead.

The Bishop's refusal to set foot in the town is farcical, especially given the townsfolk's high expectations and elaborate offerings. The snub is over the top in its symbolism: it seems that God has left the town behind. Santiago's good mood suggests his obliviousness and in turn his innocence, which the Narrator will later insist on.



A tragedy makes seemingly insignificant details take on new significance, and memory offers a warped representation of reality. Cristo likely took note of Margot's insistence only after Santiago had been killed.



The people closest to Santiago, the people most likely to warn him, are somehow the only ones unaware of the danger he is in. His murder seems fated indeed.



As soon as the Bishop passes, all the pomp and piety mustered in his honor utterly dissolves. The townsfolk fall back to gossiping openly about the latest scandal: the implosion of Bayardo and Angela's not-so-holy matrimony, and the threats to Santiago's life. Margot, it seems, is the only one at all concerned about warning Santiago.



The Narrator's mother's nearly clairvoyant reaction to the news further characterizes Santiago's death as somehow supernatural, or predestined. Her exasperation over the "lowlifes"—presumably the twins and their many enablers—paints a picture of a community that is both depraved and inflexible, incapable of preventing a widely announced murder.



CHAPTER 2

The Narrator begins by recounting the arrival of Bayardo San Román, the man who marries Angela Vicario. Bayardo first appears, apparently at random, on a steamboat coming up **the river**. He is the richest, best-dressed, most dashing man the town has ever seen. He claims to be a track engineer, but remains fundamentally mysterious to the townsfolk. The Narrator, who is in college when Bayardo arrives, hears about him through his mother's letters, which are filled with praise for the man. When the Narrator returns home for Christmas and finally meets Bayardo face to face, he finds him overly serious, not quite as charming as everyone claims, and fundamentally sad.

There is some confusion in the public memory about how and when Bayardo San Román decided he wanted to marry Angela Vicario. Some claim that Bayardo, sitting on the porch of the boarding house where he was staying, saw Angela Vicario with her mother across the square, and declared right then and there that he was going to marry her.

Others say that Bayardo San Román first saw Angela Vicario at a charity bazaar. A music box was being raffled off. Bayardo bought all of the raffle tickets, won the music box by default, and later snuck into Angela's bedroom to leave the music box for her as a gift. Thinking this indecent, Angela's mother, Purísima del Carmen, sent her sons Pedro and Pablo to return the gift to Bayardo. The twins returned later that night, however, drunk, with Bayardo in tow, and still carrying the music box they were supposed to get rid of.

The Narrator describes the Vicario family. They are poor and extremely conservative—the matriarch Purísima del Carmen “looks like a nun.” Angela is the youngest of four daughters, one of whom is dead; when Bayardo first arrives, the Vicario women are “still observing a mourning that [is] relaxed in the house but rigorous in the street.” While Pablo and Pedro Vicario are raised to be men, the daughters are taught to be good wives, trained to embroider, sew, and make paper **flowers**. Angela is the prettiest of the daughters, but she has a “poverty of spirit” that does not bode well for her eligibility. It thus strikes everyone as strange that Bayardo wants to marry her.

In this provincial town, Bayardo may as well be an alien arriving from outer space. His fancy dress, while certainly impressive, strikes the Narrator as somewhat laughable. Also of note is the fact that the Narrator first encounters Bayardo through a kind of “literature”—his mother's letters—and that when he meets him in person, he is struck by the gap between the reality he sees and the reality that was originally represented to him.



We immediately learn that Bayardo is impulsive, almost reckless. His attraction to Angela seems inexplicable, utterly arbitrary—a fact that heightens the tragedy of their marriage and the ensuing murder.



That no one can agree on how Bayardo and Angela met emphasizes the fallibility of memory. This alternative anecdote further characterizes Bayardo as impulsive and reckless with his money. Purísima's extreme conservatism is on full display here, and gets a hilarious rebuttal in Pedro and Pablo's botched and debauched mission to return the music box. Their failure poses an important question: if they couldn't perform this simple duty, how is it that they succeeded in the much graver “honorable” duty of killing Santiago?



The Vicario family—especially Purísima—embodies the most morally stringent values of the community. Their profound attachment to ideals of honor, purity, and decency confine women of the family to live a cloistered life. Their “rigorous in the street” mourning suggests that they value ritual for the sheer sake of ritual. Indeed, their moral convictions seem to come merely from the sense that “this is the way things are, and this how things must be done.”



Still, the Vicario family is excited when Bayardo expresses interest. Pura Vicario (Purísima) is less excited, but agrees to arrange the marriage if Bayardo properly identifies himself. Bayardo does so by producing his entire family. His father, General Petronio San Román, is a war hero of note. The townspeople recognize him from pictures they've seen in the news. The whole family, of course, is filthy rich.

After this revelation, it seems that Angela Vicario is the only one left who is apprehensive about the marriage. She doesn't love Bayardo, and has had no say in the matter. It is a short engagement, however, due to Bayardo's urgings.

Bayardo asks Angela which house in the town she likes best. She answers casually that the old widower Xius' house is her favorite. Upon hearing this, Bayardo approaches the widower Xius and asks to buy the house along with all its furnishings. Xius says it isn't for sale: he's keeping it all if only for the memory of his beloved wife. But Bayardo is persistent, eventually offering him an incredible amount of money—in cash. Xius can't refuse, and, with his eyes filled with tears of rage, he agrees to sell the house. Dr. Dionisio Iguarán tells the Narrator that the episode was so upsetting for poor Xius that it eventually killed him.

Meanwhile, Angela Vicario grows increasingly worried. She shares her secret—that she isn't a virgin as everyone thinks—with her female friends. They reassure her that most women have had sex by the time they get married, and that their husbands are either too clueless or too mortified to put up a stink about it. In addition, they teach her a few tricks she can employ to fake her virginity, such as using mercurochrome to stain the conjugal sheets. Angela is heartened by their counsel, and calms down a bit about the coming wedding.

The wedding ends up being the largest the town has ever seen, thanks mostly to Bayardo's extravagance. Still, Pura Vicario insists on hosting the reception on the terrace of her own modest house, right by the pigsty where Pablo and Pedro slaughter their hogs. Bayardo's family, accompanied by many people of note, arrive by boat, bearing lavish gifts. The Narrator, Santiago Nasar, and Cristo Bedoya attend together. Santiago Nasar obsessively tries to calculate the cost of the wedding, and exchanges quips to that effect with Bayardo. Eventually Bayardo and Angela take their leave of the party and head to the widower Xius' house, but before doing so Bayardo instructs the guests to keep on partying in his absence.

While the arrival of Bayardo's family dispels some of the mystery that once surrounded him, it also confirms his status as a complete alien to the community. His family belongs to a powerful political regime that, while recognizable to the provincial townspeople, hails from a distant, menacing world.



Angela's engagement to Bayardo is her social lot. It has everything to do with her position in society, and nothing to do with her actual wishes.



There is something monstrous, even violent about Bayardo's insistence on buying Xius' house, even though Bayardo frames the transaction as an act of charity. Bayardo's carelessness with his money, and Xius's stubbornness in refusing it, makes clear just how wide a gap there is between the Bayardo's worldview and the worldview of the town. His arrival has certainly upset the usual order of things. (Note also that Xius wanted to keep the house for almost ritualistic reasons—to preserve it as a memorial of his wife.)



The friends' words of encouragement give voice to a sentiment that seems to be widespread throughout the town: that following rituals and maintaining the appearance of purity is more important than purity itself—or, at least, it's all that can be reasonably expected of you.



The wedding gives Bayardo the opportunity to put his wealth on full display, and he certainly does so. The sheer extravagance is hard for the most of the townspeople to believe. There's something tragic about Pura's insistence that her own house be used for the reception, as it highlights the mismatch between Angela and Bayardo's social statuses—but it also again mingles the sacred with the profane, placing the "holy" wedding next to the pigsty. Santiago's obsession over the price of the wedding might be read as antagonistic—he, like the narrator, wants to see through Bayardo's lavish smokescreens.



Here things get hazy for the Narrator. He remembers only flashes: his sister the nun drunkenly dancing, Dr. Dionisio Iguarán escaping on a boat so as not to be seen by **the Bishop** the next morning, people tripping over poor old blind Poncio Vicario, the Narrator himself proposing to Mercedes Barcha, an offer she takes him up on fourteen years later. Eventually the Narrator, his brother Luis Enrique, Santiago Nasar, and Cristo Bedoya end up at María Alejandrina Cervantes' brothel. Pablo and Pedro Vicario are there as well, and all six of them drink and sing together.

Thanks both to the effects of alcohol and the passage of time, the narrator remembers the night as a kind of fever dream. Dr. Iguarán's eagerness to escape the disapproving eye of the Bishop suggests just how debauched the festivities were (also the fact that the narrator's sister, a nun, gets drunk and dances). Even though the party is ostensibly a wedding, the couple is oddly—one might say ominously—absent. But the drunken townsfolk are unworried. In fact, they seem consumed by fellow feeling. Their togetherness, which the reader knows will soon dissolve, only heightens the sense of impending tragedy.



Back at the Vicario household, things are much quieter. However, in the middle of the night, Pura Vicario is awakened by a knock on the door. It's Bayardo San Román. Angela Vicario is standing beside him, her dress in tatters. To Pura they look like ghosts. Bayardo refuses to enter. He pushes Angela into the house, gives Pura a kiss on the cheek, and thanks her, calling her a "saint." Surmising what has happened, Pura flies into a rage, and savagely beats Angela. She summons Pedro and Pablo back to the house. Pedro, ever the assertive one, asks Angela who took her virginity. She wastes no time in telling him: it was Santiago Nasar.

Pura's violent outburst of rage and the evidence of Bayardo's similar outburst (Angela's dress is in tatters) suggest just how entrenched Pura and Bayardo are in their beliefs. But their devotion to purity is not itself all that pure: Bayardo's insistence that Pura has been a "saint" is made brutally ironic when Pura, without hesitating, immediately subjects Angela to a terrible beating. When Angela offers Santiago's name, her choice seems random, inexplicable.



CHAPTER 3

The Narrator begins the chapter by explaining that when Pablo and Pedro Vicario were eventually tried for the murder, the court upheld their lawyer's "thesis of homicide in legitimate defense of honor." In fact, the twins justified their crime in the same exact way when they turned themselves in to Father Carmen Amador, the local priest, telling him that they "killed him openly, but we're innocent."

The verdict reveals just how embedded the religiously-inflected concept of honor is in the community—it's written into the very law of the place! The lawyer's argument contains the premise that a person might be legitimately killed in defense of an abstract concept—something that might seem absurd, but that is also inherent in the very concept of war or capital punishment.



While Pedro and Pablo have never demonstrated any remorse for the murder, the Narrator explains that, in reconstructing the facts of the case, it has become clear to him that the twins did everything in their power to have someone stop them. The twins claimed to have first searched for Santiago at María Alejandrina Cervantes' house, but María claims she never saw them. Next, they went to Clotilde Amante's store, across the square from Santiago's front door, but they must have known—as everyone in town knew—that Santiago never used his front door.

The revelation that Pedro and Pablo are reluctant killers introduces a new layer of tragedy to the murder: it's not just that the town fails to prevent the murder, it's that they fail to prevent the murder despite the many opportunities they have to do so, and despite the fundamental reluctance of the killers. Furthermore, Pedro and Pablo aren't exactly villains: it seems they are more interested in creating the impression that they're defending their sister's honor than in actually going through with the murder.



The Narrator now picks up where he left off at the last chapter. “There had never been a death more foretold,” he says. Upon hearing Santiago Nasar’s name, the twins take two of their best knives to the meat market, where they proceed to sharpen them. There they encounter Faustino Santos, a butcher, who is confused to find them at the market on a Monday morning—and still wearing their wedding suits, at that. The twins calmly explain to him and the other butchers present that they’re going to kill Santiago Nasar. Most of the butchers think the twins are simply drunk and babbling, but Faustino is a little worried. He notifies a police officer, Leandro Pornoy.

As an aside, the Narrator explains that, in trying to reconstruct the events of that night, he ended up asking a number of butchers if their job perhaps predisposes one to violence. All of them denied this, reminding the Narrator that they never look a steer in the eye when they kill it, avoid eating animals they themselves have butchered, and try not to name their livestock. The Narrator points out that the Vicario twins named their pigs, but one butcher counters by saying that the twins gave their pigs only the names of **flowers**.

The twins wrap their now sharpened knives in rags and continue on to Clotilde Amante’s store, where they plan to sit and keep watch over Santiago Nasar’s front door. Clotilde serves them two bottles of cane liquor, and they tell her that they’re going to kill Santiago Nasar. Clotilde later tells the Narrator that they looked like children. This worries her: children are capable of anything. More than a dozen customers come through the store while the twins are there, and the twins tell every one of them their plan. Eventually Officer Leandro Pornoy stops by. He is there to get milk for the mayor, Colonel Lázaro Aponte, but naturally he chats with the twins, who confirm their plan.

Leandro Pornoy informs Colonel Lázaro Aponte that the Vicario brothers have been talking about killing Santiago Nasar. Aponte doesn’t make much of this news, and doesn’t plan to do anything about it. It isn’t until his wife tells him that Angela Vicario has been returned to her mother that Aponte starts to think the twins might be serious. He goes over to Clotilde Amante’s store, confiscates the twins’ knives, and instructs them to go home. Clotilde is disappointed that he doesn’t detain him, but more for their sake than for Santiago’s. In her view, a horrible duty has fallen to them, a duty from which they must be spared.

The Narrator’s assertion that “there had never been a death more foretold” introduces a pun on which the entire novel hinges. In one sense, Santiago’s murder seems somehow predestined, as the Narrator has already made clear. At the same time, Santiago’s murder is widely announced—literally “foretold.” Faustino and the butchers are the first to learn of the twins’ plan, as the brothers publicly sharpen their knives in a ritualistic performance. The butchers’ incredulity and lack of concern will prove typical of the townspeople.



This somewhat strange digression serves to emphasize how singular the violence of murder is. Murder exists in a category of its own, apart from the everyday forms of violence with which the townspeople are familiar. The butchers’ discomfort with looking a steer in the eye as they kill it conveys just how traumatic the act of killing can be. The flower names that the twins give their victims further complicates the symbolic image of flowers in the novella.



Once again, the twins display an extraordinary openness that suggests a certain reluctance. And yet, ironically, their openness is what keeps anyone from taking their threats seriously. Clotilde is one of the few to see through to the truth of the matter. Her assertion that Pablo and Pedro looked like children suggests once again that the brothers are not quite the ruthless killers one would expect—rather, they are two individuals caught up in a situation they don’t fully understand.



The Colonel is the first (and more or less the only) bystander to actively intervene, and yet he does so half-heartedly, without any real sense of urgency. By framing the twins as the true victims of the coming crime, Clotilde seems to suggest that the murder is more a product of social forces than individual malice. The tragedy involves not just its victim but its perpetrators as well.



Pablo and Pedro Vicario leave Clotilde's store. Clotilde sends the beggar woman to warn Victoria Gúzman, and another customer to warn Father Amador. The news is spreading very quickly. Suddenly, the Vicario brothers return to Clotilde's store, wielding knives once again.

There is something mechanical and darkly humorous about the way in which Pablo and Pedro return to Clotilde's store with new knives in hand—as if they are following a track from which they cannot veer.



The Narrator explains that, back at their home, Pedro and Pablo Vicario had their first disagreement of the morning. Pedro, who had served in the military and was naturally more authoritarian than Pablo, had been the first to suggest that they kill Santiago. But now that their knives had been confiscated, Pedro considered their duty fulfilled and in any case didn't feel fit to continue: his gonorrhea was acting up, causing him immense pain. However, Pablo was determined to try again, and managed to convince his brother to go through with the murder. They sharpened a new pair of knives, stopped for coffee with Prudencia Cotes, Pablo's fiancée (sympathetic to the twins' cause), and returned to Clotilde's store.

This is the first time in the novel that the twins receive any sort of characterization. As it turns out, their personalities are distinct and fatefully complementary. While from Clotilde's perspective their persistence appeared mechanical, their decision to continue was in fact complex, and had more to do with a sort of sibling rivalry than any sort of personal conviction. Separately, Pedro's venereal disease is a stark reminder of the community's differing expectations for male and female sexuality.



At Clotilde's store, the Vicario twins borrow Don Rogelio de la Flor's shaving instruments. Pedro shaves with his knife, while Pablo uses Don Rogelio's safety razor. The sun hasn't risen yet. They wait for the light to come on in Santiago's bedroom, but it never does.

This highly ritualized display of machismo is as laughable as it is terrifying. The twins seem almost to be play-acting.



The Narrator explains that Santiago didn't turn his light on when he eventually came home, at four in the morning. Before that he had been at María Alejandrina Cervantes's brothel with the Narrator, Cristo Bedoya, and Luis Enrique. Later, the four of them had gone out serenading people. They even dropped by the widower Xius's house and sang beneath the window of the newlywed couple, not knowing that by then Angela had already been returned to her mother.

The Narrator and Santiago's drunken antics stand in stark contrast to the twins' grave preparations. The ease with which Santiago travels to Xius' house and performs a serenade for the newlyweds seems to further corroborate his innocence: would he have ever taunted Angela and Bayardo in such a way if he had actually been the one to take Angela's virginity?



Afterwards, the four friends part ways. Santiago Nasar returns home and immediately falls asleep, just before the beggar woman comes to warn Victoria Guzmán of the impending murder. The Narrator returns to María Alejandrina Cervantes' bed. Luis Enrique goes to Clotilde Amarante's store. There the twins tell him their plan, but he later claims not to remember this. He goes home, falls asleep on the toilet, and doesn't wake up again until Santiago is already dead.

The four friends are blissfully unaware of the impending tragedy. Luis Enrique's inability to remember his interaction with the twins serves as yet another example of the fallibility of memory.



CHAPTER 4

The Narrator jumps forward to the days following Santiago's murder. Santiago's body, which is ravaged and quickly decomposing, is put on public display in his own living room. Before they can bury him an autopsy must be performed, but Dr. Dionisio Aguarán is abroad. Under normal circumstances the duty would then fall to Cristo Bedoya, but he is excused due to his intimate relationship with Santiago. Finally, Father Amador agrees to perform the autopsy.

The autopsy, which is clumsily executed, finds that seven of Santiago's many wounds were fatal. His liver is sliced to pieces, his intestines and lungs and stomach perforated, his pancreas destroyed. In addition he has minor wounds all over his arms and hands, including ones that look like "the stigmata of Christ." Father Amador weighs Santiago's brain, and determines that Santiago was of greater than average intelligence, and had a bright future ahead of him. However, he notes that Santiago also had an enlarged liver—likely the result of poorly treated hepatitis—and would have died in a few years anyway. Dr. Dionisio Iguarán, when he finally returns, disagrees with this hypothesis, arguing that Caribbean people have naturally large livers. When the body is returned to Plácida Linero, it is practically in pieces. They have to rush to bury it, because it's beginning to stink up the house.

The Narrator, grieving, finds solace in María Alejandrina Cervantes' bed. He finds her feasting—this is her way of grieving. They begin to have sex, but suddenly María pushes him away, saying that he smells like Santiago. The Narrator agrees—everything smells of Santiago that day.

It even smells of Santiago in Pablo and Pedro Vicario's jail cell. They are there awaiting trial, unable to afford bail. The cell is exceedingly comfortable, but the twins are in hell. Pedro's gonorrhea is causing him extreme pain, and he can't bring himself to sleep. Pablo comes down with a "pestilential diarrhea." They begin to worry that they've been poisoned—perhaps by vengeful Arabs (Santiago's father was an Arab). Colonel Lázaro Aponte goes around interviewing the Arabs living in town. He finds them confused and sad, but not bloodthirsty.

What was once a walking, talking, singing Santiago Nasar is suddenly a hacked-up piece of meat. The transformation is shocking. The insistence that there be an autopsy is strange given the public nature of the death: an autopsy won't really discover anything about murder that isn't already known, as nearly everyone in town saw it happen.



The haphazard, brutal autopsy is less a scientific procedure than it is an extension of the violence Santiago has already suffered. It is performed as a formality, a ritual for ritual's sake (and by a priest, moreover). While the reference to stigmata seems to portray Santiago as a Christ figure, the passage also strongly emphasizes the mortality of Santiago's flesh: unlike Christ's, his body rots and falls apart. The disagreement between Dionisio and Father Amador over Santiago's life expectancy once again brings up the question of fate: was death out to get Santiago no matter what? Dr. Iguarán, a man of science, and Father Amador, a man of faith, represent in miniature the two opposing interpretations of Santiago's murder: that it was the work of God, and that it was the work of men.



María's ravenous hunger is a jarring follow-up to the description of Santiago's body: there is something at once endearing and profane about it. The pervasive smell of Santiago is a physical manifestation of the trauma the town has suffered, foreshadowing the ways in which the murder will haunt the town in years to come.



The murder instigates startling—and strangely opposite—physical reactions in the twins. Further, the suspicions of Arab conspiracy, which are soundly discredited, reveal that the townsfolk's notion of justice is by no means universal. Unlike the twins, the Arabs never think to meet violence with violence.



The rest of the Vicario family decides to leave town. Pura Vicario wraps Angela's head in a towel to hide the bruises from her beating, and dresses her in a red dress to preempt any suspicions that Angela might be in mourning for Santiago. Pura asks Father Amador to confess Pedro and Pablo, but Pedro refuses, claiming that the two have not committed a sin. The twins are transferred to a larger prison in Riohacha, where they will await trial for three years. The Narrator here inserts a glimpse of their futures after their acquittal. Pablo takes up his father's profession, working as a goldsmith. Pedro returns to the military, and is eventually killed by Guerillas.

Even after the Vicario family's guise of decency and moral purity has come crashing down, Pura insists on keeping up appearances. Her attempts to do so are ham-handed, almost farcical, and probably draw more attention than they deflect. The Narrator's discussion of the twins' ultimate fate is so brief as to be anticlimactic. Depending on whether one views the twins as villains or victims, this anticlimax is either relieving or extremely frustrating.



Suddenly, everyone in town remembers Bayardo San Román. Colonel Aponte takes a patrol up to the widower Xius' house, and finds Bayardo in the final stages of alcohol poisoning. His family is summoned back to town. Only his sisters and mother show up, and they all make a huge show of grieving for Bayardo's misfortune—the Narrator can't help but think they're covering up "greater shames." They drag off Bayardo, who seems half dead. Now empty, the widower Xius' house begins to waste away.

The murder forces the townsfolk's attention inward, and in the process Bayardo is completely forgotten. The neglect reveals that, despite his impressiveness—or maybe because of it—Bayardo never really made a place for himself within the community. His sisters' melodramatic display of grief is yet another example of empty ritual used to disguise rather than express emotion.



The Narrator now focuses on recounting Angela Vicario's life after the murder. Many years later, the Narrator travels to the backwater town where Angela eventually settled. He finds her older-looking and somewhat pitiful, but ultimately mature and witty. The Narrator probes her, trying to tease out the truth about her relationship with Santiago Nasar—he doesn't believe they were ever involved—but Angela deflects his questions, saying only that Santiago was the one.

After her public disgrace, Angela suffers an arguably greater punishment than her brothers. She becomes a victim to the cultural obsession with purity, spending long years of solitude as a literal seamstress. Her refusal to corroborate or fully reject the Narrator's suspicions is perhaps the greatest mystery of the novel. No one, it seems, will ever know why Santiago died.



She goes on to tell the Narrator that, on her fateful wedding night, she couldn't bring herself to try the tricks her friends had suggested she use on Bayardo—to do so seemed indecent. Then she recalls that, when her mother started beating her, she found herself thinking of Bayardo. She admits that she continued thinking about him for years, until she happened to see him in a hotel in Riohacha. He didn't see her. She went crazy for him.

Angela's refusal of her friends' tricks—her stoic resignation to fate—constitutes a sound rejection of her family's obsession with ritual and desperate maintenance of appearances. Her sudden fixation on Bayardo, whom she once felt nothing for, is mysterious and never fully explained. More than anything it seems to be an act of God.



She tells the narrator that, after their encounter in the hotel, she began writing letters to Bayardo. He never replied, but Angela found that the more she wrote to him, and the longer he went without replying, the more she went crazy for him. Finally, after seventeen years of not responding, Bayardo shows up on Angela's doorstep, wearing the same clothes he wore when she first saw him. He is carrying a suitcase with clothing "in order to stay," and has another suitcase full of her letters, all of them unopened.

Angela's obsessive, blind letter writing is its own kind of ritual, one driven to obsessive extremes. And yet unlike the traditional rituals taken up by her family and other members of the community, hers arises from a place of personal conviction; it isn't the result of societal expectations and pressures.



CHAPTER 5

For years, the murder is all anyone can talk about. Many feel guilty for not doing more to stop it, but most console themselves with the thought that affairs of honor are not to be interfered with. Still, the murder has a lasting effect on the town. Hortensia Baute, a local woman, goes crazy; Flora Miguel, Santiago's fiancée, runs off; Don Rogelio de la Flor takes one look at Santiago's door, which was chipped to pieces by the Vicario twins' knives, and dies of shock. For her part, Plácida Linero is able to forgive herself for locking her front door, because Divina Flor swore to her that she had seen Santiago had come inside (he hadn't). However, she can never forgive herself for mixing up the good omen of trees with the bad omen of **birds** in Santiago's dream.

Twelve days after the crime, an investigating Magistrate comes to town to make sense of it all. He is young, recently graduated from law school, and perhaps a bit too enamored of literature. In his brief—part of which the Narrator is able to dig up, many years later—he is prone to “lyrical distractions,” and admits his bewilderment that the case seems to “make use of so many coincidences forbidden literature.” Most of all, though, he is vexed by the utter lack of evidence connecting Santiago Nasar to Angela Vicario. For the Magistrate—and for the narrator—Santiago's behavior in the hours before his murder is overwhelming proof of his *innocence*.

The Narrator admits that it is his personal impression that Santiago died without understanding his own death. Of those who failed to warn Santiago that morning, many later claim that his apparent good spirits brought them to think the whole matter had been cleared up. Others, like Fausta López and Polo Carrillo, interpret his mood as arrogance. Indalecio Pardo, one of Santiago's best friends, admits that when he had the chance to warn Santiago, he was simply too scared to say anything.

Yamil Shaium, a old friend of Santiago's father, Ibrahim, hears that Pedro and Pablo Vicario are plotting to kill Santiago. Of all people Yamil commands the most authority over Santiago, but he doesn't want to alarm him unnecessarily, so he resolves to consult Cristo Bedoya first. When Cristo and Santiago are passing by Yamil's shop, Yamil calls out to Cristo. Santiago takes his leave, and Yamil breaks the news to Cristo.

Here the Narrator details the full extent of the trauma caused by Santiago's murder. It's as if there isn't a single witness who isn't profoundly affected by the murder, physically or otherwise. Plácida Linero's belief that she failed to recognize an omen that was nonetheless present in Santiago's dream has the strange effect of mixing divine will with human error: Santiago's fate is at once destined and preventable.



The magistrate's fixation on the lyrical and literary qualities of Santiago's murder has a dizzying effect: of course, the murder is literary—this is a novel, after all—and yet it's also loosely based on real events. The magistrate's character might be read as a kind of joke inserted by Márquez, a way for the author to acknowledge the improbability of the events of the novel while simultaneously lending them a certain credibility—“truth is stranger than fiction,” as they say.



The Narrator here provides a more detailed picture of the community's complicity in the murder. Strangely, it appears that everyone who fails to prevent the murder has a more or less unique reason for failing. The community's complicity in the crime comes off as widespread incompetence more than malice.



Yamil's reticence—his chief concern seems to be maintaining a sense of propriety—proves fatal, and is in fact typical of the town at large. Everyday manners and rituals get in the way of moral courage.



Upon hearing the news, Cristo Bedoya is immediately distraught. He runs after Santiago, but finds that his friend has disappeared into the crowd. Thinking Santiago has gone home, he rushes to Plácida Linero's house. There, Divina Flor and Victoria Guzmán tell Cristo that Santiago hasn't returned. Cristo searches Santiago's bedroom anyway, where he picks up a pistol, which he intends to bring to Santiago. He runs into Plácida Linero, which is cause for some confusion: he doesn't have the heart to tell her that her son is in danger, and so can't explain why he is in her house. He rushes out.

As Cristo is passing Clotilde's store, Pedro and Pablo Vicario emerge. Pedro looks haggard and unnaturally insolent, brandishing his knife, and Pablo is still wearing his wedding jacket. Pedro shouts at Cristo to tell Santiago he's a dead man. Cristo, bluffing, warns them that Santiago is armed. The twins know better—Santiago never goes armed while wearing nice clothes. Clotilde appears behind the twins and shouts at Cristo to hurry up and warn Santiago, because it looks like no one else will.

The twins' shouts awaken interest, and people start convening in the square, waiting for something to happen. Cristo hurries off in search of Santiago. He asks everyone who passes, but no one has seen Santiago. He runs into Colonel Lázaro Aponte at the door of a social club and tells him that Pedro and Pablo are after Santiago. The Colonel, who confiscated the twins' first pair of knives and sent them home, is confused at first, but eventually realizes that the two must have gotten new weapons. Cristo runs off. The Colonel resolves to do something to prevent the crime, but first goes into the social club to set a date for a game of dominoes. When he emerges again, the crime has been committed.

Cristo, thinking that Santiago has perhaps gone to the Narrator's house for breakfast, runs along the river bank. He is waylaid by Próspera Arango: she begs Cristo to help her with her father, who is dying on the stoop of the house. Cristo helps her carry her father inside, and when he emerges there are distant shouts coming from the square. He continues on to the Narrator's house, running now, and when he approaches he runs into the Narrator's Mother. She is weeping, and tells Cristo that she's heard Santiago has been killed.

Cristo Bedoya is just about the only person who immediately recognizes the gravity of the situation, which emphasizes the closeness of his bond with Santiago. His desperate search for Santiago builds up tension as the novella comes to the close, even though we already know the inevitable outcome.



Here, both the twins and Cristo are assuming roles that don't come naturally to them—their threats to each other seem inauthentic, a kind of acting. All parties, it seems, have found themselves unwillingly thrust into a terrible, unfamiliar situation, in which they are expected to behave in ways they normally wouldn't.



Colonel Aponte's indifference and sluggishness is appalling, but like so many of the other townsfolk his complicity seems more a matter of incompetence and thick-headedness than outright malice. For the Colonel, it seems, the twins' knife-brandishing was just a drunken display of machismo, so the thought that they went home to get new weapons is inconceivable.



This entirely random obstacle is yet another example of a what the Magistrate might call a "coincidence typically forbidden literature." And yet Cristo's willingness to help the man further portrays him as a morally upstanding character—even if his commitment to kindness proves tragic in this case.



The Narrator explains that, while Cristo was looking for him, Santiago had gone into his fiancée Flora Miguel's house. Cristo hadn't thought to check there because he, like everyone else in the community, was under the impression that the Miguel family didn't rise until noon. Flora had heard the news and was more mortified and angry than scared, thinking that the Vicario family would end up forcing Santiago to marry Angela as penance. When he enters Flora's house, Santiago finds Flora in a rage. She shoves at him a chest full of letters he once sent her, and she tells him "I hope they kill you!" Santiago is so confused that he drops the chest of letters. Nahir Miguel enters the room. He explains to Santiago in Arabic that Pablo and Pedro are after him. Santiago becomes extremely confused and disoriented. Nahir offers to either hide him in his house or provide him with a rifle.

Instead, Santiago stumbles outside, where a huge crowd has gathered. Santiago is so confused that he can't remember which direction his house is in. Members of the crowd shout after him, telling him which way to run. Yamil Shaium shouts at Santiago to hide in Yamil's store, then runs inside to retrieve his gun, but can't find the cartridges. Santiago runs back and forth several times. He starts to run home as if to enter through the back, but then seems to remember that his front door, which is accessible through the square, is open, and starts off in that direction. Pedro and Pablo Vicario see him, stand up, and unsheathe their knives. Clotilde Armante grabs Pedro by the shirt and shouts at Santiago to run.

Back at Plácida Linero's house, Victoria Guzmán finally tells Plácida that her son is in danger. Divina Flor is convinced that she saw Santiago Nasar, bearing **flowers**, come through the back door of the house and head up to his room, and she tells Victoria and Plácida as much. Plácida goes to the front door, through which she can see the Vicario twins running toward the house—but from her angle she can't see Santiago, whom they're pursuing. She closes and bolts the door just seconds before Santiago reaches it.

Pedro and Pablo Vicario catch up to Santiago at his door. Santiago turns to face them, and they begin stabbing him, first in the side, then everywhere. The twins later recall feeling surprised at how hard it is to kill a man, not realizing that it was their own knives holding Santiago up against the door, not letting him fall. Finally, Pablo Vicario gives Santiago a horizontal slash across the stomach, and his intestines spill out. The twins run off, pursued by Yamil Shaium and a group of Arabs.

In a strange way, Flora Miguel's chest of letters echoes Bayardo's suitcase full of Angela's letters. Flora and Angela, it turns out, occupy similar positions in society: both are kept cloistered in their house, and both are involved in engagements without having much choice in the matter. Santiago's utter confusion upon hearing the news seems to corroborate the Narrator's suspicions that Santiago had nothing to do with Angela, and had no idea what the twins had in store for him. Nahir's willingness to help Santiago stands in stark contrast to the reactions of most townspeople.



The shift from the intensely private Miguel household to the crowded, noisy public square is jarring—it's almost as if Santiago has walked into a morbid surprise party. The shock reduces Santiago to something like a confused animal, and his scurrying around, egged on by shouts from the spectators, takes on the quality of a circus performance. In grabbing Pedro by the shirt, Clotilde is the first—and last—townsperson to physically intervene.



Divina's vision is one of the few explicitly "magical" elements of the novel, and it is presented with little comment or explanation—such deadpan is typical of Márquez. Plácida's failure to see Santiago running towards her is yet another fatal coincidence.



In some ways, Pablo and Pedro seem every bit as bewildered by what they are doing as Santiago is. They deliver their brutal blows with a kind of detachment, surprised by their own actions. The violence is gratuitous, and Márquez doesn't shy from describing it in extreme detail.



Plácida Linero, who this whole time thinks that Santiago is safe in his room, can't find him in the house. She goes out on the second floor of the house and looks down into the square to see her son bleeding, trying to rise from the dirt. Santiago manages to stand and, cradling his intestines in his hands, passes through his neighbors' house in order to get to his back door. The neighbors watch him pass through the kitchen and are petrified with fear. Santiago gets to his own back door, enters the house, and then falls on his face in the kitchen.

Santiago's strange determination to reenter the privacy of his home tragically punctuates the intensely public nature of his murder. The death has been "foretold" from the start, but by ending the story with such a graphic description of the actual murder, Márquez delivers a powerful conclusion. Despite all the other forces of society, fate, memory, and ritual swirling around the act, at the center is nothing more nor less than a brutal murder.





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