

Chronicle of a Death Foretold Study Guide

Chronicle of a Death Foretold by Gabriel García Márquez

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Plot Summary

The story, *A Chronicle of Death Foretold*, is an in-depth look at the final moments leading up to the murder of Santiago Nasar. The narrator recalls from his memory, and the memories of others that he interviews, Santiago Nasar's final day of life and his murder by his friends Pablo and Pedro Vicario.

From the beginning, the narrator states Santiago's death was foretold and it was a series of inexplicable coincidences that lead to his murder. The narrator combs over every detail of Santiago's last day of life, trying to make sense of the events that occurred and the life that was taken from his friend.

The day before his death, Santiago and his friends are celebrating the marriage of Angela Vicario to a newcomer to the town named Bayardo San Román. Angela is from a poor family and when they meet Bayardo and learn of his intentions to marry Angela, they pressure her into the marriage against her wishes. In a last ditch effort to avoid marrying Bayardo, Angela confesses to her mother she is not a virgin. The women of the family convince Angela most women her age are not virgins and assures her there are surefire ways to deceive her new husband into believing she is.

On their wedding night, Angela sets off with Bayardo to their new home with all of the supplies her mother has given her to "fake" her virginity. However, being an honest person, Angela decides to tell Bayardo the truth. Upon learning his bride is not a virgin, Bayardo returns her to her family's house in shame.

When pressured by her brothers about the individual who claimed her virginity, Angela gives them the name of Santiago Nasar. The Vicario twins know what they must do to restore honor to their sister and their family.

That morning, before dawn, Pablo and Pedro Vicario set out on their mission to kill Santiago Nasar. However, they do not hide their intentions. Everywhere they go, the Vicario twins tell anyone who will listen of their plans to murder Santiago. Many people believe the twins did this hoping that someone would step in to stop them; their desire to murder Santiago seemed lacking in fervor.

When no one acts to stop adequately them, the Vicarios are left with no other option but to kill Santiago.

Early in the morning, the day after Angela and Bayardo's wedding, Pedro and Pablo Vicario chase Santiago Nasar down and stab him to death in front of his house.

So many things seemed to work out incorrectly for Santiago—if only one of the many odd coincidences would not have happened, then Santiago might have been spared.

In the end, everything seems to be working against Santiago, who ends up dead for an act that many consider pure fabrication.



Chapter 1

Summary

The narrator tells the reader about his friend Santiago Nasar and the day of Santiago's death. The narrator is speaking to Santiago's mother and recalling his own memories of that fateful day. Santiago's mother Plácida tells the narrator Santiago was the man in her life. Santiago was her only child and his father had died a few years earlier.

On the day of his murder, Santiago awoke from a dream about trees and rain. He had a headache and a metallic taste in his mouth but brushed it off as the side effects of a long night of celebrating at the wedding he had attended the night before.

Because of the arrival of the bishop, Santiago put on his special occasion outfit—a white shirt and white linen pants. If the bishop were not coming, Santiago would have worn his work outfit that included a .357 Magnum gun, but he did not have the gun with him on the day of his death. Right before he left the house, Santiago had gone into his mother's room for some aspirin and told her quickly about his dream; that would be the last time his mother saw him alive.

He left his house at 6:45 AM to wait for a boat bringing the bishop. Although the weather outside was gray and drizzling, Santiago told everyone he passed it was a beautiful day. Little does he know he will be butchered within the hour.

The narrator explains Santiago had been happy with his life before his murder. He was close to his father up until his father's unexpected death and was close to his mother. When his father died, Santiago was forced to give up school to take over managing his father's cattle ranch.

The narrator also speaks with Victoria, the house cook, about the day of Santiago's death. She tells the narrator the day was a sunny one. She had seen Santiago in the morning when he came into the kitchen for coffee. She tells the narrator about how she had warned Santiago to keep his hands off her daughter. Victoria does not hide the fact she does not like Santiago very much.

Although the front door of the house was not regularly used and normally was barred and locked, this was the door Santiago used the day of his death and it was there the men waited to kill him. No one could understand how that coincidence worked out and the only explanation offered came from Plácida who said her son never used the back door when he was dressed up.

Originally Victoria claimed she did not know the men were waiting at the front door for Santiago but as the years passed, she admitted both she and her daughter knew the men were there. Victoria said she did not believe their threats to murder Santiago and had brushed it off as drunken talk.



It turns out a note had been slipped under the door explaining the plot to kill Santiago—when, where, and why. But that morning as he left, Santiago did not see the note on the floor and it stayed undiscovered until long after the murder had occurred.

Pablo and Pedro Vicario, Santiago's murderers, waited for him outside his house at a nearby milk shop. The narrator comments he remembered these men from grammar school. The Vicario brothers were still in their dress suits from the wedding.

The bishop's ship came by the village but did not stop, just like Plácida had told Santiago. Margot, the narrator's sister, says she was there on the pier with Santiago when the boat passed and recalls he was in a good mood that morning. Margot had invited Santiago and Christo to her house for breakfast. She insisted they go to the house right away but Santiago told her he wanted to go change and would meet her there. Then he left with Christo walking toward the town square.

The narrator explains many people on the docks that day knew Santiago was going to be murdered. Everyone either assumed he had been warned of the threat on his life or thought it was all shallow talk. On her way back home, Margot hears of Santiago's murder from Angela Vicario, the sister of his murderers. Margot tells her mother Luisa about Santiago's murder. Her mother was in a tough spot—she is both the godmother of Santiago and a relative of the Vicarios. As soon as she hears the news, Luisa leaves to tell Plácida about Santiago's death. She tells her husband he always took the side of the dead.

Analysis

The narrator begins by telling the reader a murder has occurred and then proceeds to explain the events of the day of the murder. Santiago Nasar, a friend of the narrator's, is the person who was murdered. Several different people provide their memories and points of view regarding the day of Santiago's death.

It seems most everyone in the town new of the threat to Santiago's life except the few who would have warned him about it and Santiago himself. Although the reason behind his murder is not clearly stated in this chapter, it is implied it has something to do with Angela Vicario and the discovery by her husband on their wedding night that she is not a virgin.

Various opinions of Santiago's character are provided by the different individuals interviewed by the narrator—some are positive, some negative, some loving, some full of disdain.

Vocabulary

ominous, augury, sediment, palate, havoc, revels, coincided, funereal, apostolic, clamor, falconry, prostrated, threshold, prudence, pontifical, pomp, disemboweling, furtive, embitter, jubilation, consummated, debris, manioc



Chapter 2

Summary

The narrator tells the reader Angela Vicario's upset groom is Bayardo San Román, a man who arrived in the village just six months prior to his wedding with the purpose of finding himself a bride. The narrator's mother provides him with information about the new man in town while the narrator is out of town attending school. According to Luisa, most of the women in the town considered him to be quite charming. He had a way of speaking that worked to conceal, not reveal, information. He worked as a track engineer for railways. Bayardo seemed to be able to do anything and everything and do it well.

After the wedding Luisa confesses to her son her positive opinion of Bayardo was swayed and she finds him frightful; he reminds her of the devil. She never told him this in her letters because he had told her not to put such opinions in writing. The narrator recalls his first meeting with Bayardo; he found Bayardo a strange man, much less enchanting than the early opinions of some of the women in town had suggested. Yes, he was attractive, but there was a tension in him and an aura of sadness.

By the time the narrator meets Bayardo, he and Angela have already set their engagement in motion. Various stories went around about how they had met. Angela told the narrator she considered Bayardo conceited and stuck up. Although he did not win her heart, he won over her family.

The Vicarios were a humble family with little wealth. The Vicario girls, including Angela, had been raised well and conditioned to be wives. Angela was the prettiest of the girls, and when it was discovered Bayardo wanted to marry her, the family was ecstatic, except their mother who wanted to know what his story was. Up until that point, his past was a mystery of which he did not speak. Many wild rumors were exchanged about his life prior to arriving in the town but he set those rumors to rest when he told the Vicarios about his family: his mother, father, and two sisters. His mother is a renowned beauty and his father a war hero of the Conservative regime.

However, Angela was not excited about Bayardo and did not want to marry him. She was told by her family, who had been charmed by Bayardo, she was obligated to marry him for their sakes. When Angela tried to argue she did not love Bayardo, her mother told her love could be learned over time. So Angela and Bayardo were to be married after a short engagement.

No one knew Angela was not a virgin nor would anyone have thought she was not one. Angela later told the narrator she prayed for the courage to kill herself before the wedding but her prayer wasn't answered. When Angela told her mother she was not a virgin, hoping to get out of the marriage, her mother convinced her it would not matter, and said they could come up with excuses and tricks and Bayardo would be none the wiser.



So the wedding took place and Bayardo's family arrived in town. The wedding was a huge event. The couple received many gifts including a convertible. Bayardo was two hours late picking up his bride, who was secretly hoping he would not come at all. Through the entire event, Bayardo appeared to be happy. Santiago did not seem any different either throughout the festivities, recalled the narrator who was with him the entire time. Throughout the festivities Bayardo and Santiago seemed to get along well, as friends. At the end of the night, Bayardo took his wife to their new home. Everyone else continued to celebrate. The narrator, the Vicario twins, and Santiago stayed up late drinking at Clotilde's shop, just hours before the twins would murder Santiago.

Later that night a knock came at Puro Vicario's door, waking her from her sleep. She almost immediately knew the knock was bringing bad news. When she opened the door she found Bayardo there. In the shadows Puro saw Angela, her dress in shreds. Bayardo then pushed Angela into the door and thanked Puro, gently but sadly, and left. Angela later told the narrator her mother had beaten her that night in terrible anger. The next morning the twins arrived home to find their sister bruised and beaten. They demanded to know who it was that had ruined their sister and she told them—Santiago Nasar.

Analysis

In this chapter the narrator back tracks and introduces the readers to Angela Vicario's groom. A confusing picture of Bayardo San Román is painted by the descriptions provided by various characters in the story; some people describe Bayardo as charming, kind, and enchanting, while others describe him as tense, frightening, and a little strange. Yet for all his faults, Santiago and his friends embrace Bayardo as one of their own.

The narrator also back tracks and explains the development of Angela's and Bayardo's relationship as well as reflecting on the day of their wedding. It is soon learned that Angela Vicario had no desire whatsoever to marry Bayardo and was pressured into doing so by her family, particularly her mother.

The inference in chapter one that Santiago had something to do with Bayardo returning his wife to her family home is verified in chapter two, when it is revealed Santiago was the one who had slept with Angela.

Vocabulary

novice, postscript, fickle, conscription, superfluous, consecrated, idyllic, morass, languid, detest, organdy, scant, enshrouding, predisposed, augured, penury, mulatto, anemones, martyrdom, moored, clamorous, impertinence, dejected



Chapter 3

Summary

After murdering Santiago, the Vicario twins head to their church, where they confess their crime. Pablo tells Father Amador they killed Santiago defending their family's honor. Pablo and Pedro would spend three years in jail awaiting trial. Prisoners said the twins were never remorseful of their crime. The twins' statement in court was murder in defense of honor. According to the narrator, as soon as Angela told her brothers about Santiago, the men had gone to the pigsty behind their house, grabbed their two best knives, and went to sharpen them. While the brothers sharpened their knives at the meat market, at least 22 people had overheard them speaking of their plans to murder Santiago and they all agreed the brothers spoke of their plan aloud so someone would hear and perhaps warn Santiago. But no one paid attention. The men were so well known for being good people, everyone assumed it was just drunken talk. One of the butchers, Faustino Santos, told the narrator although he did not completely believe the twins talk, he had told a police officer about what they had said. Later, that police officer was at Clotilde's store at the same time as the twins, waiting for Santiago. But the narrator was never able to interview the policeman because he died soon after Santiago.

The twins had arrived at Clotilde's shop at 4:10 am. As the twins drank cane liquor, they told Clotilde they were looking for Santiago to kill him. When she asked them why they would want to kill Santiago, the twins' only reply was that Santiago knew why. Clotilde had gone to tell her husband, Don Rogelio de la Flor, what the Vicario twins had said but he brushed it off and told her not to worry. According to Don Rogelio, those boys were not capable of such things.

Back in the shop, Clotilde saw Officer Pornoy speaking with the Vicario twins and assumed he has been told of their plans. Soon the officer left and went to the Colonel's house to inform him what he had heard. Colonel Lázaro Aponte thought it was just a quarrel between friends that would not result in much so he took his time getting dressed and planned to look into it later. As he ate breakfast, the Colonel heard Bayardo had returned Angela to the Vicario house. He then put two and two together. The Colonel left his house and found the twins at Clotilde's. He thought they were just bluffing and he took their knives and sent them home.

Clotilde felt the Colonel should have interrogated the twins about their plot. She believed the twins were not eager to carry out the burden of honor placed on them.

The Vicario brothers had told many people of their plan and by 6:00 am the news had spread across town. Clotilde had asked everyone she came across to warn Santiago and had even sent word to the Father via a nun who had come to her shop. By the time the bishop's ship went past the town there were only a few, including Santiago, who had not heard of the murder plot.



The twins arrived at Clotilde's shop a second time that morning with two different knives wrapped in paper. This time the twins were different. They had had a fight—Pedro felt they had attempted to honor their family but when the Colonel disarmed them, their duty was done. Pablo on the other hand, felt they needed to fulfill their plan. Pablo had practically forced his brother to return to Clotilde's the second time around.

Clotilde gave the twins rum with the hope they would drink themselves into a stupor and not be able to complete their plans.

Back at Plácida Linero's house, the house servant Victoria Guzmán received the warning Clotilde had sent. She then went to wake up Santiago so he could go to the docks to receive the bishop but she mentioned nothing of the Vicario twins' threats on his life. Several people passed Clotilde's shop on the way to the docks and most of them knew of the twins' plan to murder Santiago but none of them did anything, including Father Amador who later told the narrator he did not know what to do.

Analysis

The narrator takes a closer look at the day of Santiago's death. After learning Santiago had slept with their sister, the Vicario twins feel as though they must defend her honor—and they must do this by killing Santiago.

But their actions make people think the twins do not want to do their duty and are trying everything they can to keep the murder from happening. Before 4:00 am the twins made their way to the butcher's to sharpen their knives and began telling everyone who would listen about their plan to murder Santiago.

Their character and reputation for being good people may have been the demise of Pedro and Pablo. Most people who heard them talking about murdering Santiago thought they were drunk and joking, and did not believe that they could or would murder anyone.

Those who were bothered enough by the twins' talk to mention their plot to someone did so in vain. The butcher told the local officer who in turn told the Colonel who simply told the men to go home. And Clotilde, who owned the shop where the twins spent most of their night in wait for Santiago, warned as many people as she could but these people did nothing when they received the news.

Ultimately, although most of the town knew about the threats the Vicario twins were making, no one went directly to Santiago to warn him and because of this, he died.

Vocabulary

thesis, parish, barbarous, absolved, baloney, scapular, novice, bellowed, marquetry, rudimentary, blennorrhoea, permanganate, misbegotten, resolute, machismo, illusory, precipice, phosphorescent, intermittent, acolyte, peremptory, carousing



Chapter 4

Summary

The Colonel was authorized to being the primary steps into the investigation of Santiago Nasar's death while the investigating magistrate made his way down to the town. Initially the Colonel thought the autopsy could wait until the town doctor returns but there is no place to store the body. Santiago Nasar's body ended up in his mother's living room. Divina Flor has to beat off dogs who try to get to the decomposing body.

But by the afternoon the body was in worse shape and the Colonel decided the autopsy must be done and he ordered Father Amador to do it even though he knew it would have no legal standing. The Father told the narrator it was as though they had killed Santiago all over again during the autopsy. And although they did not have many surgical tools, the report was in order. Seven of the stab wounds found were fatal blows. During the autopsy the Father discovered Santiago had an undiagnosed case of hepatitis that would have taken his life in the next few years.

Because of the bad state of the body, Santiago Nasar had to be hurriedly buried at dawn. After the burial, the narrator went to the house of María Alejandrina Cervantes because he does not want to go to sleep. Together they mourned their friend.

The Vicario brothers were locked in a jail cell. They did not sleep because they did not want to relive what they had done yet at the same time they believed they had done their duty as brothers. Pedro ate some of the food provided him and became so ill Pablo was convinced he had been poisoned. The idea of poisoning was quickly dismissed when it was pointed out their mother was the one who provided the food. But, when the Colonel came and saw the state of Pablo, he moved both men to his house under the watch of guards until the investigating magistrate came and took the twins to a prison in Riohacha. By the time the twins were taken to Riohacha, the twins were convinced they had done the right thing and did not feel the need to repent to Father Amador.

The mood in the streets was tense with many feeling the Arab community would want revenge. The Colonel went to each family in the Arab community; they were confused and sad but none of them seemed to harbor plans of vengeance.

Many people in the town felt the true victim was Bayardo San Román—he had lost everything. It took days for people to remember “poor Bayardo”. When they finally remembered, the Colonel went up to his house and found him unconscious in the final stages of alcohol poisoning. Dr. Dionision Iguarán gave him emergency treatment. The Colonel sent word to Bayardo's family and his mother and sisters came out to his house. Soon after that, they brought Bayardo through town, carrying his unconscious body in a hammock. They boarded a boat and left. His house was left as it was and over time it began to crumble and everything in it was looted.



Twenty-three years later the narrator ran into Angela Vicario. She would not tell him to whom she had lost her virginity, because no one really believed it was Santiago. They were never seen together and Santiago was too haughty to notice her. But she refused to say anything about it to the narrator. She did tell him though she had ignored all the advice of her mother and the other women on her wedding night. She would not deceive Bayardo.

She said from the moment he returned her to her mother's house, she had thought of him. One day, while taking her mother to a nearby town for a doctor's appointment, Angela saw Bayardo. Suddenly she was crazy about him. In the six months that followed she wrote him six letters but received no response. She continued to write to him for the next seventeen years even though she never received a response. Finally one day there was a knock at Angela's door and there was Bayardo. He came in with two suitcases—one filled with his clothes and another filled with all 2,000 of the letters she had sent him, all still unopened.

Analysis

After Santiago's murder the twins are sent off to Riohacha. The men maintain they did their honor and after some time are released. Soon the thoughts of the town people move to Bayardo. The mayor finds him a drunken mess so intoxicated that he needs medical care. His mother and sisters come to get him and take him away from the town. Many people in town begin to feel as though Bayardo is the true victim in the whole mess. They felt, in some ways, the others involved had somehow played their part in the tragedy, as though it were their destiny. But they felt poor Bayardo had lost everything.

The narrator then tells the reader what happened to Angela. Almost immediately after Bayardo returned her to her parents, Angela could not stop thinking about him. The disgust that she had originally felt turned into love and she began writing him letters every day for years. For years her letters go unanswered and there are times where she feels crazy but she must write to him. Then, one day years and years after their wedding, Bayardo shows up on Angela's doorstep, ready to stay with her.

Vocabulary

obliged, magistrate, blotch, hostile, massacre, morass, perforations, stigma, encephalic, indignation, trepanation, baling, dispersion, diuretics, pestilential, panoptic, matriarch, florid, expiated, retinue, feign, alum, belfry, rancor, lucid,



Chapter 5

Summary

For years the townspeople seem to be unable to get the thought of Santiago's murder and all of the random coincidences that lead up to it out of their minds. Many people who knew of the murder plan but did nothing spent the years trying to justify their inaction.

Twelve days after the murder, the investigating magistrate arrived in town. A huge crowd assembled around his office to give testimony they had not been asked for. The narrator never knew the magistrate's name but later tracked down the case files the magistrate had written. From these case files, the narrator found out some information about the magistrate's character. It seemed, from his notes, the magistrate was unable to find a single clue affirming Santiago had wronged the Vicarios. According to Angela's friends, she had mentioned she had lost her virginity well before her wedding night but had never mentioned a name. And when questioned by the magistrate about their sexual encounter she would not give him any details—not how or when or where. To the magistrate the actions of Santiago in the hours before his death were overwhelming evidence of his innocence.

The narrator felt Santiago died not knowing why he was attacked. Multiple people in town share their final moments seeing Santiago before he was murdered—most of them give their reasons why they did not give him warning about the Vicario twins.

Christo Bedoya was the only person who tried to warn Santiago once he heard about the threats. As soon as he heard about the twins' plan, he ran after Santiago but, being unable to find him, Christo went to Santiago's house. When he got there, Divina assured Christo that Santiago had not arrived home yet from the wedding. He told Victoria and Divina about the Vicario twins' threats but they told him that Pedro and Pablo would never kill anyone. Christo looked out the window and saw the golden sun rising and made his way upstairs to check.

Santiago's room was locked from the inside and Christo could not get in. Christo went through Plácida's room into Santiago's. Christo saw a gun on the nightstand and grabbed it, planning to give it to Santiago. Christo ran toward the docks. As he ran Pedro called after him saying they were waiting there to kill Santiago.

Christo stopped the Colonel and told him about the murder plot. The Colonel told him he would look into it but then went to the social club. Then Christo made his only mistake; he went to the narrator's house thinking Santiago might have gone there instead of going home. Then he heard a riot coming from the square. Christo ran into Luisa Santiago as he headed back towards the square. She told Christo Santiago had been murdered.



It turned out while Christo was searching for Santiago, Santiago had gone to his fiancée's house and Christo had never thought to look there. Flora had heard the rumors that Santiago had slept with Angela but she did not think the twins would kill him. She thought they would make Santiago marry Angela to restore her honor so when she saw Santiago at her house, she did not warn him about anything but yelled at him and locked herself in her bedroom. Her father, Nahir Miguel, told Santiago the Vicario brothers were set on killing him. But Santiago did not understand the reason behind the threats and left the Miguel house.

When Santiago returned to the streets, people began to yell at him, giving him directions on where to go to avoid the Vicarios. Yamil Shaium called for Santiago to get into his store. Santiago seemed confused as he wandered here and there. He headed toward his house, toward the kitchen door and then he realized the front door was opened. That is when the Vicarios spotted him.

Clotilde called out to Santiago to run and tried to hold Pedro back but he threw her to the ground. Santiago was fifty yards from his house and he took off running toward the main door. By this time, Plácida had heard about the threats the Vicario twins were making. She could see the Vicario twins running toward her door and, being told by Victoria that her son was in the house, Plácida ran and barred the front door. She heard Santiago's shouts but thought he was shouting out the window from upstairs. Plácida ran up the stairs to help her son. But while she ran upstairs, Santiago was stabbed to death by Pablo and Pedro in front of the door she had just locked.

When Santiago finally went down, the Vicario twins ran off, chased by Yamil and a group of Arabs. Plácida walked out on the bedroom balcony and saw her dead son faced down in the dirt in a puddle of his own blood. He struggled to stand up, staggered around the house to the kitchen door, went into the kitchen, and fell dead in the kitchen.

Analysis

The final moments of Santiago Nasar's life are detailed. Santiago's close friend, Christo, was running around town one step behind Santiago the entire time, trying to track him down to stop him from running into Pedro and Pablo Vicario. Once again we see the only person truly trying to save Santiago is Christo.

Finally, Santiago is warned about the rumors by the family of his fiancée. He heads back to his house, stunned, not sure why the Vicarios would want to kill him. Those inexplicable coincidences occur—first, Santiago, who normally only enters his home through the kitchen, changes his mind at the last moment and heads to the front door.

Second, the Vicarios happen to be waiting for Santiago in sight of his front door, even though he rarely ever uses that entrance to the house.

Third, the front door that had been unlocked up to that point, is barred by Santiago's own mother just seconds before he can reach it and he is locked out of his house with his pursuers right on his tail.



Many people, including the narrator, believe Santiago is not the person who slept with Angela Vicario prior to marriage. The narrator believed Santiago died, ignorant of the reason why the Vicarios attacked him.

The crime haunts the town for many years. People often think that if just one of the many coincidences that occurred that day had not happened, Santiago Nasar might not have been murdered.

Vocabulary

anxiety, absurdity, monopolies, penitential, pernicious, squalid, rigor, untrammelled, baseless, ajar, veranda, feigned, apparition, vestments, haggard, insolent, utilitarian, perplexed, penance, scimitar, lucidity



Characters

Santiago Nasar

Santiago is a young man who was murdered at the age of 21 years-old. He is well-off as the only child of his parents. His father left him a large cattle ranch when he died. He is part Arab on his father's side.

Plácida Linero

Plácida is the mother of Santiago Nasar. She is a widow, her husband having died three years before her son's death. She married Santiago's father out of convenience not love.

Victoria Guzmán

Victoria is the cook for Santiago and Plácida. She had a sexual relationship with Santiago's father for several years when she was an adolescent. She was brought to be a servant in the Nasar household after the affair burnt out. She is wary of Santiago and his sexual fascination with her daughter Divina.

Divina Flor

Divina Flor is the daughter of Victoria Guzmán. Divina works in the Nasar household with her mother. She is a young girl coming into her womanhood and is often sexually harassed by Santiago.

Ibrahim Nasar

Ibrahim Nasar is the father of Santiago Nasar. He is an Arab man who married Santiago's mother out of convenience not love. He and his son had a close relationship up until the day of his death.

Clotilde Armenta

Clotilde Armenta is the owner of a milk shop near Santiago Nasar's house. The Vicario brothers waited for Santiago at her shop. Clotilde sent out numerous message trying to warn Santiago of the Vicario brothers' threats but none of them reached him.



Pedro and Pablo Vicario

Pedro and Pablo are twins; they are the brothers of Angela Vicario. Pedro and Pablo are the ones who murder Santiago to restore the honor of their sister. They are just 24 years-old when they murder Santiago.

Margot

Margot is narrator's sister. She is with Santiago on the pier before his murder. She is one of the few people that does not know Santiago is going to be murdered.

Christo Bedoya

Christo is a friend of both Santiago and the narrator's, who had been with both men the night before Santiago's death. Christo tries desperately to find Santiago on the morning of his murder once he learns of the threats on his friend's life, but he is too late and cannot save Santiago.

Flora Miguel

Flora Miguel is Santiago Nasar's fiancée. While visiting Flora's house, Santiago learns the Vicario brothers want to kill him.

Don Lázaro Aponte

Don Aponte is a retired colonel and the town mayor for eleven years. He is made aware of the threats to Santiago's life and thinks they are just drunken talk. He sends the Vicarios home but does not do truly investigate their threats and in the end they murder Santiago.

Angela Vicario

Angela, a very beautiful girl, is the sister of Pablo and Pedro Vicario. She is the bride at the wedding the entire town is celebrating in the story. Angela's husband returns her to her parents' house after he discovers she is not a virgin. When asked by her mother, Angela claims she slept with Santiago.

Pura Vicario

Pura is the mother of Pablo and Pedro and Angela. She is also related to the narrator's mother.



Luisa Santiago

Luisa Santiago is the mother of both the narrator and Margot. She is Santiago's godmother and the person he is named after. She is also related to the Vicarios.

Bayardo San Román

Bayardo is the groom of Angela Vicario. He is around 30 years-old and arrived in the town just six months prior to the wedding. He came to the town in search of a woman to marry and decided that woman was Angela. However, on their wedding night, Bayardo discovers his bride is not a virgin and he sends her back to her parents.

Alberta Simonds

Alberta Simonds is the mother of Bayardo San Román. Alberta is from Curaçao and in her youth was proclaimed as the most beautiful woman in the Antilles. After Bayardo sends Angela back, Alberta comes to town to take her son back home with her.

General Petronio San Román

General Petronio San Román is Bayardo San Román's father. He is a hero of past civil wars and one of the most prized soldiers of the Conservative Regime, having put Colonel Aureliano Buendía to flight in the disaster of Turcurinca.

Luis Enrique

Luis Enrique is the author's brother who was with him, Christo, and Santiago throughout the wedding festivities.

Officer Leandro Pornoy

Officer Pornoy is police officer in town. Officer Pornoy is warned by one of the butchers about the Vicario twins' plot to murder Santiago Nasar. Officer Pornoy sees the twins at Clotilde's shop before the murder, speaks with them, and leaves them. He later dies a year later after having his jugular severed by a bull's horn.

Father Amador

Father Amador is a Father at the local church. He is one of the many people the Clotilde sends a warning to about the Vicario brothers' threats on Santiago's life but he does nothing because he does not know what to do and because the bishop is coming through town that morning.



Don Rogelio de la Flor

Don Rogelio del la Flor is the husband of Clotilde Armenta and he runs their milk shop with her. Soon after seeing Santiago's murder scene, he dies from the shock of the sight.

María Alejandrina Cervantes

María Alejandrina Cervantes is the town whore; she runs a brothel. Santiago and María had a love affair many years ago.

Magistrate

The investigating magistrate came to the town to investigate Santiago Nasar's murder.



Objects/Places

The Divine Face

The Divine Face is a cattle ranch inherited by Santiago Nasar from his father after his father's death.

Plácida Linero House

This is where Plácida Linero and her son Santiago Nasar live. It is a former warehouse that was purchased and renovated by Ibrahim Nasar. Santiago is murdered at the front door of the house.

Clotilde Armenta

Clotilde Armenta's shop is across from Santiago Nasar's house. This is where Pedro and Pablo Vicarion wait to murder Santiago Nasar.

Riohacha

Riohacha is the big city where the investigating magistrate is from. The Vicario brothers are sent to Riohacha for trial after they murder Santiago Nasar.

The Docks

The docks are along the waterfront in the town. This is where the town gathers to receive the bishop as he passes by on his boat.

Santiago's Dress Clothes

Santiago Nasar's dress clothes consist of a white top and pants, both made of linen. This outfit is normally reserved for Sundays but Santiago Nasar is wearing them on the day of his death because the bishop is coming to town.

Xius the Widower's House

Xius the Widower's house is the home Bayardo buys for his wife Angela Vicario prior to their wedding. It is here he discovers that his new bride is not a virgin. After he leaves town, the widower's house is left to fall into shambles.



Angela's Letters

Many years after their wedding, Angela sees Bayardo San Román. That week she writes Bayardo a letter but receives no response. After that first letter, Angela continues to write to Bayardo. She writes him almost two thousand letters over seventeen years, never hearing a response. The one day Bayardo shows up at her house with all the letters she has ever written him, still unopened.

The Meat Market

The Vicario brothers go to the meat market twice on the morning that they kill Santiago Nasar. Both times, they go to sharpen their knives—the weapons that will murder Santiago. And both times they tell everyone who will listen of their plans to murder Santiago Nasar.

Knives

The Vicario brothers choose two of their best knives and sharpened them at the meat market but their knives were taken from them by Colonel Aponte. The twins head back home to get two more knives—one with a rusty, strong 12 inch long blade and the other, a short curved blade resembling a scimitar. These two knives were used to murder Santiago Nasar and left him with seven fatal wounds.



Themes

Honor

Honor is a theme found throughout the story. Initially honor is what causes Bayardo to return Angela to her family and end the marriage when he discovers on their wedding night that she is not a virgin. In the culture of the time, women were to be virgins until marriage and it was a great dishonor and disgrace to marry a non-virgin woman.

Honor is what leads to the murder of Santiago Nasar. Once the Vicario twins discover that it was Santiago that deflowered their sister, they feel that they have no other choice but to kill him to restore her honor. They did not have any desire within themselves to kill Santiago, but honor drove them to do so. It was the idea of honor that led to a man being murdered.

And it is honor that leads to the freedom of the Vicario brothers. They are released from prison in defense of honor.

Family

Family is a strong theme throughout the story. Many people in the community are related through blood or marriage. When the Vicario twins decide to seek revenge on Santiago many of the people in the village are torn because of their familial relationships with the parties involved.

The conflict that familial allegiance causes can be seen in Luisa Santiago—she is related to the Vicarios but is close friends with Plácida Linero and the godmother of Santiago Nasar. When Luisa discovers that Pablo and Pedro are intending to murder Santiago, she leaves to warn Plácida. When her husband tries to remind her of their blood relation to Pura Vicario, Luisa tells him that you always have to take the side of the dead. Her anger with Pablo and Pedro is evident when she refers to them “lowlifes” and “shitty animals”.

Family is also what leads to the death of Santiago Nasar. Pablo and Pedro Vicario feel that they must murder Santiago to protect their family’s honor, especially that of their sister Angela.

Community

The sense of community is a strong theme throughout this story. The idea of community is seen in the description of the wedding and how the entire town came out to celebrate the marriage of Angela Vicario and Bayardo San Román.



The role that the community played in Santiago's murder can also be seen throughout the story. By the time Santiago was murdered, almost every person in the town knew that the Vicario twins were planning on killing him. Yet even with that knowledge very few of the townspeople seemed to try to warn Santiago of the impending danger and were more comfortable acting as observers to what would play out between him and the Vicario brothers. In that sense, it would seem that the community failed Santiago.

Even more so, some members of the community move beyond passivity to hinder anyone who would assist Santiago. An example of this can be seen in the character of Victoria Guzmán. When Clotilde Armenta sends a message of warning to Victoria Guzmán, Santiago's house servant, she purposefully does not pass the warning ahead to him, and according to her daughter, Victoria wanted Santiago to die.



Style

Point of View

This story is told from the point of view of a first person narrator. The narrator never tells the reader his name but does explain his relationship to the other characters in the novel. The reader is left to infer, through various interactions with other characters in the novel, that the narrator is male.

Because of the narrator's interview style writing and the fact that he is relying on his memory and the memory of others to fill in the gaps of the story, he does not seem like a reliable narrator.

Setting

This novel is set in a small town in Colombia, South America. The story takes place on a cold February morning; it flips between the present and the past memories of that fateful day when Santiago Nasar was murdered. In some senses, the story is also set in the memories of the narrator and those he has interviewed.

Language and Meaning

The author uses very descriptive, sometimes offensive language throughout the novel to paint a vivid picture of Santiago Nasar's last moments of life and his death. The novel is all riddled with words and names from both the Spanish and Arab languages. Many readers may not be familiar with the Spanish names, places, and words, but the use of this language only helps to reflect the Colombian setting.

The use of both the present and past tense and references also helps paint the complete picture for the reader. It also may help to instill a little uncertainty in the facts of Santiago's life and death as presented by the narrator.

Structure

The novel is divided into five chapters. Each chapter is relatively long, averaging about 24 pages each. Each chapter focuses on a different part of the day before and day of Santiago Nasar's death while making sure to reference the events in the former chapters to create a complete picture of the final hours of Santiago Nasar's life and his murder.

The plot follows the narrator as he recalls his friend Santiago's final moments of life, the events that led to his death, and his eventual murder. There are also subplots running

throughout the novel. An example of one of the subplots is the narrator's love affair with María Alejandrina Cervantes.

The subplots help feed the main plot and provide additional description and detail about the characters in the novel.



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 many scattered shards. (Chapter 1)

No one could understand such fatal coincidences. (Chapter 1)

No one even wondered whether Santiago had been warned, because it seemed impossible to all that he hadn't. (Chapter 1)

Don't bother yourself Luisa Santiago," he shouted as he went by. "They've already killed him. (Chapter 1)

She wasn't the only one who thought so, nor was she the last to realize that Bayardo San Román was not a man to be known at first sight. (Chapter 2)

He [Bayardo] 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. But above all, he seemed to me like a very sad man. (Chapter 6)

But she had a helpless air and a poverty of spirit that augured an uncertain future for her. (Chapter 2)

He was the first to get out of the automobile, completely covered with the burning dust or our bad roads, and all he had to do was appear on the running board for everyone to realize that Bayardo San Román was going to marry whomever he chose. (Chapter 2)

The widower died two months later. "He died because of that," Dr. Dionisio Iguarán. "He was healthier than the rest of us, but when you listened with the stethoscope you could hear the tears bubbling inside his heart. (Chapter 2)

I don't want any flowers at my funeral," he told me, hardly thinking that I would see to it that there wasn't any the next day. (Chapter 2)

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. "Santiago Nasar," she said. (Chapter 2)

We killed him openly," Pedro Vicario said, "but we are innocent. (Chapter 3)

Still, in reality it seemed that the Vicario brothers had done nothing right with a view to killing Santiago Nasar immediately and without any public spectacle, but had done



much more than could be imagined to have someone to stop them from killing him, and they had failed. (Chapter 3)

There had never been a death more foretold. (Chapter 3)

She taught us much more than we should have learned, but she taught us above all that there's no place in life sadder than an empty bed. (Chapter 3)

It was as if we killed him all over again after he was dead," the aged priest told me in his retirement at Calafell. "But it was an order from the mayor, and orders from that barbarian, stupid as they might have been, had to be obeyed. (Chapter 4)

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. (Chapter 4)

I was awake for eleven months," he told me, and I knew him well enough to know it was true. (Chapter 4)

For the immense majority of the people there was only one victim: Bayardo San Román. (Chapter 4)

When I saw her like that in the idyllic frame of the window, I refused to believe that the woman there was who I thought it was, because I couldn't bring myself to admit that life might end up resembling bad literature so much. But it was she: Angela Vicario, twenty-three years after the drama. (Chapter 4)

No one would even have suspected until she decided to tell me that Bayardo San Román had been in her life forever from the moment he'd brought her home. (Chapter 4)

Mistress of her fate for the first time, Angela Vicario then discovered that hate and love are reciprocal passions. (Chapter 4)

But most of those who could have done something to prevent the crime and did not consoled themselves with the pretext that affairs of honor are sacred monopolies, giving access only to those who are part of the drama. (Chapter 4)

Nevertheless, what had alarmed him most at the conclusion of his excessive diligence was not having found a single clue, not even the most improbable, that Santiago Nasar had been the cause of the wrong. (Chapter 5)

For him, just as for Santiago Nasar's closest friends, the victim's very behavior during his last hours was overwhelming proof of his innocence. (Chapter 5)

Christo Bedoya then made his only mortal mistake: he thought that Santiago Nasar had decided at the last minute to have breakfast at our house before changing his clothes, and he went to look for him there. (Chapter 5)

Santiago, my son," she shouted to him, "what has happened to you?" "They've killed me Wee child," he said. (Chapter 5)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

How did you as the reader perceive the character of Santiago Nasar? Do you believe that he was Angela Vicario's "perpetrator"? Why or why not?

Topic 2

Please describe the "fatal coincidences" that led to Santiago's death. Do you think that this was coincidence, as some characters in the story do, or fate, as referenced on page 83? Was Santiago destined to die?

Topic 3

Describe the dynamic of family allegiance and the role it played in the death of Santiago Nasar. Was there anyone in the book who chose friends over family? Who and how?

Topic 4

How would you describe Bayardo San Román? Do you, as the reader, feel for him in her dilemma with Angela Vicario? Do you think he was the real victim, as proposed by several people in the town? Why or why not?

Topic 5

Compare and contrast Bayardo and Santiago. In what ways are they different? In what ways are they the same? What effect did they have on one another's lives?

Topic 6

What one character, other than the Vicario brothers, do you feel was most at fault for the murder of Santiago Nasar? What role did they play in his murder? What drove their actions?

Topic 7

Describe the feelings of Pedro and Pablo Vicario leading up to the murder of Santiago Nasar. How did they appear emotionally? After the crime, what was their state of mind? Do you think that the Vicario brothers are cold-blooded killers? Why or why not?