

The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor: Who Drifted on a Life Raft for Ten Days Without Food or Water, Was Proclaimed a Nati... Study Guide

The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor: Who Drifted on a Life Raft for Ten Days Without Food or Water, Was Proclaimed a Nati... by Gabriel García Márquez

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Plot Summary

"The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is the story of a man who is hopelessly lost at sea but miraculously survives for ten days without food or water and withstands the rough waters of the Caribbean and the relentless heat of the merciless sun. Luis Alejandro Velasco was a twenty-year-old sailor in the Colombian Navy who was stationed in Mobile, Alabama, for eight months with his crew as they worked on repairing and renovating their destroyer called the Caldas.

The men had a great time during their stay in Mobile. They made friends, partied, danced, and drank many nights away. Luis became close to a young woman named Mary Address while he was stationed there. Several nights before they were to embark on the trip back to their port city, Cartagena, Colombia, they watched a movie together. They all enjoyed "The Caine Mutiny" but the storm that the men encountered in the movie gave Luis a feeling of unease. He had never been fearful of a voyage in the ocean before but he could not get the image of the storm in the movie out of his mind. But when they started out and got deep into the Gulf of Mexico, the waters seemed calm and the weather was ideal. Luis began to forget about his premonitions.

But as the Caldas ventured on and entered the Caribbean Sea, the conditions rapidly worsened. Although the skies were a beautiful and clear blue, the waters were choppy and the winds were inexplicably strong. Things only deteriorated from there. The ship rocked so violently that Luis and the other men couldn't sleep. In the middle of the night they were ordered to stand on one side of the deck in an attempt to right the ship as it was strongly listing in one direction. But a huge wave encompassed the ship and the next thing Luis knew he was underwater. He began swimming up thinking that he was still on the ship. But as he surfaced, he saw that the ship was off in the distance and he was in water. He clung to a crate that had been swept from the ship and then pulled himself up and into a life raft, one of several that had been launched by those still on the ship.

Once in the raft, he saw two shipmates in the water nearby. He struggled to row toward the two men but a wave washed over them and they vanished. The other man tried to swim toward him but he was too exhausted and succumbed to the water. He was devastated to see the ship moving away in the other direction. Luis was alone and lost at sea. That night it was so dark that Luis could not see the palm of his hand before his face. But as he looked up, he had never seen so many stars in his life. Although terrified and devastated to see three of his mates most probably drowned, he was almost certain that planes and helicopters would be out the next day and rescue him. The planes did fly over, in fact, they buzzed the area for the next two days but failed to spot him. He was truly alone and adrift in the Caribbean Sea.

Over the next ten days, Luis fought against the raging sea, harsh winds, the blistering sun, sharks, hunger, thirst, hallucinations, loneliness, and desperation. Finally, he succumbed to a resignation that the end was near. But Luis lived to tell about it. Good



fortune was on his side as he inexplicably caught the right current and wound up in a remote area of Colombia, his home country.

When he was certain that he had lived his last day, he spotted what looked like coconut palms off on the horizon. Of course, he was certain that he was hallucinating since he had been having hallucinations all along during his trek. But this time, it was for real. He had reached land. The exhausted, half-dead Luis washed up on the beach. The kind village people there tended to him and got him to a doctor. They arranged for a plane to take him to his shocked but jubilant family who had already held a memorial for him.

Luis Velasco became a hero to many. He didn't quite understand the heroism thing. He was just glad to be alive. He was paid to endorse products and to tell his story but he would not have relived his experience for all the pesos in the world.



Chapter 1: How My Shipmates Died at Sea

Chapter 1: How My Shipmates Died at Sea Summary and Analysis

On February 22nd, the crew was preparing to return to Colombia. The men had been in Mobile, Alabama, for eight months, repairing electronic equipment and the gunner for the "Caldas." On leave, they took their girls to the movies, drank, and sometimes started fights. Luis Alejandro Velasco had met his girlfriend, Mary Address, through another crew member's girlfriend. One night Luis and the guys took in the movie, "The Caine Mutiny." The thing that struck Luis and the other sailors the most was the terrible storm depicted in the movie. They all agreed that the mutineers did the right thing by taking over and changing course.

The movie made Luis feel uneasy. In the two years since he enlisted in the Navy he had never felt any anxiety about setting off on a voyage. But after seeing the movie and thinking about the voyage to Cartagena that they would soon embark upon, he couldn't sleep. Seaman First Class Luis Rengifo was snoring in the bunk below him. Rengifo would be dead at the bottom of the sea a mere eight days later. Luis vowed to quit the Navy as soon as he reached Cartagena. On the last night, the guys went drinking and bid farewell to their favorite bar, the Joe Palooka. Their girlfriends all cried that they were leaving. When a guy asked Ramon Herrera's girlfriend to dance, a brawl broke out.

On February 24, the "Caldas" weighed anchor at Mobile and headed for Cartagena. All the men were happy to be going home and none happier than chief Gunner's mate Miguel Ortega who had spent his money on gifts to take home to his wife. Miguel would be suffering from a severe case of seasickness twelve hours later and within another twelve hours after that he would be dead at the bottom of the sea.

As Luis left the port of Mobile and watched the city lights fade in the background, he knew that they would soon be traveling deep into the Gulf of Mexico and at this time of the year, it was a dangerous route. Luis hadn't seen Lieutenant Jaime Martinez Diago, second in commander but did spot First Warrant Officer Julio Amador Caraballo who passed by as Luis watched the land slip away. No one was more vocal about going home than Warrant Officer Elias Sabogal who was the chief engineer. He was looking forward to seeing his wife and six children, the youngest of which he hadn't seen yet. Rengifo who was a civil engineer planned to take the legal steps that would permit his Dominican wife to move to Cartagena.



Chapter 2: My Last Minutes Aboard the

Chapter 2: My Last Minutes Aboard the Summary and Analysis

By the 26th, the ship was in the Gulf. The weather seemed calm and the destroyer slid along smoothly. Luis felt a sense of relief that his worries seemed to be unfounded. Miguel Ortego had been seasick for twenty-four hours and was miserable. That night, Ramon Herrera felt that things would get rougher when they left the Gulf and sailed into the Caribbean which, it was estimated, would be shortly after midnight. About twelve-thirty, Luis began to notice rougher seas and was certain they were in the Caribbean. It gave him a strange sense of foreboding.

By 6 am that morning, the ship was pitching quite violently. Rengifo relied on his engineering bona fides to explain why it was unlikely for the Caldas to encounter trouble in the Caribbean. The Caldas was a "wolf ship," the same kind of ship that sunk a German submarine in these same waters. The Caldas was a safe ship. Luis tried to sleep but the rocking of the ship kept him awake. The wind was growing stronger making him recall the storm in "The Caine Mutiny." When he took over on his watch, the weather hadn't worsened. He began to think about what he would do when he reached Cartagena. He planned to write Mary twice a week. Miguel was still sick and had to be carried to his bunk.

On the night of the 27th, conditions worsened. In the middle of the night there was an order over the loudspeaker for all personnel to report on deck to the port side. The ship was listing starboard and it was hoped that the weight of the men portside could right it. Miguel was too sick to get up. If he had, he may have lived. The men didn't get much sleep but kept on relieving each other on short watches. The waves were getting higher and the wind stronger. Eventually, the relentless rocking and rolling made it impossible to sleep. On deck, the men laid down so that they wouldn't be swept overboard.

Everyone was ordered portside again to compensate for the listing. The ship continued to fight its way forward. The crew was on standby to "lighten the deck" which meant that the captain was contemplating issuing an order to cut the cargo loose to lighten the weight the ship was burdened with. An order came over the speaker for everyone to put on their life jackets. Luis estimated that they were about two hours away from their destination at Cartagena. The water swept over the ship and Luis was suddenly up to his neck in water. He saw Rengifo trying to stay afloat. Then Luis was completely deluged with water and struggled to swim upward. As he surfaced he tried to reach for the cargo or something to hold onto but was unable to find anything. Then he saw that the ship was a hundred meters away. It was only then that he realized that he had fallen overboard.



Chapter 3: Watching Four of My Shipmates Drown

Chapter 3: Watching Four of My Shipmates Drown Summary and Analysis

Luis was in the middle of the ocean watching the destroyer Caldas take hit after hit from the relentless waves. Some of the ship's cargo started to float toward him. He clutched at the crates and stayed afloat by holding onto them but was taking a battering from the mounting waves. Then he heard the voice of First Warrant Officer Julio Amador Caraballo, shouting to grab hold of the life preserver. He looked around as if he'd been in a deep sleep and saw his fellow sailors trying to stay afloat just like he was. Then he saw a raft.

There were two rafts and Luis began swimming toward one. He reached the raft and on the third try was able to pull himself up and into it. Once inside, he saw three of his mates alongside the raft reaching for it. Eduardo Castillo, the quartermaster, had a firm grip on Julio Caraballo's neck. Caraballo had a life jacket on which helped to keep both of them afloat. Rengifo was on the other side of the raft. Luis paddled closer to the men. He spotted Ramon Herrera a short distance away clinging to a crate and waving to him.

Luis found it difficult to maneuver the raft through the rough waters. He kept losing sight of the men in the violent waves. A huge wave crashed down on the men and when it cleared, Julio and Eduardo had vanished. Rengifo was swimming toward the raft. Luis saw Rengifo who was swimming toward him and shouting for him to paddle closer. But it was impossible to row against the wind or keep the raft stationary. The distance between the raft and Rengifo began to increase. Rengifo began to tire from trying to swim in the chaotic waters. Luis watched as Rengifo sank below the surface. Every so often the waves would crest and Luis would see the destroyer that had withstood the barrage of wind and waves and stayed afloat. However, the destroyer was getting farther and farther away from him. He continually looked around in the waters for some of his mates but could find no one. However, the destroyer was equipped with six rafts and he hoped that some of the other men had reached them.

Luis looked at his watch and it was exactly noon. He recalled that the last time he looked at his watch, he was on the deck of the ship and it was 11:50 a.m. It had taken just ten minutes for the tragedy to develop. The sun was beating down on Luis and he was growing hot and thirsty. There was no water to drink but he splashed his face with sea water to cool himself. It was only then that he felt a pain in his leg and realized that he had sustained a gash in his knee. Fortunately, the wound had stopped bleeding. There was nothing to do. He found himself reading and re-reading the business cards in his wallet in an attempt to distract himself.



Chapter 4: My First Night Alone in the Caribbean

Chapter 4: My First Night Alone in the Caribbean Summary and Analysis

By the time two hours had passed, the raft was moving along at a good pace without Luis rowing it. He had no idea if he was headed toward shore or out further into the Caribbean. He feared the latter. He was hoping to see rescue planes and helicopters in the air. He imagined that the Caldas that had already docked by this time.

As the sun set on his left, he knew what direction to look in for the planes. He did not blink fearing he'd miss spotting them. Even when it grew dark, he watched for their lights. As night fell, it was so dark that he literally couldn't see the palm of his hand. As darkness encompassed him, he began to feel the cold. It was impossible to stay dry in a raft and his wet clothes combined with the decreasing temperature caused a chill to overtake him. He remembered from his training that the warmest place in a life raft was on the floor. But then he thought of the large creatures that he could hear swimming beneath him and decided to stay on the gunwale, supposedly the most dangerous place to be in.

In the sky crowded with more stars than he had ever seen, he searched for Ursa Minor. Once he found the constellation, he stayed fixated on it. For some inexplicable reason, he felt less lonely as he gazed at it. He was happy he had his watch with its lighted dial but it grew to be an annoyance because he couldn't stop checking it every minute.

As the day slowly dawned on the sea, Luis had not slept nor had it wanted to. He was happy for the warmth of the sun and for the prospect of rescue. Although he had drifted all night, the horizon looked exactly the same as it had the day before. He submerged himself into the several inches of water on the bottom of the raft to ease his sunburned back.

By noon, he began to regret that he had reached the life raft. His mates had probably been pulled out of the sea and rescued. He thought he saw a speck on the horizon. He kept watching and it appeared to be moving toward him. Then it saw that it was an airplane. He stood in the raft and began waving his shirt at the plane that was coming closer. He could hear the sound of the plane's engine.



Chapter 5: Aboard the Life Raft

Chapter 5: Aboard the Life Raft Summary and Analysis

Luis waved his shirt for five minutes. He had been wrong. The plane wasn't heading directly at him. It was flying too high to see him and veered off in a different direction. Naturally, he was disheartened but tried to be proactive. He decided to try to take precautions to protect himself as much as possible. He knew that he shouldn't expose his lungs to the sun. He laid on his side and covered himself with his shirt. It was then that he first felt thirsty. He thought of drinking some sea water but that was dangerous. He could drink a small amount later if need be. Then he heard another plane. The plane passed over twice. He waved at it but it was very high and didn't spot him. He was sure they were searching for survivors and he also knew where the coast was from the direction that both planes had come from.

A short while later, he saw a huge plane with pontoons for landing in water. The plane was flying lower than the others. He could see a man looking out of the plane with binoculars as he waved his shirt. He was joyful and so certain they had seen him that he jumped up and down in his raft.

In five minutes, the plane had returned and Luis resumed his frantic shirt waving. He thought the plane was about to land but then it turned and flew back from where it had first emerged. He was still certain they had seen him. But hours passed and the plane did not return. He began to figure out the direction in which he could start rowing his raft and what land mass he was likely to find. He lay down in his raft just when a shark slid by.

More sharks approached the raft. Darkness fell and although it was pitch black, Luis sensed that they were still circling. Fear and desperation set in during his second night at sea. It had been nearly forty hours since he had food, water or sleep. He felt a little weak but not exhausted, a factor that was probably attributed to his twenty-year-old body. He found Ursa Minor and began to row. He calculated that following the constellation would lead him to Cerro de la Popa.

Luis rowed until two in the morning. But he was spent. He lay his head down, preparing to die. But then the image of his friend Jaime Manjarres appeared in his thoughts. He was smiling and pointing toward the port. All night long he would drift off and dream of Jaime. When he woke, it was as if Jaime was in the raft, encouraging him not to give up. He talked to him about food and water. Jaime pointed to the shore where the lights of the harbor began to appear. He asked Jaime to row for a while but he had disappeared. The "harbor lights" were actually the sun rays of first light.



Chapter 6: A Rescue Ship and an Island of Cannibals

Chapter 6: A Rescue Ship and an Island of Cannibals Summary and Analysis

On the third day lost at sea, nothing happened. The raft was being moved by the breeze. It was easy to lose a sense of direction since the raft was being tossed about so much and there was no point of reference - no front or back of the raft. He used his keys to mark the days, scratching each date on a the gunwale. He made the mistake of marking February 30th down instead of March 2nd. A few days later, he realized his mistake and was confused about what day it really was from then on. Whatever day it was, he lost all hope of being rescued. He still had not eaten or had any water. His skin was burned from the sun. On the fourth day, he drank a little sea water. It didn't quench his thirst but was refreshing. Without fail, the sharks arrived at 5 pm. He kept an oar near him in case he had to defend himself.

Each night he had fantasies that Jaime Manjarres was on board and that he had conversations with him. As the sun rose on the fourth day, Jaime was on board trying to get some sleep. Jaime pointed to some lights in the distance. It was a ship. Luis grabbed the oars and started rowing toward it. The ship didn't spot him and moved off in the distance. As the sun rose on the fifth day, it occurred to him that if he stayed on a course set by the wind, he would wind up on a island he had heard about - an island that was inhabited by cannibals. Now he was as afraid of the land that was potentially ahead of him as he was of the sea.

Luis was growing so weak that he feared he would pass out. He decided to tie himself to the raft so he wouldn't be sent overboard by a big wave while he was asleep or unconscious. Remembering his training, he knew that when a sailor tied himself to his raft it was one of the last signs of the end.

Luis spotted a lot of fish in the water nearby. He felt hungry for the first time. He tried to knock out a fish with his oar. But all he did was stir up the fish and cause a commotion. A large shark gobbled some of the fish up. He lay back down and when he looked up at the sky he saw seven sea gulls fly over his raft. It meant that land was near. He calculated that he was at most two days from land. A small gull landed on the end of the raft. The gull flew off and came back several times. He built up trust with the little gull who hopped on his leg and pecked on his wound. It was difficult to remain still but he endured the pain. The gull hopped up on his thigh and Luis slowly began to reach for it.



Chapter 7: The Desperate Recourse of a Starving Man

Chapter 7: The Desperate Recourse of a Starving Man Summary and Analysis

Luis grabbed the bird by the wing just as it tried to fly off. It was bad luck for a sailor to kill a gull but could his luck get any worse?! Although he hesitated for a moment, he twisted the gull's neck. The head hung down as blood spurted from its neck. He felt like a murderer. Unfortunately, the scent of blood attracted a shark that began to circle. He threw the head over the side to distract the shark.

The conventional wisdom that a starving man would eat anything might have been true but Luis did not contemplate eating with great relish - especially looking at a mass of bloody flesh and feathers. He tried to eat a piece of the leg but it nauseated him and he spit it out. He eventually threw the bird overboard causing great excitement among the fish. The moon appeared that night for the first time since his ordeal. It gave him something to focus on.

The next day Luis didn't recall waking up. He was between alive and dead. He had been adrift for six days. Later he would learn that his family held a wake for him. Up until that day, he had held out hope and tried to figure out a way to protect himself. But he was giving up the fight. At 5 pm the sharks arrived. But a flock of gulls also flew over reawakening his hopes. His throat was so sore and dry that he decided to eat his business cards which were so wet they had nearly returned to pulp. Strangely, it gave him hope that he would survive.

Luis tried to peel off the sole of his shoe but was unable to. He gnawed at his belt until his teeth hurt. He slept several hours that night. On the morning of the seventh day, he saw more gulls. He panicked thinking he wasn't near land at all. All sailors knew that it was possible for sea gulls to get lost at sea.



Chapter 8: Fighting Off the Sharks for a Fish

Chapter 8: Fighting Off the Sharks for a Fish Summary and Analysis

On the eighth day, the winds were gentle and the sea was tranquil. Scores of fish escorted Luis's raft as it was guided along by the breeze. There was a resignation to Luis's attitude that had replaced fear and desperation. He tried to grab a fish but all he did was scare all of them away. He tried for hours to grab a fish but failed. He looked at his hand afterward and saw that the fish had been nibbling on his hands and drawing blood. Suddenly, the raft was surrounded by sharks. Was it the blood on his hands? He wasn't sure.

There was a frenzy in the water. Sharks were leaping out of the water. A long green fish jumped in the raft. Luis grabbed his oar and walloped the fish on the head. He hit it again but it was still alive. The third hit killed it but blood trickled on to the bottom of the raft creating a scent that the sharks would pick up. Soon sharks were ramming the bottom of the raft. Throwing some of the bloody water into the sea drew the sharks away and they stopped ramming the raft. It was difficult removing the scales from the fish. He tried with his keys but the scales wouldn't budge. He didn't recognize the strange green fish and wondered if it was poison. He hit the fish again with the oar and saw that it was still clinging to life. He hit it again and more blood spurted out bringing the attention of the sharks again.

Luis was able pull the fish apart and took his first bite. He wasn't exactly thrilled to be eating a raw fish but he felt better after he swallowed his first bite. He took two more bites and he felt full. He hadn't eaten in seven days so it didn't take much to fill his stomach. The fish had also quenched his thirst. The fish was big so he had would have food for a while. He decided to rinse it off which was a bad idea. He dunked it over the side and a hungry shark bit down on it. He struggled with it for a while but the shark won and stole his fish. He was so angry that he beat the shark on the head. The shark retaliated by leaping in the air and snapping the oar to pieces.



Chapter 9: The Color of the Sea Begins to Change

Chapter 9: The Color of the Sea Begins to Change Summary and Analysis

Luis continued to beat the water out of frustration that his one source of nourishment was gone. On the seventh night, it looked like rain and became colder than it had been. He took his shoes off and shirt and prepared to catch some rain. The water became rough and choppy. He hung onto the side of the raft so he wouldn't be thrown into the sea. Just before midnight, a huge wave upended the raft. He was propelled underwater. He swam to the surface and didn't see his raft. Suddenly, he looked behind him and saw the raft. He swam over to it in two seconds.

He climbed back in the raft, grateful that it was midnight when the sharks weren't as active. The two good oars were lost. The only oar that remained was the one that the shark had mangled. With the waves still crashing, he tied himself to the raft with his belt and hung on for dear life. But something happened that he hadn't foreseen. A huge wave sent the raft in the air and upside down. He was tied to the raft and was drowning. He grappled to unbuckle his belt. After a struggle he freed himself and with all his might was able to push the raft over but was still underneath it. He swam out from under the raft and surfaced. With all his strength, he pulled himself back in.

The sea was calmer as day broke on day number eight. A large gull flew over the raft. He knew it was an older bird because of its size. And he knew that land had to be near because large, older gulls didn't fly far from land. As he looked at the horizon, he saw a slew of gulls flying in every direction. He began taking frequent sips of sea water which he learned later was dangerous. The raft was still being propelled by the wind and water. He suddenly noticed that the water had turned from dark blue in color to a lighter green. It was another sign that land was near.



Chapter 10: Hope Abandoned. . . Until Death

Chapter 10: Hope Abandoned. . . Until Death Summary and Analysis

To Luis, all signs indicated that he was heading to shore, perhaps somewhere along Colombia's coast. He continued to search the horizon but spotted no coastline. The old sea gull had come aboard to take a free ride. He didn't seem to fear Luis at all and even gently pecked him on the head a few times. The sun was hot early that morning. Luis' skin, especially his back, was burnt and blistered. The gull took off to join its flock.

Despair overtook Luis. He lay in the raft on his stomach, exposing his badly burned back. If he stayed in that position until twilight, he'd be dead. Luis had given up. He wasn't hungry or thirsty or frightened. Dying was his only hope. He began to think about his time in Mobile with his friends and fellow sailors. He thought of the outdoor cafe where a belly dancer performed every Saturday. He hallucinated about those days, feeling like he was really there with his friends. He woke from his daze to see a giant yellow turtle swimming alongside the raft. The turtle raised its painted head and gazed at Luis. He took it as an omen and was frightened by it. He grabbed his oar and was ready to fight off the turtle. It was large enough that if it came too close to the raft, it could overturn it. It was evening and the sharks began to circle. Luis scratched the ninth tick mark on the gunwale.

Luis noticed a red root in the bottom of his raft. He didn't know how long it had been there and when it might have washed in but it was another sign of land. He picked up the root and took a bite. It tasted like blood but it soothed his throat. He ate the entire root. It was his ninth night at sea and he thought of his family members in grief and mourning ending their nine-day vigil. Luis took comfort in the fact that he was dying.



Chapter 11: On the Tenth Day, Another Hallucination: Land

Chapter 11: On the Tenth Day, Another Hallucination: Land Summary and Analysis

The ninth night was the longest yet. He lay in the raft retracing every step that led up to the catastrophe and his days in the raft since then. He remembered hearing that the dying always retrace their steps. He was hallucinating, not sure if he was in the raft or in the water ready to be eaten by sharks. When he woke the air was cold and he was suffering from a fever. The wound on his knee began to throb again. For several hours he conversed with his friend and with Mary Address. He heard raucous music playing. He returned to reality and began to scan the horizon as he always did at daybreak.

Luis saw dark objects on the horizon. It looked like a line of palm trees. But he felt no joy because he knew it was a hallucination. The palm trees seemed to be close enough to touch sometimes and then far off in the distance. He felt dread as the sun rose. He was so blistered and burned that the prospect of another day in the sun was as frightening as a night of circling sharks. He rested his head for a moment on his battered oar. As the daylight intensified, what he saw ahead of him was really land! He grabbed his oar and began to frantically row toward shore. He calculated that he was only two kilometers away.

Luis lamented the loss of his two good oars. The stick he had left from the shark attack was no help. The current was taking him toward some cliffs. Later he would learn that it was the shoals of Punta Caribana and had the current taken him there, he would have been smashed against the rocks. He was in such a weakened condition that he wasn't sure if he could swim the two kilometers that he estimated it would take to reach the shore. Normally, that distance would have taken Luis an hour to swim but given his current condition he had no idea how long it would take and more importantly if he could make it at all. His instincts told him to give it a try and he left his raft and broken oar behind and plunged into the water.

Without the vantage point of the raft, he could no longer see the land. The Virgin of Carmen medal that he wore around his neck came off. He managed to grab it and clutched it in his teeth as he swam. Since he couldn't see land, panic struck him. Perhaps the land mass was a hallucination and he was really somewhere in the middle of the ocean.



Chapter 12: Resurrection in a Strange Land

Chapter 12: Resurrection in a Strange Land Summary and Analysis

After swimming furiously for fifteen minutes, Luis was relieved to learn that the land wasn't a hallucination. Now he could see the sun shining brightly on the tops of coconut palms. He was exhausted but was sure he could make it. The sun rose at the moment he could touch bottom but it was still too deep to wade in. Finally, he was able to stand with water up to his waist. But he was almost too exhausted to move. He half-walked, half-crawled onto the beach and fell on it completely exhausted.

After resting and gathering himself, he looked around and saw signs of civilization - a barbed wire fence, a man-made road. Luis tried to open a coconut that he found on the ground but he was unable to penetrate its tough outer shell. He heard the distant barking of a dog. He watched the road and saw a slender young black girl emerge. He thought she looked Jamaican. He called to her in English. She spotted him, looked terrified and took off like a shot.

The sound of the barking dog was closer. Suddenly, he saw the scrawny dog and a donkey laden with baskets on each side and a white man who was armed with a rifle. The man saw him and put down his rifle. Luis called to him in Spanish, asking for his help. The dog came over and licked his face. The man asked what happened to him. Luis told him his name and what had happened to him. The man had to make a delivery and said he'd be right back. He told Luis that they were in Colombia.



Chapter 13: Six Hundred Men Take Me to San Juan

Chapter 13: Six Hundred Men Take Me to San Juan Summary and Analysis

The man returned with the black girl who was his girlfriend. The man asked Luis if he could walk. Luis stood but the man caught him as he started to fall. The man and girl lifted Luis onto the donkey. Luis asked for some coconut milk but the man said he didn't have a machete. Luis saw a machete on the man's belt. Later, he learned that the man had talked to others who told him not to let Luis eat or drink anything until a doctor examined him. A short while later, they arrived at a house. A woman spoon fed him some boiled water with cinnamon. He told them his story and was surprised that none of them had heard that he was missing.

They wouldn't let him eat but fed him sugar water. A younger woman tended to his wounds. He learned later that giving him food may have sent his body into shock. Damaso Imitela, the man who found him, went to the authorities and brought several policemen back with him. The police had not heard of the accident either. That night he slept deeply for the first time in twelve days. Before dawn, the house was filled with people, many curious just to see him. The police inspector came and moved him from his bed. When they walked outside, he was met by more people who were carrying flashlights and lanterns. Many of them accompanied him on the next leg of his trip.

Luis was being taken to Mulatos. He was carried in a hammock supported by two poles. A man at each end of the hammock carried him through the narrow roads. He was given water and small bits of biscuits. They reached Mulatos at 8 am but it wasn't the end of the journey. They would go on to San Juan de Uraba where a small plane landed twice weekly. Word had gotten around and there were more curiosity seekers who wanted to get a glimpse of the man who was washed ashore. After a rest, they continued on to San Juan de Uraba. More people decided to walk with him and by the time they arrived in the town, there were some 600 people escorting him. He was immediately taken to Dr. Humberto Gomez. He examined him and told him that there was a plane ready to take him to Cartagena, saying, "Your family is waiting for you there" (p. 100).



Chapter 14: My Heroism Consisted of Not letting Myself Die

Chapter 14: My Heroism Consisted of Not letting Myself Die Summary and Analysis

Luis found it surprising that he was treated as a hero for not letting himself die. People asked him how it felt to be a hero but he never had a response. He was just happy that his terrible sun burns stopped hurting. A scar began to form on his knee. He had the same friends as he had before but they did seem to like him more. At first people he didn't know would stare at him like he was a strange animal. He spent a week at Cartagena Naval Hospital where he was assigned a guard so no one could speak to him. Press from all of the world had come to Cartagena to talk to him and tell his story.

Only Luis' father, the guards and doctors and nurses were allowed in his room. One day a doctor he did not recognize came to see him. The doctor was a psychiatrist from Bogota. He had Luis draw a picture of the ship and indicate on the drawing exactly where he had fallen over. The doctor asked him questions about the incident and had Luis sign the drawing. As it turned out, the man wasn't a psychiatrist, he was a reporter. When the drawing appeared in the newspaper, there was quite an uproar.

In Bogota, Luis was decorated by the president of the country for his heroic feat. He remained in the Navy and was given the rank of cadet. Something he hadn't anticipated was offers from advertising and publicity agencies. The manufacturer of his watch paid him to endorse his watch that had survived his ordeal and had kept perfect time. He was paid for having his story told on the radio. But no matter what money he was paid, he wouldn't have relived what he had gone through for a million pesos.

Characters

Luis Alejandro Velasco

Luis Alejandro Velasco was just twenty years old when he was a sailor with the Colombian Navy and assigned in the port of Mobile, Alabama, where he and his crew were refurbishing the Colombian destroyer, the Caldas. Luis and the others had been there for eight months and had made local friends and shared many nights of drinking and partying together. Luis had great memories of those times.

Near the end of their tour of duty in Mobile, the men watched the movie, "The Caine Mutiny." Luis was struck and with the horrific storm that the USS Caine encountered. Although Luis had never been fearful of venturing out into the ocean, the images from the movie stayed with him and he felt a looming unease about embarking on the trip home to their home base in Cartagena, Colombia.

But after the destroyer weighed anchor and set out in the Gulf of Mexico, Luis' fears seemed baseless. The waters were calm and the sky could not have been more clear. However, when they traversed from the Gulf into the Caribbean Sea, conditions deteriorated rapidly. Between the violent and chaotic waves and the gale force winds, the destroyer was at risk of tipping over. But the ship was able to maintain balance during the onslaught but the waves washed several men overboard, one of whom was Luis.

The other three men drowned but Luis was able to make it to a raft that had been set out by the ship's commander. For the next ten days, he was alone and adrift in the Caribbean with nothing around him but ocean water. He had to fight the relentless sun, the crashing waves, threatening sharks, hunger, thirst and psychological devastation but he miraculously caught the right breeze that took him on the current that landed him back in his native Colombia. The local people who found him tended to his wounds and got him to a doctor. The happiest words he ever heard were the doctor's who told him that a plane was waiting for him that would take him to his grateful family.

Luis Rengifo

Luis Rengifo was a trained civil engineer and a Seaman First Class and was assigned to the Caldas, the Colombian Naval destroyer, that lost several men overboard while traversing the chaotic waters of the Caribbean Sea. Rengifo was one of those who was swept into the water. Rengifo was a young married man who looked forward to returning to his home in Cartagena, Colombia. He planned to take whatever steps necessary to attain a legal status for his Dominican wife and bring her to Colombia. Rengifo relied on his engineering bona fides to explain why it was unlikely for the Caldas to encounter trouble in the Caribbean. He told the others that the Caldas, the Colombian destroyer,



was a "wolf ship," the same kind of ship that sunk a German submarine in these same waters. Rengifo assured the others that the Caldas was a safe ship.

The ship may have been safe and it indeed withstood the rough waters and gale force winds, however, a huge wave that encompassed the ship swept Rengifo and several other shipmates overboard and into the chaotic waters. Luis Velasco was able to climb into a life raft that he been set out by those still on board the destroyer. He spotted Luis Rengifo swimming toward the raft. He shouted to Velasco to paddle closer to him. But it was impossible for Velasco to make any progress against the wind or keep the raft stationary. The distance between the raft and Rengifo began to lengthen. Rengifo began to tire from trying to swim against the huge violent waters. And Velasco watched as Rengifo sank below the surface.

Ramon Herrera

Ramon Herrera was one of the men who was swept overboard on the Caldas destroyer as it made its way home to Colombia. From his raft, Luis saw Herrera waving to him as he clung to a crate.

Miguel Ortega

Miguel Ortega had spent all his money on gifts to take home to his wife. Miguel would be suffering from a severe case of seasickness twelve hours later and within another twelve hours after that he would be dead at the bottom of the sea.

Julio Caraballo

First Warrant Officer Julio Amador Caraballo was swept overboard during the tragedy that struck the Caldas as it traversed the Caribbean Sea. He was the only officer to have perished in the incident.

Elias Sabogal

No one was more vocal about going home than Warrant Officer Elias Sabogal who was the chief engineer. He was looking forward to seeing his wife and six children, the youngest of which he hadn't seen yet.

Eduardo Castillo

Eduardo Castillo was the quartermaster and was holding up Julio Caraballo as Luis Velasco tried to reach them in his life raft. He watched helplessly as they both vanished in the water.



Dr. Humberto Gomez

Villagers who found Luis Velasco washed up on the beach took him to a small town in Colombia called San Juan de Uraba. Dr. Humberto Gomez examined him and told him that there was a plane ready to take him to Cartagena where his family awaited his arrival.

Damaso Imitela

Damaso Imitela, the man who found Luis Velasco, took him to a house where he was tended to and then arranged to have him taken to a physician in a small town some distance away.

Mary Address

Mary Address was Luis Velasco's girlfriend during his eight-month stay in Mobile, Alabama. After he survived his ordeal in the Caribbean, he planned to write to her twice a week.



Objects/Places

Mobile, Alabama

Luis Velasco was a sailor with the Colombian Navy. He and his shipmates had an eight-month tour of duty in Mobile, Alabama, where their ship was being repaired.

The Caldas

The Caldas was the Colombian naval destroyer that Luis Velasco was assigned to. During some rough conditions in the Caribbean, Luis and several other of his shipmates were swept overboard into the sea.

Cartagena, Colombia

The Caldas left Mobile, Alabama, after it had undergone repairs and headed through the Gulf of Mexico and onto the Caribbean Sea on their voyage back to their home port of Cartagena, Colombia.

The Accident

Although the sky was blue and there was no rain, the Caldas hit a stretch of very violent and chaotic waves and gale force winds in the Caribbean which caused several sailors to be swept overboard.

The Raft

Luis Velasco was the only man swept overboard who survived the accident. He was able to grab a life raft that was launched by those still on board the Caldas. He hoisted himself up and spent the next ten days adrift in the sea until he hit land.

The Caribbean

During their trek back home to Cartagena, Colombia, the Navy destroyer, the Caldas, encountered rough waters and gale force winds which resulted in men overboard.

The Sharks

Almost like clockwork, sharks would appear at 5 pm each evening and circle Luis' raft. He once got into a tug of war with a shark over a fish that jumped into his raft. The shark won.



Food and Water

Luis had nearly no nourishment during the entire ten days he drifted in the Caribbean. He ingested the following during his ordeal: all of a red root that splashed into his raft one day, part of a green fish that leaped into his raft, a bite of a gull he killed, business cards that were still in his wallet, a few sips of sea water and a few bites of his belt.

The Watch

Luis always knew what time it was. His watch kept perfect time and it had an illuminated dial. After he returned to land and recovered, the watch company paid him to endorse the watch he wore.

San Juan de Uraba

When Luis finally made it to shore, he washed up in a remote area with only a sparse population. The people tended to him there and took him to see the physician in the town of San Juan de Uraba.



Themes

Survival

No story about a man adrift on the sea with no way to propel himself other than with a few wooden oars and with no sense of where land may be would not ring true without a strong theme of survival. Luis Velasco's story is a testament to man's instinct for survival. As impossible as the odds seemed during Luis' entire ten days at sea with no food or water and with as much psychological despair as he quite naturally felt, something deep within him prodded him to soldier on and to not give up. Even at those times when he would admit to himself that certain death was inevitable, something would spark from within him to counterbalance the negativity and to take precautions and to not give up hope.

It should also be noted that Luis not only had the benefit of man's natural instinct to survive, as a sailor with the Colombian Navy, he had extensive survival training. He had learned not to overly expose his chest to the unrelenting sun that one experiences on an open ocean that offers no opportunity of shade. He knew to stay away from too much sea water and was only tempted a few times to take a sip of the salty water. Perhaps man's ability to fantasize help in the survival of an individual who is lost at sea or is otherwise stranded or isolated in a situation that seems bereft of hope. While hallucinations could be considered fantasies on steroids, those that Luis encountered may have gotten him through a few very rough patches in his trek. When he was about ready to give it all up, the image of an old friend appeared on the raft. The friend "discussed" Luis' dilemma and pointed him forward urging him not to succumb to the sea. He recalled the happy times with his friends in Mobile. He literally felt he was there dancing and drinking the night away. He actually "heard" the music.

While nature was battering his body with blistering sun in the day, by night circling sharks were a constant threat. There wasn't much that Luis could do about either. However, what he did do, while seemingly insignificant, were things that kept him distracted - that gave him something to hold onto and to focus on. He felt comfort when he found the Ursa Minor constellation. Luis' spirit was lifted when the full moon came out for the first time during his voyage. When an old gull landed on his raft, he felt there was an affinity between them. The old gull pecked him on his head a few times, but they were gentle and almost affectionate pecks. The gull hopped a free ride on the raft and provided some companionship for Luis.

Luis' ordeal was a lesson in survival 101. He was challenged both physically and psychologically - the likes of either most people will never know. He met those challenges and emerged from his struggle stronger, more appreciative of life and much wiser.



Luck

An underlying and undeniable theme in this story about a man's tragic and seemingly hopeless predicament is luck. There is nothing scientific about good fortune. It is an intangible and something that no one can see or touch. But in this story, there is a series of events that would make a believer out of even the most strident of scientists.

Of course, there are two categories of luck - put simply, the good and the bad. During Luis Velasco's ordeal, he encountered both. To parse this story into good and bad luck, the first piece of bad fortune was the mere fact that Luis was on the *Caldas* at all. Had he not been on the destroyer during the storm, there would, of course, have been no story. Being swept off the deck of his ship and into the chaotic and dangerous waters of the Caribbean Sea was another bit of bad fortune.

That Luis was able to climb aboard a life raft that had been set out by those still remaining on the ship was, as it turned out, the most positive serendipitous event of the entire story. From the vantage point of the gunwale on the raft, he watched helplessly as three of his crew mates vanished under the water. It was unfortunate that the rescue planes didn't spot him over the next two days as they searched the water for survivors.

Luis was a trained sailor with the Colombian Navy. As such, certain life-preserving steps he learned in training helped him to survive. He drifted for ten days under the brutal sun and in the chaotic waters of the Caribbean during which time he felt anything but lucky. In fact, he gave up several times and was resigned to his impending death.

The second luckiest event in this story, is that Luis' raft inexplicably caught just the right breeze that set it on just the right current that ultimately delivered him to solid land and even more incredibly, his home country. If odds makers had been asked what Luis' chances for survival were, they most certainly would have been greatly weighted against him. Scientist and odds maker alike would have had to agree that Luis could not have survived without a little bit of luck.

Heroism

There are different types of heroes. The one that would probably first come to mind would be a person who sacrifices his own well-being to save another. When Luis Velasco washed up on the beach in Colombia after ten days adrift in his life raft, he was exhausted and half-dead. Probably another day or two in the raft under the beating sun without food or water would have been all his body could have endured. As he collapsed on the beach after crawling out of the Caribbean Sea, he had no thought other than that he was glad to be alive.

The man and woman who discovered him took him to a house where he was spoon fed boiled water and cinnamon - food would have been a shock to his and malnourished body and fragile system. They eventually got him to a doctor and once examined and clear, they arranged for a plane to take him home to his family. The people who found



Luis carried him from the small house to a tiny village and then on to a larger town that had a physician. As word spread about the stranger who washed up on the sands, curiosity grew about him. As the people tramped through the narrow roads carrying Luis in a hammock, the number of those following behind and escorting him grew at every turn. The people were curious about Luis but his legend grew as they walked along and soon their curiosity had turned into hero worship. By the time he arrived at the town, there were some 600 men, women and children following along.

Of course, poor Luis, who is almost dead, felt like anything but a hero. He was so weak that he couldn't even walk and had to be carried. But as the people heard bits and pieces of what he had endured and how he managed to make it through, they put themselves in his shoes and marveled at what he had accomplished. Although Luis didn't save anyone else, he did save himself. His instincts guided him in making some good decisions and in taking some life-saving precautions. And, of course, he had endured the abuse of a merciless sea. But most of all, the others realized how he had to have continually lifted his own spirits to keep going. Many of the people probably felt they would have given up in despair. What Luis accomplished was heroic. Saving a life is certainly a form of heroism even if that life is one's own. Every life is precious.



Style

Perspective

"The Story of A Shipwrecked Sailor" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a non-fiction story told from the point of view of Luis Alejandro Velasco who was lost at sea in a raft in the Caribbean for ten, terrifying heart-wrenching days. Although Marquez wrote the book, he did so in collaboration with Velasco. The story being told in the first person allows for the expression of more passion and emotion and adds authenticity. In the author's foreword, Marquez describes the process he used in getting the full story from Velasco. The book represents a journalistic, non-fiction reconstruction of what Marquez learned in his interviews and conversations with the Luis Velasco.

The two men, both young and somewhat naïve at the time, didn't realize that by divulging his story to a newsman that Velasco would lose his honor and that Marquez would almost lose his life. At the time of their collaboration, Colombia was under the military and social dictatorship of General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla who was responsible for the deaths of many citizens. It was a time during which press was greatly restricted and the two young men had inadvertently violated censorship laws. The story first came out as episodic installments in a newspaper. The government was happy with the story at first until there were questions about illegal cargo on the destroyer. Velasco was relieved of his naval commission and faded into oblivion.

Gabriel Marquez is the renowned author of many novels and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 for his best-selling "One Hundred Years of Solitude."

Tone

"The Story of A Shipwrecked Sailor" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is told from the perspective Luis Velasco who was set alone and adrift in the Caribbean Sea after being swept overboard from the Colombian destroyer he was assigned to and traveling on. The fears and emotions that the twenty-year-old sailor experienced over his ten-day ordeal were easily understandable and brought a great measure of realism to the story.

The story is written on a day-by-day basis. As he scratches one more tick mark into the gunwale of his raft, he proceeds to relate the particular experience he had that day. He also provides the status of his psychological state. Although it was his youthful body that helped him get through the ordeal just as important was the positivity and spirit of youth that helped him as well. Just like the unrelenting waves of the Caribbean that rocked his small raft up and down, the hope that Luis would soon be rescued and live went up with every hopeful sign and down with every harbinger of despair.

Anyone reading this book could relate to Luis' ordeal. Most would probably think they couldn't have survived it - Luis himself felt that way more often than not. In essence, the tone of the story was upbeat despite its terrifying aspects. Luis did what he could do to



survive and with a good deal of luck made it to land. The people who found him and tended to him were very compassionate and altruistic and showed the best of human spirits by caring for him and getting him the help he needed. In the end, Luis was treated like a hero. He didn't consider himself a hero. He was happy to be alive.

Structure

"The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor" by Gabriel Garcia Marquez is the true story of a Colombian sailor named Luis Alejandro Velasco who was lost at sea for ten days and given up for dead. The book is separated into fourteen chapters and is structured in chronological order with only a few brief references to past events.

The story begins with the crew members of the Caldas, a Colombian destroyer, who were stationed in Mobile, Alabama, for eight months to repair and refurbish the ship. Luis Velasco, a twenty-year-old sailor, had a premonition about embarking on the trip back to their home base of Cartagena, Colombia, through the rough waters of the Gulf of Mexico and into the rougher waters of the Caribbean Sea.

The majority of the book is devoted to Luis' miraculous journey by raft through the Caribbean. During a period of very rough waters and gale force winds, a number of the crew members were swept overboard. Luis was able to grab onto one of the lifeboats that were set out and climbed aboard. His arduous journey began in earnest as he inexplicably caught the right breeze and ten days later wound up in Colombia. He had battled the sea, wind, sharks, hunger, thirst, loneliness and desperation during those days but lived to tell about it.

The last portion of the book describes the exhausted, half-dead Luis washing up on shore in a strange land. Later he learned it was his home country of Colombia. The kind village people there tended to him and got him to a doctor. They arranged for a plane to take him to his family who had already held a memorial for him.

There are notes by the author that precede the story and tell of his inspiration to write the sailor's tale and about working with him on the book. There is a map that illustrates the where Luis was swept overboard and the route his raft took that eventually led him to dry land.



Quotes

Just below my bunk, Seaman first Class Luis Rengifo snored like a trombone. I don't know what he was dreaming about, but he certainly wouldn't have slept so soundly had he known that eight days later he would be dead at the bottom of the sea" (Chapter 1, p. 5).

"I think that an old sailor who has traveled the whole world can determine by the movement of his ship which sea he is sailing." (Chapter 2, p. 11).

"It was as if in that instant I had awakened from a moment's deep sleep. It dawned on me that I wasn't alone in the sea. There, only a few meters away, my mates were shouting to one another and trying to stay afloat" (Chapter 3, p. 19).

"At twilight the transparent sea provided a lovely spectacle. Fish of every color approached the raft. Enormous yellow and green fish, fish striped in blue and red, round ones and little ones, accompanied the raft until dark. Sometimes there was a metallic flash, a spurt of bloody water would gush on board, and pieces of a fish destroyed by a shark would float by" (Chapter 5, p. 38).

"There is an instant in which you feel neither thirst nor hunger, in which you don't even feel the relentless bite of the sun on your blistered skin. You don't think. You have no sense of what your feelings are. But still you don't lose hope" (Chapter 6, p. 46).

"The thought that for seven days I had been drifting farther out to sea rather than nearing land crushed my resolve to keep on struggling. But when you feel close to death, your instinct for self-preservation grows stronger" (Chapter 8, p. 57).

"Where am I going? I asked myself, convinced by all the signs - the color of the ocean, the old sea gull - that I would be ashore the next day. I hadn't the slightest idea where the raft was headed, driven by the wind" (Chapter 10, p. 72).

"I remembered the gunnery officer on the destroyer who had told me it was undignified for a sailor to kill a sea gull, and I felt remorseful about the little one that I had killed for no good reason" (Chapter 10, p. 73).

"Finally exhausted, I closed my eyes, but then the sun no longer burned my body. I was neither hungry nor thirsty. I felt nothing, other than complete indifference to life or death. I thought I was dying. And that thought filled me with a strange, dim hope" (Chapter 10, p. 75).



"Ten minutes later, all the suffering and hunger and thirst of ten days took their toll on my body. I lay exhausted on the warm, hard beach, not thinking about anything, not thanking anyone, not even rejoicing that, by force of will, hope, and an indefatigable desire to live, I had found this stretch of silent, unknown beach" (Chapter 12, p. 89).

"Cuffing me lightly on the cheek and smiling amiably, [Dr. Gomez] said, 'There's a plan ready to take you to Cartagena. Your family is waiting for you there'" (Chapter 13, p. 100).

"So, in my case, heroism consisted solely of not allowing myself to die of hunger and thirst for ten days" (Chapter 14, p. 101).



Topics for Discussion

Luis learned in his Naval training not to allow the sun to beat down on his lungs. What was the danger of doing this?

In what ways did Luis' training as a sailor help him through his ordeal?

As thirsty as Luis was, why didn't Luis drink some of the sea water?

Why did Luis tie himself to the raft? Why was it a risk and how did it prove to be almost fatal?

What caused Luis to have hallucinations? How did they perhaps help him get through his ordeal?

What things did Luis eat or drink during his many days on the raft? What did he eat that also quenched his thirst and why did it quench his thirst.

Why did the people who found Luis not allow him to have any food at first? Why were the people in the villages so curious about him?