

Chapter wise summary of the novella by Gabriel Garcia Marquez: *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

Chapter-1

On the day he is eventually killed, Santiago Nasar wakes up at 5:30 a.m. to wait for the boat which is bringing the bishop. The night before, he had dreamt about trees. He woke up with a headache. Some people remember that the weather was cloudy that morning, others that it was fine, but all recall that Santiago was in a very good mood. The narrator, lying in the lap of Maria Alejandrina Cervantes, was wakened by the clamour of alarm bells.

Santiago is wearing a shirt and pants of white linen exactly like the ones he had worn to the wedding the day before. Santiago goes to the house of his mother, Placida Linero, to get an aspirin for his headache.

Santiago is slim and pale, with Arab eyes and curly hair. He is the only child of a marriage of convenience. He inherited his sixth sense from his mother. From his father, Ibrahim Nasar, he learned his love of firearms, horses, and falconry, as well as the qualities of valour and prudence. He and his father spoke Arabic with each other. After his father died, Santiago abandoned his studies at the end of secondary school in order to take over the family ranch.

Victoria Guzman is sure that it did not rain on the day of Santiago's death. She recalls that she had been in the kitchen, quartering rabbits for lunch, when Santiago came in. Divina Flor, her daughter, had served Santiago a mug of coffee with a shot of cane liquor, as she did every Monday. When she came again to take the mug away, he grabbed her arm and said, "The time has come for you to be tamed." Victoria Guzman says that she will never be tamed while she is alive. She was seduced by Ibrahim Nasar, Santiago's father, when she was an adolescent. Both women had heard that Santiago was going to be killed, but neither was certain whether or not the rumour was true.

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The whole house is awakened by the bellow of the bishop's steamboat. Divina Flor leads Santiago to the front door. Even though the front door is usually closed and barred, Santiago always uses that door when he is dressed up. Divina remembers that when he went out the door, the boat stopped tooting and the cocks began to crow. There is an envelope under the door warning Santiago that someone is waiting for him to kill him, but it isn't found until long after Santiago's death.

As everyone makes their way toward the bishop's boat, the two men who are waiting to kill Santiago, Pedro Vicario and Pablo Vicario are waiting at the local milk shop, the only place that is open at that hour. They are still wearing their dark wedding suits, and holding knives wrapped in newspaper.

Though everyone has amassed roosters and firewood to give to the bishop, Father Carmen Amador, he never gets off the boat-he just stands on the upper deck and crosses himself until the boat disappears. The narrator's sister, Margot, invites Santiago over for breakfast. She finds Santiago attractive, and imagines the good fortune of his betrothed, Flora Miguel. He accepts her invitation, but says he must go home first to change into his riding clothes.

Many people on the docks know that Santiago is going to be killed, but many also think that he isn't in danger anymore. Everyone thinks Santiago has been warned that he is going to die. Margot learns that Angela Vicario, the bride of the day before, has been returned to her parents' house because her husband has discovered that she isn't a virgin. Margot is unsure how Santiago Nasar is involved in the mix-up. When she comes home, she tells her mother what she has heard, and her mother, Luisa Santiaga, goes to warn Placida that people are going to kill Santiago. However, someone running by tells Luisa not to bother, because he has already been killed.

Analysis

Although Márquez never explicitly reveals the story's setting within the narrative, the story is based on an true event that Márquez read about. In the city of Sucre, in Colombia, a young medical student and heir to a large

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fortune was killed with a machete outside his front door. The young man was killed by the two brothers of a girl who had been married but was returned to her family by her husband after he discovered that she was not a virgin when she married him. When she accused the young medical student of taking her virginity, her two brothers killed the man.

The novel resembles a mystery. We immediately learn that Santiago Nasar is going to die and continue reading to find out how and why this event will occur. However, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is not a chronicle; the narrative does not present the events chronologically, as the title misleadingly suggests. The first chapter recounts the morning of the assassination by two brothers, Pedro and Pablo Vicario, but versions of the morning are retold from various different viewpoints throughout the rest of the book. The reader is shown repeatedly the circumstances of Santiago Nasar's murder, but the overarching question of Santiago Nasar's guilt is never answered.

Despite the journalistic style of the novel, much of the narrative is comprised of repeated events that seem to carry ambiguous symbolic meaning. For example, the narrator repeatedly highlights the disputes over what the weather was like on the day of Santiago Nasar's murder—some people think it was nice out; others believe that it rained. But significance of the rain is left unclear. The narrative is particular about irrelevant details, and vague about matters of real importance.

The novel reminds us of the difficulty of understanding events as they are experienced, and the arbitrary ways that the mind chooses to pattern events in retrospect. The arrival of the bishop, for example, is an event that was seen as potentially very significant in the novel, but turns out not to be especially noteworthy at all, since the bishop never steps off the boat. At the time, everyone thought that the bishop's arrival would be the biggest event of the day. In retrospect, the murder overshadows all other memory.

Memory, reality, and symbolism are further confused by the names Márquez chooses for his characters. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, he includes fictional names along with the names of his own mother, Luisa Santiago, and of his own wife, Mercedes Barcha. The inclusion of the names of real people ties the events more strongly to a fixed reality.

Chapter 2

The narrator tells the story of Bayardo San Roman, the bridegroom of Angela Vicario. Bayardo arrives in August, six months before his eventual marriage. He is about thirty years old, but seems younger because he has a slim waist and golden eyes. He says he has come to find someone to marry.

He first sees Angela when she is crossing the town square with her mother, dressed in clothes of mourning; the two of them are carrying baskets of artificial flowers. The next time Bayardo sees her, she is singing out the numbers to a raffle at a town event. He buys all of the raffle tickets and wins a music box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which he then has delivered to her house as a gift. She never discovers how he found out it was her birthday.

The Vicarios are a family "of scant resources." Poncio Vicario is a goldsmith, but has lost his sight from doing so much fine work. Purisima del Carmen, Angela's mother, had been a schoolteacher until she married. Angela is the youngest and the prettiest of the family. Pura Vicario wants Bayardo San Roman to identify himself properly; to gain her approval, he introduces his whole family. The family drives to the village in a Model T Ford. Bayardo's mother, Alberta Simonds, is a mulatto woman from Curacao, who in her youth had been proclaimed the most beautiful woman in the Antilles. He has two young sisters, and his father is famous: General Petronio San Roman, hero of the civil wars of the past century.

Angela does not want to marry Bayardo. Their engagement only lasts four months. Bayardo asks Angela what house she likes best, and she replies that she liked the farmhouse belonging to the widower Xius, which is on a windswept hill and overlooks the purple anemones of the marshes. The widower insists that the house wasn't for sale, but Bayardo keeps offering more and more money until Xius gives in.

Nobody knows that Angela isn't a virgin. They have a huge wedding, with extravagant gifts and days and nights of dancing and revelry. The narrator

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says that he and his brother, Luis Enrique, along with Cristo Bedoya, were with Santiago Nasar all the time, at the church and after at the festival. The four of them had grown up together, and it was hard to believe that one of them could have had such a big secret.

The narrator has a confused memory of the festival—he remembers proposing to marry Mercedes Barcha as soon as she finished primary school. At six in the afternoon, the bride and groom take their leave and drive to their new house. The narrator, Luis, Cristo and Santiago all went to Maria Alejandrina Cervantes' house, where the Vicario brothers also went and were singing and drinking.

Pura Vicario goes to bed at eleven o'clock and has fallen into a deep sleep when there is a knocking at the door. She opens the door and sees Bayardo and Angela standing there. Bayardo pushes his wife into the house and kisses Pura on the cheek, thanking her for everything. After he leaves, Pura holds Angela's hair with one hand and beats her with the other. She does this so stealthily that she does not wake her husband and other daughters. The twins return home, and Pedro asks Angela who has taken her virginity. She says that it was Santiago Nasar.

Analysis

This chapter explains the motive for the murder of Santiago Nasar. The narrator implies that Santiago is not, in fact, guilty of the crime he dies for. However, even if Santiago truly is innocent, we never learn who was guilty of taking Angela Vicario's virginity. Nor does the narrator—he questions Angela at length later in life, but she quietly persists in saying that Santiago was the one.

After Bayardo's family comes to visit the Vicarios, it becomes clear to the town that Bayardo can marry whomever he wants to. Angela Vicario's parents are highly in favor of the match, since Bayardo is handsome, wealthy, and comes from a prestigious family. Earlier in the narrative, the narrator says that the Vicario boys "were raised to be men," and that the Vicario daughters "were raised to be married." In this culture, the best way a woman could improve her life was to marry a husband who would provide for her well. Angela Vicario protested to her parents that she did not love Bayardo, but her mother dismissed that idea, telling her that love could be learned.

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The brutality of the social conventions surrounding women becomes clear in this chapter. Because she was not a virgin when she married, not only is Angela abandoned by her husband, but she is beaten by her mother. The double standards of her culture are highlighted by the fact that the narrator, Santiago, Luis Enrique, and Cristo are all at a whorehouse doing whatever they please. It is culturally acceptable for men to have premarital sex, even if they are already betrothed to marry other women.

The importance of the ritual of courtship is also very evident in Colombian culture. Bayardo will do whatever it takes to win the approval of Angela by showering her with gifts. The economy behind the match is made clear through this method of courting. Bayardo does not seem to concern himself with getting to know Angela Vicario; he merely demonstrates the amount of money he will be willing to spend on her. Bayardo demonstrates that he will get the music box and that he will buy the house. It is a way of showing not only the bride, but the bride's parents, that she will be well taken care of. Another ritual is that the entire family of each spouse must meet before the match can be approved—understanding the background of the spouse is vital, so that the daughter does not dishonour herself by marrying someone from a questionable family with little money.

Chapter-3

The Vicario twins later tell the narrator that they began looking for Santiago Nasar at Maria Alejandrina Cervantes' place, where they had been with him until two o'clock. Since he wasn't there, they went to Clothilde Armenta's milk shop, which was near Santiago's house, to wait for him to come out.

After Angela Vicario reveals Santiago's name to her brothers, they immediately go to the pigsty. They pick out the two best knives, wrap them in rags, and have them sharpened at the meat market. Faustino Santos, a butcher, wonders why they are coming—he thought they were so drunk that they didn't know what time or what day it was. They talk about the wedding, and Pablo declares that they are going to kill Santiago Nasar. Because the twins are known to be good people, nobody pays any attention to them. After they leave, Faustino reports the conversation to a police officer who comes by.

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At Clothilde Armenta's milk shop, the twins drink two bottles of cane liquor. They tell her that they are looking for Santiago to kill him. Clothilde tells her husband, Don Rogelio de la Flor, but he responds that she is being silly.

Meanwhile, the police officer informs Colonel Lazaro Aponte about the Vicario brothers' plan. The Colonel has settled so many fights the night before that he is in no hurry to settle another. The Colonel hears that Angela Vicario had been brought home on her wedding night, and realizes the connection between that event and the impending murder. The Colonel goes to Clothilde Armenta's shop, takes the knives away from the boys, and tells them to go home. He explains later that he thought the twins were bluffing.

The Vicario brothers go home, get two different knives, and go to have them sharpened. Faustino is confused, believing that the boys have brought the same knives. Although Pedro makes the decision to kill Santiago, Pablo insists on following through with the plan. Pablo Vicario's fiancée, Prudencia Cotes, says she never would have married him if he hadn't upheld his sister's honor by killing Santiago. She waits the three years he is in jail, and when he gets out, he becomes her husband for life.

The twins go back to the milk shop, their knives wrapped in newspaper from Prudencia's house. Clothilde Armenta gives them rum, hoping to make them so drunk they can't do anything.

The narrator then describes Maria Alejandrina Cervantes' house, where there are musicians, a dancing courtyard, and "pleasurable mulatto girls." The girls have all been working without rest for three days, taking care of all who were "unsated" by the wedding bash. The narrator says it was Maria who did away with his generation's virginity.

But on the night before the murder, Maria wouldn't let Santiago dress up her mulatto girls as he usually did, so Santiago and Cristo Bedoya and Luis Enrique and the narrator set off with the musicians on a round of serenades. The first house they stop at is the newlyweds', though they don't know that only Bayardo San Roman is there at that point. They all go to get breakfast, but Santiago says he wants to get an hour of sleep before the bishop comes.

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Clothilde Armenta has told Father Carmen Amador about the Vicarios' plan, but because of the Bishop's arrival, the Father forgets, and, on his way to meet the bishop's boat, walks right by the milk shop where the murderers are waiting.

Analysis

This chapter relates the events on the evening of the wedding, the night before Santiago Nasar's death. This chapter chronologically precedes the first chapter of the book. This disjunction in time indicates the temporal confusion within the story as a whole. The first chapter tells about the morning of the assassination, and the third chapter relates the events leading up to that morning.

The novel explores the complexities of the concept of honor. The Vicario brothers believe themselves to be defending the honor of their sister and family, which is so important to them that they kill a man to preserve it. The severity of their crime reflects the severity of the limits imposed upon women. The brothers reason that since whoever took Angela's virginity ruined her chances of finding a suitable husband, that man must be punished with a comparable degree of severity. Even after Santiago is killed, Angela and her family leave the town because of the scandal the event has created.

The narrator mentions several times that the Vicario brothers are good people. They do not kill Santiago in a heated fury; the unfolding of the event takes hours. The town is divided into people who know what is going to occur and feel that the event should be stopped, people who think that the brothers are joking, and authority figures who are lax in their duties and allow the murder to occur. The town's tacit acceptance of honor and gender codes within their society condones the murder.

Class differences influence the course of events in the novel. Santiago's family represents the upper class. They have become affluent while others around them exist in poverty. Santiago's difference, resulting from his beauty and his wealth, makes him an object of suspicion in the town. Poorer residents envy him because of his superior financial status. Young men in the town are jealous of his proficiency with women. But the combination of economic and personal interests surrounding Santiago Nasar is never fully elucidated, making his death an unsolvable puzzle.

Chapter 4

Because Doctor Dionisio Iguaran is absent, the mayor orders Father Carmen Amador to perform the autopsy on Santiago Nasar. They perform it at the public school with the help of a druggist and a first-year medical student. The report concludes that the death has been brought on by a massive haemorrhage caused by any one of the seven fatal wounds. After the poorly executed autopsy, they quickly bury the body.

The narrator goes to see Maria Alejandrina Cervantes after the autopsy, but she won't sleep with him because she says he smells like Santiago. The Vicario brothers also complain that they can't get his smell off of their bodies, nor can they sleep. They are placed in the local prison, and Pablo Vicario gets a serious case of the runs.

The whole Vicario family leaves town. Angela Vicario's face is wrapped so that no one would see the bruises from the beating her mother gave her, and she was dressed in bright red so that nobody would think that she was mourning for her secret lover. Poncio Vicario died shortly thereafter. The twins were transferred to a prison in Riohacha, a day's trip from Manaure, the town that the Vicario family moved to. Prudencia Cotes moves to Manaure three years later to marry Pablo Vicario after he gets out of jail. Pablo learns to work with precious metals and becomes a goldsmith. Pedro Vicario goes back into the armed forces, and is never heard from again.

The mayor goes to check on Bayardo San Roman a week after the murder and finds him lying in his bed, almost dead with alcohol poisoning. Dr. Iguaran treats him, but as soon as he recovers he throws the mayor and the doctor out of his house. The mayor informed General Petronio San Roman of the situation, and he sends his wife and daughters to get Bayardo. They arrive in mourning with their hair loose, and wail as they walk barefoot to the house. They carry Bayardo out on a cot, put him on the boat and take him away.

Angela Vicario ends up in a town called Guarija, making her living as an embroiderer. When the narrator finally goes to see her, he finds her with glasses and with yellowish gray hair. He says she is so mature and witty

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that it is hard to believe she is the same person. The narrator asks Angela if it was really Santiago Nasar who took her virginity, and she calmly says it was, even though, as the narrator says, Angela and Santiago were never seen together.

The narrator says that the true misfortune for Angela is that as soon as Bayardo brings her home, he is in her life forever. She begins to think about him constantly. She says that when her mother beat her, she wasn't crying because of anything that had happened—she was crying because of him.

Angela begins to write him letters. She writes a weekly letter to him for seventeen years. Then, halfway through a day in August, he comes into her workplace. He has gained weight and is balding. He takes a step forward and lays his saddlebags on the sewing machine, saying, "Well, here I am." He is carrying one suitcase filled with clothing, and another suitcase filled with the letters she has sent him, arranged by date and tied with colored ribbons. They are all unopened.

Analysis

This chapter forms a corollary to the main narrative, which is primarily concerned with clarifying the facts around Santiago Nasar's death. The love story between Angela and Bayardo is tangential to the plot because it does not give more information about the murder.

The sexism of the characters' world is evidenced by the town's view of Bayardo san Roman as the ultimate victim after losing his wife. Even though Angela Vicario loses a husband, is beaten by her mother, and is dishonored for having premarital sex, she does not receive the same consideration as Bayardo.

At the narrative's beginning, Márquez includes a quote by Gil Vincente: "The pursuit of love / is like falconry." Falconry is mentioned several times in the narrative. The word "falconry" refers to both the actual practice of hunting small game with falcons and the art of training the falcons to hunt. The definitions of the word reflect the roles of Bayardo and Angela. In the beginning, Bayardo is hunting Angela as though she is the small game; by leaving her, he trains her to hunt, and she then hunts him.

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The letters that Angela sends to Bayardo explore the notion of the love letter. Whereas the function love letters is traditionally to express emotion or convey longing, Bayardo does not value Angela's love letters for their content. By not opening any of the love letters, Bayardo shows that the repeated act of sending a love letter, rather than the love letter's actual content, demonstrates the love that Angela feels for him. Love letters are often formulaic and interchangeable; their content is less persuasive to Bayardo than the fact that they continue to arrive. His attitude makes the love letters part of the ritual of love, and underscores his relationship with Angela as another ritual within the story.

Chapter 5

The narrator says that for years, nobody could talk about anything but the murder of Santiago Nasar. Most people felt at the time that they couldn't intervene too much because it was a matter of honor. Placida Linero never forgave herself for mixing up the bad omen of birds with the good omen of trees in her son's dream, and telling her son, before his death, that his dream boded good health.

Twelve days after the crime, the investigating magistrate arrives. Everything the narrator knows about his character has been derived from the margins of the pages of the brief that the narrator salvaged twenty years later in the Palace of Justice.

What alarms the magistrate most is that there is not a clue that Santiago Nasar has taken Angela Vicario's virginity. Angela herself never specified how or where, but insisted that he was the perpetrator. The narrator's personal viewpoint is that Santiago Nasar died without understanding his death.

Cristo recalls that as Santiago and Cristo Bedoya walked through town on that fateful day, people were staring at them. A man named Yamil Shaium, stood in the door of his shop so that when Santiago passed by, he could warn him of the planned murder. Yamil called Cristo Bedoya to see if Santiago had already been warned. Cristo left Santiago to go talk to Yamil, and Santiago continued on his way home to change clothes in order to have breakfast with the narrator's sister.

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As soon as Yamil related the Vicarios' plan to Cristo, Cristo ran to try and find Santiago. Frantic, he checked Santiago's house on the off chance that he was already home. Santiago wasn't there, and Cristo took the gun out of Santiago's night table and stuck it in his belt, not realizing it wasn't loaded.

The people coming back from the docks began to take up positions around the square to witness the crime. Cristo Bedoya went into the social club and ran into Colonel Lazaro Aponte, and he told the Colonel what was going on. The Colonel did not believe him at first because he had taken away the knives, but then realized they had gotten other knives. But because he was slow in leaving the club, the crime had been committed by the time he arrived. Cristo ran to his own house, thinking that maybe Santiago went to breakfast without changing his clothes.

Meanwhile, Santiago Nasar was in the house of Flora Miguel, his fiancée. She had heard about the planned killing, and thought that even if they didn't kill him, he would be forced to marry Angela Vicario in order to give her back her honor. She was upset and humiliated, and when Santiago came in she was furious. She handed him a box with all of the letters he had ever sent her. She told him that she hoped they did kill him, and she went into her room and locked the door.

Santiago's frantic knocking on her door woke everyone else up. Nahir Miguel, her father, told Santiago that the Vicarios wanted to kill him. Santiago said, "I don't understand a god-damned thing." He left the house, and started to head home. Clothilde Armenta yelled at Santiago to run, and he ran the fifty yards to his front door. Placida Linero, Santiago's own mother, had just closed the front door because Divina Flor lied to her and said that he was already home and had gone up to his room.

The Vicario twins caught up with him and began stabbing him. After his entrails had fallen out of his body, he fell to his knees, then managed to stand. He walked more than a hundred yards, completely around the house, and went in through the kitchen door, and fell flat on his face in his kitchen.

Analysis

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This chapter demonstrates the complicity of the town in the murder of Santiago, and shows how they saw themselves as spectators rather than actors. The division between spectator and actor is blurred by the narrator's role. He himself acknowledges that he is not absolved of blame. Because the narrator is a part of the community in which the murder took place, he cannot be an objective observer. The blurring of journalism and fiction in the story is shown most clearly in the character of the narrator himself, since he hardly discloses any revealing information. In many ways, he is the most enigmatic of all the characters.

Despite the narrator's interviews of town residents throughout the story, and despite the investigative magistrate's report, the narrator does not shed any new light, twenty years later, on the murder of Santiago Nasar. This failure to fully explain events shows that the object of the investigation to be not the discovery of the truth, but rather the determination of how such a publicized death could have taken place. In the end, the reader is left with a series of coincidences, moments of personal weakness, and assumptions whose random variety evades any sort of an overarching explanation or understanding of the crime.

Throughout the novel, the narrator's steady tone and method of progressively disclosing more information, leads us to think that the truth is about to be revealed. Especially because the narrator repeatedly insists upon Santiago Nasar's innocence, the reader feels that the true identity of whomever took Angela Vicario's virginity will be clear by the end of the book.

The absence of conclusion also illustrates the importance of ritual in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*. In a sense, the entire story is a ritual in that it re-enacts the murder, with no other result than merely showing the reader the events that happened before and after the event.