

# Chronicle of a Death Foretold

**Gabriel García Márquez**

*Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is a novella by Gabriel García Márquez, published in 1981. It tells, in the form of a pseudo-journalistic reconstruction, the story of the murder of Santiago Nasar by the Vicario twins.

## Name of the characters:

1. **Santiago Nasar** - The protagonist of the story. He is killed the day after Angela Vicario's wedding.
2. **Angela Vicario** - The dishonored bride. She becomes a seamstress after being returned home on her wedding night. She was very beautiful in her youth.
3. **Pedro Vicario** - The more serious of the two twins. It is his idea to kill Santiago Nasar. He spent time in the army, and after being released from prison he joins the army once again.
4. **Pablo Vicario** - He is the twin who insists that the twins go through with the crime. He is betrothed to Prudencia Cotes, who he marries when he is released from jail.
5. **Bayardo San Roman** - The man who marries Angela Vicario. He comes from a wealthy and prestigious family. When he arrives in town, he is described as having a slim waist and golden eyes.

6. **Purísima Del Carmen** - The mother of Angela Vicario. When her daughter is brought home by Bayardo San Roman, after he discovers she is not a virgin, Purísima beats her daughter; she is a strict mother.
7. **Poncio Vicario** - He is Angela's father. He used to work as a goldsmith until the strain of the profession made him go blind. He dies shortly after his twin sons are sent to prison.
8. **Placida Linero** - Santiago's mother. She has a well-earned reputation as an interpreter of dreams. She never forgives herself for misinterpreting the dream about trees and birds that her son had the night before his death.
9. **Maria Alejandrina Cervantes** - An elegant whore with eyes like an "insomniac leopard." She eats excessively to mourn Santiago Nasar's death.
10. **Prudencia Cotes** - Pablo Vicario's finance. She says she would not have married Pablo if he had not upheld the honor of his sister by killing the man who took her virginity.
11. **Ibrahim Nasar** - Santiago's father, an Arab. He seduced Victoria Guzman when she was a teenager. He taught his son the art of falconry and his love of firearms.
12. **Victoria Guzman** - The Nasars' cook. She violently guts rabbits on the morning of the murder. She had an affair with Ibrahim Nasar when she was a teenager.
13. **Clothilde Armenta** - The proprietress of the milk shop where the Vicarios wait to kill Santiago. She is an insightful woman, and can tell that the Vicario twins are tired and are killing Santiago only out of obligation.
14. **Don Rogelio De La Flor** - Clothilde Armenta's husband. He doesn't listen to her when she warns him about the Vicario twins' plan. He dies of shock at age eighty-six when he sees the brutal way that the Vicarios murder Santiago.

15. **Divina Flor** - Victoria Guzman's daughter. Santiago desires her sexually, but Victoria watches carefully to make sure he does not do anything to her.
16. **Margot** - The narrator's sister. She feels that Santiago Nasar would be a good catch for any girl, since he is young, handsome, and wealthy.
17. **Cristo Bedoya** - A friend of the narrator's and of Santiago Nasar. He runs all over town at the end of the book trying to warn Santiago of the Vicario's plan.
18. **Luis Enrique** - The narrator's younger brother. He plays the guitar very well, and goes around with Santiago, Cristo, and the narrator when they go to serenade Bayardo and Angela on the night of their wedding.
19. **Father Amador** - The local priest, who forgets to warn Santiago Nasar about the plot against him.
20. **Colonel Lazaro Aponte** - The lazy Colonel who fails to prevent Santiago's murder because he is checking on his game of dominoes.
21. **Faustino Santos** - The local butcher who alerts a local police officer that the Vicario brothers are talking about murdering Santiago.
22. **General Petronio San Roman And Alberta Simonds** - Bayardo San Roman's parents. Alberta Simonds used to be the extremely beautiful; General Petronio San Roman and she drive up in a model T Ford. The General is impressively bedecked with war medals.
23. **Yamil Shaium** - An Arab man who warns Cristo Bedoya about the Vicario twins' plan to murder Santiago. He and Santiago have an Arabic play on words that they exchange whenever they meet.
24. **Flora Miguel** - The pretty, but uninteresting woman that Santiago Nasar was betrothed to marry.
25. **Nahir Miguel** - The father of Flora Miguel. He is the one who warns Santiago that the Vicario brothers are waiting to kill him.

26. **Xius** - A widower who owned the most beautiful house; he died of sadness because he sold it; the house held all of his dead wife's possessions.
27. **Mercedes Barcha** - The narrator's eventual wife (and the name of Gabriel García Márquez's real wife). The narrator proposes to her at Angela and Bayardo's wedding party.

### **Outline of the story:**

The narrative outlines the events surrounding the murder of Santiago Nasar, a young man who is thought to have taken the virginity of Angela Vicario. On her wedding night, after discovering that she was not a virgin, Angela's husband, Bayardo San Roman, returns her to her house. Angela's twin brothers, Pedro Vicario and Pablo Vicario, ask her who took her virginity, and she tells them that Santiago Nasar did. The brothers find Santiago and kill him.

The narrative is non-linear. The narrator begins the story by telling us about Santiago Nasar's household the morning he was murdered. In the course of the chapter, we learn that Santiago lived with his mother, Placida Linero; their cook, Victoria Guzman; and her daughter, Divina Flor. Santiago's father, Ibrahim Nasar, has died three years previously. After his father died, Santiago took over the family ranch, which has been very successful; the Nasars are wealthy in their community.

The day that Santiago is murdered was a significant day in town because the Bishop was coming by boat to bless the marriage of Angela Vicario and Bayardo San Roman. Many people were heading over to the dock to see the boats. Pedro and Pablo Vicario were sitting in the local milk-shop, which was en route to the dock, so that they could see Santiago Nasar either going or returning in order to

track him down and kill him. The narrator's sister learns that Angela Vicario was returned home on the night of her wedding.

Bayardo San Roman had come to town to find a bride. After deciding on Angela, the courtship was short. Because Bayardo came from a prestigious, wealthy family, and the Vicarios were relatively poor, Angela did not really have a choice, even though she did not love Bayardo at the time they were wed.

The night before the murder, there had been lots of wedding revelry that had continued into the early morning at a local whorehouse run by Maria Alejandrina Cervantes, where Santiago Nasar had been carousing with the twins and the narrator until early in the morning. After returning home and finding their sister in disgrace, the Vicario brothers set out to avenge her honor by murdering Santiago Nasar. Even though they repeatedly announced their intent to murder him, the butcher, the police officer, and the Colonel all thought that the Vicarios are largely bluffing. Clothilde Armenta, the proprietor of the milk shop, even told the local priest about what the Vicario twins were threatening to do. However, in the excitement surrounding the arrival of the bishop, he forgot about her warning.

After the murder, the entire Vicario family left town because of the disgrace the combination of events had brought upon their family. A week after the murder, Bayardo San Roman left with his family; they came and retrieved him by boat. The Vicario brothers were imprisoned for three years. After their release from prison, Pablo proceeded to marry his betrothed, Prudencia Cotes, and Pedro went back into the armed forces.

After Bayardo returned Angela to her home on their wedding night, she fell in love with him. After she moved away from the town where she was disgraced, she wrote him letters every week for seventeen years, and eventually he returned to her.

For years after the crime, it was all anyone in the town spoke of. The narrator tells how his friend Cristo Bedoya searched frantically for Santiago the morning of the murder in order to warn him of the Vicario brothers' plan, but failed to find Santiago because he did not realize that Santiago had gone to the house of his fiancée, Flora Miguel. Her father was the first to warn Santiago of the murder. At this point, there were crowds of people outside who had come to see the Bishop but had lingered because they had heard the rumor that Santiago was to be killed.

When he left Flora Miguel's house, Santiago was very confused. Clothilde Armenta yelled at him to run, and he ran the fifty yards to his front door. The Vicario brothers easily caught up with him, and stabbed him to death right outside of Santiago's front door.

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## PLOT:

The non-linear story, told by an anonymous narrator, begins with the morning of Santiago Nasar's death. The reader learns that Santiago lives with his mother, Placida Linero; the cook, Victoria Guzman; and the cook's daughter, Divina Flor. Santiago took over the successful family ranch after the death of his father Ibrahim, who was of Arab origin. He returns home in the early morning hours from an all-night celebration of a wedding between a recent newcomer, Bayardo San Roman, and a long-term resident, Angela Vicario. Two hours after the wedding, Angela was dragged back to her mother's home by Bayardo because she was not a virgin. After a beating from her mother, Angela is forced to reveal the name of the man who has defiled her purity and honor. In a somewhat spurious manner, she reveals the man to be Santiago. Her two twin brothers, Pablo and Pedro Vicario, decide to kill Santiago in order to avenge the insult to their family honor with two knives previously used to slaughter pigs.

They proceed to the meat market in the pre-dawn hours to sharpen their knives and announce to the owner and other butchers that they plan to kill Santiago. No one believes the threat because the brothers are such "good people", or they interpret the threat as "drunkards' baloney". Faustino Santos, a butcher friend, becomes suspicious and reports the threat to the policeman, Leandro Pornoy. The brothers proceed to Clotilde Armenta's milk shop where they tell her about the plan to kill Santiago, and she notices the knives wrapped in rags. Meanwhile, Officer Leandro talks with Colonel Aponte who, after leisurely dressing and enjoying his breakfast, proceeds to the milk shop and takes away their knives and sends them off to sleep

though he considers them "a pair of big bluffers". Clotilde wants "to spare those poor boys from the horrible duty" and tries to convince Colonel Aponte to investigate further so they can be stopped. He does nothing more. Since the brothers had announced their plans to kill Santiago at the meat market and the milk store, the news spreads through the town, but no one directly warns Santiago. Clotilde asks everyone she sees to warn Santiago, but people do not warn him for several reasons: they assume he must have been warned already, believe that someone else should warn him, can't find him easily, don't believe it will happen, are too excited about the Bishop's arrival, want him secretly dead, or believe the killing to be justified. The brothers show up again to the milk shop with two new knives, and this time Pedro has hesitations about killing because he feels they had fulfilled their duty "when the mayor disarmed them". Nevertheless, they yell their plans to kill Santiago. Even the priest later confesses, "I didn't know what to do...it wasn't any business of mine but something for the civil authorities." He decides to mention it to Santiago's mother, but because he was excited about the bishop coming, he forgets about Santiago.

Santiago wakes up after an hour's sleep to get dressed and greet the bishop, who is expected by the townsfolk to stop in their town on his way elsewhere. He misses the note on the floor that someone has left with a warning and details about the Vicario plan. The bishop's boat passes by the town without stopping even though people have been waiting for him with various gifts. Santiago then proceeds to his fiancée, who yells, "...I hope they kill you!" because she is upset about his involvement with Angela Vicario and decides not to warn him.

The murder of Santiago Nasar is described. His friend Cristo Bedoya had frantically looked for Santiago on the morning of the murder to warn him of the plan, but Cristo Bedoya failed to find Santiago, who was actually at his fiancée

Flora Miguel's house. When Flora Miguel's father finds out, he warns Santiago minutes before the twins reach Santiago. Santiago becomes disoriented from the news and starts to run home. His mother, who is finally told, believes he is inside the house and, therefore, bars the front door to which Santiago is running while being chased by the Vicario brothers. He is repeatedly stabbed as he attempts to enter his home, over twenty times total with seven fatal wounds, as they discovered in an ill-performed autopsy performed by the priest. The murder is brutal as Santiago carries his own entrails and enters the back door of his home. He collapses in his kitchen and dies.

After the murder, the Vicario family leaves town due to the scandal and disgrace surrounding the events of Angela's wedding and Santiago's murder. Bayardo San Roman leaves town as well; his family comes by boat and picks him up. The Vicario twins spend three years in prison awaiting trial but are acquitted in court, after which Pablo marries his lover and Pedro leaves for the armed forces.

Only after Bayardo rejects Angela does she fall in love with him. After she moves away from the town with her family, Angela writes him a letter each day for seventeen years. At the end of seventeen years, Bayardo returns to her, carrying all of her letters in bundles, all unopened.

## **KEY THEMES:**

### **Ritual**

Manifestations of love in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* are ritualistic, and the novel itself is a ritual which re-enacts Santiago Nasar's death. When Bayardo San Roman first comes to town, he decides to marry Angela Vicario, whom he has never met. His courtship of Angela demonstrates the rituals of Latin American marriage culture. He brings her a gift of a music box inlaid with mother-of-pearl

for her birthday, and obtains everything his future bride asks for. The purpose of this courtship ritual is not to cause the lovers to fall deeper in love but rather to demonstrate the man's affluence and power. Personality does not determine worthiness; rather, their family and wealth do.

Angela Vicario's obsessive letter writing is another example of ritual. Angela does not care what she says in her letters; she is more concerned with the fact that Bayardo is receiving them. The ritual of writing brings her happiness. Similarly, Bayardo San Roman does not read her letters, but receiving two thousand letters over the course of seventeen years gives him the certainty that she is serious in her desire for him to return to her.

The novel's style is itself a ritual repetition of the events surrounding a crime. It does not follow a traditional narrative arc, but rather is told for the cathartic value of the act of telling. The only thing we gain from reading the story is the same limited knowledge of the occurrence that is available to the narrator. In this sense, the novel can be seen as a mere ritual of investigation as an end in itself with no other results or discoveries.

## **Honor**

In the culture of the Colombian town in which the narrative takes place, honor is taken very seriously. Nobody in the novel ever questions any action that is taken to preserve someone's honor, since it is commonly believed to be a fundamental moral trait that is vital to keep intact. A person without honor is an outcast in the community.

All of the characters in the novel are influenced by this powerful construction of honor. The defense of this ideal is directly responsible for Santiago Nasar's murder.

The Vicario brothers kill Santiago in order to restore the honor of their sister. She dishonors her family by marrying another man when she had already slept with someone else. In order for this wrong to be righted, her brothers must kill Santiago, the man who supposedly took her virginity, in order to clear her name. Though a few people in the community, like Clothilde Armenta and Yamil Shaium, try to prevent the death from occurring, most people turned the other cheek, because they believed that the severity of the crime deserved a cruel punishment. The fact that death was considered a reasonable retribution for the crime of taking a girl's virginity indicates how awful it was to sleep with an unmarried woman; doing so ruined her chances of marrying well, and marriage was women's one way to advance in the world.

### **Magical Realism:**

Gabriel García Márquez repeatedly uses strange, surreal details to highlight otherwise ordinary events. One instance of this is his description of the local brothel, which sounds so nice that the reader at first has trouble discerning what exactly Maria Alejandrina Cervantes does—though she is a whore, the description of her house is so beautiful that if one were to gloss over the description, they might perceive her house as an elegant domicile.

Márquez uses magical realism in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* to illustrate anecdotal digressions or details about characters that are not at all essential to the plot, though they are interesting. In the opening of the book, the narrator discusses the dream that Santiago Nasar has right before his death: "He'd dreamed he was going through a grove of timber trees where a gentle drizzle was falling, and for an instant he was happy in his dream, but when he awoke he felt completely spattered with bird shit." This whimsical sort of detail works against the journalistic

investigative style of the narrative, and sends the reader into several different conceptual areas between reality and fiction that he then has to disentangle.

### **SYMBOL:**

We learn that both the narrator's and Santiago Nasar's mothers interpret symbols from dreams, but the overall importance or significance of symbols in the novel is never clearly linked to any other concept or idea that informs the work as a whole. This is especially true because the work is supposed to be journalistic and factual, so any such symbols work against the narrator's purported intent of clarifying the events surrounding Santiago Nasar's death, becoming purely anecdotal. Because they occur randomly, constantly, and without any easily discernible premeditated purpose, it is difficult to distinguish any recurring symbol that has a greater significance in the text as a whole.