Love in the Time of Cholera

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

García Márquez, affectionately nicknamed "Gabo," was raised by his maternal grandparents for the first 10 years of his life in the small town of Aracataca. He eventually moving to Sucre to live with his father, a pharmacist. García Márquez's grandfather, who held progressive views about politics and great storytelling talents, became a significant influence in young García Márquez's life. García Márquez was then sent away to school in Baranquilla, where he began writing humorous poems and comic strips, and later moved to Bogotá, where he completed his secondary studies and studied law. However, García Márquez soon gave priority to his writing and worked as a reporter for a local newspaper in Cartagena—an early job that commenced his long, esteemed career as a journalist. García Márquez never finished his higher studies, instead working as a journalist in various Colombian cities and in Venezuela. In the 1950s, García Márquez published various novels, short stories, and journalistic essays that brought him national fame as an author and journalist. After spending time as a foreign correspondent in Europe, García Márquez married Mercedes Barcha, with whom he had two children. They ultimately settled in Mexico City, where García Márquez published his emblematic novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967, which won him international recognition. García Márquez continued to publish creative work throughout his life, including his other well-known novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* in 1985, two memoirs, and several screenplays. In 2012, García Márquez's brother announced that the author was suffering from dementia. García Márquez died of pneumonia in Mexico City in April 2014.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Love in the Time of Cholera is set in an unnamed city by the Magdalena River that can be loosely identified as Cartagena, Colombia. The novel references various episodes of Colombian history. Colombia's long history of social stratification and wealth disparity (vestiges of colonial rule) are depicted in the differences between the poor, cholera-afflicted life of the people in the slave quarters and the aristocratic families who struggle to maintain their status. Colombia's first took place in Cartagena in 1849, but countries around the world suffered from various cholera pandemics throughout the 19th century. Cholera causes people to suffer from severe diarrhea, vomiting, and dehydration, leading to mass-scale deaths. It spreads primarily through inadequate treatment of human feces and drinking water, as Dr. Juvenal Urbino realizes in the novel. *Love in the Time of Cholera* also mentions the various civil wars that are known as La Violencia in Colombia, a 10-year civil war between the Colombian Liberal and Conservative parties, estimated to have cost the lives of some 200,000 people. The fighting took part largely in rural areas, with political leaders and police encouraging impoverished supporters of the Conservative Party to seize land from peasant Liberals. Other events mentioned in the story, such as the sinking of the Spanish ship *San José* (which carried precious metals) off the coast of Cartagena, are inspired by historical occurrences.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Gabriel García Márquez is known as one of four Latin American novelists famous for launching the rise of Latin American literature in the 1960s and 70s. Other prominent writers were Peruvian Mario Vargos Llosa, Argentine Julio Cortázar and Mexican Carlos Fuentes. Among these writers, García Márquez—and, in particular, his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967)—is considered one of the foundational works of magical realism. Stylistically, the book was influenced by both Modernism (García Márquez was a fan of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner) and the Cuban Vanguardia movement which embraced both surrealism and the heritage of their island, becoming increasingly political in their ideology. Although magic is not explicitly present in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, magical realism has certain salient characteristics, more or less present in each work—in particular, a realistic setting in which super-natural, mysterious, or violent events are presented in a neutral tone by the narrator as though they were mere details of ordinary life. This technique allows writers to compose hidden political critique—for example, in Gabriel García Márquez's work, criticism of the civil war violence in his native Colombia, U.S. imperialism, and other forms of oppression. Other prominent writers of magical realism around the world are Chilean Isabel Allende, Argentine Jorge Luís Borges, British-Indian Salman Rushdie, and Japanese Haruki Murakami.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Love in the Time of Cholera
- **When Written:**
- **Where Written:** Mexico City
- **When Published:** 1985
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** An unnamed port in a Caribbean country (often interpreted as Cartagena, Colombia)

- **Climax:** On the day of Dr. Juvenal Urbino's death, Florentino Ariza tells Fermina Daza that he still loves her.
- **Antagonist:** Dr. Juvenal Urbino can be considered Florentino Ariza's most direct rival, since he is married to Fermina Daza, whom Florentino is madly in love with. More generally, though, the true antagonists in the novel are the various obstacles to love and happiness with which the protagonists are faced, such as social norms and unrequited love.
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Dear Old Mom and Dad. Gabriel García Márquez meant for *Love in the Time of Cholera* to be a book about love and aging. To find inspiration for his novel, he interviewed his own parents about their relationship. Their testimony serves as the foundation for Fermina's relationships with Florentino and Dr. Urbino.

High Fidelity. Gabriel García Márquez sustained a long friendship with famous Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro. After violent scandals marred the reputation of the Cuban revolution, García Márquez, unlike many other Latin-American intellectuals, maintained a close relationship with Castro. Although García Márquez strongly criticized some of Castro's political decisions, the two men were bound by enduring trust and a mutual love for literature.

PLOT SUMMARY

Love in the Time of Cholera, set in the 1870s in an unnamed city in the Caribbean, examines the meaning of love through the intertwined lives of Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza, and Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle. Florentino Ariza, a telegraph operator and the illegitimate son of Tránsito Ariza, is considered an ideal suitor in his social circle. As a young man, though, he falls in love with Fermina Daza, a young upper-middle-class woman who lives under the control of her tyrannical father Lorenzo Daza. Although the two of them have never spoken, Florentino is convinced of his love and, after many months of waiting, succeeds in handing her a declaration of love through her aunt and guardian, Escolástica. After a period of doubt, Fermina responds positively to his **letter** and ultimately agrees to marry him.

One day, Fermina is caught writing a secret letter to Florentino at her school, the Academy of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin. As punishment, School Superior Sister Franca de la Luz expels her. After learning this, Fermina's father requests a meeting with Florentino, although he is shocked to discover that Fermina knows little or nothing about her suitor. During this talk, Lorenzo Daza tells Florentino that his only goal in life is for his daughter to become an upper-class lady—and, therefore, that Fermina should not marry him. Florentino, however, refuses to give up on marrying Fermina, arguing that she should be the one to make this decision.

Furious, Lorenzo Daza takes his daughter on a long, dangerous trip through the countryside, hoping that this will make her forget Florentino. On the way, they come across scenes of death and violence, markers of the civil war between Conservatives and Liberals that has been devastating the countryside for half a century. They finally reach the residence of Fermina's mother's family, where her cousins live. There, Fermina begins a lifelong friendship with her energetic cousin Hildebranda Sánchez. Although Fermina is delighted to discover that Florentino has used his contacts in the telegraph system to send letters to her, her friendship with Hildebranda also makes her realize that it is possible to feel content without romantic love. At the same time, she remains committed to marrying Florentino.

When Fermina finally returns to the city, Florentino does not initially recognize her since she has changed so much and has fully matured into an adult. However, he approaches her in the market, using a secret code between them to make her understand that he is there. When Fermina sees him, she is struck by an instant, overwhelming feeling of disappointment. In a split-second, she realizes that she does not love Florentino but merely pities him. She rejects him, refusing to see him anymore and eliminating him from her life without giving this decision a second thought. After this, she meets a famous doctor in the city, Dr. Juvenal Urbino, who becomes fascinated with her. Dr. Urbino studied medicine in Paris and has since returned to launch an innovative series of measures to reform sanitation in his native city. This played an important role in stemming the epidemic of cholera that killed thousands of people, including Dr. Urbino's father, in the past decades. Dr. Urbino has also launched a variety of cultural activities to promote the arts and modern ideas he encountered in Europe. In all aspects of his life, his actions seem driven by a powerful belief in progress and modernity.

Fermina is initially annoyed by Dr. Urbino's courtship. In particular, when Sister Franca de la Luz visits her to express her support of this marriage, Fermina realizes that most people, including members of the Church, are hypocritical and respond to social pressures more than sincere convictions. However, after Hildebranda visits Fermina and expresses admiration for Dr. Urbino, whom they have met in the street, Fermina ultimately realizes that she wants to marry him. After their wedding, the two of them embark on a honeymoon to Europe. On the ship, Fermina and Dr. Urbino have sex for the first time. Although Fermina feared that losing her virginity would involve pain and violation, she discovers that it actually allows her to express her curiosity and adventurous spirit. During the trip, Fermina and Dr. Urbino also grasp that their marriage is not based on love but on the material security that Dr. Urbino is

able to offer Fermina. Dr. Urbino optimistically believes that the two of them will nevertheless succeed in fostering love for each other. In the long run, it proves highly ambiguous whether true love, beyond mere companionship, ever exists between the two of them. Nevertheless, neither Fermina nor Dr. Urbino ever regret their decision.

When they return from Europe, Fermina gives birth to a son, Marco Aurelio Urbino Daza. Although Fermina is not part of the upper class, she impresses high society with her elegance and talent, thus earning her place in this milieu. She and her husband bring innovative ideas to this social world and feel happy about the positive role they are playing in society. At the same time, Fermina becomes increasingly frustrated with her role at home. Instead of achieving personal fulfillment and independence, Fermina realizes that marriage has forced her to become a servant to her husband. This brings her deep unhappiness, which Dr. Urbino is unable to understand. A period of marital strife ensues. Although the couple takes another trip to Europe, from which Fermina returns pregnant with a daughter, Ofelia, Fermina then discovers that her husband has been having an affair with an American woman, Miss Barbara Lynch. Unable to stand this situation any longer, Fermina leaves the house and finds refuge at Hildebranda's home in the countryside. After two years, Dr. Urbino realizes that Fermina has failed to return not because she is still angry, but because she is stubborn and suffers from wounded pride. As a result, he goes to fetch her and she agrees to return home.

As Dr. Urbino ages, Fermina takes care of him in the same way she would take care of a baby. One day, Dr. Urbino discovers that his close friend Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, an Antillean refugee, has committed suicide at the age of 60 to avoid aging. He also discovers, from a letter Jeremiah left him, that Jeremiah was a criminal in his homeland and that he had a secret lover in the city, whose existence Dr. Urbino had never suspected. Dr. Urbino is disturbed by this series of events. Not only is he shocked to realize that his friend had concealed his past life to him, but he also realizes that he, too, is afraid of the suffering of old age, for which he has begun to take a lot of medicine. On the very same day as Jeremiah's suicide, Dr. Urbino falls from a ladder while trying to catch his parrot, which has escaped to high branches of a mango tree. The fall proves fatal, and before dying, he tells Fermina that he loves her deeply. At the age of 72, Fermina is devastated by her husband's death. At the funeral, Fermina sees Florentino Ariza, who is now 76. She does not pay attention to him, focusing instead on hiding the grief that is destroying her on the inside. That evening, though, as she is about to lock her house, she notices Florentino standing before her. He tells her that his love and fidelity for her are as strong as before. Furious, Fermina shuts the door.

Florentino Ariza has indeed never forgotten Fermina Daza. Committed to this adolescent love, he decided to center his entire life around the possibility of winning her back. As a result, he worked hard to become President of the River Company of the Caribbean, the firm that his father and uncles founded. This allows him to achieve a high social status and thus, in his mind, to prove worthy of Fermina's love. He resolves to wait for Dr. Urbino's death before resuming his courtship. In the meantime, Florentino takes part in sexual relationships with over 600 women. He believes that this does not compromise his love for Fermina, since he does not marry or start serious relationships with any of them. Many of the women Florentino has relationships with are widows. He discovers that, despite widows' grief for their husbands, widows are often surprisingly happy and free. Having escaped from the obligations of marriage, they can now focus on their own pleasure and feel free to take part in many casual relationships, often leading them to jokingly describe themselves as "whores."

However, although Florentino believes that sex is entirely separate from morality, he fails to recognize that some sexual relationships are influenced by harmful power dynamics. One woman, Olimpia Zuleta, is killed by her husband after he discovers her adulterous relationship with Florentino. Later, Florentino starts a relationship with a 14-year-old girl, América Vicuña. He understands neither that she should be protected as a child, nor that she is capable of strong romantic and sexual feelings toward him. As a result, he puts an end to their relationship to focus on his romantic pursuit of Fermina Daza without realizing that this will devastate América. At 17, the young girl commits suicide out of despair. In both cases, instead of reflecting on his moral responsibility, Florentino is primarily concerned with the safeguard of his reputation. This depicts him as a morally debased person, incapable of taking responsibility for his own actions.

Furious at Florentino's shocking admission of love on the day of her husband's funeral, Fermina writes him an angry letter. Florentino responds to it with a mild tone, focusing on intellectual meditations instead of professions of love, which he knows will upset her, and giving Fermina the impression that he is trying to erase the past. Over time, the two of them develop an intimate relationship. Florentino goes to Fermina's house every Tuesday to have tea with her. Both of Fermina's children find the idea of a romantic relationship between two old people revolting, but Fermina is not affected by their criticism. Desirous to leave the oppressive atmosphere of the city, Fermina goes on a boat trip, accompanied by Florentino. There, over 53 years since the end of their youthful adventure, the two of them begin a romantic relationship. They hold hands, kiss, and have sex, although they are both aware that their bodies are old and potentially disgusting. Although Fermina remains annoyed by Florentino's frequent references to the past, which she finds useless and distracting from his other qualities, such as his calm intelligence, the two of them find peace during this trip. They appreciate the quality of a love

separate from marital difficulties and societal obligations—a love that is rendered all the more intense by its proximity to death.

When Fermina and Florentino approach the city, the two of them realize that going back to shore means facing the reality of old age and the likelihood of death. Hoping to retain the joy and peace they currently feel, Florentino suggests that they stay on the river instead of putting an end to their journey. Both Fermina and the boat's captain, Captain Samaritano, are impressed by this idea and decide to follow it. Inspired by his romantic idealism and his love for Fermina, Florentino concludes that they could keep on sailing together like this forever.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Florentino Ariza – After falling in love with Fermina Daza as a young man, Florentino Ariza proves to be a deeply romantic person who devotes his entire life to winning back the woman of his dreams. Despite being the illegitimate son of a working-class woman, Tránsito Ariza, Florentino works hard to become President of the River Company of the Caribbean. By achieving this high social status, he hopes to one day impress Fermina. An indefatigable romantic who is obsessed with lyric poetry and the expression of love, Florentino challenges social norms in order to pursue his own sexual pleasure. He does not hesitate to take part in a romantic relationship at an old old age, thus embodying the notion that love should have no boundaries of age or status. He also proves capable of committing to his idealism when, at the end of the novel, he suggests that Fermina and he should remain on the ship forever, in order to avoid the oppression of social life. However, this very same freedom also proves morally ambiguous. Despite his professed allegiance to Fermina, Florentino enjoys hundreds of sexual relationships throughout his life, committing seriously to none. This inconsistency underlines both his mental allegiance to Fermina and his self-centeredness, which is especially apparent when he harms other people. He refuses to assume a sense of moral responsibility when taking part in a relationship with fourteen-year-old América Vicuña or when women are killed (such as Olympia Zuleta) or commit suicide (such as América Vicuña) because of their relationships with him. This callous disregard for other people reveals him to be a morally shallow individual, focused more on preserving his own reputation than on preventing harm to others. This contradiction between Florentino's enduring commitment to Fermina Daza and his potentially immoral deeds are central to his character.

Fermina Daza – A young woman from a newly rich entrepreneurial family, led by her tyrannical father Lorenzo Daza. Fermina Daza impresses everyone—including members of the aristocracy—with her elegance and talent. Authoritative and stubborn, Fermina has an independent spirit and does not like for others to give her orders. This leads her to rebel against her father Lorenzo Daza in her youthful decision to marry Florentino and to stand up to her husband Dr. Juvenal Urbino on occasion. At the same time, when she marries Dr. Urbino, Fermina's freedom of action is limited by her need to respect the norms of the upper class. This helps to explain why she fails to stand up to Dr. Urbino's mother Doña Blanca's contemptuous comments and why she accepts her domestic role at her husband's service, even if it makes her feel angry and frustrated. Beneath the surface, Fermina's romantic feelings prove unpredictable. She marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino for uncertain reasons, seemingly accepting that security and wealth are more important than love—and she remains unsure, at the end of the novel, whether what she felt for her husband was ever love. Her attitude toward Florentino Ariza is also ambiguous. She rejects him in their youth for no apparent reason but, despite ignoring him for most of her life, ultimately decides that he is a good partner in old age. Her pragmatic attitude in life also contrasts starkly with Florentino's desperate romanticism, which she finds annoying. Her own romantic feelings are unpredictable and are subject to abrupt changes. However, Fermina proves capable of enduring feelings of friendship toward her aunt Escolástica and, later, toward her cousin Hildebranda Sánchez.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle – After studying medicine in Paris, Dr. Juvenal Urbino, a charming young man from an aristocratic family, returns to his native city where he is considered an ideal potential husband. Although Dr. Urbino is fascinated by Fermina Daza, he courts and marries her without feeling intense love for her. His perspective in life is marked by pragmatism and rationality. He does not initially believe in love and considers stability to be more important than happiness in marriage. He also believes wholeheartedly in modernity and progress. This quality, combined with his concern for social welfare, leads him to reform the city-wide medical system and to become a local celebrity, admired for his ability to stop the cholera epidemic. Beyond his effort to modernize society scientifically, he abides by the religious and social norms of his society, including the patriarchal idea that husbands should not take part in running the household. However, despite his elevated moral view of himself, it is only once he meets Miss Barbara Lynch, with whom he launches an adulterous relationship, that he realizes that he is not immune to romantic passion and immoral behavior. His decision to put an abrupt end to this relationship nevertheless highlights his commitment to his principles, such as maintaining a stable marriage (even if this involves emotional self-sacrifice). He dies at the age of 81 while trying to catch a parrot that escaped into a mango tree—a ridiculous death that makes a mockery of his sober personality.

Hildebranda Sánchez – Fermina Daza's cousin from

Valledupar. She is a strong, enthusiastic woman who is desperately in love with a married man. Hildebranda and Fermina develop a long-lasting friendship that is enduring and fulfilling enough to make Fermina realize that it is possible to be happy without romantic love. A passionate woman, Hildebranda encourages Fermina's romantic pursuits, from Florentino Ariza to Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Her freedom in expressing her emotions and desires leads Fermina to playfully call her "a whore." Hildebranda's ranch in the countryside provides a refuge to Fermina when she has marital problems with Dr. Urbino. This visit also constitutes a shock for Fermina, who realizes that her previously beautiful and energetic cousin is now old and fat, confronting Fermina with the horrific reality of aging. Out of desperation over never being with her married lover, Hildebranda marries a man she does not love. In this way, Hildebranda's experience mirrors Florentino's unrequited love for Fermina, and thus underlines the sad consequences to which love can lead if it remains non-reciprocal.

Leona Cassiani – Florentino Ariza meets Leona Cassiani in a trolley and immediately identifies her as a "whore." However, Leona only wants Florentino to find her a job. Once he finds her a position in the River Company of the Caribbean, Leona proves that she is highly intelligent, hard-working, and, most importantly, a deeply devoted friend. She expresses her gratitude toward Florentino by protecting him from enemies in the company, where her talents soon allow her to have control over the entire firm. She is described as "the true woman of [Florentino's] life," although Florentino and she never develop a romantic relationship. She argues that Florentino is like a son to her and that the ideal man for her is a man who raped her when she was young—an experience that, surprisingly, left her with fascination and love for her rapist rather than anger. Leona proves faithful and committed by taking care of Florentino Ariza in his old age. She is the first and only woman who allows Florentino to realize that he can have a sincere friendship with a woman that does not involve sex.

Jeremiah de Saint-Amour – Jeremiah de Saint-Amour is an Antillean refugee who becomes Dr. Juvenal Urbino's chess partner and enduring friend. Although Jeremiah is known as a photographer of children and a saintly figure, not much is actually said about his life. Jeremiah's suicide at the beginning of the novel brings to light the gap that can exist between the appearance one gives of oneself in society and one's true life. Indeed, through the **letter** that Jeremiah leaves behind, Dr. Urbino realizes that Jeremiah was a criminal in his home country, condemned to life in prison, and that he even took part in acts of cannibalism. In addition, Jeremiah had a secret lover who lives in the old slave quarters. These discoveries shock Dr. Urbino, who realizes that his friend was more secretive and deceitful than he appeared. Jeremiah de Saint-Amour also serves as a symbol of people's fear of old age, since he commits suicide at 60 to avoid aging.

Tránsito Ariza – Florentino Ariza's mother is a hard-working, compassionate person who cares deeply for her illegitimate son's well-being. She proves dedicated to supporting her son's romantic endeavors and plays an important role in comforting him when he experiences disappointment. After initially encouraging him to court Fermina Daza, after recognizing the feeling of true love in her son, she invites Widow Nazaret to her house so that Florentino can have sex with her in order to forget his unrequited love for Fermina. At the same time, Tránsito uses her savings to rent and then buy the house she lives in, so that Florentino might one day be able to marry Fermina and have children. In this way, Tránsito reiterates her support of her son's idealized love, thus proving that she, too, might harbor romantic inclinations—and, most importantly, that she will support her son no matter what. At the end of her life, Tránsito loses her memory and is unable to take care of herself, thus exemplifying the fear and humiliation that old age can bring.

Lorenzo Daza – Fermina Daza's father is a tyrannical figure. After the death of his wife and the success of his business, he leaves Spain to live a comfortable life in the new continent. His economic status and ambition cause him to want his daughter to become an upper-class lady at all costs, even if this causes her unhappiness. As a result, he opposes Fermina's marriage to lower-class suitor Florentino Ariza and takes her on a trip throughout the countryside in attempts to make her forget about him. In the same vein, he later supports her marriage to Dr. Juvenal Urbino. Lorenzo is also a deeply immoral person. Although his mule-trading business is regarded with suspicion, this is actually the only legitimate activity he takes part in. By contrast, news articles later report the extent of his illegal activities, from arms trafficking to the trafficking of Chinese immigrants. This causes deep humiliation for Fermina and forces Lorenzo to flee the country for Spain, where he ultimately dies.

América Vicuña – América is fourteen when she first meets her legal guardian, Florentino Ariza, in the city. Florentino initiates a sexual relationship with her, which highlights his underlying immorality despite his romantic persona. Although Florentino considers sex devoid of rules and moral obligations, he does not understand the power dynamics between him, an experienced old man, and an innocent teenager. As a result, Florentino remains blind to América's sadness, frustration and anger when he terminates their relationship after three years to devote his energies to Fermina Daza. América's suicide at age 17, after Florentino leaves her, highlights the extent to which her relationship with him has devastated her, and suggests that Florentino might have played a greater role in this tragedy than he cares to realize.

Uncle Leo XII – Florentino Ariza's uncle; his father Don Pius V Loayza's brother. Uncle Leo XII is one of the founders of the River Company of the Caribbean and is President of the firm

when Florentino is first looking for a job. Unlike Don Pius V Loayza, Uncle Leo XII has taken care of Florentino by giving Tránsito Ariza money throughout the young boy's life and later by finding his nephew a job as a telegraph operator and in various positions in the company. Although Uncle Leo XII has a high socio-economic status, he cares less about material benefits than about emotional, artistic pursuits such as singing. He also supports Florentino's sexual endeavors after seeing Florentino have an affair in the company office. These characteristics suggest that he is more sensitive and fanciful than his official position might suggest, thus demonstrating that there is often a gap between people's private and public lives. After Uncle Leo XII retires, Florentino is chosen as the new President of the River Company of the Caribbean.

Dr. Marco Aurelio Urbino Daza – Fermina Daza and Dr. Juvenal Urbino's son, who has not inherited his parents' charisma and talent, is shy and seemingly unhappy. Instead of using modern medical ideas for the common good, like his father, he develops a theory about ostracizing old people from society. Although he justifies this scheme by saying that people should be spared the terror of growing old, such ideas highlight his callousness as well as his utter lack of compassion or intelligence, since he does not understand that his interlocutor, Florentino Ariza (who is already over 70), might be offended by these ideas. Dr. Urbino also proves socially conservative in considering that old people should not take part in romantic affairs, as his mother does with Florentino.

Escolástica Daza – Fermina Daza's aunt serves as a mother figure in Fermina's life. She raises the young girl as a child. A quiet, reserved woman who has taken religious vows, Escolástica nevertheless proves supportive of Fermina's youthful adventure with Florentino Ariza, since Escolástica regrets having lost a youthful love of her own. Despite Escolástica's important role in Fermina's life, Lorenzo Daza cruelly sends her back to Spain as soon as he realizes that she was aware of Fermina's exchange of **letters** with Florentino. This causes Fermina intense grief. Escolástica ultimately ends up in a leprosarium in Spain.

Widow Nazaret – Widow Nazaret is the first woman with whom Florentino Ariza has a consensual sexual relationship. After the war destroys her house, Widow Nazaret takes refuge at Florentino and Tránsito Ariza's home. Although she frequently expresses grief for her husband's death, she also realizes that his death allows her to develop a sexual life of her own, focused on her pleasure. She takes pride in having become "a whore" thanks to Florentino, and thus embodying the romantic and sexual freedom that women can achieve outside of marriage. The two of them develop a relationship over the next few years and, although they never claim to love each other, she is full of tenderness toward him. She is also the only lover for whom Florentino feels a sense of responsibility. He pays for her funeral after her death.

Miss Barbara Lynch – Dr. Juvenal Urbino's lover is a biracial American woman, a Doctor in Theology, whose father and former husband were Protestant reverends. After seeing Miss Barbara Lynch in the hospital, Dr. Urbino falls madly in love with her and begins an extramarital affair with her. However, he spends little time in her house in order to keep suspicions from arising, and seems more focused on relieving his sexual desire than on paying attention to her feelings and pleasure. Dr. Urbino's adultery with Miss Barbara Lynch reveals to him that he is not immune to immorality or romantic passion but, rather, that he can feel for other women a deeply intense love he has never experienced with his wife Fermina Daza. It also exposes Fermina Daza's racism, since she never suspected her husband could be attracted to a non-white woman.

Rosalba – When Florentino temporarily leaves the city by boat to escape from the heartache of Fermina Daza's rejection, he loses his virginity to a mysterious woman who takes him into her cabin. The woman essentially rapes Florentino by forcing him to have sex without his consent, and without revealing her identity. Despite lacking direct proof, Florentino concludes that this woman must be Rosalba, one of the daughters in a family of three daughters. It remains uncertain whether Rosalba, for whom taking care of her young baby seems to be her only priority, is the actual culprit. Either way, this episode marks the beginning of Florentino's sexual life. Instead of interpreting this sexual experience in a negative way, since he never expressed his consent, he remains fascinated by the capacity for sex with other women to make him forget Fermina Daza.

Ausencia Santander – Florentino meets Ausencia Santander through Captain Rosendo de la Rosa. Ausencia, who is almost fifty years old and is separated from her husband, subverts all of Florentino's theories about love. She inspires both frustration and pleasure in him by focusing exclusively on her own pleasure during the sexual act, thus giving Florentino the feeling that she uses him. However, they become long-term lovers. Once, during their love-making, her beautiful apartment (which Florentino admires) is robbed. It is only once Florentino discovers that he can meet potential partners on the trolley that, after seven years, he puts an end to their relationship.

Sara Noriega – Florentino meets Sara Noriega at the annual Poetic Festival, where she feels sorry for him because she understands that the poem he submitted was not chosen. After her fiancé abandoned Sara when she was young, she decided to devote herself to sex, even if it does not involve marriage. Florentino and Sara share a love for love poetry and develop a long-term affair, in which they alternate sex with Noriega's poetic recitations. She allows him to forget about Fermina for a while, but when Florentino realizes she has aged and becomes bored with her, he plans to break up with her. However, she breaks up with him before he has the chance to do so, thus becoming the only woman besides Fermina who ever rejects Florentino.

Olimpia Zuleta – After exchanging secret messages through pigeons for months, Florentino and Olimpia Zuleta launch an adulterous affair. However, after Florentino paints a message on her skin that she forgets to erase, her husband kills her by slicing her throat with a razor. This episode highlights the dangerous consequences that Florentino's careless sexual relationships can have on other people's lives.

Diego Samaritano (The Ship Captain) – The captain of the *New Fidelity*, the ship where Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza take a romantic trip together at the end of the novel. He is an honest, kind man devoted to his principles. Captain Samaritano cares deeply about the preservation of the river and its animal species. He once keeps an American tourist from shooting a manatee and, as punishment, leaves the tourist on shore. Although Samaritano is sent to prison for six months for this deed, he never regrets his actions, thus demonstrating his commitment to ecological issues and his love of animals. Unlike others, he is moved, not disgusted, by the romance that Fermina and Florentino share in spite of their age, thus proving that he values love and tenderness over societal norms.

Doña Blanca – Dr. Juvenal Urbino's mother is a bitter, aristocratic lady who criticizes many of Fermina Daza's actions, thus making the home a deeply unpleasant environment. She also forces Fermina to eat **eggplant** even though Fermina hates it. Both Dr. Urbino and Fermina are relieved to hear about her death, and immediately move their home from the aristocratic palace where Doña Blanca lived to a *nouveaux riches* house.

Lucrecia del Real del Obispo – Fermina Daza's friend visits her regularly after Dr. Juvenal Urbino's death. Although Lucrecia is a faithful friend, Fermina doubts her honesty after reading an article alleging that Lucrecia had an adulterous affair with Dr. Urbino. Lucrecia is actually innocent, but does not speak to Fermina after this event, thus seemingly confirming her culpability.

Prudencia Pitre – A woman known as "The Widow of Two" because she has outlived her two husbands, Prudencia is one of Florentino's lovers. Florentino goes to her house in a state of mental agitation after declaring his love to Fermina Daza on the day of Dr. Urbino's funeral. Prudencia, who once hoped to marry Florentino, understands that his vague words allude to Fermina Daza, and this convinces Florentino that women are always able to identify the true intentions that lie behind people's words. Florentino later visits Prudencia, who has gone blind in old age, on multiple occasions to demonstrate that he has not forgotten her.

Sister Franca de la Luz – The Superior of the Academy of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, the school where Fermina Daza studies as a teenager, embodies the religious hypocrisy that disgusts Fermina. After seeing Fermina write a love **letter** to Florentino Daza, Sister Franca de la Luz expels Fermina. Later, however, under social pressure, she intervenes to try to convince Fermina to marry Dr. Juvenal Urbino. This hypocritical act convinces Fermina that members of religious groups are not pious but merely respond to social demands. This leads Fermina to avoid engaging with any religious institution in the future and to keep her religious faith to herself.

Jeremiah de Saint Amour's Lover – Jeremiah de Saint-Amour had a secret lover who lived in the old slave quarter. This woman, who is biracial (referred to as a "mulatta" in the novel), is deeply devoted to Jeremiah and abides by his post-suicide instructions, demonstrating her love to him by moving on with her life as he told her to. Although Dr. Urbino considers the woman unprincipled because she does not go to Jeremiah's funeral (which Jeremiah forbade her to do), Fermina Daza tells her husband that this is actually a proof of love. This constitutes a moment in which the differences in Fermina and Dr. Urbino's conceptions of love are brought to life.

Gala Placidia – A black woman from the old slave quarters who works as a servant in Lorenzo Daza's house. She takes meticulous care of the house and Fermina develops love for her since Gala has replaced Fermina's mother-figure Escolástica. Gala Placidia, in turn, develops mother-like feelings for Fermina. She dies while in Fermina's service.

Don Pius V Loayza – One of the three founders of the River Company of the Caribbean, Florentino Ariza's father died when Florentino was 10 years old. Like Florentino, he was known as a passionate romantic who wrote lyrical **letters** and had occasional affairs in his office. He gave Florentino money from time to time but was otherwise uninvolved in his son's life.

Euclides – A young boy whom Florentino Ariza hires to search for the sunken galleon *San José*, which supposedly still full of treasures. Euclides tricks Florentino by making him believe that he has found the ship. This episode highlights Florentino's romanticism and gullibility. After Florentino accuses Euclides of lying to him, the young boy disappears, thus implicitly confirming his guilt.

Ofelia Urbino Daza – Like her brother Dr. Marco Aurelio Urbino Daza, Ofelia opposes her mother Fermina Daza's desire to spend time with Florentino and develop a romantic relationship with him after her father Dr. Juvenal Urbino's death, because of their old age. Fermina condemns her for this attitude and kicks her out of the house.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lotario Thugut – Florentino's friend in the telegraph company introduces Florentino to the art of the violin, to the church choir (where Florentino can observe Fermina), and to a hotel where prostitutes work. The two of them spend happy hours in that hotel—Lotario with prostitutes and Florentino simply observing the environment.

Dr. Lácides Olivella – One of Dr. Juvenal Urbino's disciples

who organizes a luncheon on the day that Jeremiah de Saint-Amour and Dr. Juvenal Urbino die.

Captain Rosendo de la Rosa – Ausencia Santander's stable lover, a married riverboat captain, introduces Florentino to Ausencia but remains unaware of their secret relationship.

Andrea Varón – One of Florentino's lovers who has relationships with both men and women. She is the only woman Florentino ever pays to have sex with, although they negotiate a symbolic fee of one peso.

Zenaida Neves – Captain Samaritano's lover, whom he calls "my wild woman." She boards the ship on their way back from La Dorada.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE

Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* follows the romantic lives of three central characters—Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza, and Dr. Juvenal Urbino—to explore the meaning of true love. The daughter of a Spanish mule trader, Fermina Daza discovers domestic love when she marries Dr. Juvenal Urbino, an intelligent man from a wealthy family. During her marriage, Fermina realizes that her couple is tied together through intense knowledge of the other, tenderness, and habit—but not necessarily through romantic love. By contrast, she discovers passionate love during her adolescent romance with telegraph operator Florentino Ariza. Although Fermina ultimately rejects him, Florentino proves to be a hopeless romantic and devotes his entire life to waiting for her to return to him. By the end of the novel, after the death of Fermina's husband, the two of them reunite. This happy ending seemingly proves that Florentino's ardent love has triumphed over Dr. Urbino's domestic affection. However, through Fermina's doubts and reflections, the novel shows that true love is not necessarily easy to recognize. Following the various periods of Fermina's life, *Love in the Time of Cholera* suggests that there might be different ways to love different people at different times, depending on personality and the various stages of life.

Although Fermina and Dr. Urbino do not marry for love, their relationship evolves over time into a relationship of mutual dependence, suggesting that relationships which lack romance can still serve a practical purpose. Dr. Juvenal Urbino marries Fermina because he admires her qualities, but not because he is madly in love with her. Over the course of their marriage, though, both characters develop tender feelings for each other. Fermina takes care of her aging husband with devotion, treating him like a "senile baby." The two characters realize that they constantly think about each other and cannot live without each other. However, they take care not to question whether this mutual dependence derives from love or mere habit, preferring not to trouble the stability of their marriage. Dr. Urbino, in fact, believes that stability in marriage is more important than happiness. He understands his relationship with Fermina as a lifelong commitment made of self-sacrifice. This devotion allows him to put an end to his adulterous relationship with Miss Barbara Lynch—a woman for whom, incidentally, he seems to feel the romantic passion that lacks in his marriage.

Ultimately, it remains ambiguous whether true love has ever emerged between Dr. Urbino and Fermina. When Dr. Urbino lies dying after a violent fall, he tells Fermina: "Only God knows how much I loved you." This romantic statement suggests that he must have felt love for her after so many years of partnership, but it does not keep Fermina from questioning the nature of this love later on. "It is incredible how one can be happy for so many years in the midst of so many squabbles, so many problems, damn it, and not really know if it was love or not," she says. Although Fermina and her husband shared evident feelings of care and affection, it remains unclear whether sharing domestic life was sufficient to kindle true, unequivocal love.

By contrast, Florentino Ariza loves Fermina with an intensity that he never doubts. However, although his romantic attitude can be seen as an antidote to the routine nature of Fermina and Dr. Urbino's marriage, the relationship between Florentino and Fermina is also marked by conflict and ambiguity. Florentino Ariza's love for Fermina is physical and uncontrollable. It manifests itself in visible ways: Florentino loses his appetite, has diarrhea, and vomits, to the point of making it seem as though he is a victim of cholera. Love, in this sense, is associated with illness, an intense physical phenomenon against which Florentino cannot fight. This suggests that Florentino's love might be unequivocal, but is not necessarily wholly positive, as it has an obsessive tinge to it. In fact, when Fermina and Florentino reunite at the end of the novel, they seem to have different conceptions of love. Fermina is annoyed by Florentino's excessive romanticism—the very quality that, in Florentino's eyes, constitutes his love. In the end, it is only by concealing the more obsessive aspects of his character (and highlighting, instead, his capacity for intellectual reflection) that Florentino ultimately seduces Fermina.

Although the novel's ending suggests that Florentino's love has finally vanquished all obstacles, it also reveals that Fermina and Florentino's relationship might be successful primarily because it represents an escape from the responsibilities of life: "It was as if they had leapt over the arduous cavalry of conjugal life and

gone straight to the heart of love. They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life, beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion: beyond love." The characters are both at "the heart of love" and "beyond love"—an ambiguous characterization. Perhaps, the novel suggests, this particular relationship is successful because it does not reflect what is traditionally understood as "love" (the intense passion that Florentino has experienced his whole life) but, rather, camaraderie in the face of death. Their love, then, functions because it is perfectly suited to this particular moment in time: the end of the two characters' lives, after long years of marriage and youthful passion.

The ending of the novel thus suggests that Florentino's love for Fermina as an elderly man arrives at the right place and time, but is not capable of replacing or overshadowing Fermina's marriage to Dr. Urbino—a man she might not have loved, but whom she feels was an adequate husband for her. While for Florentino this ending represents the culmination of his life-long desire, to be united with the woman of his dreams, for Fermina it merely fills a gap at the end of her life. The novel thus shows that love can take on various forms and serve different purposes over the course of one person's life.

SEX AND MORALITY

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, sex often represents a way for characters to escape the socially oppressive routine of everyday life. Through his experiences with widows, separated wives, and adulterous women, Florentino Ariza realizes that women often find pleasure and self-affirmation through sex, beyond what a conservative society deems acceptable for them to express. However, some sexual behaviors can remain tainted by dangerous dynamics of power and control. Florentino believes that sex lies outside the moral sphere, and this leads him to take part in morally questionable deeds, including rape and sex with a minor. By depicting these episodes in a neutral tone, the narrator challenges readers to make up their own mind about what they see. Readers are encouraged to question the morality of sex in various contexts and develop their own moral perspective and to differentiate sexual interactions that are potentially liberating from those that can prove violent and harmful.

In a society marked by rigid social norms and class-based behavior, sex—especially sexual relations outside of marriage—can provide a freedom lacking in ordinary society. In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, first-time sexual experiences constitute joyful acts of discovery. Florentino loses his virginity to a woman who introduces him to a new sensual world whose existence he had never imagined, and which might be potentially capable of making him forget his obsessive love for Fermina Daza. Similarly, for Fermina, sex is a form of discovery: of her own body and of male anatomy. First, she experiences masturbation as a secretive, pleasurable activity in harmony with her natural instinct. Then, during her first sexual relation with her husband Dr. Juvenal Urbino, she examines his penis with curiosity while Urbino explains how it functions, thus providing her with important information. These episodes suggest that sex can be tied to curiosity and personal knowledge, providing an opportunity for everyone involved to learn more about each other's bodies.

In addition, illicit or non-traditional sex allows people—in particular, women—to escape the constraints of marriage. Widow Nazaret's intense sexual life with multiple partners, leads her to consider herself "the only free woman in the province." As Florentino gets to know multiple widows, he concludes that widowhood indeed allows women to be in control of their own lives, without having to obey orders or to focus on anything but the satisfaction of their own pleasure. In the novel, non-widowed women find a similar freedom after separating from their husband or through adultery. However, sexual relations do not always provide a perfect escape from society and can actually heighten the dangers and inequality that exist in society. Although Florentino claims that "nothing one does in bed is immoral if it helps to perpetuate love," he is naïve (or hypocritical) in believing that sexual relations exist in a moral vacuum. Indeed, on various occasions, Florentino's sexual decisions make him directly or indirectly responsible for other people's deaths.

After Florentino writes with paint on the body of one of his lovers, Olimpia Zuleta, she is later killed by her furious husband. Florentino puts flowers on Zuleta's grave but does not seem plagued in any way by guilt or grief. His nonchalant attitude in response to his own actions demonstrates the potential immorality that irresponsible sex can encourage. Even more disturbing is Florentino's relationship with a 14-year-old girl, América Vicuña, of whom he is the legal guardian. Although he knows she is still a child, he does not hesitate to have sex with her. This story, too, has a tragic ending. After Florentino abandons her to focus exclusively on Fermina Daza, she kills herself out of jealousy and pain. Florentino later experiences grief but never questions the morality of his deeds. In both cases, Florentino fails to examine his own responsibility in these deaths. Instead, his immediate reaction is selfish: he fears for his own reputation, fearful that people might discover his secret relationships with these women—again, sex proves to be as much a vehicle for pain and violence as a lighthearted escape.

In addition to these deaths, rape in the novel is described in neutral or positive terms. Florentino's first sexual experience is a case of rape, since he is taken by surprise by a woman who forces him to lose his virginity without ever asking for his consent or revealing her identity. However, Florentino is fascinated by this experience, retaining only the positive

aspects of it. Similarly, Florentino's friend Leona Cassiani desperately searches for the unknown man who raped her when she was young, whom she believes to be the love of her life. Both Florentino and Dr. Juvenal Urbino take part in acts of rape—Florentino with a maid, and Dr. Urbino by using his authority as a doctor to touch his female patients sexually during gynecological exams. In the novel, none of these episodes is condemned in explicit ways or recognized as a form of violence.

These episodes demonstrate that sexual relations are not exempt from violence or unhealthy power dynamics, which can lead to fatal consequences. But by remaining neutral and not explicitly drawing the line between moral and immoral behavior, or consent and lack thereof, the novel invites readers to make up their own minds about the moral validity of certain actions. It is up to the reader to pay attention to these episodes and realize that sexual relations in the novel are not always as innocent or innocuous as they might appear.

SOCIAL NORMS VS. PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Gabriel García Márquez shows that public appearances do not always reflect private reality. Despite what high society promotes, being wealthy and having a stable marriage (the main goals of the upper class) do not necessarily guarantee happiness. During her marriage to Dr. Juvenal Urbino, Fermina Daza realizes that the impression of contentment she emanates to the outside world does not reflect her experience in the house, where she is a servant to her husband. Through this personal dissatisfaction and her husband's adultery with a mixed-race woman, Miss Barbara Lynch, Fermina discovers that the values of high society regarding social class, the role of women, and race do not actually conform to people's desires. Instead, the novel suggests, challenging certain social codes may be the proper path to achieving a measure of freedom and happiness.

The focus of high society on social class and norms wrongfully suggests that social status reflects a person's worth or happiness. In a world obsessed with status, family can prove an obstacle to personal happiness. When an adolescent Fermina Daza decides that she wants to marry Florentino Ariza, who has a promising future but is an illegitimate son in a poor family, Fermina's tyrannical father Lorenzo Daza opposes the project. This suggests that a conservative family's view of marriage is not meant to promote love or happiness, but rather social advancement. Paradoxically, though, upper-class people trust that wealth and power *generate* happiness. In the case of Fermina and Juvenal, people believe that the beautiful, practical house they own guarantees that their marriage will be a happy one. Dr. Urbino, too, naïvely assumes that the security he brings his wife makes her happy.

However, material comfort is unrelated to personal happiness, as it still disguises underlying power dynamics. Despite her wealth, Fermina is secretly miserable. She realizes that being married and taking care of a house is a form of servitude. Focused on the logistics of everyday life, she sees herself as "a deluxe servant" whose only goal is to take care of her husband. The power she has as a member of the upper class does not give her freedom. Rather, "she was absolute monarch of a vast empire of happiness, which had been built by [her husband] and for him alone. She knew that he loved her above all else, more than anyone else in the world, but only for his own sake: she was in his holy service." Dr. Urbino recognizes this himself when he says that "[a] man should have two wives: one to love and one to sew his buttons." He assumes that being a wife necessarily entails taking care of the household and of her husband. He, along with the rest of society, does not realize that Fermina might actually long for equality or personal realization beyond the domain of the household.

As these personal aspirations clash with societal expectations, it becomes clear that social norms serve primarily to limit people's lives—not to lead them to fulfillment and contentment. Much of the sincere joy that Dr. Urbino and Fermina experience during their marriage derives from their opposition to the small-minded nature of high society. Dr. Urbino defies traditional norms by marrying a woman who is not part of the local nobility. Although people initially reject Fermina because of that, she soon makes her way in society thanks to her natural demeanor, which convinces everyone that she deserves to be admired and respected. More generally, Fermina and Juvenal bring modernity and progress to the city: "The most absurd element in their situation was that they never seemed so happy in public as during those years of misery. For this was the time of their greatest victories over the subterranean hostility of a milieu that resisted accepting them as they were: different and modern, and for that reason transgressors against the traditional order." Happiness, in other words, can come from challenging the system and motivating society to evolve in the public sphere. However, the enjoyment that Fermina and Juvenal feel relates exclusively to their *public* role, not their private life—yet it is easy to confuse the two.

Ultimately, it is when characters are able to forgo tradition for their true emotional desires that they prove happiest. Dr. Urbino's adulterous relationship with Barbara Lynch is doubly scandalous because Miss Lynch is a "mulatta" (a mixed-race woman). Having assimilated society's racist beliefs, Fermina believes that her husband would never be attracted to a black woman. She does not realize, instead, that her husband feels joyous and free in the presence of his lover. Similarly, when Fermina and Florentino develop a romantic relationship in their old age, many people are aghast. América Vicuña, Florentino's adolescent lover, says that old men don't marry, thus confusing social norms with individual desire. In turn, Fermina's children

do not approve of their mother's relationship, judging that love at that age is obscene.

In both cases, people are not able to understand that actual happiness, love, and attraction are not tied to society's views about how people *should* behave. Without necessarily intending to, Dr. Urbino's relationship with Miss Lynch and Fermina's with Florentino challenge social norms, revealing that personal happiness is most likely to flourish outside of rigid social categories. The novel thus suggests that the conservative values of high society are an obstacle to people's happiness and that people are most likely to enjoy freedom beyond rigid social categories.

ILLNESS, MORTALITY, AND HOPE

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, old age and death are always looming in the lives of the protagonists. The narrative opens with the description of Antillean refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour's dead body, which his friend Dr. Juvenal Urbino is summoned to examine. When the doctor sees the dead body, he is shocked and soon realizes that he, too, is mortal. Over the course of the novel, various characters experience such moments of revelation. Indeed, although people such as Dr. Urbino play an important role in ridding society of dangerous diseases like cholera, the process of coming to terms with one's own mortality is intensely personal. Dr. Urbino, his wife Fermina Daza, and Florentino Ariza will all have to accept that they have little power over the aging of their body. However, instead of giving in to resignation, Fermina and Florentino highlight another route: dedicating themselves to making their final years as pleasant and full of love as they can. Until death strikes, the novel suggests, no love or hope is vain if it contributes to people's happiness.

As a modern, rational doctor, Dr. Juvenal Urbino believes that sensible medical reforms can greatly ameliorate people's lives and allow society to progress. After his return from Paris, Dr. Urbino realizes that many behaviors in his native city exacerbate the spread of cholera. He is appalled to note that people drink water infested with waterworms, which they superstitiously believe have supernatural powers but are actually harmful to ingest. People also consider a scrotal hernia to be a symbol of virility, even though it is a severe condition. In addition, although cholera affects everyone, regardless of wealth or skin color, he notes that the disease kills a larger number of poor black people because they do not have the infrastructure, such as septic tanks in colonial houses, to protect themselves. Aware of these medical and social issues, Dr. Juvenal Urbino does not allow himself to succumb to the hopelessness of the situation—instead, he works hard to find solutions. He fights to build a closed sewage system, to convince people not to dispose of waste anywhere, and to move the slaughterhouse farther from where people live and eat. These innovative methods play an important role in preventing a new outbreak of cholera in the city, demonstrating that society is able to progress and protect itself from preventable ills, rather than merely accepting death as fate.

Beyond social progress, on a personal level Dr. Urbino and other characters are forced to accept that there is one thing in human life that even the best medical reforms cannot fight: old age and death. The idea of time passing provokes horror and panic in various characters. Florentino notices the ravages of time not in his own life, but in those of others. In particular, he is shocked to see Fermina Daza almost trip on steps in public while holding on to her husband. In that moment, Florentino realizes that what scares him most is old age, which could force him to rely on another person for support, in the way that Fermina and her husband depend on each other to survive. Although characters try to defend themselves against old age, their efforts are largely futile. Most characters in the novel demonstrate an attitude toward old age that is marked by fear and shame, considering old age to be humiliating. Jeremiah de Saint-Amour takes a particularly drastic measure to prevent old age: suicide. Dr. Urbino does not kill himself, but secretly takes a variety of medications to prevent certain problems associated with old age, such as vertigo and sleep issues. Similarly, Florentino is ashamed to become bald and to have to replace his teeth. Rather than either accepting old age as an inevitable part of life or trying to better themselves, these characters try in vain to ignore and conceal their problems.

In the end, however, whatever precautions or opinions characters might have about growing old and dying, they ultimately have no control over how their lives end. Dr. Juvenal Urbino dies after climbing in a tree to try to catch his escaped parrot, a darkly humorous death that contrasts starkly with his reputation as a serious, respectable man. This shows that death is unpredictable and surprising—and, therefore, that worrying about it does not impact its outcome. As a result, the only solution to old age and death is to confront this period of life head-on and make the best of one's time left on Earth. Florentino and Fermina realize that shame does not add anything positive to their lives. Although they are both afraid about the other discovering their old body and their "sour smell of old age" during sex, they ultimately prove accepting of each other's physical states. Instead of considering that old age is an obstacle to their love, they accept that they can now express affection in a new way: through calm, tender acts, at odds with the passionate love-making and intensity of their youth.

By the end of the novel, it appears that the only solution to the inevitable struggles of illness and old age is to make the best of difficult situations and enjoy life as much as possible. On the ship, when Florentino and Fermina are about to return to port and the routine nature of their lives—and, therefore, to the imminence of their death—they decide to believe that "it is life, more than death, that has no limits." Instead of giving in to death, they turn the boat around, spurning the reality of

boredom and decrepitude. Just as Dr. Urbino's commitment to disease prevention advocates an optimistic and proactive outlook on life, their choice to keep on enjoying themselves emphasizes that death is ultimately out of their control—but that their capacity to enjoy their own lives isn't.

MORAL CORRUPTION AND CYNICISM

Although *Love in the Time of Cholera* primarily focuses on interpersonal issues such as love and relationships, the backdrop of the story is much more somber. The characters in the novel find themselves in a world ravaged by civil war, cholera, and environmental destruction. Politicians prove incapable of stemming a tide of civil conflicts, religious leaders bow to social interests, and businessmen prove committed only to their self-interest. As is typical of magical realism, a literary style of which García Márquez is considered one of the founders, the narrator adopts a neutral tone toward immoral or horrific events, mentioning complex moral issues with apparent indifference and detachment in order to reflect the cynicism that characters feel toward their circumstances. The hopeless disillusionment that characters face throughout the novel underscores the dire and widespread consequences of broken institutions. The futility of their small attempts to better their circumstances suggests that settling into resignation, rather than resistance, is sometimes the inevitable reality of living in a corrupt society.

In a world marked by chaos, ambition, and greed, powerful human institutions such as the government and the Catholic Church seem unable to change things. On a national scale, politics fail to bring the peace and stability for which people yearn. Ever since the country's independence, civil wars have repeated themselves in endless succession, giving citizens no rest. The conflict opposes Liberals and Conservatives—although, as Dr. Juvenal Urbino notes, politicians do not actually confront each other on the basis of political opinions but according to their social class. "A Liberal president was exactly the same as a Conservative president, but not as well dressed," Dr. Urbino wryly notes. His cynical view reflects the idea that the country is never going to escape the cycles of war. Like him, everyone is used to the idea that war is ineluctable, spreading in the same way an epidemic of cholera might. However, Dr. Urbino notes that people speak about the war as though it were an ordinary fact of life, but that their eyes remain full of terror. At odds with the narrator's detached tone, this observation reminds the reader that war is *not* normal but is, in fact, deeply traumatic to everyone involved.

Beyond politics, religious institutions also fail to serve as an antidote to sin and harm. The Catholic Church is shown to have methods and goals that are contradictory with the basic tenets of faith and moral virtue. Fermina Daza notes the hypocritical attitude of the nuns who expelled her from school for writing a love **letter**, but who, under pressure from the Archbishop, later intercede to organize her marriage with Dr. Urbino. This shows that, like any other human institution, the Church is prey to social and financial pressures. Some members of the Church even take sides in the civil war, using their authority to promote political goals instead of fighting for peace. This discredits the Church as an institution capable of bringing reconciliation and stability to society and demonstrates that religion, which commonly serves uniting force of moral soundness, merely validates characters' disillusionment in this setting.

Businesspeople further take advantage of this chaotic situation to serve their self-interest, not the common good. Fermina discovers that her father Lorenzo Daza was not an honest trader, but a man who took part in illegal schemes to make large profits, including from the sale of arms that fueled the civil war. This leads her to feel disillusioned about people's motives. Similarly, excessive deforestation and hunting—presumably out of commercial self-interest—has destroyed the environment that Fermina and Florentino see from the boat. The landscape is burnt, deprived of trees, and the animal population annihilated. This apocalyptic setting mirrors the dejection and hopelessness that the characters feel in the face of seemingly limitless corruption.

Faced with such disorder, characters realize that, beyond small acts of resistance, they must resign themselves to the inherently savage nature of the human world. Lacking inspiring role models, individuals are forced to find their own ways to behave morally. Fermina's anger at the Catholic Church does not lead her not to stop believing in God, but to express her faith in a private way. She prefers to pray silently to God than to join a religious congregation. She does not actively fight the system but, by removing herself from it and finding joy in her religious practice, she believes her commitment to God to be more sincere. Similarly, the ship captain fights the destruction of the land in his own way. When an American man kills a manatee, an endangered species, Captain Samaritano is so furious that he abandons the man on shore and is later imprisoned for this act. However, the captain shows no regret, believing that it was his duty to protect the vulnerable animal. His resolve highlights his moral values and his capacity to sacrifice himself for the common good, in contrast with the bleak, morally-depraved society in which he lives.

In a society in which institutions do not seem to function, though, the most common reaction is cynicism and despondency. Appalled by the destruction he sees in and around the river, Florentino concludes that "there was nothing anyone could do except bring in a new river." In the face of widespread damage, Florentino realizes that individual human deeds are insufficient: only a complete rebuilding might provide a solution to the destruction. This desire is obviously impossible to realize, and thus expresses the desolation that Florentino feels in the face of a situation he cannot change.

Therefore, the political and social backdrop to *Love in the Time of Cholera* is a bleak environment in which humans feel helpless before the immorality and self-interest that guides many members of society. Beyond small acts of personal resistance, characters are forced to resign themselves to the savage instincts of human nature, which are capable of destroying the very planet they depend on to live.

SYMBOLS

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

LETTERS

In *Love in the Time of Cholera*, letters represent the desire of various characters to either display or obscure the truth from others. Writing letters provides an opportunity for characters to reveal their true selves or, on the contrary, to disguise some of their intentions. Before committing suicide, refugee Jeremiah de Saint-Amour writes Dr. Juvenal Urbino a letter describing his past crimes. This act of transparency demonstrates de Saint-Amour's desire for his true identity to be known, even if it is unflattering and might shock his friend—who, in addition, will be unable to answer de Saint-Amour since he will be dead. Florentino Ariza's letters to Fermina Daza, on the other hand, are not meant to highlight past immoral deeds, but to seduce her. In his youth, Florentino uses lyrical poetry to do so, whereas in old age he writes meditations on issues related to life and death. These strategies reveal that Florentino has learned new, innovative ways to impress the woman he loves, even if his actual intentions (to win Fermina over) have not changed. Letter-writing, in this sense, is not necessarily fully honest and genuine for every character in the novel, since they can choose to reveal only the aspect of themselves that might appeal to their addressee, according to their particular goals. This issue is further complicated by the fact that Gabriel García Márquez never transcribes any letter for readers to see. This suggests that the actual content of letters might matter less than characters' reactions to them. In other words, the capacity for letters to serve as vehicles for people's emotions and desires ultimately proves more important than their literary content. The various uses of letter-writing in the novel thus signal the variety of intentions that characters have toward each other—whether this involves telling the truth and revealing one's past crimes or building trust to achieve romantic seduction.

EGGPLANT

Eggplant in the novel highlights the unpredictability and absurdity of human emotions. As a young woman, Fermina Daza is convinced that she hates eggplant, to the point of posing not eating eggplant as one of the conditions to marry Florentino Ariza. After marrying Dr. Juvenal Urbino, she suffers because his mother Doña Blanca cooks eggplant all the time. However, when Fermina once tries eggplant without knowing what she is eating, she discovers that she actually loves this vegetable. At the end of the novel, she cooks it for Florentino during their trip on the river, symbolizing her newly found joy and love. Fermina's sudden change of mind regarding eggplant mirrors some of her abrupt emotional shifts—for example, the moment when, despite their shared professions of love, she declared she had no feelings for Florentino. Her shifts from hatred to resignation and then to uncontrolled passion highlight the mystery of personal preferences and the uncontrollable nature of human emotions. It suggests that love (and hate) might vary over one's life, bringing joy and suffering in unpredictable ways. In this way, it highlights the absurdity of human inner life, which can shift from one opinion to the next for no apparent reason.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *Love in the Time of Cholera* published in 2007.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ No one ever thought that a marriage rooted in such foundations could have any reason not to be happy.

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Urbino's mother dies, Fermina and Dr. Urbino leave his aristocratic palace to move to a residential district built for *nouveaux riches*, non-aristocratic people who have recently become wealthy. The house has a lot of advantages. It is airy, efficient, and capable of remaining cool under the oppressive heat of the city. This sets a seemingly perfect environment for the new couple's marriage.

By associating the house's physical "foundations" to the "foundations" of the couple's life, outside observers associates material sturdiness to marital bliss. However, people's assessment that material stability is the basis on which people's happiness depends is a belief that is both

widespread and, in Fermina's case, completely wrong. Although Fermina has indeed married Dr. Urbino for the security he provides, she soon realizes that this is not enough to make her feel fulfilled. Instead, she soon becomes frustrated by the role she is expected to play in the house and the problems she has with her husband.

This belief thus highlights the enormous gap that can exist between people's judgment of other people's lives and actual reality. In a society obsessed with class differences—in the city, extreme wealth coexists with utter misery—people forget that material stability, while essential for survival, does not necessarily generate personal fulfillment.

❝ He recognized her despite the uproar, through his tears of unrepeatable sorrow at dying without her, and he looked at her for the last and final time with eyes more luminous, more grief-stricken, more grateful than she had ever seen them in half a century of a shared life, and he managed to say to her with his last breath:

"Only God knows how much I loved you."

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle (speaker), Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Urbino falls from a mango tree while trying to catch his parrot, he waits for his wife to arrive before letting himself die. His final words express the love and admiration he has for her, and seemingly settles their marital fights once and for all, concluding that love has vanquished adversity.

However, despite Dr. Urbino's heartfelt attitude, this pronouncement only adds to the ambiguity of his relationship with Fermina. Beyond mere rhetoric, the fact that he is "more grateful" than Fermina has ever seen him and that "only" God" knows his feelings signals that Dr. Urbino has probably never expressed such strong feelings to his wife. Therefore, it remains ambiguous whether these sudden feelings reflect a lifelong attitude or, on the other hand, whether their intensity merely results from Dr. Urbino's proximity to death, which changes his perspective on life. Perhaps, too, what Dr. Urbino means by "love" is a complex feeling of care and tenderness—and not necessarily the passionate feeling that is usually understood as romantic love.

Either way, this conclusion shows that Dr. Urbino and Fermina's relationship ends in a positive way, through the acknowledgment that they have shared something special—a unique partnership, the beauty of having taken care of each other for most of their life—which has proven greater than marital troubles.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ After Florentino Ariza saw her for the first time, his mother knew before he told her because he lost his voice and his appetite and spent the entire night tossing and turning in his bed. But when he began to wait for the answer to his first letter, his anguish was complicated by diarrhea and green vomit, he became disoriented and suffered from sudden fainting spells, and his mother was terrified because his condition did not resemble the turmoil of love so much as the devastation of cholera.

Related Characters: Tránsito Ariza, Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

When Florentino first sees Fermina Daza, he falls madly in love with her. This generates in him a feeling that is both uncontrollable and excessively intense, leading him to suffer from serious physical consequences. The association of love and cholera suggests that love is not necessarily a wholly positive phenomenon. As is mentioned at the beginning of the novel, love can lead to despair and suicide, and in Florentino's case, it causes him to lose control over his mind and body.

The association of love and physical suffering belongs to a long tradition of lyrical love poetry, dating back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. However, in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, García Márquez takes this idea to a new extreme, showing that suffering for love is not necessarily noble but potentially disgusting. This adds an element of humor and of danger to the narrative, showing that it exceeds the bounds of what is traditionally considered normal and appropriate in love.

"Take advantage of it now, while you are young, and suffer all you can," she said to him, "because these things don't last your whole life."

Related Characters: Tránsito Ariza (speaker), Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

When Tránsito Ariza sees her son Florentino suffer for love because of his early relationship with Fermina Daza, she pities him and fears he might suffer from cholera. Once her fears are assuaged, however, she tells her son to enjoy the intensity of his feelings, even if they entail physical suffering, because they usually occur only at the beginning of one's life, along with one's first romantic experiences. Tránsito's reasonable, common-sense approach soon clashes with the reality, which proves wilder and more fanciful than anyone could have imagined. Instead of forgetting Fermina and moving on with his life, as one might expect he would, Florentino decides to dedicate his entire life to winning back his first and only love—thus proving his mother that "these things" can indeed last one's whole life.

This scene highlights how extreme and extravagant Florentino's love-related thoughts and actions are. Although he sees his commitment to Fermina in terms of love and determination, from the outside it is easy to consider him crazy for pursuing a seemingly hopeless goal. This possibility of seeing Florentino as either deeply romantic or somewhat deranged remains valid throughout the novel. Ultimately, the way in which people judge Florentino depends on their own perspective and on what they consider to be normal or valuable in love and life.

She turned her head and saw, a hand's breadth from her eyes, those other glacial eyes, that livid face, those lips petrified with fear, just as she had seen them in the crowd at Midnight Mass the first time he was so close to her, but now, instead of the commotion of love, she felt the abyss of disenchantment. In an instant the magnitude of her own mistake was revealed to her, and she asked herself, appalled, how she could have nurtured such a chimera in her heart for so long and with so much ferocity. She just managed to think: My God, poor man! Florentino Ariza smiled, tried to say something, tried to follow her, but she erased him from her life with a wave of her hand.

"No, please," she said to him. "Forget it."

Related Characters: Fermina Daza (speaker), Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

After going on a long trip in the countryside, Fermina Daza returns to the city, where she makes plans to marry Florentino Ariza. However, despite their exchange of letters, she has not seen him in so long that, when she does, she realizes that the feelings she nurtured for him were nothing but an illusion. Therefore, in an instant, she changes her mind and decides she does not want to marry him or see him ever again. This brutal shift in Fermina's feelings remains largely unexplained and ambiguous. Later, Fermina realizes that she did not actually know much about Florentino, and that this contributed to her rejection. However, the same could be said about Dr. Urbino, whom she actually decides to marry. Perhaps, upon seeing Florentino, she realized that she felt no physical attraction to him. The description of his face does indeed make him seem more like a living corpse than a charming human being. Perhaps what excited her about marriage was the enthusiasm and independence it conveyed, more than the actual individual courting her.

Beyond these possible conclusions, it's possible that in the same way that Florentino cannot control the physical consequences that love has on his body, Fermina too cannot control her emotions. In that sense, there might no true explanation for her actions—only the surprising volatility of human emotions.

Chapter 3 Quotes

She herself had not realized that every step she took from her house to school, every spot in the city, every moment of her recent past, did not seem to exist except by the grace of Florentino Ariza. Hildebranda pointed this out to her, but she did not admit it because she never would have admitted that Florentino Ariza, for better or for worse, was the only thing that had ever happened to her in her life.

Related Characters: Hildebranda Sánchez, Florentino Ariza, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132-133

Explanation and Analysis

After Fermina Daza rejects Florentino Ariza, Fermina's cousin Hildebranda Sánchez comes to visit her. During this trip, Hildebranda realizes that all of Fermina's explanations about the city involved her memories with Florentino. This highlights not Fermina's enduring love for him but, rather, the utter solitude of her life, in which she is deprived of other friends or activities. This scene thus provides an explanation for Fermina's rejection of Florentino. It suggests that Fermina loved (or thought she loved) Florentino because he brought real life and excitement to her monotone existence, kept stale and boring under her father's supervision.

After her marriage to Dr. Urbino, Fermina's life only changes partially. Although she does take part in many more activities outside the household, helping her husband organize cultural activities of various kinds, she still remains tied to the house, which she is expected to manage on her own.

❝ In this way he learned that she did not want to marry him, but did feel joined to his life because of her immense gratitude to him for having corrupted her. She often said to him:

"I adore you because you made me a whore."

Said in another way, she was right. Florentino Ariza had stripped her of the virginity of a conventional marriage, more pernicious than congenital virginity or the abstinence of widowhood. He had taught her that nothing one does in bed is immoral if it helps to perpetuate love.

Related Characters: Widow Nazaret (speaker), Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

Florentino Ariza is the first man Widow Nazaret sleeps with after the death of her husband. From that moment onward, she leads a life of sexual promiscuity, enjoying the company of as many men as she pleases, far from the monogamous obligations of marriage. Her self-definition as "a whore" suggests that she has re-appropriated a traditionally negative term and turned it into a positive expression. Widow Nazaret is not a prostitute who makes men pay for sex, but merely a woman who enjoys non-conventional sexual affairs, without any form of commitment. She considers that becoming a metaphorical "whore" in this way has brought her happiness and freedom, not shame.

This scene thus introduces topics of morality and corruption in sex. Although Florentino considers sex free of moral obligations, and Widow Nazaret visibly enjoys the freedom that casual sex brings her, on other occasions the novel mentions corruption and perversion in more serious ways—for example, when Florentino has a relationship with a 14-year-old girl. In other words, not all sexual relationships in the novel are as innocent and liberating as Widow Nazaret's attitude suggests. In some cases, Florentino's sexual behavior can be morally reprehensible, and sex responsible for tragic consequences. The novel thus suggests that, although ideas about corruption and immorality can be used in a lighthearted, positive way, they can also have other, dangerous real-life consequences. It is up to the reader to distinguish between the two.

❝ He was aware that he did not love her. He had married her because he liked her haughtiness, her seriousness, her strength, and also because of some vanity on his part, but as she kissed him for the first time he was sure there would be no obstacle to their inventing true love. They did not speak of it that first night, when they spoke of everything until dawn, nor would they ever speak of it. But in the long run, neither of them had made a mistake.

Related Characters: Fermina Daza, Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 159

Explanation and Analysis

When newlyweds Fermina and Dr. Urbino are on their honeymoon, they make love for the first time. During this act, Dr. Urbino reflects on his motivations for marrying her. He concludes that, although love is not *the basis* on which they have built their relationship, it will be possible for love to *emerge* from it. Dr. Urbino's point of view associates "true love" with hard work and commitment—an idea that suggests that love derives from mutual dependence and partnership, not intense, uncontrollable feelings of admiration and attraction. While optimistic, this idea is highly ambiguous, since it is never confirmed (or contradicted) in the story. Indeed, the couple's unwillingness to ever discuss this issue, throughout the novel, shows that they are not sure they have ever succeeded in truly "inventing" love. At the same time,

though, Fermina and Dr. Urbino's lack of regret about their match suggests that their partnership has been strong enough to bring them joy in life, even if it has not been marked by the unrestrained passion of romantic love.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ But in those solitary Masses they began to be aware that once again they were mistresses of their fate, after having renounced not only their family name but their own identity in exchange for a security that was no more than another of a bride's many illusions. They alone knew how tiresome was the man they loved to distraction, who perhaps loved them but whom they had to continue nurturing until his last breath as if he were a child, suckling him, changing his soiled diapers, distracting him with a mother's tricks to ease his terror at going out each morning to face reality. And nevertheless, when they watched him leave the house, this man they themselves had urged to conquer the world, then they were the ones left with the terror that he would never return. That was their life. Love, if it existed, was something separate: another life.

Related Characters: Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 202-203

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout his hundreds of affairs, Florentino Ariza discovers that widows are free and happy beings. Married life, by contrast, often brings women ambivalent feelings of love and suffering. The description of most married women's life is grim and depressing. Despite women's initial illusions, they soon realize that security, care, and fidelity cannot replace the true joy of love. However, they soon resign themselves to their fate, accepting that love is a vain ideal they must learn to renounce.

This state of affairs contrasts starkly with the romantic and sexual freedom that women can find outside of marriage—and that Florentino often engages with. Free of the obligation to take care of their husband, they can finally focus on their own selves and put their desires first, without having to abide by constraining rules and norms of behavior.

This passage can be understood as a denunciation of the patriarchal system that oppresses women, keeping them from expressing their full potential. In such a system, instead of being equal partners, men and women are tied together in relations of power, in which women must serve their husbands. By depicting the joy that women can find in true personal freedom, the novel provides harsh criticism of an oppressive society.

❝ Instead, she was something she never dared admit even to herself: a deluxe servant. In society she came to be the woman most loved, most catered to, and by the same token most feared, but in nothing was she more demanding or less forgiving than in the management of her house. She always felt as if her life had been lent to her by her husband: she was absolute monarch of a vast empire of happiness, which had been built by him and for him alone. She knew that he loved her above all else, more than anyone else in the world, but only for his own sake: she was in his holy service.

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle, Fermina Daza

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

During her marriage, Fermina realizes that her hopes and illusions about the woman she wanted to become have never come to pass. Instead of finding true love, joy, and, most importantly, independence in marriage, she has taken on the role of a servant, whose actions all tend to the service of another being: her husband. Fermina's private disillusion contrasts with her public role, in which she is revered. This contradiction at the center of her life—as a powerful *and*, simultaneously, subservient being—brings her deep unhappiness. This unhappiness emphasizes that what Fermina is experiencing is not directly because her husband is tyrannical and cruel (as had been the case with her father), but because of the gendered system in which she finds herself, according to which women must serve their husbands. Fermina's frustration, in this sense, has little to do with the love she might or might not feel for her husband, but in the very conception of marriage that society promotes.

Ultimately, instead of rebelling, Fermina accepts her fate, determining that none of this is her husband's fault, but is the result of an unequal society. Although Fermina's resignation maintains peace in her marriage, it can also be seen in a tragic light, as an admission of hopelessness.

He was a perfect husband: he never picked up anything from the floor, or turned out a light, or closed a door. In the morning darkness, when he found a button missing from his clothes, she would hear him say: "A man should have two wives: one to love and one to sew on his buttons."

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle (speaker), Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 222

Explanation and Analysis

After describing Fermina's frustration in her marriage, the narrator describes Dr. Juvenal's lack of participation in the household. This passage is ironic in tone. It associates being "a perfect husband" with performing absolutely no domestic functions in the house. In other words, what society expects a "perfect husband" to be is an uninvolved man who expects others—namely, his wife—to take care of his every need. In this light, Dr. Urbino's comment about having two wives seems particularly cruel, since he assumes that his wife's goal is to be a servant to him.

These opinions about marriage contrast with his social consciousness. Indeed, although he is committed to bringing ideas of modernity and progress to the city, he does not realize that a traditional institution such as marriage could also be reformed to increase everyone's health and well-being—in this case, the happiness and self-worth of his wife. This episode suggests that Dr. Urbino's views about progress are limited, since he is not able to realize that, beyond physical health and security, people also deserve to feel happy and fulfilled.

Over the years they both reached the same wise conclusion by different paths: it was not possible to live together in any other way, or love in any other way, and nothing in this world was more difficult than love.

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

After Fermina Daza and Dr. Urbino try exchanging roles in the household for one day, Dr. Urbino admits that he is incapable of managing the house like Fermina does. In turn, Fermina finds her husband's helplessness endearing. Dr. Urbino adds that Fermina, too, would be unable to take on his job for a day. Instead of growing bitter from this experiment, both of them thus accept that their respective tasks are both difficult and worthy of respect.

The non-interchangeability of their roles at home convinces the couple that this situation is the only logical and conceivable one. Although seemingly based on experience, this conclusion is fallacious. Indeed, their definition of love is based only on their narrow experience—not, in a more scientific manner, on a variety of possible scenarios from which they have chosen the best one. For example, it would be possible to imagine in which both Fermina and Dr. Urbino have jobs while servants take care of the organization of the home.

In other words, Fermina and Dr. Urbino's conclusions about love do not necessarily suggest that they have truly *discovered* something new but, rather, that they have *resigned* themselves to the status quo, which they now choose to see as something good. The use of the word "love" is additionally ambiguous, given that Fermina often proves doubtful about the existence of true love between her and Dr. Urbino. Therefore, it remains unclear whether this self-delusion actually brings them (and, in particular, Fermina) happiness or whether it merely serves to assuage their doubts.

Chapter 5 Quotes

She was still a child in every sense of the word, with braces on her teeth and the scrapes of elementary school on her knees, but he saw right away the kind of woman she was soon going to be, and he cultivated her during a slow year of Saturdays at the circus, Sundays in the park with ice cream, childish late afternoons, and he won her confidence, he won her affection, he led her by the hand, with the gentle astuteness of a kind grandfather, toward his secret slaughterhouse. For her it was immediate: the doors of heaven opened to her.

Related Characters: Florentino Ariza, América Vicuña

Related Themes:

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

When 14-year-old América Vicuña arrives in the city, she spends time with her relative and guardian Florentino Ariza, who is already in his 70s. Although Florentino is supposed

to take care of the young girl, he feels no qualms about starting a sexual relationship with her. This relationship is the most disturbing of all of Florentino's sexual affairs. The fact that Florentino could be attracted to a girl whom he openly recognizes as a child and decides to act on this desire highlights his lack of moral wisdom. The book emphasizes the symbolic (and, perhaps, physical) violence of this act by describing the cabin where Florentino has affairs as a "slaughterhouse"—a place where animals are murdered, foreshadowing América's death.

Paradoxically, as is common in the novel, instead of feeling shocked or violated, América only experiences pleasure with Florentino. This, however, does not make the situation any less morally problematic. Indeed, due to her young age, América is particularly vulnerable emotionally. This leads her to become attached to Florentino Ariza beyond anything he could ever have imagined and, ultimately, to commit suicide when he ends their relationship.

The book's description of the various stages through which Florentino gains América's trust highlights Florentino's manipulative tendencies and perversion which, until this moment, has been shown primarily in a positive light, as a challenge to rigid social norms. Here, it can be seen in a negative way, as complete lack of respect for América's dignity and innocence as a child.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Still looking at her, he said without warning:

"I am going to marry."

She looked into his eyes with a flash of uncertainty, her spoon suspended in midair, but then she recovered and smiled.

"That's a lie," she said. "Old men don't marry."

Related Characters: América Vicuña, Florentino Ariza (speaker), Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Urbino dies and Florentino finally contacts Fermina to tell her he still loves her, he wants to devote his energy to this romantic pursuit and thus decides to put an end to his sexual relationship with América. When he reveals his hope to marry Fermina—whom he does not mention by name—to América, the young girl panics then reassures herself by realizing that Florentino is too old for that. This scene is significant in the way it highlights América's paradoxical mix of maturity and innocence. She is clearly old enough to have internalized the fact that old people in society are expected to have stable, quiet lives, not to start new long-term relationships. In this sense, this scene highlights the prejudice that society has against old people.

At the same time, what América does not realize is that, whether or not Florentino is really going to marry, he is *not* interested in loving her and staying with her forever. América's love for Florentino has kept her from understanding that their relationship was meant as a distraction for him, not a serious commitment.

This scene thus emphasizes Florentino's lack of moral and emotional intelligence in understanding that his relationship with América is based on inequality and potentially harmful power dynamics. Although at his age he can treat this relationship in a lighthearted way, for her it is strong and intense—capable, as Florentino later learns, of making her kill herself out of jealousy and despair.

❝ It had to be a mad dream, one that would give her the courage she would need to discard the prejudices of a class that had not always been hers but had become hers more than anyone's. It had to teach her to think of love as a state of grace: not the means to anything but the alpha and omega, an end in itself.

Related Characters: Fermina Daza, Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

After Fermina becomes a widow, Florentino resolves to make her love him through love letters, as he once did in their youth. This time, however, he attempts to curb his passion and go about this process rationally. In order for her to want to be with him, she needs to share his concept of love. Florentino implies that, because of the norms of high society. Fermina has grown to see love as a means to an end. Her marriage to Dr. Urbino can be seen as an example of this, since she married him not out of love but out of a desire for material security. In this sense, the love that developed between them was never the central focus of their

relationship.

By contrast, Florentino believes in love as a phenomenon that must be experienced fully, regardless of its social and material consequences. His description of love associates love with a particular state of mind in which one is detached from the burden of reality—a state that is potentially as close to madness ("a mad dream") as it might be to religious spirituality ("a state of grace," "the alpha and omega"). This definition of love makes Florentino and Fermina's relationship particularly logical and strong at the end of their lives, when both of them are close to death and thus no longer care about trivial things such as ambition and social mobility.

❝ One day, at the height of desperation, she had shouted at him: "You don't understand how unhappy I am." Unperturbed, he took off his eyeglasses with a characteristic gesture, he flooded her with the transparent waters of his childlike eyes, and in a single phrase he burdened her with the weight of his unbearable wisdom: "Always remember that the most important thing in a good marriage is not happiness, but stability." With the first loneliness of her widowhood she had understood that the phrase did not conceal the miserable threat that she had attributed to it at the time, but was the lodestone that had given them both so many happy hours.

Related Characters: Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle, Fermina Daza (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 300

Explanation and Analysis

After Dr. Urbino's death, Fermina reflects on her relationship with her husband. She realizes that, although she often felt miserable during her marriage, she sees this relationship in a different light now that it is over. At the time, she considered herself unhappy in an emotional way. She felt dissatisfied with her role at home, frustrated by her husband's apathy, and disappointed with the fact that marriage had not conformed to her high expectations. However, she now understands happiness in a different way, as the absence of true difficulties. The material security and devotion that Dr. Urbino was able to give her (despite his adulterous affair) allowed them to live a comfortable life. It is this comfort and peace—if not exuberant joy and passion—that Fermina recognizes as valuable.

Ultimately, however, it remains unknown whether Fermina or Dr. Urbino might have been able to find partners who could have made them happy in different ways—for example by providing true, passionate love instead of mere stability. Therefore, it remains ambiguous whether Dr. Urbino's pronouncement is truly wise or whether it is simply a way for him and Fermina to comfort themselves.

❝ "A century ago, life screwed that poor man and me because we were too young, and now they want to do the same thing because we are too old." She lit a cigarette with the end of the one she was smoking, and then she gave vent to all the poison that was gnawing at her insides.

"They can all go to hell," she said. "If we widows have any advantage, it is that there is no one left to give us orders."

Related Characters: Fermina Daza (speaker), Ofelia Urbino Daza, Florentino Ariza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 323-324

Explanation and Analysis

When Ofelia criticizes Fermina and Florentino's relationship, arguing that they are too old for romance, Fermina rebukes her daughter. As usual, Fermina's words reveal her authoritative, stubborn nature. Her sense of freedom and independence also comes through. As Florentino had predicted, Fermina has become like other widows who realize that the death of their husband brings them grief but also newfound control over their own lives. Deprived of marital responsibilities, they now feel free to take part in relationships with whomever they want. Despite what society thinks, being old can thus bring liberation and love, not stagnation and apathy.

Fermina's words are also surprising in the way they seem to contradict past declarations. She now argues that her relationship with Florentino ended for external reasons—namely, because they were "too young." However, in the past, Fermina has given other reasons for her rejection of Florentino: in particular, the fact that she did not actually know him. She has also never expressed regret for this decision. Therefore, it remains ambiguous whether she now believes that she was too naïve in breaking up with him or whether she is merely saying this to make a point, arguing that there is no age at which one should not be free to fall in love.

She could not conceive of a husband better than hers had been, and yet when she recalled their life she found more difficulties than pleasures, too many mutual misunderstandings, useless arguments, unresolved angers. Suddenly she sighed: "It is incredible how one can be happy for so many years in the midst of so many squabbles, so many problems, damn it, and not really know if it was love or not."

Related Characters: Fermina Daza (speaker), Dr. Juvenal Urbino de la Calle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 329

Explanation and Analysis

Despite Dr. Urbino's profession of love before his death and Fermina's appreciation of the life they have shared, she still remains unsure about whether or not they actually felt love for each other. Fermina's interrogations at this stage in life suggests that love might be a complicated concept. She wonders if love is defined by longevity and fidelity or whether it should be measured in terms of pleasure. In this sense, Fermina implicitly separates marital attachment (which she shared with Dr. Urbino) from romantic passion (which she never felt for him). She wonders if events such as fights are an obstacle to love or if, on the contrary, staying together in spite of them is a proof of love.

Fermina's question is never answered. Although she later seemingly shares love with Florentino, the two situations are not comparable, since her relationship with Florentino bypasses these very questions by avoiding the difficulties of marriage.

At night they were awakened not by the siren songs of manatees on the sandy banks but by the nauseating stench of corpses floating down to the sea. For there were no more wars or epidemics, but the swollen bodies still floated by. The Captain, for once, was solemn: "We have orders to tell the passengers that they are accidental drowning victims."

Related Characters: Diego Samaritano (The Ship Captain) (speaker), Florentino Ariza, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 336

Explanation and Analysis

While Fermina and Florentino are on their romantic boat trip, they notice that the environment around them is bleak and disturbing. Not only is the natural wildlife completely destroyed because of hunting and deforestation, but they also witness the horrific sight of corpses on the river. As often happens in the novel, this sight adds a layer of mystery, danger, and horror to a seemingly innocent narrative of love. Such episodes suggest that the characters are trying to make the best of their lives in a world marked by violence and chaos.

The Captain's mention of accidental drowning victims is highly suspect, since the number of corpses is unspecified and suggest foul play more than mere accident. In light of the civil wars ravaging the countryside and the greed that can lead businessmen (such as Fermina's father) to indirectly kill others, these deaths remain suspicious. This episode thus creates uncertainty about the future, suggesting, perhaps, that even if cholera and civil war have actually disappeared (which is not entirely certain), new violence and challenges await the country's citizens.

It was as if they had leapt over the arduous calvary of conjugal life and gone straight to the heart of love. They were together in silence like an old married couple wary of life, beyond the pitfalls of passion, beyond the brutal mockery of hope and the phantoms of disillusion: beyond love. For they had lived together long enough to know that love was always love, anytime and anyplace, but it was more solid the closer it came to death.

Related Characters: Florentino Ariza, Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 345

Explanation and Analysis

On the ship returning to the city during Fermina and Florentino's romantic journey, the two of them behave like old partners used to each other's presence. The description of their love is ambiguous, as Fermina and Florentino are both in "the heart of love" and "beyond love." This paradox suggests two different definitions of love. In the first case ("the heart of love"), love is defined as a state of peaceful bliss beyond difficulties such as those Fermina experienced with her husband. In the second case ("beyond love"), love is a form of romantic and sexual passion—the kind of obsession that has marked Florentino throughout his life.

Ultimately, it remains ambiguous which type of love is

inherently more valid or powerful. However, the narrator suggests that the intimacy that forms between two people as death approaches is stronger than any other. Death, it seems, brings a greater intensity to people's interdependence, allowing them to depend on each other and respect each other in a way that they might not if they still had their whole life ahead of them. In this sense, the true value of love ultimately depends as much on romantic chemistry as on life circumstances, which give a different meaning to relationships.

The Captain looked at Fermina Daza and saw on her eyelashes the first glimmer of wintry frost. Then he looked at Florentino Ariza, his invincible power, his intrepid love, and he was overwhelmed by the belated suspicion that it is life, more than death, that has no limits.

"And how long do you think we can keep up this goddamn coming and going?" he asked.

Florentino Ariza had kept his answer ready for fifty-three years, seven months, and eleven days and nights.

"Forever," he said.

Related Characters: Florentino Ariza, Diego Samaritano (The Ship Captain) (speaker), Fermina Daza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 348

Explanation and Analysis

Although previous passages have emphasized the peaceful, comforting effect of love, in this final passage the beauty and passion inherent in Florentino's conception of love comes to light one last time. Now that Fermina is not married and that they both know they are soon going to die, they no longer feel attached to their life in the city. This encourages them to keep from entering the city as long as they can.

In this final passage, therefore, Florentino's ideal view of love as a quasi-spiritual phenomenon, detached from the demands of social life, finally meets reality—since, here, they are able to escape social life by staying on the boat. This gives tremendous force to Florentino's suggestion that they escape together forever—an idea that, in other circumstances, might have seemed far-fetched and delusional. In this way, the narrative finally matches Florentino's idealized mental world, showing that it is indeed possible for people to live their dreams instead of submitting to the destructive power of death.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

When Dr. Juvenal Urbino enters the house of his friend Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, he notices a bitter-almond smell and automatically associates it with unrequited love. Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, a refugee from the Antilles, committed suicide by inhaling gold cyanide, which produces the smell that Dr. Urbino notices. In the man's dark bedroom, Dr. Urbino finds his friend's dead body lying on his bed next to his dead dog. Dr. Urbino can immediately tell that Jeremiah is dead. He gently lifts the blanket that covers him and sees his friend's naked, blue body, which seems to have aged 50 years, and his limp legs, which always forced him to use crutches. Dr. Urbino sighs that Jeremiah behaved foolishly, since the worst has already happened.

The fact that the novel opens on a crude scene of death, involving physical details about the corpse's state, suggests that the themes of death and aging will be at the center of the novel. Before readers know anything about Dr. Urbino's thoughts or life, they are forced—like Dr. Urbino—to confront the brutal fact of death and realize that everyone is mortal, even one's closest friends. His lack of knowledge about Jeremiah's motives also highlights that one never truly knows everything about the people around them, since people's private thoughts are often out of reach.

An 81-year-old man and the most famous physician in the city, Dr. Urbino makes use of his authority, telling the police inspector and the medical intern present that an autopsy is not needed, since cyanide was undoubtedly the cause of death. Noticing the intern's disappointment at not being able to inspect the body, Dr. Urbino says that he will soon find someone who has killed himself out of love. He then realizes that this is the first suicide by cyanide he has ever witnessed that was *not* caused by the troubles of love.

Dr. Urbino's association of cyanide with unrequited love introduces the idea that passionate love can lead people to desperate behavior, if they become so desperate that they choose to commit suicide. This presents love—which will later be compared to cholera—as a potential illness, a phenomenon so intense that it can destroy the life of the person who experiences it.

Dr. Urbino, who is known to abide by civic rules, refuses to talk to the Archbishop so that Jeremiah might be buried in sacred religious ground. He counters the police inspector's praise of Jeremiah by noting that, if Jeremiah was a saint, he could only be considered an "atheistic saint." Confused by Jeremiah's decision to kill himself for no reason he can yet perceive, Dr. Urbino examines his friend's possessions, noticing an unfinished game of chess on his desk—one in which, very surprisingly, it can be seen that talented Jeremiah was going to be beaten in four moves by a chess master—and Dr. Urbino considers this a clue.

Dr. Urbino abides by religious rules and conventions, such as not burying non-believers or suicide victims in sacred ground. It is never clear why Jeremiah might be considered a "saint," because few details are given about his personality and his life in the city, beyond his love for chess. However, in light of what Dr. Urbino later finds out about Jeremiah, the common acceptance that he is saintly suggests that it is possible for a person to behave in admirable ways in a given context while having behaved depravedly in another.

Dr. Urbino also notices an envelope on Jeremiah's desk, addressed to Dr. Juvenal Urbino. He tears the envelope open and sees 11 sheets of paper, which he fervently reads. When he is done, he feels distraught, though he simply tells the inspector and young intern that the missive contains Jeremiah's death wishes. Dr. Urbino then realizes that he is now bound to miss Pentecost Communion, which he has missed only two other times in his life. He concludes that God will understand. Dr. Urbino then plans to inform anyone who knew Jeremiah of his death. He aims to be done with such tasks in time to go to the luncheon that Dr. Lácides Olivella, one of his disciples, has organized.

Dr. Urbino's shock at reading Jeremiah's letter introduces the idea that, despite being his close friend, Dr. Urbino might not know much about Jeremiah's life, and that there might be a gap between Jeremiah's outward behavior and his inner thoughts or past life. Dr. Urbino's commitment to religious traditions such as going to Mass highlights his appreciation of fixed schedules and following a determined routine (a quality that also comes forth in his capacity for taking charge of organizational details). The nature and extent of his faith, on the other hand, remains largely unknown.

Since the wild years of his youth, Dr. Urbino now follows a rigid routine and has acquired fame throughout the province for his medical capabilities. Dr. Urbino has always refused to prescribe medicine for old age, but in secret, he takes medicine to alleviate his own symptoms related to aging, such as vertigo and insomnia—"it [is] easier for him to bear other people's pains than his own." He even takes a medicine to alleviate his own fear of the negative effects of mixing too many different kinds of medicine.

In addition to Jeremiah's secretive private life, Dr. Urbino's actions highlight the divide between public statements and personal fears. It also suggests that, as a doctor, Dr. Urbino has failed to take elderly people's fears and symptoms as seriously as he should have.

Dr. Urbino's daily routine consists of teaching a class at the Medical School every morning before having breakfast and lunch at home. Then, he reads books that booksellers in Europe send him and goes to visit his patients at their homes. At his old age, Dr. Urbino knows that patients mostly call on him in desperate situations, but he considers this to be a form of specialization. Dr. Urbino trusts in his medical instinct and insists that most medicine is harmful, and that once death has arrived, all a doctor can do is alleviate the patient's suffering. His wife, Fermina Daza, knows his unchanging schedule so well that she can send him a message at a particular place if need be.

Dr. Urbino's regimented schedule suggests that his profession and social life reflect an essential aspect of his personality: his love of order and rationality. Although Dr. Urbino rejects all superstition in the medical field, it remains ambiguous whether his distaste for medicine derives from factual evidence or from his own (not necessarily rational) instinct. Despite Dr. Urbino's apparent predictability, he will soon discover that he is not as reliable as he believes himself to be.

When Dr. Urbino was younger, he would spend time in the Parish Café after work to play chess. There, he met Jeremiah de Saint-Amour, to whom he soon became a protector, without inquiring what caused Jeremiah to become a refugee or to have crippled legs. He contributed financially to Jeremiah's incipient career as a child photographer. Dr. Urbino did this because of his love for chess, a game in which Jeremiah was greatly superior. Jeremiah made Dr. Urbino progress and, over time, the two of them became good friends.

This description of Dr. Urbino and Jeremiah's friendship suggests that, despite being long-lived, their relationship relied on an external activity—chess—more than deep understanding of each other's life and feelings. Jeremiah's crippled legs bring a first hint of doubt in his life story, as it is possible that Jeremiah suffered from an illness or, perhaps, that what happened to his legs involved human violence.

On his way home in a carriage, Dr. Urbino gives a quick glance to Jeremiah's **letter** and tells the coachman to go to the old slave quarter. Returning to the letter, Dr. Urbino remains shocked by Jeremiah's confessions but concludes that they reflect the folly of a man before death. Dr. Urbino almost never visits the old slave quarter. Inside his elaborate carriage, in which he still orders his coachman to wear a velvet uniform and a top hat—which some people consider cruel in Caribbean weather—Dr. Urbino observes the streets around him, near the evil-smelling marsh and slaughterhouse garbage. He is appalled to notice the fragile houses made of wooden boards and metal, the drunken noises wafting out from taverns on a Sunday, and the group of children running after the carriage.

Dr. Urbino's social behavior is contradictory. Although he visibly finds the sight of poverty disturbing, he also insists on retaining aristocratic practices, such as dressing his coachman in a traditional way. This last detail is surprising, since in other aspects of his life Dr. Urbino does not seem to care about emphasizing his aristocratic background but, instead, as a doctor, takes pains to make the whole of society healthier and more modern. His shock at witnessing poverty highlights the strict divisions and inequality that separate social classes in the city.

When Dr. Urbino finally reaches his destination, he enters a decrepit house in which a biracial woman (referred to as a "mulatta") opens the door. She invites him to sit down in her parlor, which reminds Dr. Urbino of a crowded antique shop in Montmartre. Dr. Urbino can tell from the woman's grief-stricken attitude that he has nothing new to tell her: she already knows what happened to Jeremiah. The woman, Jeremiah's lover, confirms that she was indeed with him before his death. Her words express warmth and gentleness that very closely resembled love.

"Mulatta" is a derogatory term for a woman of mixed race—in Spanish, it means "young mule." Dr. Urbino's thoughts about Paris contrast starkly with the environment he is in, since his experience of the world (having been able to travel to Europe) contrasts with the poverty of the country he is in. Although race is not extensively discussed in the novel, racial distinctions between people are usually mentioned in a way that suggests they are tied to class and social status. Dr. Urbino's failure to describe the woman's feelings as love (instead of as something that approximates *love) introduces, for the first time in the novel, the question of what love truly is. It suggests that Dr. Urbino's conception of love probably clashes with the woman's.*

Jeremiah and his lover had met in Port-au-Prince, and the woman later followed him to this city. Dr. Urbino does not understand why the two of them kept their relationship secret. Dr. Urbino had always assumed that Jeremiah's disability affected his entire lower body and that he had no lover. She replies that it was Jeremiah's wish, adding that secrecy made their relationship more intense—a model relationship, perhaps. Dr. Urbino is then astonished to realize from her narrative that *she* is the mysterious chess master whose moves he witnessed on Jeremiah's desk. He blurts out a shocked compliment about it, but the woman replies that Jeremiah was already gloomily affected by the thought of his death and did not play with energy.

The woman's association of romantic fulfillment with secrecy suggests that social codes and public behavior can be harmful to the true expression of people's feelings and happiness. The woman's talent for chess also challenges what Dr. Urbino considers to be good chess players: members of his circle—who are usually upper-class and male. Jeremiah's anguish about dying gives his death a human element that the description of his corpse previously lacked. It suggests that, even if he committed suicide, he was not necessarily unafraid of death.

After the chess game, Jeremiah wanted to write a **letter** to the man he admired the most in his life and his closest friend, Dr. Juvenal Urbino, even though they were only linked by a mutual passion for chess. To Urbino's consternation that Jeremiah's lover knew of Jeremiah's intentions, the woman replies that she would never have reported Jeremiah, out of love for him. She explains that Jeremiah planned to commit suicide at age 60 in order to avoid growing old, although this decision brought him despair. When Dr. Urbino mentions the dog, the woman says that she did not tie the dog as Jeremiah had instructed, but that the dog had clearly died anyway, because he did not want to run away.

The woman's respect for Jeremiah's decision suggests that she places his desires before her own emotions, such as sadness and grief. In this sense, it reflects the woman's courage and respect for her lover's individuality, beyond any notion about religious or ethical prohibitions of suicide. The anecdote about the dog highlights the animal's devotion. It also replicates traditional tragic love stories, in which two people tied by love and faithfulness choose to die together rather than live apart.

Jeremiah had told his lover to remember him with a rose. The woman recalls that, the night before, she laid on Jeremiah's bed during the long hours in which he wrote his difficult **letter**. Then, she made coffee and cut the rose that she now wears. Dr. Urbino is repulsed by her attitude, which he considers too indulgent and passive toward grief, utterly devoid of principles. The woman concludes that she will not go to Jeremiah's funeral, according to his instructions, and will keep on living without respecting the local custom of staying inside the house. Instead, she will remain happy in this neighborhood, which she calls the "death trap of the poor."

Dr. Urbino's failure to understand what he considers to be the woman's outlandish behavior highlights his strict adherence to social norms, which condition the ways in which people are supposed to mourn. By contrast, the woman follows no greater rule than her lover's instructions. This suggests that she has placed individual preferences before collective obligations. The value of each mode of belief depends on one's understanding of ethics and social norms. The woman's capacity to remain happy in what she recognizes as dangerous, unsanitary conditions highlights her strength and resistance.

Dr. Juvenal reflects on this description on his way home, recalling the seedy neighborhood and its chaotic atmosphere, in which some of its oldest inhabitants still bear the mark of being branded as slaves. He notes that people in this neighborhood take part in wild, alcohol-fueled parties, which inject the old city with chaos, foul smells, and "new life." Since the country's independence from Spain and the abolition of slavery, old families and their houses have decayed in silence. Women hide their faces to protect themselves from the sun or whenever they go to mass. People take part in boring love affairs, devoid of passion. Overall, life in the city is pestilent; smells rise from the swamps and the streets, bringing death.

Dr. Urbino's reflection of the history and social environment of the city highlights his social consciousness and his awareness of inequality. Although he recognizes past oppression and the difficult conditions that the poor live in, he also seems fascinated by their capacity to make the best of life and, unlike the rigid norms of entrenched aristocratic families, to celebrate life fully, in all of its chaos and pleasure. Despite abiding by societal conventions, Dr. Urbino seems to long for a more carefree life, one in which passions might express themselves fully—an attitude that Florentino Ariza later exemplifies.

Dr. Juvenal Urbino realizes that the colonial city is far from his idealized memory of it, which sustained him in Paris. He recalls that in the 18th century, the city was a bustling center of commerce, thanks to the slave trade, as well as the residence of the Viceroys of Granada. In its heyday, the city once saw a ship leave the bay with a cargo full of precious stones, which an English ship attacked. According to legend, the ship sunk near the port with its treasures.

The city's story is one of oppression, because of colonial rule and slavery. This has created the deeply unequal society that Dr. Urbino lives in, in which aristocratic families have benefited from extensive privileges while the rest of society has largely remained poor. The story of the sunken ship highlights the exploitation that colonial powers inflicted on local lands, from which they took precious materials. It also later highlights Florentino Ariza's romantic nature, inclined to believe in such stories.

Dr. Urbino's house is an ancient, large, and cool house, decorated in accordance with European taste. Its beauty and efficiency makes it obvious that the woman in charge of it, Fermina Daza, is highly competent. Of all the rooms in the house, Dr. Urbino's library is the most magnificent. In general, the pleasant atmosphere in this house—which keeps its inhabitants cool and away from the sun—convinces onlookers that the couple living in it must be a happy one.

People's assumption that material comfort translates to marital happiness is superficial and wrong, since it later becomes apparent that Fermina and her husband are not as happy as they seem. The association of Fermina with the beauty of the house also highlights the rigid social norm according to which women's role is to take care of the house.

After Dr. Urbino's morning visits, he returns home to rest before the luncheon organized by Dr. Lácides Olivella. There, Dr. Urbino sees the household staff trying to catch the household parrot, which has escaped to the highest branches of the mango tree. Dr. Urbino has taught the parrot, who's lived with them for 20 years, French and Latin. The parrot often imitates the French songs he hears Urbino play, as well as the servants' laugh when they hear him singing in a foreign language. This parrot has grown so famous that visitors from abroad come to the house to hear him. Once, though, when the president arrived, the parrot refused to sing, which made Dr. Urbino feel humiliated.

The parrot provides a lighthearted, humorous anecdote in the story. In contrast to the poverty and oppression visible in the city, he is a ridiculous, unpredictable presence, capable of making people laugh. The parrot's refusal to sing for the president makes this political visit ridiculous. It highlights the absurdity of certain presidential activities and suggests that the intelligent parrot might have been expressing his dismissal of politics—or might have misbehaved simply to annoy his owner.

Despite his parrot's exploits, Dr. Urbino hates animals. It is Fermina Daza, his 72-year-old wife, who adores them and has adopted various animals over the years—dogs, cats, a monkey, and more—until she filled the house with animals. Although Dr. Urbino, busy with work, was not much involved in the life of the house, he imagined at the time that, surrounded by so many animals, his wife must be incredibly happy. However, one day a German mastiff with rabies attacked and killed all the animals in the house, leaving a blood bath. After that incident, Dr. Urbino told his wife that he would accept nothing that does not speak in their house. Fermina Daza applied these words slyly and ultimately bought a royal parrot.

Once again, Dr. Urbino—like the rest of society—uses external factors such as the presence of animals in the house as proof of his wife's happiness. This suggests that he does not actually know how his wife feels, since he relies on circumstantial evidence (instead of actual communication) to evaluate the status of his marriage. The violent massacre that ensues is a brutal, symbolic reminder that this happiness might be more fragile than it seems—and that the pleasant atmosphere in the house could go up in flames from one moment to the next.

Dr. Urbino accepted Fermina's trick and now finds the parrot's progress exciting. The parrot occasionally pronounces sentences that he must have heard sailors utter. Once, he saved the family by imitating the loud barking of a dog to scare thieves away. Since then, Dr. Urbino has been taking care of him, though he and Fermina made sure to clip the parrot's wings after he tried to escape. The parrot has escaped again this morning, though. After three hours of trying to cajole him into coming down, Dr. Urbino resolves to call the fire department, which he founded himself, creating a corps of professional firemen to handle accidents.

Fermina's literal application of her husband's words highlights her intelligence, since she found a loophole in his statement which allowed her to see her own desire fulfilled. This emphasizes her stubbornness and her independent spirit, which keeps her from accepting that her role is simply to follow orders. The parrot's stubbornness suggests that, despite the impression of intimacy between Dr. Urbino and him, he enjoys disobeying and annoying the people who take care of him.

In the meantime, Fermina Daza dresses elegantly for the luncheon. Although her loose dress and high-heeled shoes may seem inappropriate for her age, the outfit fits the shape of her body perfectly. At the age of 72, Fermina appreciates the fact that corsets and other constraining articles of clothing are going out of fashion, because it allows her to feel that her body is free.

Fermina's freedom in dressing highlights the fact that there is no age limit to one's desire to express one's beauty and sensuality. Fermina's desire for her body to feel free mirrors her larger desire for freedom in her life—freedom from servitude in the household and from the difficulties of marriage.

For many years now, Fermina has dressed Dr. Urbino—at first out of love and later out of necessity. The two of them have been married for 50 years and cannot imagine a life without each other. However, although they have developed a mutually dependent partnership over the years, they've never dared ask each other whether this partnership is based on love or on mere habit. Fermina has seen her husband's memory and physical shape decline over the years, and now treats him like a "senile baby."

The description of Fermina and Dr. Urbino's marriage appears contradictory. The idea that such an intimate, caring relationship could be deprived of love is surprising, since it is clearly strong enough to encourage each of them to depend on each other entirely. This suggests that there might be a difference between romantic love and the love that stems from care. Fermina's treatment of her husband as a "baby" suggests that their love is a familial one, based on relationships of need.

The two of them have never realized that it is easier to maintain general stability in a marriage than to handle everyday problems. Once, the two of them fought because Dr. Urbino argued that he had spent a week washing without soap, whereas Fermina said that there had always been soap. In truth, there had been no soap for three days, not a week. In then end, after days of tension, Dr. Urbino finally caved in, admitting that there was soap. This allowed them to find peace again. The narrator also notes that Dr. Urbino is the first man Fermina ever heard urinate, an act that he has also struggled to maintain over time—and has finally given in to old age by sitting down on the toilet instead of standing.

The description of Dr. Urbino and Fermina's fight about soap seems ridiculous, but highlights that daily habits can potentially destroy even a seemingly invulnerable, caring relationship. The absurdity of such situations suggests that making a marriage work—specifically, in the narrator's terms, maintaining its stability—involves constant effort, even in such seemingly trivial circumstances. The narrator's comment about urinating emphasizes that trivial ordinary activities play a large role in building intimacy between a couple.

On Pentecost Sunday, Dr. Urbino shares what he has discovered about Jeremiah de Saint-Amour with Fermina. He says that Jeremiah was condemned to a lifelong prison sentence in his original country for a crime including cannibalism. Fermina had always assumed that Dr. Urbino appreciated Jeremiah for his life in their country, not for his past, and does not understand her husband's shock. She also argues that, instead of lacking principles, Jeremiah's lover revealed the depth of her love for him. Frustrated, Dr. Urbino says that what bothers him is not Jeremiah's past deeds but his duplicity. Fermina replies that, had Jeremiah not taken up a false identity, no one would have shown him love.

The horrific nature of Jeremiah's past crime highlights the fact that one's public appearance can be completely at odds with one's past life. This suggests, too, that it might be possible for people to change and redeem themselves. Fermina's defense of Jeremiah's lover suggests that following traditional norms does not make one more ethical or loving, unlike what her husband seems to think. Her pragmatic attitude also leads her to argue that truth might be less important than love and friendship in life.

The two of them then head to their luncheon, the marriage anniversary between Dr. Lácides Olivella and his wife. At the party, Dr. Urbino is seated at a table with both Conservatives and Liberals. The Archbishop comments to Dr. Urbino that this is remarkable, given the civil wars that are ceaselessly affecting the country, but Dr. Urbino remarks to himself that Liberal and Conservative presidents are the same, except that the latter are better dressed. He also notes that these people's identities are less political than a result of their family lineage, which always prevails over politics and war.

The passing mention of civil wars suggests that, unlike what might appear at first glance, the atmosphere in the city and the country is fraught with violence and danger, which always lurk in the background. Dr. Urbino's cynical attitude toward politics suggests that people are usually moved less by political ideals than by social class, which determines everything in this society—from the neighborhood where one lives to one's political affiliation.

At the table, people mention Jeremiah de Saint-Amour's death. Dr. Urbino invents a new word, saying that Jeremiah died of "gerontophobia," and someone laments that this death was not for love. Dr. Urbino then shares his memories of Jeremiah with the Archbishop, speaking of the saintliness with which Jeremiah lived—a thought that shocks the Archbishop, who does not consider suicide compatible with saintliness. Dr. Urbino asks the Mayor to preserve a collection of Jeremiah's photographs.

Although not much is known about the details of Jeremiah's saintly attitude, the Archbishop's shock suggests that he is more concerned with appearances—namely, the nature of one's death—than with one's lifelong conduct. This highlights the rigid nature of certain religious norms, which can sometimes fail to recognize the true qualities of a person who does not abide by rules.

After the speeches have been made and everyone has eaten, Dr. Urbino Daza, Fermina and Juvenal's son, finally arrives, saying that he was told his house was on fire. Fermina and her husband leave around that time to get ready for the funeral. At home, they discover that the firemen have destroyed the mango tree and sections of the house in their desperate (yet unsuccessful) efforts to catch the parrot. Dr. Urbino urinates in the garden, appreciating the smell of asparagus in his urine, and takes a nap.

This passage is humorous in light of the fact that the firemen were not called for something as serious as a fire, but merely to catch the house parrot. The destruction that ensues is equally ridiculous, since the damage done seems completely disproportional to the problem at hand. These details anticipate the darkly humorous nature of Dr. Urbino's death, which will seem absurd and ridiculous.

When Dr. Urbino wakes up, he is moved by sadness, realizing that these are his final days. He knows that he is suffering from old age and, were it not for his religion, feels compelled to admit that Jeremiah's idea to prevent old age is not necessarily a bad one. However, he also appreciates the sexual peace that old age has brought. While Fermina is cleaning up after the firemen, Dr. Urbino hears his beloved parrot call out. He walks out to insult him, and the parrot returns the insult.

Dr. Urbino's desire to flout his religious principles and commit suicide suggests that they do not necessarily reflect his true beliefs. It also highlights his difficulty in handling old age and the fears that are related to this period in life.

Dr. Urbino then tries to catch the parrot, using a ladder to climb the tree, but the parrot consistently jumps one branch higher. After a while, a servant comes out and screams, realizing that Dr. Urbino is high up and could easily fall. At the same moment, Dr. Urbino reaches out to catch the parrot, but he suddenly feels the ladder fall beneath him and knows he is about to die, though he regrets doing so without taking Communion or saying goodbye to those he loves.

Dr. Urbino's cause of death—trying to catch a parrot in a mango tree—is ridiculous. This suggests that death is utterly unpredictable and has no bearing on one's personality or on the nature of one's life, such as the serious, rigidly organized lifestyle of Dr. Urbino.

Hearing the servant's scream and then the shouts of their neighbors, Fermina runs out screaming as well. She is deeply shocked to see Dr. Urbino lying on the ground and, when she approaches him, she sees that he is resisting death to talk to her. "Only God knows how much I loved you," he tells her before dying.

Dr. Urbino's profession of love contrasts with the couple's doubts about the nature of the feelings that tie them together, as well as with Fermina's later doubts about their love. However, it suggests that Dr. Urbino is capable of romance and that he values Fermina immensely as his partner.

Dr. Urbino's funeral becomes a city-wide event. Dr. Urbino was famous in his country for his modern medical techniques, which he learned during his studies in Paris. The last cholera epidemic had killed his own father and, focused on eradicating cholera, Dr. Urbino organized the building of the first aqueduct and the modernization of the sewage system. He founded various societies, from medicine to language, as he believed in using progressive ideas throughout all aspects of society. He created the Center for the Arts and the annual Poetic Festival. He also restored the Dramatic Theater to introduce opera to the country. However, although he considered himself a moderator between Conservatives and Liberals, each group rejected him in its own way.

Dr. Urbino seemingly led a virtuous life, focused on ridding the city of dangers such as cholera and on promoting learning across a variety of disciplines. Despite his cynical view of politics, which has not helped to eradicate violence in the country, Dr. Urbino has proven hardworking and hopeful throughout his life, trusting that modern ideas could bring better living conditions to everyone. His son Dr. Urbino Daza's ideas, by contrast, although equally modern, will prove double-edged, since they have an idea of progress that is inherently exclusionary.

In life, some of Dr. Urbino's concrete actions proved that he did not behave as an entrenched aristocrat: namely, his move to a *nouveaux riches* house, instead of his family palace, and his marriage to Fermina Daza, who belonged to the lower classes. Although high society initially scoffed at Fermina, they were later impressed by her superior elegance and personality.

The upper class's reluctance to admit Fermina in its ranks highlights the deeply unequal nature of this society, in which one's social ascent depends not on one's merit but on one's connections to members of high society. Fermina's success, however, suggests that it is possible to elevate oneself through marriage.

Although Fermina is deeply grieved by Dr. Urbino's death, she also demonstrates authority and self-control. She organizes the various details of her husband's funeral and is careful to control her outward gestures so that they do not reveal the extent of her grief and anger at the world. When she sees her husband in the coffin, she tells him that they will see each other again soon.

Like Dr. Urbino's profession of love, Fermina's grief shows that, despite her doubts about the nature of her love, she cared about him deeply and will miss him. Her self-control also highlights the emotional divide between public behavior and private feelings, which often do not align.

At that scene, Florentino Ariza, a man in the crowd, feels a pang of emotion. He played an important role in smoothing over the various organizational details that followed Dr. Urbino's death. His serious, efficient attitude impresses everyone around him and, although his status as a bachelor makes his natural charm suspicious, he feels that he had loved passionately and silently longer than anyone else. On the night of Urbino's death, Florentino Ariza, the President of the River Company of the Caribbean, dresses as somberly and elegantly as he always does, even in the strong heat. He stays until the end of the funeral, completely soaked by rain, and returns home to rest, so as not to fall sick.

Similarly to Fermina's private grief, Florentino also keeps his secret intentions hidden, putting on a show of neutral self-control when he is in fact overwhelmed by romantic passion. Florentino's dark, sober attitude and appearance give him an air not only of mystery, but of danger and gloom. This external characteristic suggests, on a symbolic level, that his behavior is far from transparent and that he is capable of taking part in potentially immoral or unsavory deeds.

After Fermina has said goodbye to all her friends, she prepares to lock herself in her house when she sees Florentino Ariza standing by her door. Before she can say anything, Florentino tells her that he has been waiting his whole life to reiterate his vows of love to her. Convinced that Florentino is not crazy but is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, she tells him to leave at once and never return, concealing her anger with a neutral tone.

Florentino's declaration of love seems completely inappropriate in the circumstances that Fermina finds herself after the death of her husband. However, the idea that Florentino seems influenced by supernatural powers returns various times in the novel, suggesting that his actions and desires lie—in people's minds, at least—above human laws and norms.

It is only after Fermina hears Florentino leave that the full weight of her husband's death affects her. She cries, realizing, as she lies in bed, that she has not slept alone since losing her virginity. Everything around her reminds her of her husband, fueling her tears, and she finally falls asleep in a daze. She cries in her sleep, but when she awakes, she realizes that she thought more about Florentino than about her late husband last night.

Fermina's simultaneous grief for her husband and curiosity (or anger) toward Florentino suggests that personal feelings and thoughts are largely uncontrollable. Fermina knows that Florentino's behavior was improper, but this rational thought does not keep her from thinking of him. This suggests that she might have more feelings (whether positive or negative) about Florentino than she realized.

CHAPTER 2

Florentino Ariza has loved Fermina Daza without ceasing ever since their adolescent relationship. Florentino was the only child of Tránsito Ariza, who had a brief affair with ship-owner Don Pius V Loayza, who founded the River Company of the Caribbean for the Magdalena River with his brothers, but died when Florentino was young. After school, Florentino worked at the Postal Agency. He became the protégé of telegraph operator Lotario Thugut, who taught him both to use the telegraph and to play the violin.

Florentino's decades-long passion for Fermina Daza becomes the crux of the story. It exemplifies Florentino's commitment and determination but also his excessive romanticism, which reaches near-fanatical level. The fact that Florentino is an illegitimate son serves as a prelude to Florentino's own behavior.

Although Florentino becomes the most sought-after bachelor in his circle, he falls in love with Fermina Daza as soon as he sees her. He is sent to deliver a telegram to Lorenzo Daza, who lives in an old, half-ruined house. Lorenzo Daza, who does not have many friends, receives the telegram with a somber stare. On Florentino's way out of the house, he sees a young girl reading next to a woman he assumes is her mother and is overwhelmed by her.

The power of Florentino's love derives in part from its mysterious, irrational nature. Like Dr. Urbino, Florentino feels immediately attracted to Fermina, without being able to say why. It remains ambiguous whether such a strong, visceral reaction is a necessary ingredient to romantic love. To Florentino, this phenomenon certainly leaves him with no doubt: he is in love, once and for all.

Florentino later discovers that Lorenzo Daza arrived from Spain after the death of his wife with his only daughter and his unmarried sister, Escolástica, a 40-year-old woman who took religious vows. Lorenzo's daughter, Fermina, studied at an expensive religious academy for young elite ladies. This reveals the family's wealth, if not their high social position—a fact that reassures Florentino, who realizes that Fermina might be a good match for him. However, Fermina always walks alone with her aunt, who keeps her from interacting with other people.

Fermina grows up in a stifling atmosphere, in which she is not allowed to socialize beyond the household. This highlights her father conservative worldview, which aim to keep his daughter from having relationships he (or society) does not approve of. Florentino's assumption that Fermina belonged to his class because her father was not a local aristocrat proves naïve, since Florentino does not take into account Lorenzo Daza's ambition.

Florentino proceeds to seek Fermina everywhere. He sits in the park next to her house. He writes a long **letter** full of segments of love poems that he reads continually. His mother tells him to win over Fermina's aunt first. In the meantime, both Fermina and her aunt have noticed her suitor. Escolástica, who has raised Fermina like a mother would, tells Fermina that she should expect a letter from him one day. However, following his mother's advice, Florentino does not want to give her directly his 70-page letter.

The adults' assumptions about how Florentino should proceed in his courtship highlights prevailing attitudes of the time, in which a suitor's relationship with the legal guardian matters as much as his relationship with his beloved. The length of Florentino's letter underlines his exuberant, youthful passion. However, he also learns that he must proceed strategically in order not to scare or alienate Fermina.

Finally, after spying on Fermina in various locations and believing that she has not noticed him, Florentino boldly walks up to Fermina, who is alone in her doorway, and tells her that he wants to give her a **letter**. Surprised by his determined tone, at odds with his seemingly passive attitude, Fermina tells him to return every day until he notices that she has changed seats. When the day arrives, Florentino gives her an abridged version of the letter, promising fidelity and eternal love. Fermina tells him to return only when she says so.

Fermina and Florentino challenge the authority in Fermina's home by exchanging secret letters and adopting complex stratagems. Florentino's decision to condense his letter mirrors his later decision, in old age, to write neutral meditations instead of passionate letters to Fermina. In both cases, Florentino discovers that it is better to conceal some of his passion in order to woo Fermina more successfully.

This event affects Florentino's health. He loses his appetite and suffers from diarrhea, vomiting, and fainting. Although Tránsito knows this to be the consequence of love, Florentino's symptoms so closely resembled cholera that she calls a doctor for her son. Tránsito tells him to enjoy these moments, because such intense feelings only exist in youth.

The intensity of Florentino's symptoms depicts love as an uncontrollable physical, mental, and emotional phenomenon. As mentioned at the beginning of the novel, in which suicide was associated with love, such radical passion can even lead to death.

Florentino's state affects the quality of his work, but his friend Lotario Thugut protects him. Lotario also introduces Florentino to an old, run-down colonial hotel where men can choose "little birds," or prostitutes, but Florentino only wants to lose his virginity for love. Lotario's charm and sexual exploits make him known in the hotel. Florentino, too, becomes a usual fixture there, as the hotel owner approves of his quiet attitude. Florentino also accompanies Lotario to the church choir, where he observes Fermina Daza.

The time that Florentino spends in the hotel filled with prostitutes anticipates Florentino's later extensive sexual affairs. Although no explicit discussion of prostitution appears in the novel, no one condemns this practice. As a result, it remains ambiguous whether this practice can be seen as a form of freedom for men and women (interestingly, the word "whore" often acquires a positive connotation in the novel) or as one of the many sexual practices in the novel that can have harmful consequences.

After a month of waiting, Florentino finally talks to Escolástica, asking her to allow him to see Fermina alone. Impressed by Florentino's determination, Escolástica believes he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. As a result, she leaves Florentino and Fermina alone. Fermina then realizes that her suitor is not ideal, because he is too somber and mysterious, but she feels curious about him, which the narrator mentions is one aspect of love. After fervently re-reading Florentino's **letter**, Fermina initially thinks she does not have to respond, but she simultaneously becomes obsessed with Florentino. During their brief meeting, Florentino tells her she should respond out of politeness, and she agrees.

In addition, to physical illness, the intensity of Florentino's passion leads people to believe that it has a spiritual quality—one, nevertheless, that could also be seen as near-madness. Florentino and Fermina's exchange about letter-writing suggests that not everyone conceives of letters in the same way. Although Florentino sees it as an opportunity to share one's feelings, Fermina often accepts letters as one-way messages. Letters, however, more than direct contact, because their only form of communication.

Fermina then answers Florentino and the two of them fall desperately in love. They think about each other all the time, become obsessed with each other, and write each other daily **letters** even though it will take them one year to talk to each other again.

The description of Fermina and Florentino as perfectly in love remains ambiguous, since Fermina ultimately rejects him without a second thought. It thus remains unclear whether such youthful passion can be considered true love or not. The artificial nature of love letters might perhaps have served to impede true, sincere communication between the two of them.

Aware of Lorenzo Daza's domineering attitude, Escolástica allows Fermina to communicate secretly with Florentino. The young lovers hide **letters** in secret spots. Tránsito becomes worried by her son's state, feeling that Florentino is putting his health in jeopardy by writing fervent letters every night. Fermina, by contrast, writes more straightforward, practical letters, which allows her not to commit herself entirely. One night, Florentino plays a self-composed waltz, "The Crowned Goddess," below Fermina's window. Later, he plays it throughout the city to avoid raising suspicion.

Florentino and Fermina's love is fueled by the difficulty of their communication. The stratagems they devise to exchange letters or declare their feelings to each other heighten the excitement of this youthful adventure. It remains ambiguous, as Fermina later reflects, whether her enthusiasm for Florentino derived from this particular excitement or from Florentino's actual personality.

When one of the numerous civil wars affecting the country in the past half-century risks reaching the city, a curfew is instituted. Too self-absorbed to be aware of the external world, Florentino is imprisoned one night as a potential spy but is released after three days. After two years of correspondence, Florentino finally proposes to Fermina. After taking a few months to answer, she follows Escolástica's advice and says yes, adding that she will marry him if he promises not to make her eat **eggplant**.

Florentino's love makes him blind to anything outside of its realm. This is a humorous quality with potentially dangerous consequences—to himself, as in this example, and, as it becomes clear in the next decades of his life, to other people he harms without noticing. The background of violence in the novel remains constant, suggesting that life is more cruel than Florentino and Fermina's youthful energy and sheltered lives make it seem.


Unsurprised by this turn of events, Florentino's mother, Tránsito, has long negotiated to rent the entire house they live in, instead of sharing it as they have done. To do so, she uses the money she receives from her small pawn shop, where she gives loans to rich families in a discreet way, thus allowing them to keep their reputations intact. With her savings, Tránsito hopes to buy the house before she dies. In the meantime, Florentino is promoted to First Assistant at the telegraph office and is reassured that the practical aspects of his marriage are stable. Florentino and Fermina agree to wait two years before marrying, by which time Fermina will be done with her studies.

Florentino is not too blinded by his passion to ignore practical realities of life, and he understands that financial security is a prerequisite to marriage. However, like Dr. Urbino later, he fails to foresee that financial stability does not guarantee the stability of people's feelings—and, in particular, of Fermina's love. Tránsito's job highlights the hypocrisy of high society, in which people are concerned exclusively with their reputation and take extreme means to pretend that they are still rich and powerful.


In the meantime, Florentino reads and memorizes a variety of love poems that fuel his **letters**. He also spends time in the hotel, where he discovers scars on the women's bodies, the result of violent attacks or crude C-sections. He feels comfortable there, sharing the women's everyday lives while staying a virgin for Fermina.

Although prostitution is not necessarily condemned in the novel, the violence that these women have suffered from are an example of the cruelty that sex can lead to. In this sense, it serves as a dark, gloomy foreboding concerning Florentino's future sexual affairs, in which he sometimes fails to take the women's safety into account.


Four months before Florentino and Fermina have promised to be engaged, Lorenzo Daza approaches Florentino and tells him that they need to talk. The week before, Sister Franca de la Luz, the Superior at Fermina's school, saw that Fermina was secretly writing a love **letter**. This led Fermina to be expelled. When Fermina finally told her father the truth, he did not understand how all she knew about Florentino could be his profession and his love for the violin.

Sister Franca de la Luz's behavior highlights the prejudice that society holds against young girl's love and sexuality. Instead of being free to express romantic desires, girls are denied the freedom of love. Fermina's very limited knowledge of Florentino shows that their love is based on scarce information, and that their intimacy might be more fragile than they realize.

As punishment, Lorenzo sent his sister Escolástica back to Spain. Many years later, Fermina discovered that her aunt had died in a leprosarium. Fermina responded with rage to her father's decision, emerging from this grief-inducing event a changed woman, far from the innocence of adolescence. Fermina, however, refused to change her mind about Florentino and threatened to kill herself with a meat knife. As a result, Lorenzo resolved to have a chat with Florentino.

Fermina's apparent willingness to sacrifice herself for her love mirrors Florentino's determination to be killed rather than to give up on Fermina. However, in light of Fermina's later change of heart, it remains ambiguous whether this represented true love, an effort to escape her father's control, or a fleeting emotion. Her father's callous attitude highlights his lack of feeling and his belief that his daughter's happiness matters very little.

Lorenzo admits to Florentino that his only goal is for his daughter to become a high-society lady. Lorenzo works as a mule trader and laments his own reputation. He concludes his speech by asking Florentino to give up the courtship. Florentino then asks Lorenzo what Fermina's opinion is, since she should decide for herself. However, Lorenzo menacingly says that only men should decide his. When he threatens to kill Florentino, Florentino replies that he would be honored to die for love.

Florentino's defiant attitude mirrors Fermina's, suggesting that love is strong enough to make someone give up on their own survival. Florentino's desire to hear Fermina's opinion derives not only from his desire to know exactly how she feels about him, but also represents his defense of women's freedom. Unlike Lorenzo Daza, he believes that women should be free to make their own decisions regarding their romantic life.

That week, Lorenzo Daza takes his daughter out of the city, only mentioning that they are going "to their death." After Lorenzo threatens to hit Fermina with his belt, she agrees to go on the trip with him. They ride on mules throughout the countryside, suffering fear and hardship. However, Fermina remains convinced that her love with Florentino will remain strong. She and her father see hanged corpses and meet various soldiers, signs of the ongoing civil war, which has not reached the city. They are able to escape death by saying that they are Spanish.

The fact that Lorenzo prefers to put his daughter's and his own life in danger to escape Florentino's influence underscores his fanaticism, his belief that life is not worth living if it does not revolve around social climbing. The fact that no political details are given about the hanged men or the presence of troops on the territory highlights the brutality and absurdity of war, which leads to horrific destruction, regardless of what strategic goals might be at play.

They finally reach the town of Valledupar, where Fermina's mother's family live. There, Fermina meets her cousin Hildebranda Sánchez. Hildebranda, too, is in love. She takes care of Fermina, who has terrible ulcers on her behind, caused by mule-riding, which are potentially life-threatening. Fermina feels happy to be so well taken care of. When her cousin hands her a telegraphed **letter**, Fermina cries, understanding that Florentino was able to use the telegraph network in the country to write to her.

This period in Fermina's life is dynamic and complex. Although she is moved by Florentino's devotion, she also discovers another gratifying aspect of life, friendship, which is capable of bringing her happiness even if Florentino is not present. The fact that her ulcers could potentially have killed her once again highlights her father's cruelty as well as the absurdity of death, which is capable of striking at any moment.

Fermina's father, Lorenzo, in the meantime, assumes that his daughter has forgotten all about her suitor. Paradoxically, Fermina's love story mirrors her parents', because her mother also had to fight her own parents to marry Fermina's father—which she ultimately did. Fermina's father, though, does not realize that his tyrannical attitude simply mimics the one he fought when he was younger.

Lorenzo's blindness to the fact that he *was lucky to have been accepted into a respectable family when he was not considered worthy of them underlines people's hypocrisy when it comes to social ambitions. Following only the orders of one's family and social expectations is often contrary to personal happiness, the novel suggests.*

In Valledupar, Fermina finds pleasure in spending time with Hildebranda—who is in love with a married man—and realizes that it is possible to be happy even without romantic love. However, in her **letters** she determines to organize the practical details of her future relationship with Florentino, as she is convinced that she can only have a happy life if she shares it with a man she loves. Simultaneously, her relationship with Lorenzo Daza becomes smoother, giving the impression that it is close and loving.

Hildebranda's love for a married man proves potentially as tragic as Florentino's later unrequited love for Fermina—although Hildebranda's story, unlike Florentino's, does not end in fulfillment. Fermina's assessment that she can't be happy without romantic love remains ambiguous, since she never regrets marrying Dr. Urbino, a man she is never sure she actually loves.

In the meantime, Florentino resolves to go diving to find the sunken galleon, the *San José*, and its treasures. He finds a young boy, Euclides, to help him in his task because he cannot swim. They make various trips in the scorching sun and, after Florentino finally reveals what their true purpose is, the young boy returns with fantastic tales about the treasures of the underwater ship. He brings back a precious earring and medal as proof.

Florentino's innocent attitude toward life is mostly deprived of the suspicion and cynicism that adults around him exemplify. Instead, his romantic inclinations make him particularly gullible and vulnerable to manipulation, as his determination to do everything in life in the name of love keeps him from recognizing people's baser intentions.

This encourages Florentino to mention his enterprise to Fermina, who believes that this is one of Florentino's many poetic exaggerations but also worries that he might have gone crazy. Euclides brings so much evidence from the sunken ship that Florentino finally shows them to Tránsito, who immediately realizes that the objects are fake and that Euclides is mocking Florentino. Although Euclides swears he never lied, he soon disappears and Florentino never sees him again.

Tránsito serves as a down-to-earth, balancing presence in Florentino's life. Although she encourages his love for Fermina Daza, she also remains realistic about the world. Euclides's disappearance confirmed his guilt. To Florentino's credit, the story of the San José *galleon, however, is based on historic fact. It was sunk in battle in 1708 and the sunken ship was actually found recently, in 2015—decades after the publication of* Love in the Time of Cholera.

One positive aspect of this adventure, though, is that Florentino discovers the beauty of the lighthouse and becomes friends with the lighthouse keeper. On Sundays, men come from all over the city to observe the women sunbathing on the beach—and wearing elaborate bathing suits that hide almost their entire body—without being seen, using the spyglass. Later, after Fermina rejected Florentino, he spent many happy moments in the lighthouse.

The practice of watching women from the lighthouse—presumably without their knowledge—is blatantly voyeuristic, although Florentino does not seem disturbed by this.

Florentino then suddenly learns that Fermina is returning to the city. That night, he can't sleep. When Fermina arrives with the schooner under pouring rain, Florentino doesn't recognize her—both because of the rain and because she has matured during her time away. At the age of 17, Fermina now has a more imposing attitude and, recognizing this, Lorenzo gives her the "keys to [her] life": authority over the house.

On a symbolic level, the fact that Florentino does not recognize Fermina represents the first major element of uncertainty and rupture in their relationship, suggesting that something during the trip has perhaps made them grow apart. Meanwhile, the association of womanhood with household tasks underlines the rigid gender roles that women are expected to abide by.

The next day, Fermina goes to the market with Gala Placidia, their black servant from the old slave quarters. Florentino is amazed to see her pass next to him. She has changed during her time away; she has an intense stare and wears an elegant braid that gives her an adult air. He follows her in the crowd and is astounded by the ease with which she walks among so many people, which she used to do with Escolástica when they went to the market. She ignores snake charmers and beggars but enters all the stores, trying on clothes and sampling various foods. Beyond these playful moments, she buys everything she needs with authority, as though she has done it all her life, when this was in fact her first time being in charge of a household. She buys various things that she plans to use in her marriage with Florentino.

Fermina's authority and efficiency will remain strong qualities throughout her life, especially as she becomes a wife, a household manager, and a woman bent on entering high society. Fermina's attitude does in fact reflect the society's unequal class structure, as beggars and rich market-goers coexist in the same public spaces. Her determination to plan her marriage with Florentino suggests that she is still deeply devoted to him—an attitude that will make her sudden rejection of him all the more surprising. In light of her attitude in the market, it is possible that what attracts Fermina to the idea of marriage is its promise of personal independence, which she has never enjoyed before.

Overwhelmed and fascinated by Fermina's beauty, Florentino still finds the courage to act quickly and talk to Fermina in the Arcade of the Scribes, a quiet gallery. Florentino whispers to her that she is a "crowned goddess." However, when Fermina turns around, everything she's felt for Florentino suddenly vanishes, convincing her that it has all been a mistake. Disappointed and pitying Florentino, thinking "poor man" to herself, she waves her hand at him and tells him to forget her before walking away. She later writes him a **letter** telling him that her feelings for him were an illusion. She returns to him everything he has ever given her, and even though Florentino insists on seeing her, she refuses his visits. It is not until 51 years later that he would finally talk to her again.

Florentino's words to Fermina reference their secret language of love, in which Florentino calls Fermina a "crowned goddess"—a term derived from the lyrical love poetry he reads so fervently. Fermina's sudden rejection and pity for Florentino remains unexplained. This, combined with Fermina's lack of repentance about this act and her general honesty, suggests that Fermina's feelings are simply unpredictable. It suggests, perhaps, that Florentino and she did not know each other well enough for their love to be based on true mutual understanding, resistant to change.

CHAPTER 3

At 28 years old, Dr. Juvenal Urbino is considered a perfect suitor. After returning from Paris, where he studied medicine, he proceeds to exhibit his various talents, from science to music. However, despite young girls' bets about who might spend time with him, it is only once he meets Fermina Daza that his life changes.

Although this succinct description of Dr. Urbino's attitude toward Fermina suggests that he has fallen in love with her, this is actually not the case. There is a difference, the novel suggests, between being fascinated by someone and actually loving them.

Dr. Urbino, however, has never believed in love, considering it "a clinical error." Although he often strolled with women in the peaceful streets of Paris, he missed home and decided to come back. Upon his return, he discovers that his memory has idealized his country and that it is in fact more dismal than he remembered. For example, when he talks with the family and friends who come to greet him at the port, he sees fear and uncertainty in their eyes, which they try to conceal with a neutral tone, making light of the civil war. As he notices the poor, squalid nature of the city, he tries to hide his disappointment. Despite his disenchantment, over the next few weeks the love of his family and friends brings him comfort—though his father is now dead, having succumbed to cholera, which deprives the house of a dynamic spirit.

Dr. Urbino's disappointment with reality after his trip outside of the country mirrors Fermina's disappointment with Florentino after the countryside. Memory, the novel suggests, is capable of idealizing loved people or places to the point of making them unrecognizable. Only patience and sincere love—in this case, the love of friends and family—is capable of making one come to terms with reality and accept it. However, Dr. Urbino's return represents a unique moment in the novel in which characters recognize the horrors of the civil war, beyond what the narrator's neutral tone describes. This moment reminds readers that the backdrop to the story is dark and dangerous—and that they should not be fooled by the apparent normality of such terror.

Concluding that it is his responsibility to take care of this world, Dr. Urbino tries to bring modern ideas about medicine to the city. He works hard to reform public sanitation and challenge widespread superstition. Although colonial houses have septic tanks, the majority of the population is poor and lives in terrible conditions, getting rid of human feces in the open, near their houses. He wants to build an aqueduct instead of letting people drink water infested by waterworms, which are superstitiously considered beneficial, as they are considered to lead to scrotal hernia—a source of male pride. He also fights to rid the market of the refuse from the nearby slaughterhouse and to build a protected, covered market. He realizes that, although his friends emphasize the beauty and value of the city, he alone recognizes its deterioration.

Dr. Urbino's highest social and scientific qualities come to light in his lifelong efforts to reform his home country. For example, his ability to realize that poor neighborhoods do not benefit from the same protections as upper-class houses shows that his goal is to help the city as a whole, not only protect his own class. This highlights his strong ethics and his humanitarian inclinations. His objective, perspective allows him to confront inequality and medical problems head-on. This keeps him from either idealizing the city (as his friends do) and from giving in to cynicism, which would simply condemn the city to the misery he has found it in.

The last epidemic of cholera killed thousands of people in 11 weeks, most of whom were buried in mass graves, though when these overflowed, the bodies were taken to a cemetery outside the city. A cannon was shot regularly because people believed that cannon powder could stop the epidemic. Although cholera is a disease that affects everyone, regardless of their status, the poor black population got hit the strongest during the epidemic.

The novel frequently mentions issues regarding race and class to emphasize that the society in which the story takes place is a deeply unequal one, in which wealth and misery coexist. Cholera brings these dynamics to life by showing that vulnerable populations suffer more from public disasters than the rich, who are better able to protect and take care of themselves.

Dr. Urbino later realizes that his father's attempts to stop the epidemic were futile, and probably contributed to the spread of cholera, even though he showed great sacrifice and was honored by the city. De. Urbino's father ultimately died of cholera while writing a farewell **letter** full of love to his family. It is only when Dr. Urbino receives his father's letter that he finally cries. This event brings Dr. Urbino closer to death, realizing that no one was immune to it, and leads him to become obsessed with cholera.

Despite his scientific mistakes, Dr. Urbino's father is a model of devotion to a public cause. This attitude, which Dr. Urbino inherits, contrasts with Dr. Urbino's son's ideas, which are disturbing in their exclusionary nature, meant to remove so-called dangerous segments of the population from the general public. This suggests that medical knowledge does not exist in a moral void, but that doctors should be moved by social principles of tolerance and equality.

After one year back in the city, Dr. Urbino sees his first case of cholera—a patient who dies within four days. He orders the schooner on which the patient had come to be quarantined and tells the city to stop using the cannon. Although 11 more cases are reported that year, Dr. Urbino establishes strict quarantines and medical supervision which keep these cases from evolving into a crisis. Since then, people have realized that they should follow Dr. Urbino's advice. They close the sewers and build a market far away from open trash. However, by then Dr. Urbino is too consumed by his feelings for Fermina Daza that he does not necessarily care about his newfound fame.

Dr. Urbino's medical success suggests that rational experiments can fight superstition—for example, shooting a cannon to stop cholera. This shows that superstition derives from lack of knowledge, not from an inability or unwillingness to learn, and that it can therefore be eradicated when it represents an obstacle to the public good. Dr. Urbino's obsession for Fermina mirrors the way in which Florentino forgets about his own job and duties when he thinks about her. In Dr. Urbino's case, however, it remains ambiguous whether this represents love or the desire to attain a certain goal: to marry Fermina.

Incidentally, according to Dr. Urbino's belief, love does indeed arise from "a clinical error." Dr. Urbino is called on to examine Fermina Daza, who is suspected of having cholera. When he arrives, he is impressed by the beauty of the semi-ruined house and feels that God is present. Following Fermina's instructions, he waits for her father to return before examining her. However, both Fermina and Dr. Urbino are distraught by the presence of Lorenzo Daza in the room. Though overcome by emotion, Dr. Urbino examines Fermina's body in the neutral way of a physician, concerned only about cholera, although Fermina covers her breasts with her arms. Dr. Urbino concludes that Fermina is suffering from food poisoning, and Lorenzo Daza, both relieved and impressed by the doctor's aristocratic background, gives Dr. Juvenal a gold peso, an extravagant fee.

As happened when Florentino exhibited dangerous physical symptoms after falling in love, love is once again associated with cholera in this scene. In this case, cholera simply provides the backdrop for Dr. Urbino's growing fascination for Fermina. The meaning of this association between love and cholera remains open to interpretation. The constant threat of death and disease in the novel perhaps makes love all the more intense and exciting. Alternatively, perhaps the threat cholera represents the external pressures that Fermina is subject to, such as her father's demands, which limit her capacity to love freely.

The next week, Dr. Juvenal Urbino returns to the house at a time when Fermina's father is absent. He gives her a brief medical examination through the window, although he hasn't been called or announced. Fermina does not understand why he has come and finds him annoying. However, Dr. Urbino compliments her beauty and asks her about music, his favorite topic to initiate friendship. Furious about the fact that Dr. Urbino is trying to seduce her, she slams the window shut.

Like Florentino, Dr. Urbino tries to talk to Fermina alone, when her father will not intervene. The difference in Dr. Urbino's success thus derives not from different means to obtain the same goal (Fermina's acceptance), but from Dr. Urbino's social status. Indeed, in this case, the only reason Lorenzo Daza allows for this to happen is because Dr. Urbino comes from an aristocratic family.

Lorenzo Daza, who has observed the interaction from another window, then yells at Dr. Urbino to wait for him. He invites him inside and forces his daughter to apologize to him. Furious, Fermina curtsies. Dr. Urbino is embarrassed and wants to communicate sympathy to Fermina, but she does not humor him. Lorenzo Daza then invites Dr. Urbino for coffee. The two of them drink coffee and many glasses of anisette. Lorenzo spends time lamenting his daughter's stubbornness while also lauding her qualities. Drunk, Dr. Urbino leaves the house after many hours, hoping to catch sight of Fermina, which he does not. On his way home, he vomits, causing his mother to realize that something highly unusual must have taken place for him to be in this disorderly state.

Fermina's lack of independence is evident in her obligation to follow her father's orders. This serves as a prelude to her later role in the household, where she will be subject to Doña Blanca and her husband's demands. This whole process of courtship also suggests that women must be convinced to marry someone—and that they cannot trust their initial feelings toward their suitor, but should instead pay attention to his material offers. In Fermina's case, it remains ambiguous whether she actually develops feelings for Dr. Urbino before marrying or whether she does so primarily to achieve material security.

Later, Dr. Urbino serenades Fermina under her window. Simultaneously, her father tries to convince her that Dr. Urbino is a perfect match. Both Lorenzo and Dr. Urbino seek out each other's company. Lorenzo teaches Juvenal Urbino chess, which would remain an addiction throughout his life. Dr. Urbino then sends Fermina a **letter**, in which he asks, in a simple way, for her father's permission to visit her. She pities him, saying "Poor man," realizing that these are the same words she used to pity Florentino Ariza.

The similarity between Florentino and Dr. Urbino's courtship suggests that the two men are, to an extent, interchangeable. This highlights the uncertainty of Fermina's decision to reject Florentino and marry Dr. Urbino, since it does not seem based on any clear difference of feeling for either man. This adds mystery to Fermina's feelings and to the narrative, suggesting that certain events lie beyond characters' control.

Fermina receives three more **letters** over the next months, including an anonymous threat saying that she will incur disgrace if she does not accept Dr. Urbino's courtship. She also receives a doll from Martinique that grows overnight, according to what Fermina believes to be African spells. This mysterious event and its recollection would bring her terror even many years later, when she is happily married with children.

Although the writer of the anonymous letter is never discovered, the letter shows that Dr. Urbino has clout in society and might have secret supporters helping him in his task. The mention of magic is one of few instances in the novel where seemingly supernatural events take place, in line with the themes often present in works of magical realism.

Finally, Dr. Urbino sends Sister Franca de la Luz, Superior of the Academy of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin. Seeing this woman reminds Fermina of the horrors of that school, which she considers marked by spiritual emptiness. Although Sister Franca de la Luz seems genuinely happy to see her former pupil, as soon as she mentions that she is here to convince Fermina to follow Dr. Urbino's wishes, Fermina angrily retorts that she does not understand Sister Franca's behavior since nuns like her believe that love is a sin. Threatened with a visit by the Archbishop, Fermina remains impassive. Her stubbornness convinces Sister Franca that Fermina is still thinking about Florentino. In the end, the Archbishop never visits.

Unlike Florentino, Dr. Urbino benefits from a host of high-society allies in his romantic pursuit of Fermina, which gives him an advantage. Fermina's comment about the nuns' hypocrisy underscores the fact that, instead of embodying strong moral principles, most members of society—even those meant to inspire others on a spiritual level—merely sustain the pre-existing class structure, by encouraging individuals like Fermina to make choices based on wealth and prestige instead of personal feelings. Fermina's resistance to this highlights her honesty and integrity.

It is only when Hildebranda Sánchez arrives for a visit that Fermina's life changes. The two of them bathe naked, compare each other's bodies, and smoke cigars. Hildebranda decides to go to the telegraph office, where she observes Florentino Ariza. Although she finds him miserable-looking and inelegant, she is soon impressed by his kindness and devotion in helping her mail her secret lover a **letter**. She tells Fermina that Florentino's life clearly revolves around love.

The friendship that Hildebranda and Fermina share plays an important role in Fermina's life, since Hildebranda remains someone she can count on regardless of what is happening in her life in the city—for example, when Fermina later has problems with her husband. Hildebranda proves a good judge of character by understanding Florentino's obsession with love.

Hildebranda is shocked by Fermina's solitary life. Indeed, Fermina's life revolves around the routine of taking care of the house, which makes her feel as though everything in her life is determined from the outside. She dedicates time and energy to organizing a house where this does not matter tremendously, since, along with painting classes, this is mainly a way for her to pass the time. Although she manages to live in the same house with Lorenzo in a smooth way, one day he returns home announcing that they are suffering from total ruin. This deeply affects Fermina, who feels that she is now completely alone, living in a fragile social situation.

The fact that Fermina's main activity, at a young age, is taking care of the house foreshadows the fact that this is not a temporary function, but will remain her lot for the rest of her life, because that is what is expected of female heads of household. Although this is not stated explicitly, it seems likely that Fermina's fear of falling into poverty played an important role in her decision to marry Dr. Urbino, who would shield her from such problems.

Hildebranda brings animation to Fermina's life. As Fermina shows her cousin around the city, it becomes apparent that every place they see is a marker of Fermina's relationship with Florentino. Fermina realizes that her affair with Florentino is the only thing that has ever taken place in her young life. Fermina and Hildebranda have their picture taken by a foreign photographer, although Fermina's copy of the photo soon disappears. Florentino would purchase the photograph years later.

Fermina's monotone, solitary lifestyle means that she necessarily depends on other people, such as Hildebranda and Florentino, to bring excitement to her life. In the case of her relationship with Florentino, this could have made it easy for Fermina to confuse love with entertainment. The fact that this picture was ultimately purchased by Florentino, on a pure stroke of luck, underscores Florentino's lifelong obsession for Fermina.

After having their photograph taken, the two women still have white starch on their faces and are harassed by the crowd. A carriage then stops near them and Dr. Urbino walks out, telling them that he will take them wherever they want. Although the house is not far, the carriage makes various detours while Dr. Urbino tried to have conversation with the women. Fermina is furious and quiet, so Hildebranda plays games with Dr. Urbino. When the women finally leave, Dr. Urbino grabs Fermina's ring finger, telling her that he is waiting for her reply. In doing so, he catches her glove, and Fermina leaves without asking for it back. That night, Hildebranda expresses her admiration for Dr. Urbino. Smiling at her cousin's enthusiasm, Fermina playfully calls her a whore.

Fermina's frustration at this situation suggests that she does not appreciate Dr. Urbino's scheming. Indeed, it remains unclear whether Dr. Urbino chanced to be where the girls were or whether he followed them there—a more sinister possibility. The fact that Dr. Urbino happens to catch Fermina's ring finger brings the idea of a marriage to the forefront, suggesting that Dr. Urbino desperately wants this and that all Fermina would have to do is say yes. Fermina's joking reference to her cousin at a "whore"—usually a derogatory term—is meant in a playful, non-insulting way. It is one of the many instances in which the word is used in the novel to describe positive qualities of sexual freedom and exuberance.

That night, Fermina finds that she cannot sleep well because she is thinking of Dr. Juvenal Urbino constantly. The next morning, therefore, she writes Dr. Urbino a **letter**, telling him that he can talk to her father. Florentino Ariza soon discovers that Fermina is going to marry the doctor and falls into deep lethargy. Tránsito Ariza organizes for him to move to a new port along the Magdalena river, using her contact with Florentino's uncle Don Leo XII Loayza to achieve this. Florentino's uncle finds him a post in telegraphy, announcing that the telegraph is the instrument of the future. Before leaving on this journey, Florentino plays his violin waltz under Fermina's window one last time. Then he leaves, vowing never to return.

It remains unclear why Fermina decides, all of a sudden, to marry Dr. Urbino, whom she seemed to dislike so much. In this way, her decision mirrors her abrupt and unexplained rejection of Florentino. It is possible that Fermina found her cousin's enthusiasm contagious; that she too was charmed by Dr. Urbino's playful mood in the carriage; that financial worries finally convinced her to marry; or perhaps that, as is later mentioned, she felt that this was her last possibility to marry before she considered herself too old.

During this trip, Florentino's first journey outside the city, the ship captain takes rigid measures to prevent harm to passengers since a new civil war between Liberals and Conservatives has just started. He forbids people from shooting alligators, a popular sport, and ultimately confiscates people's weapons to keep passengers from fighting. He also prohibits people from leaving the ship after he sees a boat carrying the plague flag. Florentino spends his days alone, resisting stoically, and sees dead bodies floating on the river, victim either of cholera or the civil war. The terrible smell affects his recollection of Fermina.

On the ship, it becomes apparent that Florentino will conceive of all of his experiences—on this trip and for the rest of his life—in terms of his love for Fermina. The corpses on the river highlights the utter horror of civil war and cholera, which people in the city are not usually faced with. In addition, the prohibition to shoot alligators foreshadows the utter destruction that affects the river at the end of the novel, when it will become clear that human violence has destroyed the ecosystem.

In general, all of Florentino's thoughts tend toward Fermina. However, one night, when he is walking to the bathroom, someone catches him and pulls him inside a dark cabin. A naked woman undresses him and positions herself over him, causing him to lose his virginity. After this, she tells him to leave and forget about what had happened. Florentino concludes that the woman had been planning this assault. Reflecting on the pleasure he felt during this experience, he realizes that sexual experiences might be able to replace his passion for Fermina Daza.

Florentino's first sexual experience is non-consensual, since he is taken into a cabin without knowing what is happening to him. As in other instances of rape in the novel, this episode is not described in negative terms. Rather, it serves as a mind-opening experience for Florentino, who will then devote his life to sex. However, in light of the novel's neutral description of other morally shocking phenomena such as civil wars—an attitude typical of magical realism—readers are expected to evaluate such episodes critically, reflecting on their social and moral implications even if the narrator does not explicitly do so.

Florentino tries to identify the mysterious woman, but fails to do so. He believes it had to be a woman from the family that's staying in the cabin where he was pulled into. He disregards the youngest and oldest of the girls, ultimately concluding that his assaulter must have been a woman with a young child, even though she seems exclusively concerned with her child's well-being. He discovers that her name is Rosalba and becomes obsessed with her, but cannot find any clue indicting her.

It remains unclear whether Rosalba is actually the woman who forced herself on Florentino. Florentino remains convinced that it must be her, but the novel provides no greater proof beyond Florentino's conviction. This suggests that Florentino's conception of her is probably just as much the result of his own fantasy as a realistic possibility.

After eight days, the ship stops at a port from which people can go to Antioquia, a region affected by the civil war, and Florentino realizes too late that Rosalba and her family are leaving. This makes him feel lonely. As a result, he returns to his thoughts about Fermina Daza, and feels jealousy for the first time at the thought of her upcoming wedding. Although he desires revenge, he soon repents for wishing for Fermina's death.

As this early episode suggests, Florentino primarily uses sex and fantasy as a way to distract himself from his continuous thoughts about Fermina and to keep from feeling lonely. It remains ambiguous, throughout his numerous sexual relationships, whether this is always true or whether, in some cases, he actually appreciates his relationships as an end in itself.

On the event of the boat's last stop, Florentino imagines Fermina's wedding for himself, torturing himself with these images, even though he later realizes that he has miscalculated the date and laughs at himself because of it. The next day, after a night full of fever, caused by his love, he realizes that he no longer wants to work so far away from his city and decides to return there. He resolves never again to abandon the city where Fermina Daza lives.

Florentino never feels excitement for a particular trade (in this case, telegraphy), but always considers his profession in terms of the social worth it can bring him, which might impress Fermina. Florentino is also able to laugh at himself from time to time, as he does when he realizes he has tortured himself unnecessarily. This demonstrates that he does retain a sense of reality despite his romanticized obsession.

When Florentino arrives, he is convinced he can smell Fermina Daza's scent in the air. Then he learns that Fermina is on her honeymoon in Europe and will probably only return years later. This gives him hope that he might be able to forget her, perhaps through sexual affairs.

Florentino's belief that he recognizes Fermina's smell is humorous since Fermina is not actually in the city. It is more likely that Florentino simply recognizes the smell of his hometown, a place he now associates strongly with Fermina.

One night, a woman named Widow Nazaret spends time in Tránsito Ariza's house to take refuge from the war. Tránsito sends her to her son's room in the hope that she might make him forget Fermina. Sitting on Florentino's bed, the woman, who is 28 years old, begins to tell him about her grief for her husband. Then she undresses joyfully, making pauses that coincide with the sound of cannons marking a nearby attack. In turn, she undresses Florentino and the two of them make love. She has an exuberant joy and energy she has not been able to express with her husband.

The experience with Widow Nazaret represents Florentino's first consensual sexual relationship, even though his mother and the widow herself orchestrate it. The mention of cannons adds an eerie atmosphere to this scene, highlighting the presence of danger and death in another part of the city. This first experience with a widow is one of many, and Florentino soon realizes that most widows are just as happy as Widow Nazaret to rekindle their sexual passion.

Still talking about her husband and her grief, Widow Nazaret concludes that now, at least, she always knows exactly where he is. From then on, she abandons her mourning clothing and welcomes a variety of men into her rebuilt house, enjoying the pleasure of taking control of her sexual life and of being, as she says, "the only free woman in the province."

The fact that Widow Nazaret is able to remember her husband fondly while taking part in numerous sexual affairs suggests that these two aspects of life, while seemingly contradictory, are compatible. It suggests that marriage never brought her the sexual pleasure she now enjoys—and, therefore, that her life now is unrelated to anything she ever experienced with her husband.

Florentino continues to see Widow Nazaret on a regular basis, and she seeks to imitate love without being bound to it. She feels grateful to Florentino for making her "a whore," and Florentino concludes that he had indeed freed her from the "virginity" of marriage, teaching her that no sexual act done in the name of love could ever be immoral. When she begins to spend time with more men, though, they see each other less and ultimately forget each other.

Although Widow Nazaret enjoys casual relationships, she does not necessarily want them to be purely utilitarian but, rather, appreciates creating tenderness between Florentino and her—which Florentino will later repay in kind by taking responsibility for her after her death. Florentino's belief that any sexual act is morally valid gives Widow Nazaret the freedom she desires, but also overlooks that in certain cases harmful power dynamics can exist between the people involved.

This experience serves as the first in a long series of affairs. Florentino's solitary attitude gives women the impression they are doing him a favor and he, in turn, is easily able to identify women who might be interested in him. Throughout his life, he keeps a record of his affairs, which ultimately numbers 682 long-term sexual relationships.

The extraordinary number of affairs Florentino has in his life underlines Florentino's obsession with sex. His entire life revolves around finding sexual partners while waiting for Fermina. It remains ambiguous whether he chooses this way of life out of loneliness or out of pure passion.

Although Florentino is convinced he has all but forgotten Fermina Daza, he once sees her in the streets and is shocked by how elegant she looks in her fancy dress. He also admires the attitude she and her husband share. Instead of feeling jealousy, Florentino feels ashamed, convinced that he is not worthy of a woman like Fermina.

Florentino's admiration of Fermina and Dr. Urbino suggests that he, too, sees only the outside expression of this marriage and does not realize that Fermina is not necessarily happy. Florentino's conviction that he must become worthy of Fermina leads him to work hard to achieve a higher social status.

Fermina seems happy with her decision to marry Dr. Urbino. In Valledupar, she often heard her cousins talk about sex, including the sexual relations of her family members. She discovered the pleasures of "solitary love," although, until she married, masturbating made her feel ashamed. Overall, she was convinced that losing her virginity would be a terrifying, painful experience. As a result, during her wedding and her honeymoon, she is anguished at the thought of being raped.

Fermina's fears about sex contrast with Florentino's previously described ignorance and innocence—instead of being worried about sex before it happens, he simply does not think about it. By contrast, Fermina's attitude suggests that she has perhaps internalized certain beliefs—for example, those promoted at her religious school—that sexuality is fearful and wrong. This attitude also contrasts with many widows' discovery that sex can be a source of joy and revitalization.

Fermina's husband anticipates her fears and allows her to spend her first three nights on the ship to Europe without any painful experiences. Dr. Urbino spends the first night taking care of Fermina, who is experiencing seasickness. On the fourth night, he asks about the fact that she does not pray before going to bed. She answers that she was disgusted by the hypocrisy she witnessed at school and now prefers to express her faith in silence, keeping a private relationship between God and her.

Dr. Urbino's tact reveals the respect and tenderness he feels for Fermina, as his goal is to make her feel comfortable. Fermina's rejection of religious tradition suggests that faith is unrelated to one's outward behavior. Rather, Fermina believes that clinging to traditions that hypocritical members of the Church have perverted is worse than resisting moral corruption on one's own.

That night, as Fermina prepares to sleep in the same bed as her husband for the first time, she makes sure the room is completely dark before exiting the bathroom in her nightgown. She enters the bed in terror, but Dr. Urbino simply takes her hand and recounts stories about his life in Paris. Meanwhile, he begins to caress her body. Annoyed by his attempt to take off her nightgown, she does so herself and then stays still. He takes her hand again and touches her nipple, which surprises her and makes her blush. He jokes that she should not worry since he has already seen her breasts, and Fermina replies with a smile that she is still angry about that.

All of Dr. Urbino's actions aim to make Fermina feel comfortable. His effort to build trust and intimacy between them underlines his respect for her and his belief that the sexual act—like their relationship in general—should be a partnership. Fermina's brusque movements and responses highlight her forceful character, resistant to other people's orders. Overall, though, this scene is filled with tenderness, surprise, and humor, which serves to lessen Fermina's fears.

As Dr. Urbino begins kissing her, Fermina explores his body until finding his penis. Then, she prays to herself and begins exploring this organ with curiosity. She is surprised by its shape and asks Dr. Urbino about its function. He proceeds to explain to her how it works and she concludes that it is ugly. Dr. Urbino added that it is also unpredictable, since men have little actual control of it. She also notes that there are too many parts to it, and Dr. Urbino is shocked to realize that he had written about the exact same thing: the fact that the human body could be more efficient if it were more simple. She encourages him to continue his medical explanations, but he retorts that this would be a lesson not in science, but in love. The two of them remove the sheets, and Fermina locks her arms around his neck.

This scene suggests that Fermina has forgotten her fears and expressed her curious, adventurous spirit. Dr. Urbino's medical explanations serve to emphasize that sex is a normal, natural function of the body and that there is nothing fundamentally wrong or immoral about it. It also suggests that sex (and, in this case, losing one's virginity) does not have to be a solemn, uncomfortable experience, but can involve playfulness and should rely on positive communication between the two partners. Fermina's willingness to take part in this activity highlights her own desire to explore a new aspect of her body and life: her sexuality.

Dr. Urbino reflects privately that he does not actually love Fermina but admires her personality—namely, her authoritative attitude and her strength. However, when she kisses him, he concludes that they will be able to create love together. Although they never discuss this issue explicitly, they both know that they made the right choice in marrying each other.

Dr. Urbino's conception of love as something that people build together is optimistic, but also suggests that he has never actually experienced the intensity of romantic love himself.

At dawn, Fermina is still a virgin. However, the next night, she undresses before he comes to bed. She is the one who makes the first move, excited about this new adventure, and realizes that there was not much blood, only a small stain. They are both surprised to realize that they made love well. They do so every day, but Dr. Urbino soon realizes that, despite his strong character, Fermina won't allow anyone to have control over her, and that he will therefore need to share power. After three months of sterile love-making, Fermina suddenly becomes pregnant and returns home ready to have a baby.

The gradual nature of Fermina's first sexual experience allows her to feel comfortable and confident. Fermina's strength of character comes forth in everything she does. However, although it might lead to power-sharing in the pair's marriage bed, it fails to impact her role in their household, which remains constrained by social norms.

When they return to their country, the couple seems changed, full of love and modern European ideas. Dr. Urbino makes sure to find ways to receive books from Europe, and Fermina discovers the elegance of foreign fashion. They also bring back the shared memory of seeing Oscar Wilde in a Parisian bookstore. However, when people ask Fermina about the trip, the fatigue of traveling and of her pregnancy causes Fermina to reply that Europe was not so special.

Dr. Urbino and Fermina's appreciation of European culture allows them to bring new life to the society they live in, and to strengthen their trust in modernity and progress. In this light, Fermina's dismissive comment about Europe is humorous, since it does not reflect her fascination with it, but also signals that the Caribbean city she lives in is perhaps the place where she feels most at home.

CHAPTER 4

When Florentino Ariza sees Fermina and Dr. Urbino so triumphant together, he decides that he will become wealthy and powerful and wait for Fermina for the rest of his life, so that he can be worthy of her. As a result, he asks his Uncle Leo XII for a job, which he receives even though his uncle is still frustrated at Florentino's refusal to move the year before. This reflects the fact that although Uncle Leo XII seems rigid and impassive on the outside, he actually has a passion for singing deeply emotional, compassionate songs, caring little for the material advantages of his position. His particular sensitivity allows him to tell immediately that Florentino is like his father: driven in life by love.

Florentino's reaction to seeing Fermina and Dr. Urbino together is paradoxical. Instead of concluding that he should leave Fermina alone, since she seems so happy, he remains convinced that he will one day be able to seduce her. Although he once insisted to Fermina's father that Fermina should be responsible for her own destiny, he now seemingly contradicts this idea by failing to take Fermina's rejection seriously. This highlights Florentino's selfish attitude, which often makes him unable to understand that he is the only one who values his youthful relationship so much.

In the early years of Florentino's new job at the River Company of the Caribbean, he is incapable of writing official documents because his style is too lyrical and romantic. Florentino works hard but concludes that the only thing that interests him in life is love. However, his seemingly passive attitude conceals strong power and determination, which allow him to work hard for 30 years in a wide variety of positions.

Florentino's hardworking attitude contrasts with his idealistic, romantic nature. It suggests that Florentino is able to have a pragmatic understanding of reality only insofar as reality serves his hidden romantic goals—in this case, to become rich and powerful so that he might one day impress Fermina.

Uncle Leo XII tells Florentino that his father, Don Pius V Loayza, conceived him in an unlocked office room on a Sunday, lying to his wife about his whereabouts. Florentino is bothered by some of aspects his father's character but realizes that others are just like him. For example, in a notebook, he finds his father's scribble that his only regret in life would be not dying for love. Florentino also later discovers that he looks more like his father over time—and that such resemblance is a definitive sign of aging. His father never recognized Florentino as his legitimate son, and Florentino recalls his father once giving him money for the week before telling him never to return. Uncle Leo XII, however, kept on giving Tránsito Ariza money.

Florentino's resemblance to his father is both moral and physical. Don Pius V Loayza's mix of idealistic romanticism (like his desire to die for love), potentially excessive sexual life and immoral behavior (having an adulterous affair and then failing to take responsibility for his own actions by taking care of his son) highlight the contradictions at the heart of Florentino's own behavior. Florentino, too, believes in the elevated ideals of love but sometimes fails to prove morally admirable in his sexual relationships.

After work, overwhelmed by his love for Fermina, Florentino begins writing love **letters** free of charge in the Arcade of the Scribes. He has a steady stream of clients and once even writes back-and-forth love letters to the same girl and boy. Later, after agreeing to marry, the couple realizes what happened and asks Florentino to be their child's godfather. Florentino also writes some of his own love letters, hoping to publish them as a book.

Although it is humorous that Florentino helped two people become a couple by writing their letters for them, this episode also highlights the artificial nature of love-letter writing and, more generally, of traditional courtship. Although the two young people clearly wanted to be together, their letters reflected Florentino's *conception of love, not their own personal, sincere thoughts to each other.*

In the meantime, Florentino's friends become persuaded that he has changed permanently, and Florentino knows that this is because of his unwavering resolution to win Fermina back. Tránsito Ariza helps him by buying their house, making space for Florentino to have children. During this period, Tránsito also discovers that she is suffering from an incurable illness, which affects her memory.

Instead of dissuading her son from pursuing a seemingly unreachable goal, Tránsito Ariza supports Florentino in his romantic, life-long endeavor to seduce Fermina. In this way, Tránsito—unlike the tyrannical Lorenzo—puts Florentino's happiness and desires first, instead of her own beliefs about how harmful his attitude might be.

Florentino, in turn, has developed a steady habit of making love without actually feeling love. When he goes to the hotel of his youth, where he conducts his affairs, he dresses his lovers as men to protect their anonymity. However, when people see him enter with men, his reputation becomes even more tarnished than it already was. As a result, he begins seeking safe places to have affairs, from jetties to the lighthouse. He develops theories about love-making, concluding that the most ragged-looking women were usually the most passionate and energetic during sexual relations. Although Florentino had planned on writing about these theories, Ausencia Santander soon proves that theories about love are completely futile, since they can so easily be proven wrong.

The negative judgment that people have of Florentino highlights society's condemnation of homosexuality as well as, more generally, any sexual relationship that does not fit the norm. In his sexual life, Florentino becomes convinced that appearances are often deceitful. This makes him seem open-minded, capable of realizing that people's outward presentation does not necessarily reflect their personality—a theory that could be applied to him, too, since he seems outwardly somber and respectable but has a highly unconventional private life.

After 20 years of marriage, Ausencia Santander and her husband have separated. She now has a regular lover, Rosendo de la Rosa, a riverboat captain, who brings Florentino to Ausencia's house. During lunch, in which Rosendo drinks an enormous quantity of alcohol, Florentino marvels at the beauty of Ausencia's house. When the drunken Rosendo falls asleep, Florentino and Ausencia drag him to bed, still unconscious. They then suddenly decide to undress and make love. From then on, Ausencia begins to invite Florentino over whenever Rosendo is away on trips. They are not afraid of being caught because Rosendo always announces his return with the ship's horn, saluting his wife, children, and mistress.

This episode highlights the extent to which people in this city can be unfaithful and deceitful. Rosendo de la Rosa has a secret mistress, Ausencia, and Ausencia, in turn, cheats on him with Florentino. This series of infidelities underlines a lack of honesty and transparency in people's lives. Rosendo's willingness to acknowledge both his wife and his mistress through the ship's horn suggests that does not seem conflicted about this aspect of his life.

At 50 years old, Ausencia is an expert in love-making. She always welcomes Florentino naked, even though he never announces himself. She undresses him immediately, but Florentino is careful to remove his watch and chain and put them in his boots, which he always does when he has affairs, so that he will not forget them. Ausencia would then climb on top of Florentino and seek her own pleasure, enraptured and passionate, leaving him with the impression that he is being used. However, his hurt pride combined with feelings of joy and happiness, and he never fails to return.

It remains unclear in what precise way Ausencia subverts Florentino's theories about love, but her focus on taking control of the situation and achieving pleasure at all cost certainly seems unique in Florentino's experience. In general, though, throughout Florentino's affairs, it remains ambiguous whether he *is ever truly focused on the pleasure and well-being of his partners, instead of his own satisfaction. In this sense, then, Ausencia may be serve as a mirror for Florentino's general attitude to love and sex.*

After two weeks, when Ausencia lets him kiss her before undressing him, Florentino knows that she has developed feelings for him. One day, after spending the afternoon in her bed, they leave the room to realize that thieves had come while they were making love, stealing everything in the apartment. The thieves left a note saying this was Ausencia's fault for "fucking around."

Florentino's awareness that Ausencia might feel love for him suggests that he is never able to fully control the emotional nature of his sexual affairs, although it remains ambiguous whether he ever feels true love for any of his partners.

Florentino beings to see Ausencia less, not because of the desolation of her house but because he has discovered that he can meet people in mule-drawn trolleys. One day, during Carnival, he meets a woman who makes a lasting impression on him. She is dressed as a sick patient and tells him she is crazy; Florentino laughs. The two of them dance together, although the woman still insists she came from a psychiatric institution. Florentino offers for them to go to the lighthouse, but as they wait to watch the end of celebrations—a delay that saves his life—guards arrived to catch the woman, who had indeed escaped from the asylum after decapitating a guard and wounding others. She defends herself with hidden garden shears but is ultimately put in a straitjacket. Florentino brings chocolates to the asylum on the following days but then gives them away.

Florentino's innocence and gullibility keeps him from recognizing the presence of danger in his life. This is the first episode in which it becomes apparent that sexual relations can be potentially dangerous, depending on the person and conditions in which they take place. Florentino's inability to understand this highlights his naïveté. He is too focused on the excitement and pleasure of sex to understand its real-life implications. The chocolates he brings the woman suggests either that he is not capable of learning from his errors, since, blinded by his romantic attitude, he still does not see the woman as a threat, or that he is expressing compassion for her.

On the trolley, Florentino also meets Leona Cassiani. She is "the true woman of his life" even though they never share a sexual relationship. When he first sees her in the trolley, he notices that she is a pretty black woman but immediately recognizes her as a "whore." Leona follows him out of the trolley and, when Florentino tells her he is not interested, she replies that she can tell he is. Florentino knows he is part of a secret society of people who immediately recognize each other, knowing they are always ready to have sex with each other. However, Leona only wants him to find her a job, and he is able to integrate her in the River Company of the Caribbean.

It remains ambiguous whether Leona is a prostitute or merely a woman Florentino considers sexually liberated. It remains unclear whether Florentino and Leona harbor romantic feelings for each other or whether they are merely a theoretically good match. However, through this comment, the narrator suggests that Fermina is not necessarily the perfect person for Florentino—merely the one he *has decided he is going to wait for.*

Leona Cassiani becomes a highly talented employee. She submits ideas to Florentino's Uncle Leo XII to reform the company, and he ultimately creates a new position for her, allowing her to serve as his personal assistant. Within a few years, Leona has already taken control of most aspects of the company and, after a few more years, could have accepted a position of General Secretary. However, her goal throughout is only to protect her benefactor, Florentino. She finds ways to give Florentino the impression that she is following his orders when in fact the opposite is true, and she protects him from the scheming of secret enemies.

Leona demonstrates love and generosity in discreet ways: by helping and protecting Florentino even if he does not realize it. This sense of self-sacrifice highlights Leona's fidelity and humility, since she puts Florentino's own success and ambition before her own. Leona's progress in the company shows that her success depended on having a contact (Florentino) who might introduce her to the company and thus allow her to reach socioeconomic mobility. It remains unclear how, in such a socially rigid society, she could have proceeded otherwise.

Although Florentino never fully grasps the extent of Leona's actions, he is full of regret that he didn't make love with Leona upon first meeting her, even if she had made him pay for it, which he usually refuses to do. One night, when both of them are working late, he suddenly enters her office and, shaking, asks her when they would ever stop what they were doing. Leona says that she has been waiting for such a moment for the past 10 years, but that it is now too late. After so much hard work on his behalf, she has grown old prematurely, even though he is 20 years older than her. She says it would feel to her like having sex with a son. Although Florentino doubts this is truly her last word, he nevertheless understands for the first time that it is possible to simply be friends with a woman.

Leona and Florentino are highly similar in their free, open-minded view of sex. However, Florentino's regret about not having had relations with Leona from the beginning suggests that sex is the natural way in which he expresses his emotions—and that he is not used to feeling strong attachment for a female friend. Leona's reaction, by contrast, shows greater maturity. Although she was also attracted to Florentino from the beginning, she has learned to see him differently, not as a potential sexual partner but as a close friend to whom she can express love by providing him care and protection.


Leona is the only person with whom Florentino ever feels inclined to share his secret love for Fermina Daza. He realizes that, apart from his mother, the only people who know about his love belong to Fermina's world. One day, Dr. Urbino enters Florentino's office to protect himself from a passing cyclone. Although Florentino is struck with the feeling of being inferior to Urbino, the two of them chat briefly about music. Florentino says he likes Gardel, to which Dr. Urbino replies that he is popular indeed.

Florentino's desire to tell someone about Fermina Daza suggests that he does not necessarily enjoy carrying such a heavy secret in his life—one that determines his every decision. Florentino's appreciation of Carlos Gardel, a famous French-Argentine tango singer, shows that his musical tastes are less refined than Dr. Urbino's, who does not necessarily listen to popular performers.

Dr. Urbino was told once that Florentino had been in love with Fermina, but he had quickly forgotten it, finding the matter uninteresting. In the office, after speaking Dr. Urbino about his various musical projects, he suddenly mentions his wife, saying that he would be nothing without her. Florentino is then shocked to realize that Urbino loves Fermina as much as he does. He concludes that they are both victims, united by a shared passion, and feels grief at the thought that Urbino would have to die so that Florentino might be able to express his. When Leona Cassiani enters the office after Urbino leaves, Florentino feels the urge to tell her about Fermina but ultimately does not.

Dr. Urbino's forgetfulness about Florentino and Fermina's youthful relationship highlights his general lack of interest in love—perhaps because he has never experienced its intensity himself and is more interested in rational issues. Florentino's inability to tell Leona about his secret love underlines his solitary, potentially lonely life, despite his hundreds of sexual partners. It is possible he does not tell her because he is shy and fears exposing a vulnerable side of personality or because he fears her reaction, which might consider him a madman.

Reflecting on Dr. Urbino's cultural activities, including the organization of the Poetic Festival, Florentino remembers that, despite participating every year, he has never won a prize. One year, a Chinese immigrant surprises everyone by winning the first prize, causing a polemic in the city. Years later, though, when the poem is reprinted, everyone realizes that the poem is not that good, and therefore could indeed have been written by the Chinese immigrant.

This anecdote relates to the novel's mention of underlying social dynamics. In this case, it appears that many people in the city have racist, xenophobic attitudes, considering that Chinese immigrants are incapable of writing poetry. The mention of Chinese immigrants also anticipates a revelation concerning Lorenzo Daza, Fermina's father.


During that event, Florentino meets a woman wearing only black who consoles him when his name is not called. She explains that she noticed his sadness because the flower he wore was shaking. Florentino suggests the two of them go somewhere together and invites himself to her house. There, they become regular lovers, even though her cat attacks them while they are in bed. When he realizes she feels love for him, he is close to 30. The woman's name is Sara Noriega. After a fiancé abandoned her, Sara concluded that she wanted to sleep with men anyway, regardless of whether or not she was married. She has the peculiarity of putting a pacifier in her mouth during love-making to enhance her pleasure.

Florentino's relationship with Sara Noriega highlights, once again, that women are often proactive in launching sexual relationships with Florentino, eager as they are to express their own sexual desire. The mention of a violent cat and Sara's pacifier adds an element of humor and extravagance to their love-making. It also shows that, as Florentino has claimed, morality has little to do with sex in such situations, since the purpose of the act is to give both of them pleasure—even if this involves seemingly strange habits.

Florentino makes their affair clandestine, even though Sara Noriega feels free and is not bothered to be seen with him. Throughout his life, Florentino has always made sure to maintain women's anonymity, revealing none of their secrets. On the only occasion he left written proof of his involvement, he risked his life. He believes that he is Fermina Daza's husband and takes part in sexual affairs without actually betraying her. To explain Florentino's strange behavior, Tránsito believes he is incapable of love, whereas others believe that Florentino does not like women. Florentino never tries to disprove such rumors.

It remains ambiguous whether Florentino hides his relationship with women to protect them or, on the contrary himself—for example, from husbands' wrath or from the possibility that Fermina might discover that he has been with other women. Florentino's love for Fermina hinges on madness, since the commitment he believes to have with her is purely one-sided and exists only in his mind, not in reality.

Florentino visits Sara Noriega on a regular basis. However, her knowledge and skill at love-making convinces Florentino that he is not, as she claimed, her first lover. This makes him feel jealous. Sara Noriega, however, insists that this is a talent some people are simply born with. On Sunday afternoons, Sara enjoys reciting poetry; Florentino wonders whether love is Sara's passionate poetic declamations or their love-making, and she concludes that everything they do naked is love.

Florentino's jealousy is irrational, since he, too, has had many lovers. He seems to expect from Sara Noriega an innocence he does not have himself. This episode also suggests that, although he might not realize it, Florentino might have developed sincere feelings for Sara Noriega, leading him to want a more exclusive relationship. Their use of the word "love" makes this situation all the more ambiguous.

They submit a jointly written poem to the Poetic Festival but lose. Sara Noriega is furious because she believes that Fermina Daza plotted against her. Florentino, on the other hand, is gloomy because Fermina Daza has changed deeply and now looks like a mother. This forces him to come to terms with the fact that everything is constantly changing, including Fermina. He becomes aware of the passing of time and realizes that all he does is wait. Sara Noriega, meanwhile, calls Fermina "a whore," saying that Fermina married Dr. Urbino without love, for his money. Sara also claims that feminine intuition told her that Fermina plotted against her to keep her from winning the poetry prize.

As in all aspects of his life, Florentino understands the passing of time only through his love for Fermina. Despite his shock at realizing that he is passively waiting for time to pass by in order to hope to be reunited with Fermina, he does nothing to change his behavior, instead accepting that that is an integral part of his life. Although Sara shows lack of insight in believing that Fermina was plotting against her, her comment about Fermina marrying Dr. Urbino for money alone might actually be true—even though Fermina might not describe it that way.

Then, Florentino realizes that Sara Noriega is also affected by the passing of time, as she spends more time crying and is becoming bitter. They begin to fight about the poetic prize, which Sara is very sensitive about, and Florentino realizes he wants to put an end to the relationship. However, Sara beats him to it, suddenly announcing that she is waiting for a lover to come by and see her. Humiliated, he leaves and never sees her again. For five years, he spent many pleasant hours with Sara Noriega, feeling happy with her in bed and temporarily forgetting Fermina. As a result, their separation only heightens his longing for Fermina and his desire for Dr. Urbino to die.

Once again, the fact that Sara Noriega was able to make Florentino forget Fermina for a while raises the question of whether what they felt for each other was love—capable of rivaling Florentino's for Fermina's—or mere sexual pleasure. Faced with the disappointment of their breakup, Florentino returns to his ideal love for Fermina. Although Fermina, as a living, breathing person, is changing, Florentino's love remains immutable precisely because it is detached from real life.

Florentino concludes that he is meant to make a widow happy. In his experience of spending time with widowed women, he has realized that, despite their grief over their respective husbands' deaths, they soon became aware that they were suddenly in control of their own lives. They spent years taking care of their husbands as they would a child and, whenever their husband left the house to work in society, they feared he might leave them forever. Love, these women accepted, belonged not to their world but to an alternative life. It is only once they became widows that they realized how free they could be to satisfy the needs of their own body. Florentino concludes that Fermina will probably become a widow exactly like these other women.

Florentino realizes that the best time to be with Fermina would be after she becomes a widow. This would give her the relief and freedom necessary to enjoy sexual pleasure and to give up on having rigid responsibilities in the household. In this sense, Florentino implicitly admits that Fermina would not find him attractive at any stage of life, but only in one in particular: widowhood. Florentino's description of the difference between married women and widows' ways of life highlights the societal constraints women suffer from.

In the meantime, Fermina gives Florentino absolutely no thought. Although she once felt pity for her suitor, she never regretted her decision to reject him. She later realizes that the reason behind this decision was that she never actually knew Florentino. To her, he was a mere shadow. Dr. Urbino's courtship, on the other hand, focused not on love but on what he could give her, such as security and order, which might in the end approximate love. At that point, Fermina had already accepted that she did not necessarily need love to live. Despite her fear that this might be her father's plot, she agreed to marry Dr. Urbino because she felt that she was aging and would soon reach 21 years, a date before which she had hoped to settle.

Although Fermina is more romantic than her husband, Dr. Urbino, they both understand that love derives at least in part from mutual knowledge and intimacy—which Florentino and Fermina were never able to cultivate. Fermina's decision to marry Dr. Urbino, in turn, did not depend on love but on Fermina's desire for security and on her fear about aging. This creates ambiguity about whether Fermina ever felt what she might consider to be true love, since she has concluded that her love for Florentino was an illusion and that she does not necessarily love her husband.

It is only once Fermina returns from her honeymoon that she doubts her decision. During the next six years, she feels like a prisoner in a strange house. Fermina's mother-in-law, Doña Blanca, a mean, bitter woman who lives with them, makes her feel inadequate by criticizing her behavior constantly. Lonely and desperate, Fermina resolves to devote her energies to her son, soon realizing that love for one's children develops through the closeness that derives from raising them. Meanwhile, Fermina is forced to eat **eggplant**, which Doña Blanca insists on preparing. Doña Blanca also berates Fermina for playing the harp instead of the piano, which she considers improper in a lady. Dr. Urbino tries to intervene but Fermina ultimately submits to her "deluxe prison sentence," surprising herself with her own abidance to the rules of high society.

Fermina's struggles to feel comfortable in her own house suggest that marriage has not brought the radical change and independence she might have hoped for. Rather, under Doña Blanca's influence, Fermina is once again forced to submit to a parent's authority. Her willingness to accept this state of affairs instead of rebelling highlights her desire to enter the upper class Dr. Urbino and his mother belong to—and, if necessary, to learn new ways of behaving that might be considered more acceptable. Dr. Urbino's inability to change the situation is a first indication that he might not be progressive or rebellious enough to bring Fermina true happiness at home by challenging social norms, such as the necessity to respect his mother.

Dr. Urbino argues to himself that his problems with his wife have nothing to do with the environment at home, but with the absurdity of marriage, which forces near strangers to live together perfectly while nurturing love, which, in their case, did not pre-exist their marriage. Dr. Urbino still feels enough love to ask Fermina to wash him, but in such moments, although they feel close, they fail to express their sexual desire to each other. They only make love occasionally, finding the same joy they experienced during their honeymoon, but failing to feel desire on an ordinary basis. During this period, Fermina also discovers that her father's business has always been illegal. As a result, Lorenzo Daza leaves the country, and Fermina is relieved when she learns he had died.

The mention of Lorenzo Daza's misdeeds after Doña Blanca's bitter remarks paints a picture of parenthood as a potentially oppressive force, capable of making one's children miserable. Dr. Urbino's self-deceit about the situation at home shows that he is unable to confront his own responsibility with regard to Fermina's unhappiness. He prefers to accuse the general institution of marriage rather than the particulars of his homelife. The lack of sexual passion between Fermina and her husband contrasts starkly with Florentino's sex-obsessed life and highlights the lack of strong passion and intimacy between them.

Paradoxically, it is during this difficult period that Fermina and Dr. Urbino seem the happiest. Their main joy derives from their fight against the upper-class milieu, in which they succeed in introducing some modern ideas. Fermina is not intimidated by the women of high society, whose hostility, she knows, conceals fear. Therefore, by trying not to intimidate others, she is able to integrate herself into this milieu and participate in the most important cultural events of the time. This gives people the impression that Fermina and Dr. Urbino's marriage is perfectly happy.

Once again, the association that people make between one's external appearance and one's private life proves entirely mistaken, since material and cultural benefits do bring the couple joy—as they promote the goals of modernity and progress that Dr. Urbino care so much about—but fail to ignite true happiness in them. Social climbing and popularity become empty achievements if they are not accompanied by a personal sense of joy and worth.

Once, Fermina wonders if she would have been happier with Florentino Ariza. That very night, she confides her worries to Dr. Urbino, forcing both of them to express how they really feel. They resolve to return to Europe for a trip, in order to regain their lost love. When Fermina sees Florentino Ariza on the pier as they are leaving, she feels no compassion for him, considering him a mere shadow, someone she never actually knew.

Fermina's decision to tell her husband about her dissatisfaction in her marriage is a signal of deep trust. It also indicates that she does not believe she would have been better off with Florentino, but that this thought merely reflected a desire to escape her current situation. Fermina's indifference toward Florentino reveals her straightforward, pragmatic nature, at complete odds with Florentino's obsessive romanticism.

Florentino Ariza has also suffered during this period. His mother, Tránsito, is losing her memory, sometimes forgetting Florentino he is, and he spends a lot of time taking care of her.

Tránsito's memory loss serves as an indication of the difficulties that old age can bring, forcing previously independent adults to depend on others for help.

During this time, Florentino helps a young woman, Olimpia Zuleta, find her parasol and later takes her back to her house, where she keeps many pigeons. When Florentino once sees her husband at the port, he hears the voice of the devil speaking to him. That same day, Florentino stops by Olimpia's house. Over the next few days, Olimpia and Florentino begin exchanging secret love **letters** through carrier pigeons. This is the first time Florentino left written proof of his involvement with a woman, although he made sure not to write his name anywhere.

The fact that Olimpia's husband inspires in Florentino the voice of the devil foreshadows the presence of danger and hatred. Florentino's exchange of letters with Olimpia mirrors his youthful experience with Fermina, although here it is deprived of the same passion and focused primarily on physical attraction.

Six months after their first meeting, Florentino and Olimpia finally meet to make love in a cabin by the docks. There, Florentino writes on Olimpia's body the sentence: "This pussy is mine," with an arrow pointing downward. That night, when Olimpia's husband sees this message on her body, which she has forgotten to erase, he slices her throat with a razor. The man is later captured, and Florentino fears that his secret relationship with Olimpia might come to light—not because he fears the man might find him one day, but because he doesn't want Fermina to discover that he's had relationships with other women. When Florentino's mother dies, he notices that Olimpia's grave is nearby. He plants a rosebush near her grave, which soon spreads throughout the graves.

The sentence that Florentino writes on Olimpia's body shows him in a playful, possessive, and vulgar light that he has not previously been shown in. Indeed, Florentino's affairs are rarely recounted from the perspective of his own pleasure and inner thoughts. Here, readers get a glimpse of Florentino's attitude during sex. Florentino's failure to feel morally responsible for Olimpia's death and his fear that Fermina might hear about it highlight the potentially maddening effect his obsession for Fermina has on his mind, since he is incapable of reflecting rationally on anything else.

Tránsito's death condemns Florentino to his ordinary routine and time passes by without him noticing, until he realizes it has been years since his relationship with Olimpia and the death of his mother. When he turns 40, he discovers that he is suffering from pains in his body because of old age. Soon, he realizes that 30 years had passed since his youthful adventure with Fermina Daza.

Once again, Florentino evaluates time in his life in relation to Fermina. The passing of time is all the more frightening to him because he is not actively filling his life with goals and achievements, but, rather, is simply waiting for the time to come when he can express his true desire: to be with Fermina.

Fermina, in the meantime, is convinced that she married the right man. She and Dr. Urbino move to a new house in La Manga and leave their previous difficulties behind. Fermina's son, Marco Aurelio, is studying at the Medical School, and her daughter, Ofelia, looks a lot like her. The couple return from two years in Paris after hearing of Doña Blanca's death, and Fermina is once again pregnant. Dr. Urbino sells the old palace they had lived in to buy a new house. Dr. Urbino accepts that their honeymoon could not be replicated because Fermina has given so much of her love away to her children since then. Fermina also realizes, after eating it without realizing, that she actually loves **eggplant**. This leads them to cook eggplant on a regular basis.

Fermina and Dr. Urbino's escape to Paris to solve their marital problems mirrors the end of the novel, in which Fermina will also escape the burden of real life with a trip. This suggests that love and happiness might best be cultivated away from the difficulties of social obligations. It also highlights the couple's upper-class status and wealth, which allows them to go on expensive trips for the sole purpose of pleasure. Fermina's discovery that she likes eggplant highlights the utter unpredictability of her feelings—whether in terms of food or of love.

At home, Fermina concludes that she is "a deluxe servant," serving her husband's needs in their home even though, in society, she is the one who is taken care of and revered. Her husband's love, she feels, is purely self-centered, because it depends on her anticipating his every desire. She does not blame Dr. Urbino for his strict demands regarding meals and household organization, blaming "life" instead. He is, as the narrator ironically mentions, an ideal husband who never cleans anything in the house. Dr. Urbino himself says that a man should have two wives: "one to love and one to sew on his buttons."

Even after the death of Doña Blanca, Fermina realizes that she is still not independent, since parental authority has now been replaced with her husband's authority. Her feeling that she is a servant highlights the oppressive nature of society, in which women's lives are constrained not only in society but in their private lives, thus giving them absolutely no feeling of freedom or independence. Dr. Urbino's complacency in this regard suggest that his embrace of modernity and progress does not apply to relations between men and women.

Fermina becomes frustrated by Dr. Urbino's lack of knowledge about the effort it takes to organize a house. Therefore, she asks him to take on her tasks for a day. Dr. Urbino is soon overwhelmed and proves helpless. He concludes that they both have their individual roles—she is a caretaker and he is a doctor—and both of them conclude that it is not possible for love to express itself in a different way than it did in their home.

Dr. Urbino's attempt to take on Fermina's tasks allows him to feel more respect for his wife's daily activities, but it does not encourage him to modify the status quo that is making his wife so unhappy. Instead, both of them turn this inequality of household roles into a positive good*—something not that they do not* want *to change but something that simply* cannot *be changed, because it is the only way of expressing love. This fragile belief, however fallacious, allows them to move on in their life without bitterness.*

Regarding Florentino, Fermina feels only pity and guilt. However, she soon becomes affected by nostalgia for the time she spent with her cousin Hildebranda, to which Florentino is connected. However, she remains devoted to Dr. Urbino, taking care of him during old age, in which he desperately needs her. It is in such moments of intense partnership that their loved reaches its fullest expression. They know that their love has conquered many obstacles, such as the daily difficulties of fights and frustrations linked to marriage, and was capable of facing many more.

Fermina's nostalgia signals the passing of time and the longing for the peaceful period of her youth. Meanwhile, Dr. Urbino and Fermina are moved by deep tenderness and partnership—one, nevertheless, which still relies on Fermina taking care of her husband's every need. Their intimacy derives on common experience and hard work more than on shared values or similar personalities, and this gives their relationship the weight of experience—although it remains ambiguous whether this truly is the love either of them would have hoped for.

CHAPTER 5

To celebrate the advent of the 19th century, Fermina and Dr. Urbino take part in various ceremonies, including a trip in a hot air balloon. During their journey through the countryside, they fly over beautiful landscapes but also see human corpses everywhere, affected by cholera. Dr. Urbino ironically concludes that this must be an extraordinary form of cholera, as he can see that people have been given a death blow behind the neck.

It remains ambiguous whether the bodies were indeed affected by cholera and murdered so that the disease would not spread, or if they represent the mass assassinations that were taking place during the civil war. Either way, this dreary, horror-filled landscape serves as a reminder that, for many people, life is not as peaceful as it is for city-dwellers like Fermina and Dr. Urbino.

To Florentino, who see the couple return from this trip, such public events—and the aging he's noticed in Fermina—are the true markers of time in his life. He sometimes talks to the couple when Dr. Urbino greets him, but Fermina remains impassive and indifferent. He wonders to himself if this might be Fermina's way to hide her secret love for him. This thought leads him to return to his obsessive habits. He observes the couple in their carriage, identifies their routines, and often passes in front of their house. Later, though, he hears that Fermina might be suffering from consumption and traveled to Panama to cure herself. He begins investigating about her life and discovers that she left in an extremely discreet manner, giving no information about her whereabouts.

Florentino's love for Fermina reaches heights of absurdity. Incapable or unwilling to face the reality of Fermina's indifference, Florentino prefers to believe in a made-up idea: that Fermina still loves him. This rejection of facts shows him as a deluded person, potentially maddened by love and obsession. His efforts to follow the couple highlight this fact—not only because they are invasive and disturbing, but also because they have no logical purpose beyond gathering information. Florentino's belief that Fermina has gone to Panama (when she has actually left to see her cousin, as the story is about to reveal) shows that his efforts to unveil the truth are futile—he will never actually understand Fermina's behavior.

In reality, Fermina has left her home to go visit Hildebranda Sánchez in her province. This is the result not of disease, but of a crisis in her marriage. Dr. Urbino understands her decision and interprets it as divine punishment for his sins. As soon as Fermina leaves, however, both of them immediately regret their weak characters and Fermina's decision to leave. Nevertheless, it takes her two years to return.

Fermina's decision to leave Dr. Urbino highlights how unhappy she has become in her marriage, but her immediate contrition shows how mutually dependent the two of them have become. Although they are not necessarily happy when they are together, they now need each other to live.

The crisis in Fermina and Dr. Urbino's marriage began when Fermina smelled a strange smell on her husband's clothes. She had the habit of smelling people's clothes and could immediately tell the difference. However, she could not understand how, with such a rigid schedule, her husband could have an affair, especially since she knew that Dr. Urbino only made love at night. During the next few weeks, though, she noticed the smell time and again. Although she did not have any other clue of her husband's infidelity, her suspicion led her to notice changes in his character. He seemed both passive and unusually sensitive. Once, she even thought she saw him looking at her full of hatred.

This marital crisis suggests that Fermina is not the only one who has been suffering during her marriage. Dr. Urbino's look of hatred for Fermina—which might or might not have actually taken place—suggests that he, too, resents not being able to express his freedom the utmost (in this case, his love for Miss Barbara Lynch). Fermina's belief that her husband only makes love at night shows that she knows little beyond her husband's habits, and that she does not realize he is capable of developing new ones outside of her reach.

Overwhelmed by her secret thoughts, Fermina began to wonder if she was going crazy. However, she also learned that Dr. Urbino had not taken Communion in weeks. He refused to answer her questions, and this convinced her that he was living in sin and was intent on pursuing this path, since he had not even sought help. One day, she suddenly called him during his reading. When he asked her what was wrong, she answered that he knew better than she did. This concluded the conversation. Instead of feeling desperate fear, Dr. Urbino experienced relief, as his relationship with Miss Barbara Lynch could finally come to light.

Dr. Urbino's failure to take Communion shows that religion does not necessarily play the morally inspiring role he believes it does, since he rejects it when he knows he is behaving immorally. Fermina's desire to confront her husband allows her to air out all her negative feelings and also gives Dr. Urbino the change to explain himself. Therefore, although this crisis is unpleasant for both of them, it has the potential to increase honesty and sincerity between them.

Dr. Urbino had seen Miss Barbara Lynch, a tall "mulatta," in the hospital. Fascinated by her, he observed her medical examination, learned her address, and visited her that afternoon. Miss Lynch recognized him and invited him in for coffee. Dr. Urbino then realized that a friend had once warned him that, during his marriage, he would have to face a violent passion that would uproot him. However, convinced of his moral righteousness, he had discarded this possibility, which had now come true.

The mention of Miss Lynch's race—with the derogatory term "mulatta"—is significant not only because this society is so rigidly organized along racial and class-based lines, but also because it also subverts Fermina's expectations, later revealing her own racial bias. Dr. Urbino's discovery of true passion suggests that all his theories about love are at least partially wrong, since they derive in large part from his lack of experience about what romantic passion truly entails.

Miss Lynch, who is 28 years old, was the only child of a black Protestant Reverend and spoke good Spanish. She had recently divorced another minister. When Dr. Urbino mentioned her earlier examination, she suggested he return the next day in the afternoon. Upon examining Dr. Urbino's documents to find clues about her husband's behavior, Fermina had found the inscription of the woman's name but had discarded the possibility that they were lovers because the woman was black and therefore not suited to her husband's taste.

Fermina's belief that she knows who Dr. Urbino would or would not find attractive proves wrong not only because she does not realize that her husband is capable of unpredictable behavior, which he could not even anticipate himself, and also because it disguises Fermina's prejudice.

The next day, Dr. Urbino examined Miss Lynch, taking part in a gynecological exam in which he proceeded to touch her in sexual ways. He had done that once in the past, although the woman's indignant reaction had brought him great shame. This time, though, Miss Lynch only made a remark about medical ethics, to which Dr. Juvenal replies that ethical codes assume doctors have no feelings or desires. When he confesses his attraction to her, Miss Barbara Lynch admits that she has known this all along, ever since she saw him at the hospital. She says that she is black but not stupid.

Dr. Urbino's use of a medical exam as a sexual opportunity is deeply morally disturbing. In addition, the fact that he was guilty of this in the past suggests that he has not learned from his mistake. In this particular case, he is lucky that Miss Lynch reciprocates his desire. However, in behaving so unethically Dr. Urbino shows that he lacks respect and compassion, paying attention exclusively to his own pleasure, not to the dignity and integrity of the woman before him, who is expecting a medical exam.

During their relationship, Miss Lynch wanted love and her reputation safeguarded. She allowed Dr. Urbino to repeat his auscultation but did not take off her clothes. Dr. Urbino could not resist his desire and visited her every day, but it was difficult to be discreet in the poor neighborhood where the carriage was so easy to spot in the street. Therefore, Dr. Urbino could never stay long, even though he wanted to be with this woman for the rest of his life. Although he was obsessed with her, he came in with barely enough time to make love to her while standing up. Such quick sexual acts left him satisfied and exhausted while Miss Lynch had barely enough time to feel the beginning of sexual pleasure.

Although it is initially ambiguous whether Dr. Urbino feels love or only sexual desire for Miss Lynch, his desire to spend his life with her suggests that his feelings are more than purely sexual. However, once again, he seems less interested in making Miss Lynch happy than in satisfying his own sexual needs. This introduces an element of inequality in their relationship. Overall, it remains unclear whether Miss Lynch shares Dr. Urbino's feelings, or whether she is simply humoring him by letting him come to her house.

Finally, Dr. Urbino became too morally disturbed by his own behavior and, concluding that all he needed was someone who understood him, confessed everything to Fermina on the afternoon she mentioned his infidelity. He decided never to see Miss Lynch again, although he sent her a tiara. He suffered in silence and told his confessor what he had done after Communion.

Dr. Urbino's capacity to admit his wrongs underlines his moral integrity. Even though he has behaved wrongly, he tries to stand by his greatest commitment, his marriage to Fermina, even if this causes him deep suffering. This also suggests that he trusts in the safety of his love with his wife more than the passion of an affair.

After Dr. Urbino told Fermina everything about his affair, she was most bothered by the fact that he had told her confessor before her, since she considered religious officials unworthy of trust. This made her feel even more humiliated than the fact that Dr. Urbino's lover was black—although he corrected her, saying that she was a "mulatta." Fermina concluded that she now understood everything, since the mysterious smell was that of a black woman.

The contrast in Dr. Urbino and Fermina's attitude toward the Church derives not from disagreement over what constitutes moral behavior, but from varying beliefs in the importance of tradition and the uprightness of the clergy. Once again, Fermina's association of her husband's black lover with the feeling of humiliation highlights her racist prejudice.

Five days later, Fermina left for Hildebranda's province. Although Fermina's children knew nothing about what had happened, they were not surprised and had actually wanted her to take such a trip for a long time. Soon, Fermina also realized that she had long wanted to go on such a journey, to revisit the places she associated with nostalgia. On her way, though, she realized that the idyllic villages she remembered were full of corpses because of cholera—this time, without a final blow in the neck. As a result, she decided to avoid such villages, in order to keep her memories clear of disgust.

Fermina's children's lack of surprise suggests that Fermina's unhappiness must have been easy to recognize and that she had probably needed a break from the oppression of home for a long time. Fermina's disappointment at revisiting familiar places shows that it is impossible to relive the past, since people and places constantly change and, in addition, memory often idealizes scenes from the past.

When Fermina arrives at Hildebranda's, she is shocked to see how fat and aged her cousin has become, although she still has the same personality as before. She is still in love with the same man, although she has married someone else. Dr. Urbino fetches his wife after two years, when the local bishop tells him that the only reason his wife has not returned is because of wounded pride. Fermina, who has been busy preparing **eggplant** for lunch, is overjoyed to see him.

Hildebranda's desperate love for a married man mirrors Florentino's desperate love for Fermina. In both cases, the love remains in their mind even if it cannot express itself in reality. Fermina's joy at seeing her husband confirms that she does not actually want to separate from him, since they share too close a relationship for either of them to feel perfectly happy without the presence of the other.

After Fermina's return, she and Dr. Urbino go to see a movie, which she says out loud is boring. Florentino, who is also there with Leona Cassiani, recognizes her voice. After the event, he sees Fermina leave with her husband, using his arm to support her. When she almost trips on the steps, Florentino feels terrified. He realizes that he is not afraid of death but of aging in the same way and of having to rely on a woman for support.

In the same way that Fermina's shock at seeing an aged Hildebranda showed that it is easier to recognize the passing of time in others than in oneself, Florentino is amazed to realize that Fermina—whom he has idealized so much—is also growing old. His fear of depending on someone else highlights his habit of living independently, without either the comfort or the difficulty of having a loved person by his side.

After this, Florentino accompanies Leona home. In her apartment, in which he has spent many Sundays, he tries to caress her but she stops him, telling him that she has long realized he is not the man for her. She reveals that she was raped by a mysterious man when she was young and had since tried to find him because of the passion he had aroused in her.

Once again, as happened with Florentino's first sexual experience, rape in the novel is described not as violence or violation but as a pleasurable experience, capable of generating passion. Surprisingly, Leona's confession shows her to be potentially as deluded as Florentino—who can be seen, in some ways, as her male alter ego.

Florentino is now 56 and has entered old age. He struggled to keep from balding but has ultimately had to accept the loss of his hair. He also needed an operation on his teeth and, following his uncle's advice, had all of his teeth removed, so that he could wear false teeth.

Florentino's struggles with old age mirror Dr. Urbino's difficulties at the beginning of the novel. Both of them use palliatives to treat certain symptoms, but are ultimately helpless before the advance of old age.

Uncle Leo XII retires after many years at the head of the River Company of the Caribbean. Florentino decides to spend his Sundays with him, since he no longer sees him at work. His uncle tells him that, despite all the changes in politics and the economy he has witnessed during his long career, including many civil wars, the country is still stuck in colonial times. He also wants his nephew to marry, and told him that he would have married Leona if he were 50 years younger. Months later, Florentino is chosen as President of the River Company of the Caribbean. Florentino knew that the only reason he had achieved such a position was thanks to his desire to be worthy of Fermina Daza.

Uncle Leo XII's harsh evaluation of the country's state suggests that the civil wars the country has known have brought only violence and destruction—no real progress or development. This is visible, for example, in the rigid division between aristocrats and the rest of the population. The fact that Florentino attributes his professional success to his love for Fermina shows that his obsession for Fermina, however unrequited, has given him something to live for, capable of making him work hard and achieve social mobility.

Florentino then recalls the various lovers he has had over the years. He notes that he always followed their lives, even from afar, maintaining at least a distant link with them. He remembers Rosalba and Widow Nazaret, the only one for whom he proved responsible as he paid for her funeral expenses. He remembers one woman who had threatened to cut off his penis so he would only belong to her, and another who taught him that it was possible to be in love with various people at the same time, claiming that her heart "had more rooms than a whorehouse."

Florentino's long-term interest in all of his former lovers does not necessarily imply that he felt love for them, but it certainly indicates that he feels a minimum of tenderness and interest in their lives. The variety of experiences he has had suggests that each individual has a different way of conceiving of sexual relationships—as a subversive act capable of providing freedom, as a form of ownership, as love, and so on—and that there is not just one way to experience pleasure through romance and sex.

Another lover, Andrea Varón, had both women and men as lovers. She was the only one for whom Florentino ever paid to have sex, though they negotiated a symbolic fee of one peso and Andrea managed her sexual life as a business exclusively for her own pleasure. Sara Noriega was the only one who left Florentino with some bitterness. She ended up in a psychiatric institution, where she was forced to be isolated because she loudly recited lewd poetic verses that could drive other inmates insane.

The topic of prostitution appears at various times in the novel, either literally or metaphorically (through women's self-definition as "whores") but is rarely depicted in a negative light. Like other unconventional practices, it is shown as a potentially liberating experience for women—although one potentially fraught with danger and violence, as Florentino discovered in the hotel as a young man.

Around the time when Dr. Urbino dies, Florentino is having an affair with a 14-year-old girl, América Vicuña, to whom Florentino, her relative in the city, was supposed to serve as a guardian while she studied in secondary school. Although Florentino knows that she is still a child, he recognizes nascent womanhood in her and guides her toward sexual relations with him. América feels that she has reached heaven and becomes so happy that she performs exceptionally well at school. Florentino, in turn, enjoys this relationship because it is defined by innocence instead of the calculation he is used to. He begins to love her and takes special precautions to prevent pregnancy. Although people warned her to stay away from Florentino because old age might be contagious, she ignores their advice.

Florentino's relationship with América is the one where Florentino's conception of sex as a realm free of morality is challenged most severely. Florentino's failure to realize that, as an old, experienced man, he might be taking advantage of América Vicuña's innocence for his own pleasure shows him as an unthinking, potentially callous being. The fact that América feels pleasure while having sex with Florentino is unable to erase the dangerous underlying power dynamics between them, which renders their relationship deeply unequal. Indeed, while Florentino sees this relationship in a light way, as distraction, América experiences through it her first, intense feelings of love and attraction.

On Pentecost Sunday, after making love, they hear church bells ring continuously. Florentino knows that Jeremiah de Saint-Amour had died but concludes that the bells must be ringing for someone more important, such as a governor. América does not care about death and is enjoying lying next to Florentino in bed, in a cabin next to the dock. Florentino loves her but feels anxious about her, because he's foreseen that she will die by the end of her studies. Remembering that he has to attend de Saint-Amour's funeral, he dresses and helps her with her braid.

América's lack of interest in death contrasts starkly with Florentino's understanding that she will die soon. This prescient thought suggests that Florentino might not be as ignorant about América's passionate attitude as he appears to be. In this sense, it is possible that Florentino is knowingly taking advantage of América's innocence to have sex with her, while knowing that she will be much more affected by it than him.

When they enter the carriage, the driver tells Florentino that the bells are ringing for a famous doctor. Florentino immediately understands that Dr. Urbino has died, even if the tale of his death seems ridiculous. Florentino suddenly feels terrified at the idea that he could have been the one to die. In an agitated state, he drops América off at school and hurries to Dr. Urbino's house.

Florentino's identification with Dr. Urbino's fate derives from their similar age as well as their shared passion for Fermina Daza. Dr. Urbino's death is a primordial moment in the narrative, since it allows Florentino to confront his fantasy about seducing Fermina again with reality.

Florentino has fantasized about, and waited for this moment his entire life. Full of determination, he declares his everlasting love to Fermina Daza. Although he knows his confession could be considered too brutal, he fears losing such a precious opportunity and is convinced that this is his destiny. For the next few weeks, he barely sleeps and suffers from pains and discomfort related to old age. When he finally gives up, he sees that a **letter** is waiting for him by the door—the letter he has hoped to receive for over 50 years.

Florentino's excitement at Dr. Urbino's death is shocking because it seems so disrespectful. It emphasizes both Florentino's determination and selfishness, as he proves more committed to expressing his feelings than to gauging Fermina's sadness and grief. It also highlights his desperation, since he knows that, in the same way that Dr. Urbino has died, he, too, could die at any point.

CHAPTER 6

Although Florentino interprets Fermina Daza's **letter** as a proof of love, she wrote it out of pure anger. Her vicious words allow her to express her frustration at this completely new situation, in which she is suddenly husband-less and alone. Like people with amputated limbs, she feels her husband's presence as though he were an invisible extension of herself. Overwhelmed by grief, Fermina also wants to remain in control of her life. She burns any piece of clothing or object that reminds her of Dr. Urbino, convinced that he would have approved of such an act. Dr. Urbino, in fact, wanted to be cremated, but was unable to because of religious practice.

Once again, Florentino chooses to interpret Fermina's actions in a way that makes him feel valued and that confirms his fantasies about love. Fermina's genuine grief, based on a shared life with her husband, contrasts starkly with Florentino's mental love—equally enduring yet based on nothing but his tenacity and imagination. The intensity of Fermina's feelings prove that she and her husband developed a very strong partnership, however many difficulties they may have faced.

Despite this gesture, Fermina still feels as much grief as before and misses her husband's presence. Nevertheless, she resolves to move her life forward instead of wallowing in her sadness. Her only obstacle is Florentino, for whom she now feels rage and hatred. She is offended by his actions but also realizes that her efforts to forget him have only made her remember him more. Whenever Hildebranda comes to visit, she always mentions Florentino, pitying him because his situation reminds Hildebranda of hers. Fermina, however, is unable to feel pity, having completely eliminated him from her life.

For the first time in her life, Fermina is forced to face her own feelings, without the authority of a father, mother-in-law, or husband. She has the opportunity to take control of her life and actions beyond social obligations. Her feelings for Florentino remain ambiguous. The fact that she thinks about him a lot, even if her thoughts contain hatred and anger, eliminates her previous indifference toward him—suggesting that her feelings are capable of changing once more.

When Fermina saw Florentino with Leona Cassiani in the movie theater, she had been surprised to observe his self-assurance. She had interpreted his presence at her husband's funeral as a way to heal old wounds, and was therefore deeply shocked when he declared his enduring love for her. She became so furious about the way her thoughts about this event were replacing her thoughts about her husband that she wrote a scathing **letter** to him.

Fermina's desire to forget about her youthful relationship with Florentino remains constant throughout the novel, even as her indifference toward Florentino slowly disappears. This highlights a deep personality difference between Fermina and Florentino. Although Fermina does feel nostalgic about certain aspects of her youth, she never regrets leaving Florentino and does not necessarily feel attached to this episode of her life.

Florentino, too, is suffering. He wishes for the presence of Tránsito, who always comforted him, or Leona Cassiani, but he knows that he would have to confess everything to her. Finally, he goes to the house of one of his former lovers, Prudencia Pitre, a widow, and appears at her door in the middle of the night. Prudencia had once hoped to marry Florentino, but he had always preferred to remain single for Fermina. She welcomes him, and the two of them chat about the past for hours. Finally, when Florentino asks her what an old widow would think if she were offered marriage, Prudencia immediately understands that he is talking about Fermina Daza. However, he does not admit the truth and leaves the house sad.

Florentino's desire to find someone he might be able to confess his feelings to suggests that he depends on women not only for sex but also for emotional relief. However, his lack of desire to tell Leona the truth highlights his fear of being seen as vulnerable—and, perhaps, as a madman. Prudencia's willingness to welcome Florentino into her home shows that some of Florentino's casual relationships are not deprived of care, tenderness, or commitment—even if this commitment never translated into marriage.

On Saturday, the day Florentino usually spends with América, he tells her that they will not make love and that he is going to marry someone else. Initially worried, América laughs the matter off, arguing that old men do not marry. Florentino then becomes conscious of the difference in their ages and resolves to spend less time with her.

América's denial of the possibility that Florentino might marry is rational in the sense that it expresses a common societal belief (namely, that older people do not have exciting love affairs) but also expresses her passion for him, since it reveals that she does not want *him to marry.*

Florentino decides to apologize to Fermina. After receiving her **letter**, he was not hurt by her insults but knew that he must respond to her. He decides to use the typewriter to compose his letter. Instead of lyricism, he focuses on serene argumentation, aiming to clear the past of accumulated feelings and to begin their new relationship with a clean slate. In his letter, he hopes to disguise his love by rendering the tone meditative and by discussing important arguments about life and relationships. He makes detailed plans about how he will proceed to seduce her, knowing that his efforts will have to convince her that love is an end in itself and that she can discard the norms that her social class abides by.

Although Florentino's scheming has occasionally been presented in a neutral light, as a traditional form of courtship, here it acquires a more disturbing tone, since it emphasizes the artificiality of romantic courtship. Florentino simply wants to pretend *that he is leaving the past behind because he knows that this idea appeals to Fermina. This highlights the potential lack of sincerity in letter-writing, which allows writers to present the aspect of themselves that will most appeal to their addressee—in this case, to disguise the fact that Florentino has been obsessed with the past all his life and is incapable of leaving it behind.*

Florentino begins writing regular **letters** to Fermina, satisfied that she has not sent any back. After one month, he numbers them to emphasize their continuity. In the meantime, he visits old lovers such as Prudencia Pitre and Andrea Varón to demonstrate his affection for them. His relationship with América, though, has grown complicated. He does not realize that América is now 17 and harbors love for him. She seeks him out so that they could make love but, when this fails, she becomes obsessed with finding the woman who had stolen her lover from her. Blind to América's feelings, Florentino assumes that she has given up on their relationship.

Despite Florentino's regular letter-writing, Florentino and Fermina's relationship does not depend on mutual communication—but, rather, on Florentino's one-sided efforts to attract Fermina's attention. This highlights Florentino's determination as well as Fermina's inability or unwillingness to communicate her increasingly friendly feelings toward him. It remains ambiguous whether Florentino is truly ignorant of América's feelings or whether he simply prefers to ignore his part of responsibility in the young girl's unhappiness.

On the anniversary of Dr. Urbino's death, Florentino goes to the memorial Mass without being invited. When Fermina sees him, however, she walks up to him and thanks him for coming. She has found Florentino's **letters** fascinating and has been amazed at his change in tone. In his letters, he's communicated ideas about love, old age, and death that align with her own, and she's grown convinced that Florentino is indeed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. She concludes that these letters she received from a wise old man prove that Florentino is trying to erase the past and would be as bold and offensive as he had been in the past.

Fermina's friendly gesture toward Florentino reveals, for once, that Florentino was correct in assuming that she was becoming more open to him. Mention of the Holy Spirit is frequently made with relation to Florentino's attitude. It highlights the highly abnormal intensity of his passion, capable of making people believe that he is moved by supernatural forces—and, perhaps, that he is partially mad. Fermina's admiration of Florentino derives in part from lack of full understanding, since she does not yet realize that he is not as willing to erase the past as he shows.

Feeling that Dr. Urbino's presence is now a soft, supportive one, instead of one marked by patriarchal authority, Fermina feels more secure. She recalls her husband's words after she had once desperately expressed her unhappiness to him. He said that stability, not happiness, was the hallmark of a good marriage. She now understood that this must be true, because stability had served as the foundation for their happiness.

The concepts of "happiness" and "love" in the context of Dr. Urbino and Fermina's marriage are open to interpretation. Paradoxically, Fermina has complained about the lack of love or happiness in her marriage but now asserts happiness as a fact. This suggests that she can define happiness in retrospect, even if she was not necessarily aware of the peace and joy that her marriage brought her on a daily basis.

Fermina becomes known as the Widow Urbino, and her children visit her occasionally. She becomes increasingly curious about Florentino and asks her friend Lucrecia del Real del Obispo what she knows about him. Lucrecia mentions that Florentino is known as a "wandering succubus." However, when Fermina defends him, Lucrecia admits that such rumors are often vain, and that people say similar things about her.

As Florentino had predicted, Fermina is more interested in Florentino now that she is a widow. Lucrecia and Fermina's conversation about what rumors say about people suggests, once again, that public appearances do not reflect personal worth. In Florentino's case, however, accusations of sexual obsession or perversion are not necessarily far from the truth.

Two weeks later, Florentino comes to visit Fermina without announcing himself. Fermina panics but ultimately invites him in, although Florentino has to leave hurriedly because he feels that, because of his emotions, he needs to relieve himself of diarrhea. They agree to see each other the day after tomorrow, and Florentino hurries to his carriage, where he relieves himself, causing the driver to tell him that what he has looks like cholera.

Florentino's diarrhea recalls the physical effects that love had on him in his youth, which were similar to the symptoms of cholera. It suggests that, despite aging, Florentino is still as vulnerable as before when it comes to the expression of love. It also associates love with suffering, suggesting that it does not only involve joy and pleasure.

Two days later, Florentino has tea at Fermina's house. They talk about various topics, and though Florentino tries to mention their past love affair, Fermina avoids the subject. They begin seeing each other regularly for tea. Florentino keeps trying to mention the past, but this annoys Fermina, now 72, who knows that everything has changed since they were young. Frustrated by his behavior, she wonders if they should continue seeing each other, since these visits make no sense, but Florentino simply replies that there has never been any inherent sense to them.

Florentino's visits to Fermina underscore the personality differences between the two of them. Although Florentino has remained stuck in the past, Fermina has moved on and feels no attachment to her past love. Fermina also proves more pragmatic than Florentino, who tries to convince her that love and friendship can be an end in itself, even if it involves moments of discomfort. His insistence derives from his belief that he will one day be able to seduce her and make her forget trivial annoyances.

On one occasion, during his regular Tuesday visits, Florentino shows Fermina the photograph of her and Hildebranda. He had seen it for sale in the market and bought it. Unable to understand how that was possible, Fermina concludes that this must have been a miracle of love. Soon, Fermina's son Dr. Urbino Daza and his wife join Florentino's visits, and they all play games together.

For once, Florentino obtaining Fermina's photograph is—as far as readers know—purely casual and not the result of Florentino's obsessive scheming.

Dr. Urbino Daza invites Florentino to have lunch with him. During this lunch, he details his theory that old people should be kept separate from society as soon as they cannot take care of themselves. This would serve a humanitarian purpose, so that people would not be afraid of old age and suffering. Dr. Urbino Daza also thanks Florentino for keeping his mother company in her old age. Florentino then mentioned that, in Dr. Urbino Daza's ideal society, both Florentino and Fermina would be ostracized and dead by now. Only then does Dr. Urbino realize the inappropriateness of what he's just said. He tries to justify himself with convoluted explanations. Despite this, Florentino is convinced that in their next meeting, Dr. Urbino Daza will ask him to marry Fermina.

Dr. Urbino Daza's theories about keeping some people away from society reflect dangerous 20th century beliefs about the impurity of certain people, as expressed by fascists and Nazis. This contrasts with Dr. Juvenal Urbino's positive theories of social change, meant to improve everyone's health, regardless of age, status, or social condition. This suggests that intelligence and knowledge do not always go hand in hand with social progress, but can actually prove destructive if used for the wrong purpose.

That afternoon, Florentino falls on the stairs leading to his office, and the doctor tells him to stay in bed for two months. He therefore resumes exchanging **letters** with Fermina. Annoyed by Florentino's frequent mentions of the past, Fermina becomes convinced that Florentino cannot accept the process of aging, which makes him obsessed about the past. Therefore, she begins reassuring him about death, in the same way he shared his thoughts with her, and he begins reflecting about death directly, as he has never done before.

Florentino and Fermina exchange roles. The meditations on life, aging, and death Florentino had initially started as a means to an end (namely, to seduce Fermina) are now directed toward him and, as happened to Fermina, capable of making him feel better. Through this exchange, Fermina teaches Florentino to face the difficulties of the present instead of escaping them by resorting to romanticism and idealization.

In the meantime, Leona Cassiani and América take care of Florentino, who is stuck in bed. Florentino soon learns of América's troubles at school but still does not understand the depth of her love for him. He does not tell her parents anything, hoping that time would solve these problems—and, specifically, that death might. Florentino realizes that he is growing old. He recalls once assaulting a maid in this house but, now, he completely lacks sexual desire.

Florentino's evasion of his moral responsibilities becomes clear in this episode, since he knows that América's situation is growing dangerous but fails to do anything about it. It is ambiguous whether Florentino hopes to die before América or whether he anticipates that she will. The mention of the maid's rape once again highlights the violence and lack of consideration that Florentino can display toward some objects of his sexual desire.

After a couple of weeks, Fermina realizes that she misses Florentino's visits. She becomes convinced that her youthful excitement for Florentino had not been love, and feels that Florentino's insistence on this lessens his value as a person and a thinker. During this period, Fermina is devastated by news about an old couple that was murdered during their regular trip to their honeymoon spot.

Fermina's appreciation of Florentino derives not from nostalgia but from her recognition of his intellectual qualities, which he had not displayed before. The news about the married couple's murder occurs various times in the story. It emphasizes the unpredictability of death as well as the violence that affects so many people in the country.

Fermina also receives a **letter** from Florentino containing a news clipping that declared that Dr. Juvenal Urbino and Lucrecia del Real had conducted an adulterous affair. Although this was not true, since the two of them had only been friends, Fermina interprets her friend's lack of visits from then on as an admission of guilt. Simultaneously, a newspaper publishes information about Lorenzo Daza's business, proving that he had falsified money and participated in arms trafficking during the civil war as well as the smuggling of Chinese migrants. Ironically, his mule trading business, which had aroused suspicion, was actually legitimate.

The reason why Lucrecia del Real, despite her innocence, stops visiting Fermina remains unexplained. This, along with Lorenzo's business activities, suggests that one's views about people do not remain unchanging after death—rather, the relationship evolves as those still alive attempt to make sense of new thoughts and discoveries. Lorenzo Daza's utterly self-interested, immoral behavior adds another unsavory layer to his character, in addition to his tyrannical attitude toward Fermina.

Florentino then goes to visit Fermina, leaving his bed for the first time in two months. Fermina is seething with rage because of the stories about her husband and her father. She is grateful to Florentino, who penned an anonymous letter berating newspapers for not respecting people's honor. She also becomes panicked about how intimate their relationship has grown, full of trivial lovers' quarrels until late at night.

Despite displaying immoral behavior in his own private life, Florentino seems committed to certain moral principles, such as defending people's reputation—which he paradoxically never felt particularly bothered about when negative rumors affected his own person. This action can be interpreted as yet another effort to impress Fermina and win her over.

Fermina's daughter Ofelia finds the relationship between Fermina and Florentino utterly revolting. When she tells her mother this, Fermina kicks her out of the house. She is angry that her relationship with Florentino had been impeded once because they were too young, and now because they are too old. She adds that her status as a widow now prevents anyone from giving her orders.

Fermina's comment that her relationship with Florentino was once ended because of youth is ambiguous, since she was the one to put an end to it and never regretted her action. Perhaps, now that she actually has feelings for Florentino, she is becoming more nostalgic about the past. She might also simply be saying this to vent her anger.

Although Florentino has offered Fermina to go on a boat cruise with him multiple times, it is only after her bitter exchange with her daughter that she accepts the idea. She decides to journey on the *New Fidelity*, a ship where Florentino had once ordered a Presidential Suite to be built in the hope that it would one day serve as his wedding suite with Fermina. The morning of the trip, she goes to the cemetery, where she expresses all her frustration to her husband, thus settling things between them.

The ship's name is particularly evocative in the context of Fermina and Florentino's new relationship. Florentino's anticipation that they might one day be together is correct, even if his hope in marriage never concretizes. This suggests that reality does not always conform to Florentino's scheming, but is capable of bringing unanticipated events.

Dr. Urbino Daza and his wife accompany Fermina and Florentino to the ship. However, when Florentino announces that he is staying with her, Dr. Urbino Daza is shocked because he considers two old people's love indecent. His wife harshly rebukes him.

Florentino and Fermina's challenge of traditional beliefs about old age proves that personal happiness does not derive from obeying social norms, but from following one's own desires.

That night, Florentino and Fermina sit outside her cabin, and Florentino notices that Fermina is crying. When he asks her if she wants to be alone, she curtly replies that she would have told him so if that were the case. He takes her hand in the darkness and both are surprised by how bony their hands are. This gesture, however, encourages Fermina to talk about her dead husband, and Florentino knows that she is thinking about what to do with the love left over from her marriage.

This exchange underlines Fermina's forceful, authoritative attitude, intent on giving people orders instead of receiving orders or suggestions from them. Fermina's discussion of her relationship with her husband mirrors the many conversations that Florentino has had with widows, for whom grief about their husband's death does not prevent them from falling in love again or having new sexual relationships.

Enjoying holding Florentino's hand in hers, Fermina reflects on her marriage. Although she does not regret marrying Dr. Urbino, she said that despite such a long life shared together, full of arguments and fights, she does not know if what they shared was truly love. Afterwards, she tells Florentino to leave. When he tries to kiss her, she prevents him from doing so, saying that she smells like an old lady.

Fermina's brusque manners reflect not annoyance at Florentino but her characteristic desire to remain in control of the situation and to tell Florentino how to act. Her negative judgment about her smell is realistic, since Florentino later says they both smell like old people, but also suggests that she feels somewhat embarrassed or humiliated to be so old.

The next day, Fermina sees the late Dr. Urbino saying farewell to her and recalls him once declaring that, once a woman has decided to sleep with a man, nothing could stop her. She realizes that Florentino is now within reach in a way he had never been in their youth. That morning, she sees Florentino dressed in comfortable white clothing and realizes that he had dressed for her. Both of them blush when they see each other, and Captain Samaritano finds this sight sweet and tender.

Unlike others, Captain Samaritano is able to see Fermina and Florentino's relationship for what it is, his judgment not clouded by preconceptions about how old people are supposed to behave. Fermina's appreciation of Florentino shows that what their youthful adventure lacked was true knowledge of each other, which Florentino's courtship and their immediate plans had not given space for.

Captain Samaritano then takes them on a visit along the ship, explaining how it works. He also explains that excessive deforestation has destroyed the river and trees alongside it. Hunting for skin, too, has killed all the alligators. Manatees have become extinct because they were being hunted for sport. A lover of manatees, Captain Samaritano once left an American hunter on the shore of the river after the tourist tried to kill a manatee. Although the Captain was sent to prison for six months, he never regretted his act. Fermina concludes that the Captain is an honorable, empathetic man. During the trip, they also pass by what looks like a woman in white waving to them. The Captain explains that she was the ghost of a drowned woman. Although Fermina knows the woman does not exist, she can still see her face distinctly.

The destruction of the river shows that, beyond diseases like cholera and national catastrophes such as civil war, human greed and indifference to the natural world can have disastrous consequences. In addition to this tale of human-based destruction, the sight of the ghost introduces an element of supernatural mystery in the narrative. Although magic appears little in Love in the Time of Cholera, *unexplained supernatural events such as this one are common in works of magical realism for which Gabriel García Márquez is known. They add surprise and unpredictability to the story, blurring the boundaries between imagination and reality.*

Fermina, who has been feeling pain in her ear, does not eat that day and simply watches the landscape. She wonders what method Florentino will use to spend time with her. After hours of waiting, after evening had settled, she walks out of her cabin and runs into Florentino, who has been sitting on a bench for hours, wondering how he would go to Fermina. They go to sit at the bar, but Fermina suddenly remembers the story about the old murdered couple and is horrified for a while.

For once, it is clear that Fermina is waiting for Florentino to act. He no longer has to make decisions based exclusively on how he feels but can take her own desires into account. The story about the murdered married couple haunts Fermina for many weeks. It is possible she identifies with them and is terrified of the prospect of death, which, as her husband's death confirmed, is largely unpredictable.

When they go to the observation deck, Fermina takes Florentino's hand and exclaims that women are strange, which makes her laugh. However, she realizes that the pain in her ear is bothering her excessively, but she does not want to make him feel worried by sharing this. She is comfortable, having the feeling that she has known Florentino all her life. When Florentino wants to kiss her goodnight, she offers him her cheek but then gives him her lips when he insists. She giggles and makes a comment about ships. This causes Florentino to shudder, as he recognizes the smell of old age in her breath, a smell of decay and fermentation that he had already noticed in Widow Nazaret. However, Florentino is overwhelmed by a happiness he has not experienced since his youthful affair with Fermina.

Florentino's comment about the strangeness of women relates to the unpredictability of Fermina's feelings and behavior. Indeed, although Fermina once rejected Florentino and behaved indifferently toward him, she now seeks out his presence, revealing that her feelings have changed. Florentino's shock at her old-age smell, which he knows all old people share, aims to show their relationship in a realistic way, without hiding its potentially unpleasant side effects. In this sense, the novel shows that love and attraction do not depend on physical perfection but on a sincere appreciation of the other person.

That morning, Florentino receives an urgent telegram from Leona Cassiani informing him that América Vicuña is dead. A few hours later, he learns that América committed suicide after failing her exams. Florentino knows that there are other explanations that contributed to her suicide, but he is reassured to hear that there is no evidence pointing toward him. To prevent himself from feeling anguish, he erases the memory from his mind.

The news of América's death is a brutal reminder of Florentino's past deeds. Although he behaves honorably and respectfully with Fermina, he has not always done so with all of his lovers. In the case of América, he has preferred to avoid thinking about his moral obligations and this has now led to the young girl's anguish and death.

A few days later, the passengers see corpses floating on the river, even though both cholera and the wars have ended. Captain Samaritano tells them that they were people who drowned by accident. The ship is then forced to make a stop for fuel, forcing everyone to wait a week before moving again. During this period, Florentino is appalled by the state of the river and concludes that the only solution would be to replace it with a new one. All trace of animal life is gone.

The suspicious nature of these corpses floating on the river suggests either that the captain is lying or that violence will afflict this country even once catastrophes such as cholera and civil wars have disappeared. As they all realize by noticing the destruction on the river, simple human greed and ecological indifference is capable of leading to horrific consequences.

During this time, Fermina realizes that she has become deaf in her left ear. Florentino concludes that love becomes stronger during disasters, and the two of them sit happily together while holding hands. After three nights, Florentino begins to caress her and she insists that they go to the room and make love properly. She asks him not to look while she undresses, saying that he would not appreciate the sight. Her body is covered in wrinkled skin. After she turns off the light, he undresses as well.

Fermina's sudden deafness, after days of ear pain, highlights that she is at an age in which the body can experience many difficulties, causing one to readjust to a changing physical form. Fermina's desire for Florentino not to see her undress mirrors her first sexual experience with Dr. Urbino, when she was too shy to expose herself in the light. This suggests that sexual relations can be marked by shyness and embarrassment at all stages of life and experience.

The two of them lie on their back and speak of their lives. Florentino tells Fermina that he stayed virgin for her. Even though she does not believe him, knowing that his literary style makes him make such pronouncements to achieve a particular effect, but she appreciates its tone. When Fermina begins to touch him, noting that his skin is as soft as a baby's, Florentino says that his penis was dead. He knows that this happens sometimes, but he feels angry with himself. She, in turn, is afraid he is furious and would not return.

Florentino's bold pronouncements are a result of his romantic attitude more than sincere honesty. That Fermina understands this (as was not the case with a young girl like América Vicuña, for example) keeps it from being immoral and deceitful, since Fermina recognizes his sweeping pronouncements as Florentino's particular way of expressing the intensity of his passion.

Later that day, Florentino returns anyway, ready to make love. Fermina feels compassion for his awkward beginner's movements, noting that compassion in these cases is not so different from love. Although this is the first time she has had sexual relations in 20 years, she feels that the experience of it is sad and might have ruined everything. However, they stay together all the time during the next days, and Captain Samaritano serves them aphrodisiac meals as a joke. For the time being, though, they enjoy simply being together, and only make love later, when the occasion arises spontaneously.

Fermina's belief that Florentino is indeed a virgin is highly ironic, since Florentino has been with hundreds of women. This suggests, perhaps, that he has never made love to someone he actually loved, and that this makes him awkward, or that the two of them need to make love to each other, since each relationship is different. This episode suggests that they both need to follow a spontaneous rhythm instead of trying to conform to traditional schemes of love and love-making.

A few days later, they arrive at La Dorada, their destination. However, when the ship prepares to return, Fermina panics because she does not want people she knows to walk on board and see her on a trip with a man who is not her husband. Florentino understands and convinces the Captain to sail with a flag indicating cholera on board, which allows them to make no stops on the way back. Florentino knows that people use this technique to avoid taxes and concludes that it is not an immoral decision if it is meant for a good reason.

Despite the freedom that Fermina feels when she is with Florentino, she is not yet willing to face the judgment of others in her social circle. This episode underlines that returning to ordinary society is in fact a threat to the peaceful relationship that Fermina and Florentino have established beyond traditional social norms of behavior, such as waiting a certain time after one's husband's death to be seen with someone else.

The *New Fidelity* thus sails back at a rapid pace. To celebrate this felicitous decision, Fermina prepares a special **eggplant** dish that Florentino calls "Eggplant Al Amor." The ship makes one stop early on in which a beautiful woman, Zenaida Neves, Captain Samaritano's lover, walks on the ship. Florentino and Fermina quickly develop an intimate partnership, in which they take care of each other's needs. Florentino plays "The Crowned Goddess" on a borrowed violin and Fermina wakes up once, realizing that she feels sadness, not anger, at the thought of that old couple that was murdered. She begins to dream of more trips with Florentino, in which they might feel free and in love.

Now that Florentino and Fermina's relationship relies on true knowledge of each other and the trust derived from true experience, Florentino's excessive romanticism, which leads him to idealize their youthful relationship, is no longer an obstacle to their love. Fermina's peace at the thought of the murdered couple suggests that she might finally be at peace with the possibility of her own death—and, perhaps, that she has accepted the inherent violence and unpredictability of the human world.

The night before reaching the port, they have a joyful party. Unlike what Captain Samaritano and Zenaida believe, however, Fermina and Florentino do not feel like young lovers. Rather, they are experiencing feelings at the core of love, beyond the difficulties of marriage. They behave with tranquility, beyond excessive emotions, "beyond" love itself. They realize that their love is strong and becomes more intense as it nears death.

This paradoxical characterization of love, in which Florentino and Fermina seem to be both within and beyond love, signals that there are different ways to understand love. Ultimately, what matters most to them is the intensity of their partnership now that they are entering the final stage of their life, in which they are capable of being uniquely lonely and vulnerable to death.

The next morning, as they near the port, Fermina realizes that being back in the city will feel like dying. Florentino feels the same way and is suddenly overwhelmed by grief for América Vicuña. He has to lock himself in the bathroom and cry to relieve his feelings, realizing in that moment that he had loved her more than he thought. When Captain Samaritano communicates with the port authorities, he realizes that it will be very complicated for them to reach the shore if people believe they are affected by cholera. Furious, he cannot understand how to get out of this mess.

Florentino's outpouring of emotions suggests that he has indeed been repressing emotions—and, perhaps, feelings of moral responsibility—toward her, since he knows that she killed herself at least partially out of grief after the end of their relationship. Both Florentino and Fermina understand that returning to the city will bring them back to reality (and, therefore, to the possibility of death), whereas they have been enjoying an escape from social duties and the monotonous rhythm of life by being together on the ship, far from people's judgment.

After listening to Captain Samaritano, Florentino offers an original solution: to sail all the way back to La Dorada. When Fermina looks at him, she realizes that he is once again speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Captain asks him if he is certain, and Florentino says he is. Looking at Fermina, in which he finds a trace of decay, and examining Florentino's face, over-excited by love and passion, the Captain concludes that life, not death, is limitless. Finally, he asks how long they can possibly keep up this stratagem. Having nurtured his answer for over 53 years, Florentino replies: "Forever."

This time, Florentino is finally to see his fantasies and reality reconciled. To begin with, his trip with Fermina has been a dream come true, allowing his lifelong wish (namely, to start a relationship with her) to come to life. Now, therefore, he is able to express the full extent of his passion without seeming mad or ridiculous—since this very expedition could also be considered ridiculous. Florentino's desire to stay on the ship forever thus reunites his fantasies about Fermina with the reality of the love they have now built together, allowing them to enjoy each other's company and defy, as long as they can, the threat of death.

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