

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GABRIEL GARCIA MÁRQUEZ

Gabriel García Márquez spent the first eight years of his life in Aracataca, a city in a rural region of Colombia. Soon after he was born, his father became a pharmacist and moved with his wife to a nearby city, leaving the young Gabriel with his maternal grandparents. García Márquez's early development was considerably influenced by his unique, rural upbringing and the personalities of his grandparents—his grandfather, who was known as “the Colonel,” was an excellent storyteller, and his grandmother, a superstitious woman, would often narrate events about the supernatural as though they were fully real. After moving to Bogotá, García Márquez began his studies in law, but he became increasingly interested in fiction and journalism. He started his career as a journalist while pursuing these studies, primarily covering domestic political events. The events he covered as a journalist, particularly La Violencia and the 1958 Venezuelan coup d'état, strongly impacted his perspective. His commentary on these critical events appears in many of his writings. In 1967, García Márquez published his masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which was widely read and received worldwide acclaim. In 1982, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature, a recognition of his rich realization of the fantastical. He continued to write celebrated short stories, novels, and works of non-fiction until late in his life. After fighting with a misdiagnosed cancer for many years, he died of pneumonia in 2014.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The historical setting of “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” is only vaguely defined. The central village of the story appears to exist in relative isolation, interacting only with neighboring villages. For this reason, it is difficult to place the setting of the story into an exact geographical and historical context. However, García Márquez's perspective and writing were strongly inflected by his experience with La Violencia, a decade-long civil war in Colombia. The brutal rural fighting and censorship that occurred during this conflict impacted García Márquez's understanding of the importance of community, as well as his view of the purpose of his work.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

“The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” is an example of magical realism, a genre in which fantastical events are mixed with the everyday. Magical realism is strongly connected with

the Latin American Boom, a proliferation of acclaimed literature written by Latin writers in the 20th century. García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Alejo Carpentier's book *The Kingdom of this World*, and Jorge Luis Borges's collection *A Universal History of Infamy* are some of the landmark examples of the genre and movement. García Márquez's literary style was deeply influenced by several earlier works in the western literary tradition. In particular, García Márquez was formatively impacted by Kafka and his novel *The Metamorphosis*, which he read as a young writer. García Márquez has also acknowledged the influence of Faulkner and the mythohistoric qualities of Faulkner's Yoknapatawtha county.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World” (“El ahogado más hermoso del mundo”)
- **When Written:** 1967
- **Where Written:** Barcelona, Spain
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Literary Period:** 20th century Latin American fiction
- **Genre:** Magical realism
- **Setting:** A tiny coastal village on a cliff face
- **Climax:** The handsome drowned man is elaborately buried by the villagers, and they vow to redesign their village to honor his memory.
- **Point of View:** Omniscient third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Solitude. Solitude is a theme that pervades much of García Márquez's work, including “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World.” He titled his Nobel Prize acceptance speech “The Solitude of Latin America,” and in his speech, he explains that the solitude of the settings in his works reflects the political solitude of Latin America.

Detail Aversion. García Márquez was known to purposefully leave out important details in his writing in order to force the reader to actively interpret the narrative. García Márquez was influenced in this stylistic decision by his reading of Greek tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*.



PLOT SUMMARY

The children of a coastal village encounter the large, drowned body of a man which washes up on the beach. The body is

covered with many items from the sea. A few men from the coastal village carry the body to the nearest house in the village, noticing that it is of an extreme weight and height. They speculate that the drowned body has absorbed water, making it heavier, and that it has grown taller in death. It is immediately clear that the body is a stranger's, as the village is quite tiny and its inhabitants can see that no one is missing.

The village men travel to neighboring villages to see if any village is missing a man. The village women stay behind to tend to the drowned man's body. They remove the mud and sea plants that still cling to his body and see that he is extraordinarily handsome—he is the best built and most virile man they have ever seen.

The women attempt to make clothes for the man, as no article from the village fits him. While the women work, they fantasize about the drowned man's life and personality. They imagine, at first, that he was magnificent man whose house was marvelous. They picture him performing incredible feats, such as him calling fish out of the water and planting **flowers** on cliffs. The women put down their own men in comparison, imagining the drowned man as someone far more capable.

The women are pulled out of their fantasies by the most elderly woman's comment that the man "has the face of someone named Esteban." Some disagree at first, but eventually everyone agrees. Prompted by the woman's remarks, they feel profound pity for the man, whose body must have inconvenienced him in life, as it still bothers him in death. The women imagine him awkwardly navigating houses that are too small for a man of his stature, and people who ridicule him when he leaves. They weep for the drowned man and place a handkerchief over his face.

The men return with the news that the drowned man does not belong to a neighboring village. The women express deep relief that the man is now their own. Fatigued from nighttime travel, the men wish to quickly dispose of the body. They construct a makeshift platform to which they will tie an anchor. But the women find many ways of delaying the drowned man's burial. They decorate his body with an assortment of items.

The village men become distrustful of the women and their attachment to a floating corpse and begin to grumble. Hurt by the men's lack of care, a woman removes the handkerchief from the drowned man's face. The men are stunned by the drowned man's features. They are moved by the humility of his features and lose their mistrust.

The village holds an elaborate funeral for the drowned man. The women get so many flowers that it is hard to walk about. The villagers select a family for the man so that through his relation to these people, all of the village is his kin. While they bring the man to his burial, they recognize for the first time the desolate qualities of their village. The villagers vow to paint their walls in bright colors and make houses with wider doors

and taller ceilings in order to honor the drowned man's memory. They imagine a future in which a captain points to their promontory, which is covered with pungent flowers, and states that this is Esteban's village.



CHARACTERS

The Drowned Man – At the beginning of the story, the drowned man is found in the sand, encrusted with sea debris. He is brought back to a house by the village men, who notice his extreme size. Although he is not alive during the events of the story, he is heavily personified in the imaginations of the village's inhabitants: At first, due to his unprecedented physical beauty, he is viewed by the village women as someone of tremendous authority and poise. Later, however, after the most elderly woman asserts that his name is Esteban, the women imagine him as a humble, awkward, but good-natured man. The village men adopt this view of his character, too, once his handsome features are unveiled to them. The novel nature of the drowned man's appearance prompts the climatic, planned renewal of the central village. The villagers are so struck by his obliging nature and incredible physique that they plan to honor his visit by creating wider houses, painted walls, and extensive flower beds. Thus, despite his inaction, the drowned man causes the most consequential developments that occur in the story. The colorful renewal of the village simply would not have occurred without his visit.

The Village Women – The village women tend to the drowned man's body after the village men leave to see if any neighboring villages are missing a man. While they work to produce clothes for him, they imagine his character in life. They cycle through multiple perceptions of him, but the personification that they ultimately accept, that of his being an obliging man, inspires great sympathy in them. The village women transmit their view of the drowned man's character to the men once they unveil the drowned man's features. When this occurs, the village is collectively moved to renew its layout; the villagers feel their community must permanently reflect the man's splendor, as the women have claimed him as their kin.

The Village Men – The village men play the role of the skeptic in the story. While the village men are out inquiring about missing men to try to figure out who the drowned man is, the village women invent a sympathetic personality for the drowned man. When the men return, they are distrustful of the women, who seem far too concerned with the treatment of what was previously "a piece of cold Wednesday meat." The men are convinced, however, when the women reveal the man's face—in it, they see the drowned man's sincerity, which enables the villagers to celebrate the drowned man with an immense quantity of **flowers** and plan to transform their dwellings. Having overcome their skepticism, then, the men help in the town's renewal.



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.



TRANSFORMATION, MYTH, AND CONNECTION

In “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,” a tiny remote seaside village experiences a profound transformation as a result of its encounter with a huge and handsome drowned man, whom they name Esteban. The villagers are so moved by the splendor of the man's appearance and humility of his expression that they decide to radically remake their village. They aim to honor his memory with wider doors, taller ceilings, colorful walls, and extensive flowerbeds.

Yet while the most obvious consequence of the village's experience of the drowned man is this planned physical change, the story suggests that the village's transformation is more consequential than a mere renovation of appearances. The final lines of the story imagine, from the perspective of the village, a captain and passengers observing the now beautiful, **flower-filled** village and identifying it as Esteban's village. A village that through the story was unknown, tiny, and nameless, in the future will be noteworthy and named.

The villagers who imagine this future clearly anticipate that their experience with Esteban will come to define their community. The physical renewal of their village is, understood in this light, just a physical manifestation of the closer ties the villagers have formed through their experience of the central events of the story. While initially in the story the villagers quarrel over small issues (such as the name of the drowned man, the speed at which they should prepare the body for sea burial), by the end of the story they are in clear and unanimous agreement—they all recognize Esteban's miraculous beauty and sincerity and plan to commemorate him by changing their own lives and village. The changes that the village undergoes are a clear testament to the transformative power of the villagers' shared experience. By illustrating this, the story suggests that strong, shared cultural experience and stories—what might be described as a communal founding myth—can transform group identity by creating connection and a shared vision.



FANTASY AND REALITY

Throughout “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World,” the people of the village have evolving and vastly different perceptions of the huge and handsome drowned man. At first, many of the women of the

village are convinced that he was a man of enormous authority and poise. But later they believe that he was actually a kind, humble, and awkward man. The women who hold onto their first perception of the man insist that his name is Lautaro, but even they eventually assent to the later assessment of his life and character and agree with the widely held belief that his name is Esteban.

Similarly, the men of the village are unconvinced at first that the dead man is anything other than a piece of “cold Wednesday meat.” In fact, they think he may not have even been huge when alive—that he grew in size only by absorbing water when dead. However, after the women reveal Esteban's face, the men arrive at exactly the same view of his character as the women.

In both of these instances, perceptions which started as a fantasy are transmitted to the group and profoundly shape their view of what is real. Garcia Marquez cleverly suggests in his story that reality is mutable and that it could consist, surprisingly, in whatever perception it is that people jointly assent to. But the story further suggests that such a mutually agreed upon reality within a community is then stable and strong—it truly becomes reality—and can change and inspire people.



KINSHIP

When the mysterious, huge, and handsome drowned man washes up on the shores of the village in “The Handsomest Drowned Man in the

World,” the question of which group the drowned man belongs to motivates much of the action in the story. When the body is first found, it is evident that he is not from the village—the tiny size of the village makes it easy for the villagers to recognize that no one who lives there is missing. This fact motivates the men of the village to go to neighboring villages to see if they might be missing a man. The men do this, presumably, out of a strong respect for kinship—for the fact that those who are related to the man will naturally care and want to know about his fate.

When the village men later return with the news that the drowned man is not from a neighboring village, the village women delight at the fact that “he is ours.” This assertion captures a difference aspect of the idea of kinship. In their time cleaning up and clothing the mysterious dead man, the women have become attached to him—have even named him Esteban—and so when it is clear that others don't have ties of blood kinship with the man, the women claim kinship with him themselves. Kinship does not have to be based solely on blood ties. Yet the story suggests that when people feel kinship, they want that kinship to be socially sanctioned. And so, before the funeral for Esteban the village selects two people of the village to be his mother and father so, through the close ties of the village, *everyone* is his kin.

The village then envisions a future in which their village is seen as Esteban's village. Then the fact that their homes are not sufficiently large enough for the spirit of Esteban to move through comfortably, and are not vibrant enough to honor his handsomeness, compels the villagers to transform their community. They have made Esteban their kin, and Esteban then lives on through them and their village to which he belonged. In this sense, the relation of kinship informs the most consequential change that occurs in the story. The story suggests, then, that kinship is a matter of blood, spirit, and social relations, and that the obligations and connections people feel on the basis of kinship is what often informs the most noble acts of self-improvement.



SYMBOLS

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



FLOWERS

In "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World," flowers symbolize the splendor of the drowned man and the possibility of rejuvenation for the town. The description of the village at the beginning of the story notes that there are "no flowers" near the twenty-odd wooden houses that populate the village's "desertlike cape." However, after the village's encounter with the drowned man, the villagers imagine creating an immense bed of pungent flowers on the cliff face. The desolate, sterile pragmatism of the first description of the village is meant to contrast strongly with the image of the village in the future decked out in flowers.

The flowers are associated with renewal in part through their association with the marvelous qualities of the drowned man. When the women of the village imagine his extraordinary exploits in life, they picture him getting flowers to spring out of the rocks. And later, when they make his elaborate burial platform, they bring so many flowers that it is difficult to walk about. Flowers evoke the extraordinary qualities of the man because they, like the drowned man, are beautiful, vibrant things that were previously absent from the village. When the villagers ultimately imagine populating their cliff with flowers in memory of the drowned man, the imagined floral change represents their collective intent to permanently add the vitality of the drowned man to their previously grey village.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Collected Stories* published in 2008.

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World Quotes

☞ When they laid him on the floor they said he'd been taller than all other men because there was barely enough room for him in the house, but they thought that maybe the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men.

Related Characters: The Village Men, The Drowned Man

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 98



Explanation and Analysis


Here, the village men comment on the size and weight of the drowned man after carrying his body from the beach. This passage illustrates the way in which the story interweaves fantastical elements into more realist detail: everything about the story seems normal besides the extraordinary size of the drowned man, but the village men *don't* seem to find this detail strange. They quickly rationalize it as a normal part of death—perhaps they're implying that drowned men are bigger than other men because their bodies have absorbed water, but perhaps they're literally implying that it's accepted fact that drowned men keep growing. Either way, the man's extraordinary size is something odd enough to merit remark from the townspeople, but they're not blown away by it, showing that the world of the story is a bit askew from the real world.

It's also noteworthy that the men seem to converge on a single explanation of the drowned man's size. The fact that the group decides that the man's size is perfectly rational suggests that it might be a kind of mass hysteria that's making them accept the man's size without seeing it as a complete affront to everything they thought they knew about human beings. Since the group agrees that it's okay, it's possible that it's simply a group dynamic that allows fantasy and reality to be so seamlessly blended in the story.

☞ They did not even have to clean off his face to know that the dead man was a stranger. The village was made up of only twenty-odd wooden houses that had stone courtyards with no flowers and which were spread about on the end of a desertlike cape.

Related Characters: The Village Men

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 98



Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the men learn that the drowned man is not one of their own simply by looking around their tiny village and seeing that no one is missing. The passage's description of a desolate, undecorated set of dwellings contrasts strongly with the rejuvenated, colorful village envisaged by the villagers at the end of the story. The conspicuous lack of flowers, in particular, contrasts with the abundantly floral quality of the future village. Flowers are thus a clear symbol for the transformation which occurs through the village's encounter with the drowned man, as the absence of flowers is associated with the dreary initial state of the village and their presence signals a rebirth of the village.

The passage also hints at the fact that the village's future self-improvement will have something to do with a bond of kinship. While the drowned man is a stranger, the village is desolate and unwelcoming. But as soon as he becomes familiar and one of their own, the village endeavors to beautify itself. The description of a bleak village is clearly associated with the state of affairs in which the drowned man is unfamiliar, while the contrasting image of a rejuvenated village is connected with the drowned man being the villagers' kin.

●● As they were doing that they noticed that the vegetation on him came from faraway oceans and deep water and that his clothes were in tatters, as if he had sailed through labyrinths of coral.

Related Characters: The Village Women, The Drowned Man

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

After the men depart to make their nighttime inquiries about whether this man might have come from a nearby village, the women notice some curious items clinging to the man as they clean his body—in particular, they notice artifacts of distant oceans, which suggest that this man has

come from very far away and has been in the water a long time. His journey to them seems to have been mysterious and arduous, showing that he is not just an ordinary man from a neighboring village, but rather someone much more exotic and fantastical.

The narration of this passage highlights the villagers' mythmaking about the man, which is a crucial element of their shared fantastical experience. The image of the drowned man sailing through "labyrinths of coral" is attached to a sentence about the women's observations, which perhaps implies that the women are merely imagining this man's exotic journey. The women in this passage reinforce their shared experience of the fantastical by creating background myths like this. The collective transformation that occurs at the end of the story is facilitated in part by the myths about the experience that they create and share.

●● They thought that if that magnificent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor [...] They thought that he would have had so much authority that he could have drawn fish out of the sea simply by calling their names and that he would have put so much work into his land that springs would have burst forth from among the rocks so that he would have been able to plant flowers on the cliffs."

Related Characters: The Village Women, The Drowned Man

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100


Explanation and Analysis

While creating clothes for the handsome drowned man, the village women imagine the drowned man in life. They think of him as a man of prodigious talent who could perform a number of extraordinary feats. The imaginations of the village women illustrate the unique way in which the fantastic is interpreted in the story's setting, as well as how myths supplement the unique experiences shared by the collective. The women interpret the fantastic body of the man through additional fantasies, arriving at one that they share. The myth of his background is so vividly imagined by the women that it seems almost to be something that they accept as true and real. But of course, this myth later transforms into a different fantasy in which the drowned man is named Esteban.

The beliefs and myths of the villagers that help define their shared experience of the drowned man are integrated into their understanding of reality through a joint belief in their truth. It seems possible that the stronger the consensus in a story, the more vividly it is imagined and the more firmly it is viewed as an element of reality.

●● The more stubborn among them, who were the youngest, still lived for a few hours with the illusion that when they put his clothes on and he lay among the flowers in patent leather shoes his name might be Lautaro. But it was a vain illusion.

Related Characters: The Village Women, The Drowned Man

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the village women gradually acquire the belief that the drowned man's name is Esteban. They feel sympathy for him, as they imagine that he was an obliging man who was inconvenienced by his big, beautiful body in life. The description of the man in this passage is a complement to the women's previous image of him in which he is a figure of great poise and authority. The shift between the two images of the man exemplifies, like several other episodes in the story, the distinct way in which shared fantasy evolves, as well as how these fantasies become indistinguishable from beliefs about what is real. Following this episode, the women firmly believe that the drowned man was of a certain nature in life and that his name was Esteban. They manage to transmit their view of him to the men, who come to believe precisely the same thing. The villagers' firmness in their belief is facilitated by the consensus. But if a new consensus were to be reached, it seems likely that they would adopt that perspective instead.

●● They only had to take the handkerchief off his face to see that he was ashamed, that it was not his fault that he was so big or so heavy or so handsome [...]. There was so much truth in his manner that even the most mistrustful men, [...] even they and others who were harder still shuddered in the marrow of their bones at Esteban's sincerity.

Related Characters: The Village Men, The Drowned Man

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the men adopt the view of the drowned man held by the women. They believe, after seeing his features, that he was a humble, sincere, and obliging man in life. The villagers come together and act cohesively for the first time in the story after arriving at a shared understanding of the drowned man; they decide to honor his memory with colors and flowers and to redesign their dwellings. The shared understanding of the drowned man seems to consist of a set of myths about how the drowned man was in life.

It's evident that sharing this experience of the drowned man—and, moreover, these myths about the drowned man's past—helps connect and endear the villagers to each other, enabling them to positively transform their community. In this sense, the transformation that occurs at the end of the story is facilitated by the experience and myths that the villagers share in the story.

●● At the final moment it pained them to return him to the waters as an orphan and they chose a father and mother from among the best people, and aunts and uncles and cousins, so that through him all the inhabitants of the village became kinsmen.

Related Characters: The Village Men, The Village Women, The Drowned Man

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 103


Explanation and Analysis


Before the drowned man's sea burial, the villagers decide to give him an extended family in the village. This allows the villagers to have a relation to the drowned man, and it moreover connects the villagers to each other, as they now share relations to the drowned man. The fact that the drowned man is now one of their own motivates the villagers' planned, climactic changes. The villagers aim to accommodate the memory of the drowned man, as he is now their kin, in the act of transforming their dwellings and the cliff face. In this sense, the village's establishing of kinship with the drowned man strongly informs the most

consequential developments in the story; the village aims to rejuvenate itself at the end of the story so that it can adequately be “Esteban’s village.”

☛ While they fought for the privilege of carrying him on their shoulders along the steep escarpment by the cliffs, men and women became aware for the first time of the desolation of their streets, the dryness of their courtyards, the narrowness of their dreams as they faced the splendor and beauty of their drowned man.

Related Characters: The Village Men, The Village Women, The Drowned Man

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the villagers recognize the sterility of their village for the first time as they carry the drowned man to his sea burial. The villagers’ newfound awareness of the barren quality of their village enables them to positively remake their dwellings in the future; the qualities missing from their village are illuminated only through their experience with the drowned man. So that their village reflects the splendor of the drowned man, the villagers plan a profound transformation of their village in the final lines of the story. They imagine a future in which their village is a spectacular, rejuvenated landmark which people admire.

The shared experience of the drowned man expands the perspective of the village’s inhabitants and further endears them to each other. The profound illumination of the manners in which the village was lacking is owed to the magical elements of their experience, and the villagers’ commitment to act upon this insight is owed to their bond. So while the drowned man’s splendor is a crucial element of the story, it is critically complemented by the social changes that occur in the story. The two together inform the climatic developments of the story.



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.

THE HANDSOMEST DROWNED MAN IN THE WORLD

The children of a coastal village find a large, drowned body on the beach. The body is encrusted with detritus from the sea. The children play with the drowned man in the sand for an afternoon before someone notices the body and alerts the rest of the village. The men of the village who carry the drowned man to the nearest house say that he is much heavier and taller than any man they've known. They speculate that his great size might have something to do with his extended exposure to the sea, that he might have absorbed water into his body.

The village has very little land. Because of this, the villagers must throw the bodies of the dead off a cliff into the sea. The village is also so small that they know the dead man must be a stranger, since it is easy to see that everyone from the village is present. The village men leave to see if any of the neighboring villages are missing a man, while the women stay behind with the intent of cleaning the drowned man. They remove the mud, scales, and various plants that obscure his features. The unfamiliar plants covering his body suggest he comes from a very distant place. Once the man is cleaned off, the women realize that he is exceptionally handsome—he appears to be taller, stronger, more virile, and better built than any man they've ever seen.

The women decide to make the drowned man clothes using spare fabric, as no article of clothing that the village men have is sufficiently large for him. While they sew through the night, the sea is unprecedentedly restless and the wind is unnaturally calm. The women, meanwhile, imagine the man when he was alive: they think he must have been a magnificent, towering figure of great authority who draws fish out of the water by calling their name. They start to think less of their own men in comparison, imagining the handsome, drowned man as someone far more capable.

The story establishes in its first lines that the fantastic will coexist with mundane, real things—the children play with the gigantic body as though it is a normal item, and they actually initially mistake the body for something ordinary from the sea when they first find it. The men casually rationalize the body's extraordinary features, creating an explanation—that the man is so large because his body has absorbed water—that's not all that likely, but which they provisionally accept as a group to avoid challenging their preconceptions about the world.



The villagers clearly respect the relationship that neighboring groups may have with the drowned man. Even though he is a stranger to whom they don't owe anything personally, the village men decide to locate his kinsmen so they can have closure about the man's death. The villagers also decide to clean his body, presumably also for the sake of anyone who may be related to him. While the women clean him, an additional fantastical element is introduced—the women recognize that the man is extremely handsome, and even his dead body allows them to imagine a better, more exciting life.



The women make sense of their magical experience by supplementing it with fantastical backstory. During this episode, they compare the mythical exploits of the drowned man to their own men's actions as though his imagined backstory were real, suggesting that they temporarily view it as completely true. The wide agreement among the women that their invented stories about the man are true appears to be facilitated by the women having jointly created the stories. Everyone is contributing, and nobody disagrees.



They are pulled out of their web of fantasies only when the oldest woman says, with compassion, "He has the face of someone named Esteban." Most of the women immediately see that this must be true. A few of them attempt to deny it and speculate that he has some other name, but even they eventually agree.

The women did not have enough fabric, so the clothes they've made for Esteban are too small, and the buttons have popped off of his shirt. The women realize that Esteban must've been inconvenienced by his huge body in life, just as he is being disadvantaged by it even in death. They imagine him having to awkwardly but endearingly deal with places that are ill equipped to handle someone of his stature, and people who mock his size behind his back. Moved by their imaginations, the women begin to weep for him.

The men return from their nighttime trips to other nearby villages with the news that the drowned man does not belong to any neighboring village. The women are relieved, as this means Esteban is now theirs. The men of the village plan a makeshift sea burial for the drowned man, but the women delay it by adding more and more charms and decorations to his body. Soon the men become distrustful of the women and their feelings for the drowned man, as they can't understand why the women care so much about a drifting corpse. In response, offended by the men's lack of care, a woman removes the handkerchief covering Esteban's face.

The men are immediately struck by Esteban's beauty and by the obliging, humble nature suggested by his features. Moved by his appearance, the men cease to distrust the women and their intentions. Instead, the men join with the women and hold the most splendid funeral they can for Esteban. Residents from other villages stream in to attend, and the villagers choose a family for Esteban so that he will not be put to rest as an orphan. As they bring him to the water to lay him to rest in the depths of the sea, the villagers recognize the desolate and dry quality of their village for the first time.

The women quickly part with their first view of the drowned man when someone provides a new view that seems plausible. The old woman's view comes to be accepted over the previous, even though the two are similarly speculative, by virtue of the group consensus shifting.



The women elaborate on their alternate view of the drowned man in much the same way they did previously; however, in this instance, his features, stature, and circumstance after death are interpreted as meaning that he's an obliging, humble man. The backstory the women create is so intensely believed by the village women that they weep for him and his misfortunes. The village women appear to believe that it is completely and indubitably true.



Having bonded with the drowned man, the village women are deeply relieved that they can claim the man as their kin. The women are compelled both by their sympathy and new relation to the man to thoroughly decorate his body and funeral litter. The men have not shared the women's experience of the drowned man and, furthermore, have not yet recognized him as their own, so their perspective is, at first, at odds with the aims of the village women.



The men are struck by the appearance of the drowned man in much the same way that the women were. They consequently come to believe the same things of his character and backstory—that he is a humble man and was troubled by his body in life. The shared beliefs and experience of the villagers compel them to act and think single-mindedly for the first time in the story; as a group, they hold a spectacular, moving funeral for the man who is now their kin, and recognize the sterility of their village. The experience has connected the villagers to each other and transformed their perspective.



After the funeral, the villagers know that something has changed in them. They aim to capture Esteban's memory in their village by making wider, larger houses so his spirit could move easily through the village. They will honor him by painting their houses in bright colors and by planting great **flowerbeds** along the cliffs. They imagine a future time when a great passenger liner approaches their promontory and a captain points to their floral village as a landmark. The captain, in their vision, points and explains in many languages that this peaceful, beautiful place is Esteban's village.

While the villagers clearly aim to improve the village for their own sake, so that it may become a vibrant community for themselves and their progeny, they also aim to improve it for the sake of their kinsman, Esteban. They want their village to suit and represent the splendor of the drowned man. Sharing the experience of the drowned man's visit has profoundly shifted the villagers' perspective and deeply endeared them to each other; in the story's final lines, the villagers plan to realize a future that they collectively and vividly imagine. The transformation has, in this sense, enabled the villagers to cohesively strive towards a goal of self-rejuvenation.





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