

Guilty But Not Charged

Six months before Santiago Nasar's murder by the Vicario twins, Bayardo San Román arrives in town in search of a wife—a seemingly innocent desire that sets in motion a chain of events ending in tragedy. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* by Gabriel García Márquez, the townspeople are initially skeptical of Bayardo, but as soon as he produces his wealthy and prestigious family, they accept him and agree that he "was going to marry whoever he chose" (34). He chooses Angela Vicario, until he discovers on their wedding night that she is not a virgin. Bayardo then returns Angela to her family in disgrace, a decision that ignites a sequence of events that lead to Santiago's murder. While Pedro and Pablo Vicario actually commit the murder, Bayardo San Román is the most to blame for it because of his selfish decision to return Angela and his silence afterwards, which seals Santiago's fate.

Bayardo's decision to return Angela Vicario on their wedding night, driven by his superficiality and ego, is the catalyst for the tragic events that follow. Rather than dealing with the situation quietly or compassionately, he immediately rejects her and brings her back to her family. When Pura Vicario opens the door, he "softly pushed his wife into the house without speaking a word" (46), as if she is damaged goods. As a result, Angela is forced by her brothers to name her perpetrator, thus setting them on a path of revenge. Had Bayardo actually tried to get to know Angela, he might have discovered her secret long before the wedding night and could have made an informed decision about marrying her. Instead, he calls her "well-named" (29) the first time he sees her and decides immediately she will be his wife. Then, he proceeds to use his money to buy her material things and is more concerned with his "delirious ideas" (38) for making the wedding even larger than emotionally connecting with his fiancée. The fact that he so quickly returns her shows that he was in love with the idea of having a wife, not with Angela herself.

Without a doubt, his superficiality causes him to marry a woman he hardly knows, so his shame in discovering she is not a virgin is hypocritical.

After returning Angela, Bayardo has the option to use his power and influence to intervene on behalf of Santiago, who is in danger in the first place because of his decision to return his wife, but chooses silence instead. Bayardo could have convinced the community and the Vicario brothers that revenge was unnecessary because he is a man of wealth and influence. For example, the townspeople are enamored by his family's wealth and prestige when they arrive in town and agree that he can marry whomever he chooses. The Vicario parents, in particular, view him as a "prize of destiny" (34) that Angela is lucky to marry and could learn to love. In addition, the twins themselves fall victim to Bayardo's "irresistible charm" (30) when trying to return the music box he bought for Angela; they end up hanging out and drinking with him the entire evening, bringing him home the next day. Bayardo is well-liked and respected both in the community and by the Vicario family, which suggests that had he voiced disapproval of their plan to kill Santiago, it might have been stopped. However, he disappears from view to wallow in his own misfortunes. Bayardo's unwillingness to speak up most certainly enables the murder to happen.

Some may argue that the Vicario brothers are the most to blame for the obvious reason that they are the ones to carry out the murder. After Angela reveals the name to them, they pick out "their two best knives" (50), sharpen them at the meat market, and wait in Clotilde Armenta's milk shop to kill Santiago. The first knife strike comes from Pedro Vicario, and then Pablo Vicario "gave him the only stab in the back" (118). There is truly no doubt that the Vicario brothers brutally and ruthlessly stab Santiago to death. However, while the Vicario brothers physically kill Santiago, their actions are largely the result of societal pressure and not a personal desire to commit this

atrocities. The morning of the murder, Clotilde observes that they "were not as eager to carry out the sentence as to find someone who would do them the favor of stopping them" (57). Pablo Vicario "put the knife in [Pedro's] hand and dragged him off almost by force in search of their sister's lost honor" (61). The brothers' reluctance shows that they feel trapped and forced into following through on society's code of honor. If Bayardo had never returned Angela in the first place for her supposed dishonor, her brothers would not have felt compelled to restore her honor. While Bayardo did not kill Santiago himself, he lit the match.

In the end, Santiago's death is not the result of one single decision, but Bayardo San Román's choice to return Angela sets everything in motion, making him the most to blame for the tragedy. Rather than work through the situation privately with his new wife, Bayardo's pride and ego cause him to return her on their wedding night, pushing the Vicario brothers towards violence. Despite having the power to speak up and dissuade the Vicario brothers from committing murder, Bayardo chooses silence. While others in the community obviously bear some guilt, Bayardo is the catalyst for the entire tragedy. If he had made more thoughtful decisions in which he put others' needs before his own, Santiago might have lived. Through Bayardo, García Márquez shows how an individual's pride and inaction can set off a chain of irrevocable consequences that affect an entire community.