

The House of the Spirits



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ISABEL ALLENDE

Isabel Allende Llona was born one of three children to Francisca Llona Barres and Tomás Allende, the second secretary at the Chilean embassy, in Lima, Peru. In 1945, Allende's parents divorced after her father left the family, and she moved to Santiago, Chile, with her mother and siblings and lived with her maternal grandparents. Allende's grandmother was interested in spiritualism, an influence that is seen in *The House of the Spirits*. Allende also had unlimited access to her grandmother's rather large library, sparking a lifelong interest in reading, especially Shakespeare. Allende's mother remarried a Chilean diplomat, and the family traveled extensively, enrolling Allende in private schools in both Bolivia and Beirut, Lebanon. Allende finished her schooling in Chile, where she met and married her first husband in 1962 and went on to have two children. She worked for the United Nations in Chile and Europe until 1965 and translated English romance novels into Spanish on the side. During this time, Allende also worked as an editor, a journalist, and even wrote and published two children's stories. In 1970, Allende's father's cousin, Salvador Allende, was elected the first socialist President of Chile, and in 1973, was overthrown in a military coup d'état. During the coup, President Allende reportedly committed suicide; however, it is suspected that he was killed by the opposition. Much like the character of Alba in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende began helping those blacklisted by the new government escape the country, which landed Allende herself on the wanted list. She escaped to Venezuela, where she lived in exile with her family for 13 years. During this time, Allende wrote and published *The House of the Spirits* (originally in Spanish) in 1982, to critical and popular acclaim. Over the next several years, Allende wrote many novels and nonfiction works, such as *Eva Luna* in 1987 and *Paula* in 1994. She is the recipient of numerous awards and accolades, including the Hispanic Heritage Award in Literature in 1996, the Chilean National Prize for Literature in 2010, and the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2014. Allende lives in California with her husband, Roger Cukras, and is considered the most widely read Spanish-language author in the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While it is not explicitly stated, Isabel Allende alludes to the Chilean government multiple times in *The House of the Spirits*, and she also references the 1973 Chilean coup d'état. In 1970, Salvador Allende, Chile's first socialist president, was democratically elected by the people. President Allende's

election was an important moment on the world stage, and it sparked considerable social and political conflict in Chile, which was divided between conservatives and progressives. The unrest between the right-wing Chilean Congress and Allende's socialist government was worsened by the economic warfare ordered by United States President Richard Nixon. As Allende was elected during the Cold War, the American government feared that Allende's Chile would prove a good example of a well-functioning socialist society, so strategies were developed to weaken Chile by crippling the economy. On September 11, 1973, the Chilean Navy captured the seaside city of Valparaíso and stationed ships along the coast in a military coup d'état. Radio and television stations were bombed, as was the Presidential Palace in the city of Santiago. By midday, every branch of the military and the police joined the coup, and President Allende was overthrown. President Allende died in the beginning days of the coup, although conflicting reports exist as to the cause. Some reports claim Salvador Allende was killed in the fighting on September 11, others say he committed suicide, and some claim he was murdered outright by the opposition. After the coup, army chief Augusto Pinochet was appointed supreme power by a military counsel in 1974 and he served as Chile's dictator for several years. Conditions under Pinochet's rule were similar to those in *The House of the Spirits*. Freedom of the press was suspended, there was widespread censorship of books and ideas, and large gatherings (other than church) were outlawed. During Pinochet's reign, some 80,000 Chileans were interned, nearly 30,000 were arrested and tortured, and roughly 3,000 were executed. Augusto Pinochet resigned his position of power in 1990, and in 1998, he was indicted for human rights violations committed during his time as dictator. Pinochet served several months of house arrest in London, England, and was subsequently sent back to Chile, where he was indicted for more offenses. He died in 2006 without ever being convicted.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The House of the Spirits is a work of magical realism, which is a style of fiction writing that portrays the world realistically but also incorporates magical elements. Magical realism is most often associated with Latin American literature, and with Isabel Allende in particular. Famous works of magical realism by Latin American authors include [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#) and [Love in the Time of Cholera](#) by Colombian novelist Gabriel José García Márquez, [Labyrinths](#) by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, and [Like Water for Chocolate](#) by the Mexican novelist and screenwriter Laura Esquivel. Despite its close association with Latin America, magical realism is written in other parts of the world as well. For example, Salman Rushdie's [Midnight's](#)

Children, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki are all works of magical realism. In addition to elements of magical realism, *The House of the Spirits* also focuses on strong women who resist oppression and abuse. Novels with similar subject matter include *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich, and Ana Castillo's *The Mixquiahuala Letters*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The House of the Spirits
- **When Written:** 1982
- **Where Written:** Venezuela
- **When Published:** 1982
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Magical Realism; Semiautobiographical Novel
- **Setting:** An unnamed South American country based on Allende's Chile
- **Climax:** Alba is arrested, tortured, and raped during the military coup d'état.
- **Antagonist:** Esteban Trueba; Esteban García; patriarchal society; government corruption
- **Point of View:** First Person; Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Girl Power. While living in Chile in the 1960s, Allende worked translating English romance novels into Spanish. She was ultimately fired for making unauthorized changes to the books, however, when she was caught rewriting female characters to make them smarter and more independent.

The Real-life Poet. In the 1970s while working as a journalist, Allende interviewed Pablo Neruda, the Chilean writer who inspired Allende's character, the Poet, in *The House of the Spirits*. Neruda reportedly told Allende she had too much imagination for journalism and told her to be a novelist instead.



PLOT SUMMARY

"Barrabás came to us by sea," 10-year-old Clara del Valle writes neatly in her **notebook**. She is in the habit of recording all events, big and small, but she has no way of knowing that her notebooks will later be used to "reclaim the past" and "overcome terrors." Clara's father, Severo, has political aspirations and her mother, Nivea, hopes her husband is successful so that she can fight for women's rights from the inside. Clara has special "mental powers," which her family tries to keep secret. She can read auras and predict disasters, make the saltshaker move across the table without touching it, and talk to spirits. One day, two men arrive with a coffin, and Nana,

the servant in charge of the children, runs in the house and tells Nivea that her brother Marcos has died overseas of a mysterious plague. Nivea and the children, especially Clara, are devastated; however, Barrabás, a puppy of indeterminate breed, is among Marcos's personal possessions, and Clara quickly falls in love with him. Clara's sister, Rosa, is engaged to Esteban Trueba, who has been away for two years working in the northern mines. Esteban is madly in love with Rosa, and he writes her countless letters. Severo's political ambitions within the Liberal Party soon pay off, and he runs in the Congressional election to represent a province in the south. A roasted pig arrives as a gift from the southern voters, along with a decanter of the finest brandy. Within days, the pig is gone, and Clara announces there will be an accidental death in the family. The next day, Rosa develops a fever, and the family physician, Dr. Cuevas, orders sweet lemonade with a splash of liquor. Nana gives Rosa some of the brandy, which Rosa drinks and goes to bed. In the morning, Nana finds Rosa dead. The brandy, which was laced with rat poison, was meant for Severo. Rumors spread that the Conservative Party sent the brandy to Severo as revenge for joining the Liberal Party despite his high social status, but this is never confirmed. The only thing known for sure is that the brandy did not come from the southern voters. The entire del Valle family is devastated, as is Esteban Trueba, who returns from the mines. In her grief, Clara stops speaking and remains silent for many years.

Esteban decides not to return to the mine and goes instead to Tres Marías, his family's rundown *hacienda*. When Esteban arrives, the estate is in ruins, and a peasant named Pedro Segundo García has been serving as an unofficial foreman. Esteban immediately goes to work fixing up the main house, rebuilding the barns, and planting the fields. Directing the peasants, Esteban laughs at the idea of "class struggle"—he believes the peasants are lost without a strong *patrón* like him to guide them. Esteban builds a schoolhouse and a general store, and he even builds brick houses for the peasants, which is unheard of on other estates. He works for months and grows restless and anxious. Esteban feels that he needs a woman, so he rapes a peasant girl named Pancha García. After this, he is so busy working and raping other peasant women that he is the last to notice Pancha's pregnancy. Many peasant women claim that Esteban has fathered their children, but he doesn't believe them. He does, however, believe that Pancha's son is his, but still refuses to acknowledge any "bastard offspring." To avoid such drama in the future, Esteban visits a local brothel where he meets a prostitute named Tránsito Soto. She has big dreams and asks Esteban to borrow her 50 pesos to help make them happen. Esteban doesn't know what she will do with the money, but he is fond of Tránsito, so he gives it to her.

In the meantime, Esteban receives a telegram from his sister, Férula, which claims their mother, Doña Ester, is dying and wants to see him. Esteban doesn't particularly love his mother,

but he returns home, where Doña Ester begs him to settle down with a respectable wife and have sons to carry on his name. As Doña Ester dies, Esteban goes to the del Valle residence and asks Severo if he has any available daughters. The only daughter left is Clara, Severo says, and she refuses to speak and sees ghosts. Esteban likes silence and isn't afraid of ghosts, so he asks to meet her. Clara, finally speaking again, tells Esteban that she has been waiting for him. Esteban falls madly in love with Clara, and they soon announce their engagement at a lavish party, during which Barrabás is mysteriously stabbed and dies in Clara's lap. Severo and Nivea fear the dog's death is a bad omen, but the wedding plans progress. Esteban, now a wealthy man, begins construction on a mansion, which soon comes to be known as **the big house on the corner**, and Clara invites Férula to move in with them. After their honeymoon, when they arrive at the house for the first time, Clara faints when she sees Esteban has made Barrabás made into a rug. "I told you she wouldn't like it," Férula says to Esteban.

Before long, Clara is pregnant, and Esteban must return to Tres Marías. Férula and Clara settle into a comfortable routine without him and grow incredibly close. Férula waits on Clara hand and foot and resents Esteban and the masculine disruption he brings to the house. Clara talks endlessly to her unborn child, which she knows is a girl and has already named Blanca. After Blanca is born, Férula is so busy taking care of both Clara and the baby that she has little time to resent Esteban. When Blanca is just a child, Clara and Esteban decide to spend summers at Tres Marías, where Blanca plays with Pedro Segundo's son, Pedro Tercero. Clara writes in her notebook that Tres María is her "mission" in life, and she takes to spreading her mother's messages of equality to the peasants. Esteban is furious and claims he won't tolerate a suffragette wife espousing nonsense, but she pays little attention and continues her talks with the peasants. Clara becomes pregnant again—which Férula takes as a personal insult—and they go back to the big house on the corner, where Clara gives birth to twin boys, Jaime and Nicolás. The night Clara gives birth, Esteban goes to the local brothel, the Christopher Columbus, where he is surprised to find Tránsito Soto. She offers to pay back the 50 pesos, but Esteban says he would rather she owe him a favor.

Nana moves into the big house on the corner to help Férula with the children, and the Mora sisters, three local students of spiritualism, are drawn to Clara and the house. The women move in, and even though Esteban doesn't approve, he says nothing because he loves his wife. In the meantime, Esteban grows tired of the closeness of Clara and Férula's relationship and banishes Férula from the house. Clara tries to divine Férula's location, but she is unable to find her. In the meantime, more students of spiritualism arrive and move into the house, and Clara spends her days talking to ghosts and levitating furniture. Time passes, and the Truebas continue spending

summers at Tres Marías, where Blanca falls madly in love with Pedro Tercero. Esteban hates Pedro Tercero, who plays a guitar and sings songs of revolution, but Blanca sneaks out her window every night to meet him. A Frenchman named Jean de Satigny comes to stay at Tres Marías and notices Blanca immediately. He follows Blanca when she sneaks out to meet Pedro Tercero and finds them making love by the river. Jean goes directly to Esteban, who jumps on his horse and meets Blanca halfway home. He violently beats Blanca, and when Clara objects, Esteban knocks out Clara's teeth.

Clara and Blanca return to the big house on the corner, and Clara never speaks to Esteban again. It soon becomes clear that Blanca is pregnant, and Esteban forces her to marry Jean de Satigny to avoid public scandal. Their marriage doesn't last long, however—Blanca leaves Jean after she discovers his pastime of photographing their male servants naked. Blanca returns home to Clara, where Jaime, who is studying to become a doctor, delivers Blanca's daughter, Alba. Alba grows up in the house, surrounded by Clara's magic and Esteban's love. Esteban has little tolerance for his own children, but he deeply loves Alba. One day, Blanca takes Alba to meet a famous man who sings songs on the radio. The man is Pedro Tercero, but Blanca doesn't tell Alba he is her father. Clara dies on Alba's seventh birthday, and the entire family is devastated, especially Esteban, who lives the rest of his life in mourning. The big house on the corner deteriorates with Clara's death, and Esteban's relationship with his family continues to worsen. He even sends Nicolás—whose only interest is Clara's spiritualism—abroad, and he tells him never to come back. Esteban's friends take him to the local brothel to cheer him up, where Esteban is again surprised to find Tránsito Soto. She oversees the brothel now, which she runs as a cooperative. Everyone is happy, she says, and no one is exploited.

When Alba is 18, she falls in love with Miguel, a law student and outspoken socialist who leads protests at the university. Alba supports Miguel's cause, and after she sits in on a protest that lasts days, she encounters Colonel Esteban García, a former peasant from Tres Marías and Esteban Trueba's biological grandson. Esteban García sexually assaulted Alba multiple times during childhood. In the following weeks, the Socialist Candidate is elected President of the Republic, and their divided nation is consumed by political unrest. Esteban Trueba, who serves as the Senator of the Republic, and the other conservative politicians plan a military coup d'état to seize control of the government and rid it of Marxism once and for all. But once the military takes over, they murder the President, suspend congress, and refuse to relinquish power. Jaime is killed early in the coup, and Miguel goes off to fight with the guerillas. Blanca hides Pedro Tercero—who is on the new government's wanted list—in the house, and Esteban, still in shock over Jaime's death, helps Blanca and Pedro flee the country. Alba follows Blanca's lead and begins hiding wanted

revolutionaries in the house until she can help them escape the country, but Esteban knows nothing about it—or that the police have their house under surveillance.

Alba is arrested in the middle of the night and taken blindfolded to an unknown location, where she is questioned by a man whose voice she immediately recognizes as Esteban García's. He asks her about Miguel, and when she refuses to talk, she is beaten, tortured, and raped. Weeks later, after receiving three of Alba's fingers in the mail, Esteban goes to see Tránsito Soto. Miguel helps Esteban look for Alba and suggests Esteban go see Tránsito, who knows many important people in her line of work. She finds Alba two days later and arranges to get her home. Back at the big house on the corner, Esteban and Alba fix up the crumbling mansion, and Esteban suggests they write this story. After Esteban says all he has to say, he goes to Clara's bed and dies happy and pain-free. At the moment of his death, Clara's spirit appears, smiling and laughing as she was in the prime of her life. Now, Alba is having a baby—a daughter, she knows—though she isn't sure who the father is. What matters is that the child is *her* daughter; Alba also know it's important to record her experiences in her own notebook, so that others will know her story as well. "*Barrabás came to us by sea...*" Alba writes.

never talks to Esteban again. She continues to live with Esteban in the big house on the corner, but she confines herself to her side of the house and completely ignores him. Years later, when Clara's granddaughter, Alba, is seven years old, Clara decides it is time to die, and her body slowly shuts down. She dies peacefully, surrounded by her family and the spirits of the big house on the corner. The character of Clara underscores the importance of historical records and preserving the past; however, she also represents spiritualism and the supernatural within the novel, which serves as a metaphor for the strength and power of women even in the face of patriarchal oppression.

Esteban Trueba – The patriarch of the Trueba family and one of the narrators of *The House of the Spirits*. When Esteban is first introduced, he is engaged to a young woman named Rosa and is away working in the northern mines. Esteban is madly in love with Rosa, and after she is killed in an assassination attempt meant for her father, Severo, Esteban is devastated. He goes to Tres Marías, his family's rundown *hacienda*, and restores the land and house. He rapes and abuses the peasant women and fathers many of their sons, but he refuses to acknowledge his "bastard offspring." Despite this, Esteban is convinced he is a good landowner, and believes that the peasants are incapable of maintaining a decent life without him. Esteban eventually marries Rosa's younger sister, Clara, and falls desperately in love with her too. He gives her everything money can buy (including **the big house on the corner** where they live), although she doesn't seem to notice, and they have three children together—Blanca, Nicolás, and Jaime. Esteban's fierce temper, however, guarantees a difficult relationship with his family. When he finds out about teenage Blanca's affair with Pedro Tercero, Esteban savagely beats Blanca and knocks out Clara's teeth. Afterward, his family relationships get even worse, and the only one he seems to love unconditionally is his granddaughter, Alba. Esteban is a conservative politician and is elected Senator of the Republic; he believes Marxism is true evil. When the President is elected, Esteban helps plan the coup d'état and seize control from the socialist government. After Alba is arrested and detained during the coup, he enlists the help of Tránsito Soto, a prostitute Esteban used to frequent, to find her. With Alba back, Esteban begins to soften, and by the time he dies, he is free from the pain and anger that has plagued him for most of his life. Esteban represents government corruption and the oppression of the lower classes by oligarchic society, but more importantly, he is the personification of the patriarchy. He staunchly believes in traditional values, and he rules his family with fear and violence. However, through love—the romantic love he feels for both Rosa and Clara, as well as the familial love he feels for Alba—Esteban begins to soften after years of anger and violence.

Alba de Satigny – Clara and Esteban Trueba's granddaughter, Blanca and Pedro Tercero's daughter, Miguel's lover, and one of



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Clara del Valle/Trueba – Esteban Trueba's wife; mother to Blanca, Jaime, and Nicolás; and Alba's grandmother. Clara has supernatural powers: she can read auras, predict natural disasters, levitate furniture, and talk to ghosts. After the trauma of her sister, Rosa's, death and witnessing the sexual assault of Rosa's dead body, Clara is silent for years, and she doesn't start speaking again until she meets Esteban Trueba. Clara doesn't love Esteban as he loves her, but she has resigned herself to the fact that she won't marry for love. She spends most of her time writing in her **notebooks**—which Clara claims bear witness to her life—and ignoring domestic work. After the birth of her twin sons, Jaime and Nicolás, Clara begins to take interest in **the big house on the corner** where the Truebas live, and soon various students of spiritualism and the supernatural (like the Mora sisters and the Poet) come to live with the family. Clara also has a special connection to Esteban's *hacienda*, Tres Marías, which she claims is her "mission" in life. She treats the peasants respectfully and frequently lectures them, repeating her mother, Nivea's, messages of equality and justice. Esteban doesn't approve of Clara's political message, and nor does he approve of the strange spiritualists living in his house, but he allows it to continue because of his love for Clara. But after their daughter, Blanca, is caught having sex with Pedro Tercero and Esteban violently beats her, Clara defies him, and Esteban knocks out several of Clara's teeth. After this episode, Clara

the narrators in *The House of the Spirits*. Alba grows up in **the big house on the corner** listening to her family's outrageous stories and witnessing Clara's magic. As a child, Alba is sexually abused by Esteban García, (Esteban Trueba's estranged illegitimate grandson) who resents Alba's identity as Esteban Trueba's legitimate granddaughter. Clara dies when Alba is just seven years old, and Alba's life changes drastically. Life at the big house on the corner just isn't the same without her grandmother, even though Alba enjoys a close and loving relationship with both her mother and grandfather. When Alba is 18, she meets and falls in love with Miguel, and his passion for socialism and equality consumes her. Alba joins protests and reads Marxist literature, but she supports Miguel's cause out of her love for him, not out of ideological conviction. After the military coup d'état, Miguel fights with the guerillas, and Alba stays in the capital, helping those on the new government's wanted list escape the country. She is arrested by the police in the middle of the night and detained for weeks, where she is tortured and raped by Esteban García. Alba quickly realizes that Esteban García's torture has more to do with his desire for revenge than his desire to get her to talk about Miguel, and she knows nothing she says will stop the abuse. While detained, Clara's spirit visits Alba and encourages her to write her story. Without stories and personal accounts, Clara says, it will be too easy for others to forget the atrocities taking place in their country. Alba is finally released with Tránsito Soto's help, and upon discovering that she is pregnant, Alba writes her story and waits for Miguel to return from war. In addition to the power of love and the importance of recording the past, Alba represents feminine strength in the face of the patriarchal oppression. She underscores the importance and power of female relationships, which she draws upon to overcome the trauma of Esteban García's abuse.

Blanca Trueba – Clara and Esteban Trueba's daughter, Alba's mother, and Pedro Tercero's lover. Blanca grows up spending summers at Tres Marías, and she falls in love with Pedro when she is just a girl. Despite her deep love for Pedro, Blanca knows her father will never approve of their relationship, and as a member of the upper class, Alba knows that she will never be fully accepted in Pedro's life as a peasant either. After Jean de Satigny tells Esteban about Blanca's secret affair with Pedro, Esteban violently beats Blanca. She flees to **the big house on the corner** with Clara after this incident, and her relationship with her father never recovers. When Blanca finds out she is pregnant with Pedro's baby, Esteban forces her to marry Jean to prevent people from finding out about the scandal. Blanca agrees—out of fear, not love—and she moves with Jean to a northern province. Their marriage is never consummated, and while she does consider Jean a friend, she ultimately leaves him when she finds erotic photographs of their male servants in his private "laboratory." Blanca gives birth to her daughter, Alba, shortly after and spends most of her life at the big house on the corner. Her time there is miserable, and Esteban never lets her

forget that she lives there because of his "pity." She reconnects with Pedro Tercero over the years and never stops loving him, though it takes decades for them to truly reunite. After the coup d'état, when Pedro is placed on the wanted list, Blanca hides him in the house. Esteban later helps both Blanca and Pedro escape the county, a moment in which Esteban's dormant love is finally revealed. The name Blanca means "shining white," which connotes purity and thereby underscores the sexist expectations of her patriarchal society—Blanca is valued only for her potential as a wife and mother, and her life is determined entirely by men. She is told whom to marry and when, and she isn't free to make her own decisions. Blanca also illustrates the lasting power of love and its ability to transcend all things, including class and social status. Blanca loves Pedro Tercero for decades, and this love guides her actions throughout most of the novel.

Pedro Tercero García – Pedro Segundo's son, Blanca's lover, and Alba's biological father. Pedro Tercero grows up a peasant on Tres Marías, and he falls in love with Blanca when he is just a boy. As a child, he listens to his grandfather, old Pedro's, stories and dreams of freedom and equality. He befriends Blanca's brother Jaime, and they spend hours talking about socialism and class struggle. Father Jose teaches Pedro to play the guitar, and Pedro goes on to write many songs about revolution. He spreads his songs around Tres Marías, along with socialist propaganda, and he is the only peasant with enough courage to stand up to Esteban Trueba. Esteban quickly banishes Pedro Tercero from the property for spreading subversive pamphlets to the peasants, but Esteban never knows that the songs the peasants hum and sing were written by Pedro and contain the same messages as his pamphlets. After Esteban finds out about Pedro and Blanca's love affair, Esteban violently assaults Pedro and severs three fingers from his right hand. Pedro runs to Father Jose, who tends to his injured hand, and he later moves to the capital. Pedro's songs make him famous, and he even manages to reconnect with Blanca over the years, but she refuses to run away with him. Blanca doesn't tell Alba that Pedro is her father until she is a young adult, and even though Pedro doesn't agree with this decision, he respects it. After the President is elected, Pedro goes to work for the government. When Esteban Trueba is held hostage by the peasants at Tres Marías, Pedro convinces them to let him go—a favor that Esteban returns when he helps Blanca and Pedro escape the country together after the coup d'état. Pedro Tercero represents class struggle in the novel. He is born into the peasant class and spends his life fighting for equality. Like Jaime, Pedro Tercero is a kind of foil to Miguel. Pedro clearly advocates for socialism and Marxist ideals, but he takes a nonviolent approach. Pedro Tercero fights for equality through music, and through legal channels by working for the government.

Esteban García – Pancha García and Esteban Trueba's

grandson. Esteban García grows up as a peasant at Tres Marías, and he is never acknowledged by Esteban Trueba (the owner of the *hacienda*) as his biological grandson. Pancha teaches Esteban García from a young age that Esteban Trueba's blood runs in his veins, and she tells him that had he been born in place of Blanca, Jaime, or Nicolás (whom Esteban Trueba accepts as his legitimate children), he would inherit Tres Marías and maybe even be President of the Republic. Regardless, Esteban García seems to have inherited his grandfather's violent streak and exhibits sadistic tendencies from an early age: as a child, he drives nails into the eyes of chickens. When Blanca and Pedro Tercero are caught in their forbidden affair, Esteban García leads Esteban Trueba to Pedro Tercero's hiding place, where Esteban Trueba assaults Pedro and severs three fingers from his right hand. Esteban García later visits Esteban Trueba at **the big house on the corner** and asks him for a recommendation to become a police officer. Esteban Trueba writes the recommendation, as he owes Esteban García an award for finding Pedro Tercero, but Esteban never realizes the young man is his grandson. Esteban García grows up resenting Esteban Trueba and his biological family, especially Alba, whom he encounters multiple times throughout the book. When he visits Esteban Trueba to ask for the recommendation letter, Esteban García has erotic fantasies about strangling six-year-old Alba and sexually assaults her. Later, when Alba turns 14, Esteban García (now a police officer) forcibly kisses Alba in the garden, humiliating and scaring her. By the time of the military coup d'état, Esteban García is a colonel, and he plays a significant role in torturing Alba after she is arrested. He rapes her repeatedly, and even electrocutes her before she is finally released. Esteban García is the personification of violence—especially against women—but Alba's anger at Esteban García doesn't last long. She knows that Esteban is the way he is for a reason: Esteban Trueba's violent rape of Pancha, Esteban García's grandmother, decades earlier. Esteban García is consumed with the desire for revenge, and Alba vows to "break that terrible chain."

Férula Trueba – Esteban Trueba's sister and Doña Ester's daughter. When Doña Ester falls ill with crippling arthritis, Férula is expected to take care of her. Férula rejects two marriage proposals and completely dedicates her life to her mother's care. After Doña Ester dies, Férula is left alone and middle-aged with very few options in life. Férula resents Esteban and his freedom to live his life as he pleases, and this resentment only worsens when she moves in with Esteban and his new wife, Clara. Férula and Clara become close friends, and they love each other deeply. Férula takes care of Clara, just like she did Doña Ester, and she waits on her hand and foot, bathing Clara and powdering her skin. When Blanca and the twins, Jaime and Nicolás, are born, Férula takes care of them, too; however, she reserves a special place in her heart for Clara. Though the novel doesn't directly specify the nature of Férula's love for Clara, it seems to imply that Férula may have romantic

feelings for her. The years Férula spends with Clara are the happiest in her life, but she is also tortured with jealousy: she listens in and spies on Clara and Esteban when they have sex, and Férula later goes to confession and tells the priest she has committed a terrible sin with her feelings for Clara. Esteban ultimately banishes Férula from the house, calling her a "dyke" and a "whore," and she dies alone years later, impoverished and living in a tenement house. In death, Férula's ghost visits Clara, and she walks right into the Truebas' dining room and kisses Clara goodbye in front of her entire family. Clara lives the rest of her life without anyone ever loving her as much as Férula did. Férula is one of the foremost representations of female oppression in the novel, as her life is not her own. She is forced to live the domestic role society dictates, and she isn't free to love who or how she wants. Férula's character also underscores the many forms love can take and the power love has to transcend all things, including death.

Jaime Trueba/del Valle – Clara and Esteban Trueba's son, Blanca and Nicolás's brother, and Alba's uncle. Jaime is Nicolás's twin brother, but they couldn't be more different. While Nicolás is busy chasing girls and talking to ghosts, Jaime is studying medicine so he can become a doctor and serve the poor. He is close friends with Pedro Tercero, and together they talk "of justice, of equality, of the peasant movement and of Socialism." Esteban wants Jaime to be a lawyer and go into politics, but Jaime won't hear of it. His own principles are completely at odds with his conservative father, who calls Jaime a "hopeless loser" and claims his "utopian values" don't exist. Jaime falls in love with Nicolás's girlfriend, Amanda, but he never acts on his feelings out fear of rejection and respect for his brother. Amanda falls in love with Jaime years later, after he helps her overcome a drug addiction, but by then there is no trace of Jaime's love left. Jaime is also close friends with the President, whom he meets during a routine medical call; he calls Jaime to the Presidential Palace on the morning of the coup d'état. Jaime is subsequently killed when he refuses to say that the President was an alcoholic who committed suicide, and despite his differences with his father, Esteban greatly mourns Jaime's death and never quite recovers. Jaime serves as a sort of foil to Miguel. While they both support socialism and Marxist ideals, Jaime is uncomfortable with the violence of revolution. He is a pacifist, and he seeks the equality and freedom of the working and peasant classes through non-violent means.

Count Jean de Satigny – A visiting Frenchman who becomes Blanca's husband. Count Jean de Satigny first arrives at Tres Marías in search of a partner for his chinchilla business. Jean is handsome, fashionable, and presumably wealthy, and all the area landowners compete to go into business with him. Jean, however, chooses Esteban Trueba as a partner, and soon takes notice of Esteban's daughter, Blanca. Jean is a mysterious man who refuses to let Clara read his fortune, and no one seems to know very much about him, such as how old he is or where in

France he is from. One night, Jean witnesses Blanca sneak out her window, and when he follows her to the river, he finds her having sex with Pedro Tercero. Jean immediately tells Esteban about Blanca and Pedro's affair, and after Blanca becomes pregnant with Pedro's baby, Esteban forces her to marry Jean. After their wedding—in which Blanca's pregnancy is strategically concealed—Jean and Blanca move to a northern province, where Jean spends Blanca's dowry on fancy clothes and fine porcelain. Jean and Blanca's marriage is never consummated, and while it isn't explicitly stated, Allende implies that Jean is gay. Blanca ultimately leaves Jean when she discovers naked pictures of the servants and strange sex toys in his private photography "laboratory," and she never sees or hears from him again, not even to obtain a divorce. Blanca, however, still tells her daughter, Alba, that Jean de Satigny is her father, which Alba believes until she is a young woman. Jean represents class struggle within the novel. He clearly isn't wealthy like he claims, and he is willing to do whatever he must to be upwardly mobile and gain entrance to the upper class.

Tránsito Soto – A prostitute and friend of Esteban Trueba. Esteban first meets Tránsito Soto at the Red Lantern, a brothel near Tres Marías. She is the best dancer there, and is Esteban's favorite. Tránsito has big plans in life, and she asks Esteban to borrow her 50 pesos to help make them happen. Esteban quickly agrees to lend her the money. He later runs into Tránsito at the Christopher Columbus, the best brothel in the capital city. She offers to repay his money, but Esteban says he would rather she owe him a favor. Esteban runs into Tránsito a handful of times over the years, and each time she is doing a little better. She ultimately ends up running the Christopher Columbus, which she transforms into a "whores' cooperative," where everyone makes money and no one is exploited. When Esteban receives Alba's severed fingers in the mail after she is arrested and detained following the military coup d'état, he goes to Tránsito and asks for her help. Esteban figures a woman like Tránsito knows how to pay her debts, and he assumes someone in her line of work knows a lot of important people. Tránsito finds Alba within two days and arranges her release. Tránsito's methods are never revealed, but she is another example of a strong woman in Allende's book. She is independent and competent, and she lives her life exactly as she wants to. Tránsito's "whores' cooperative" also reflects the Marxist ideology present throughout most of the novel. Everyone at the Christopher Columbus is equal, and meaning no one is able to take advantage of another.

Amanda – Miguel's sister and Nicolás's girlfriend. Amanda is a smart and beautiful girl, who is first introduced to Nicolás by the Mora sisters. Amanda's mother is dead, and she has taken responsibility for her younger brother, Miguel, who is just five years old when their characters are first introduced. Amanda, like Nicolás, is interested in Clara's spiritualism, but she ultimately takes a job as a journalist. Unbeknownst to Nicolás

or Amanda, Nicolás's twin brother, Jaime, falls madly in love with Amanda, but his feelings are never realized out of respect for his brother and fear of rejection. Amanda becomes pregnant during her relationship with Nicolás, and they convince Jaime, who is just a medical student at the time, to perform an illegal abortion. Afterward, Amanda and Nicolás drift apart, but she reconnects with Jaime years later when his niece, Alba, falls in love with Miguel. Amanda's difficult life of poverty and bad relationships leads to substance addiction, and Jaime helps her into a detox program. Afterward, Amanda falls in love with Jaime (although his own feelings have waned) and volunteers at his medical clinic after the military coup d'état. Amanda is ultimately killed during the coup; she is arrested and tortured by the police, but she refuses to give up any information about Miguel, a wanted revolutionary. Amanda is another example of a strong woman in Allende's novel, dedicating her life to raising Miguel and keeping him safe, which also highlights the profound love between family members that is present throughout the novel.

Nicolás Trueba – Clara and Esteban Trueba's son, Jaime and Blanca's brother, Amanda's boyfriend, and Alba's uncle. Nicolás is Jaime's twin, and he is the only one of Clara's children to take an interest in spiritualism. Nicolás is handsome and incredibly smart, and he is constantly fighting with Jaime. Nicolás spends many weekends visiting the Mora sisters, where he first meets Amanda. Jaime and Nicolás slowly grow apart, and while Jaime is busy studying medicine, Nicolás dances flamenco and preaches free love. After Amanda becomes pregnant and Jaime performs her abortion, Nicolás and Amanda drift apart, too. When Alba is born, Nicolás takes an interest in her education, but with his strange hobbies of spiritualism, yoga, and smoking hashish, Esteban worries Alba will turn out "stark raving mad." Like Marcos, Nicolás travels all over the world—he even spends a year in India as a beggar—but he returns home and opens a school, the Institution for Union with Nothingness, in which his students are in search of a philosophy to help them escape "earthly strife." When Esteban discovers Alba with her head shaved bald and repeating the word "Om," he puts Nicolás on a plane overseas and tells him to never come back. Despite being a man, Nicolás's character also portrays the oppression of patriarchal society. Esteban, who is the personification of the patriarchy, considers "magic, like religion and cooking," a "particularly feminine affair." Nicolás doesn't fit the patriarchal ideal of a man, and as such, his father effectively banishes him from his family.

Nívea del Valle – Severo's wife. Nívea is the mother of 15 children (four of whom have already died at the beginning the novel), including Clara and Rosa. Like Severo, Nívea has political aspirations. Nívea wants to fight for women's rights from the inside, and she is referred to as "the country's first feminist." She stands on soapboxes and protests with her suffragette friends, but she can't bring herself to take off her corset like the

rest of them, which reflects the power of the patriarchy to control even the strongest women. Nivea is a loving mother, and Clara grows up hearing her outrageous stories of the past and their family history. Nivea and Severo are killed in a car accident when Clara is an adult, during which Nivea is decapitated and her head misplaced. Clara manages to find Nivea's head—thanks to her supernatural powers—when even police bloodhounds fail. However, Esteban Trueba fears people will ask *how* Clara found Nivea's head, so instead of having the head properly buried, he puts it in a hat box in the basement. Years later, when Clara dies, Esteban buries her with Nivea's head. Nivea is the personification of female strength and power within the novel. She believes in women's rights, and it is because of women like Nivea that future generations of women can vote and wear long pants. Nivea's fight, however, isn't easy, and many men (including her son-in-law, Esteban) condemn her. Esteban says Nivea is "sick in the head," and claims what she really needs is a "strong hand" to keep her line.

Ana Díaz – A student activist at Alba's university. Alba first meets Ana during the university protest, in which student activists barricade themselves inside a building in support of striking workers, and Alba notices immediately that Ana has the same tiny insignia of a raised fist embroidered on her sleeve as Miguel. Ana, like Miguel, supports socialist ideologies and advocates for class warfare and equality, and she initially gives Alba a hard time for her high social standing and wealth. When Alba is struck with incapacitating menstrual cramps during the protest, Ana implies that Alba is weak because she is a member of the bourgeoisie. True proletarian (working-class) women, Ana says, don't even complain during childbirth. Later, after Alba is detained, tortured, and raped during the military coup d'état, she again meets Ana Díaz in a concentration camp for women. Like Alba, Ana is raped and tortured inside the camp, but they find strength in each other, and Ana and Alba resist the violence and abuse of the camp when they are together. Ana gives Alba the **notebook** that Alba uses to record the experience of her confinement, and it sparks Alba's interest in writing and helps her to heal. The character of Ana Díaz is an example of a strong woman within the novel, and her support of Alba underscores the solidarity of women, even in the face of perceived differences.

Miguel – Amanda's brother and Alba's lover. Miguel is an orphan, and his sister takes responsibility for him as a young child. When Miguel is just five years old, Amanda begins dating Nicolás, Alba's uncle. Miguel watches from a closet as Alba is born, although he doesn't remember this later on. Alba and Miguel meet again years later at university, where Miguel is in his last year of law school and is an outspoken socialist. He talks of revolution (as represented by a tiny insignia of a raised fist embroidered on his sleeve), and he supports class warfare and thinks the violence of oppression can only be overcome with more violence. Miguel organizes the student protests on

campus, and when the President is overthrown during the military coup d'état, Miguel joins the guerillas. Miguel and Alba are madly in love, and after she is arrested and tortured by the police after the coup, Miguel goes to Esteban to help look for her. It is Miguel who suggests Esteban go to Tránsito Soto for help, and at the end of the book, Alba is released and awaits Miguel's return from war. Miguel and Alba's relationship is a testament to the power of love within the novel, but more importantly, Miguel represents class struggle and the working-class fight for equality and freedom.

The Poet – A writer and guest of Clara's at **the big house on the corner**. Like Clara's other guests, the Poet is an enthusiast of spiritualism and the supernatural, and he frequently reads his sonnets to entertain Clara and the other guests. The Poet supports and advocates socialist ideology, and lines of his poetry are painted on city walls by members of the youth brigade after the military coup d'état seizes power from the President. As the Poet lays dying, the police ransack his house looking for communists and subversive literature. He dies four days later of a heart attack, and a wake is held for those with enough courage to attend. Esteban and Alba pay their respects at the Poet's funeral, which is a "symbolic burial of freedom." While it isn't explicitly stated, Allende's Poet is presumably based on the real-life Chilean poet and politician, Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), who is often referred to as the national poet of Chile. While it was initially assumed that Neruda died of a heart attack, the Chilean government acknowledged that he was likely killed in an incident during the 1973 Chilean coup d'état. The Poet, like Sebastián Gómez, illustrates the persecution of intellectuals and the oppression of free thought and ideas under the dictatorship imposed in the novel.

Dr. Cuevas – The local physician. When Rosa falls ill with a fever early in the novel, it is Dr. Cuevas who examines her and orders sweet lemonade with a splash of liquor. After Rosa dies from drinking this poisoned brandy, it is Dr. Cuevas who performs her autopsy and determines foul play. Nivea and Severo again call Dr. Cuevas when Clara stops speaking after Rosa's death, but his painful and invasive treatments traumatize Clara and do nothing to cure her silence. Dr. Cuevas takes care of Clara when she is pregnant with Blanca, and when the pregnancy exceeds her due date, he performs a cesarean section without even asking Clara's input. When Clara is pregnant with Jaime and Nicolás, Dr. Cuevas again considers a cesarean, and he neglects to involve Clara in this decision as well. Clara ends up calmly giving birth to the twin boys with Férula's help before Dr. Cuevas even arrives, taking the decision of her care out of his hands. The character of Dr. Cuevas further highlights the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Clara and the other women lack bodily autonomy, and men like Dr. Cuevas simply decide how to treat them with little to no input.

Severo del Valle – Nivea's husband and Clara and Rosa's father.

Severo is an atheist and a mason, and he completely supports his suffragette wife and her fight for women's rights. Like Nivea, Severo is an aspiring politician, and even though he is a member of the upper class, he joins the Liberal Party. He runs in the Congressional election, representing a southern province he has never been to, but he drops out of the race after Rosa is killed by poisoned brandy intended for him. The brandy, which is thought to be a gift from the southern voters, is a clear assassination attempt. Rumor spreads that the brandy was sent by the Conservative Party as revenge for Severo's decision to join the Liberal Party despite his class, but this is never confirmed. When Severo drops out of the Congressional race, he hopes none of his descendants will ever enter politics, which he claims is "a trade for butchers and bandits." Severo's experience reflects the corrupt nature of politics and government within Allende's novel, and it further underscores the resistance that liberalism and other left-wing ideologies are met with by the Conservative Party.

Pedro Segundo García – Old Pedro's son, Pedro Tercero's father, and Pancha García's brother. Pedro Segundo is a peasant at Tres Marías, and he serves as the *hacienda's* unofficial foreman in Esteban Trueba's absence. Pedro continues as the foreman after Esteban's arrival, and the two men spend hours together working the land. Pedro is the closet Esteban has to a friend, but Pedro detests Esteban and his cruelty, and Esteban can see the "murderous hatred" in Pedro's eyes. Still, Pedro is loyal and honest, and he works for Esteban for years, later helping Clara run the *hacienda* when Esteban is injured in an earthquake. Pedro Segundo loves Clara as much as he hates Esteban, and he leaves Tres Marías for good when Esteban beats Blanca and knocks out Clara's teeth after Blanca is caught having a secret affair with Pedro Tercero. Pedro Segundo represents the oppression and exploitation of the peasant class by an oligarchic society. He works hard for little pay and no respect, but he is too afraid to revolt against his oppressor and demand equality.

Barrabás – Clara's dog. After Marcos dies, Barrabás is found among Marcos's possessions as a puppy. He is delivered to Severo and Nivea de Valle's along with Marcos's body, and Clara instantly falls in love with him. Barrabás is of an unknown breed, and he has a tail that can clear tables with a single swipe. Barrabás never leaves Clara's side, but he is mysteriously stabbed and killed the night of Clara and Esteban Trueba's engagement party. Severo and Nivea fear the dog's death is a bad omen, but the wedding progresses as planned. As a wedding present, Esteban has Barrabás made into a rug, and he presents the rug to Clara when he gives her **the big house on the corner**. Clara faints at the sight of Barrabás as a rug, and the rug spends years stored in the basement until Clara's granddaughter, Alba, resurrects the rug and puts it back in Clara's bedroom. Barrabás's presence is felt in three generations of del Valles, which underscores the family's

profound connection and shared history throughout the years.

The Candidate/the President – A politician in the Socialist Party. The Candidate vies for the presidency of the unnamed South American country of the novel for 18 years before finally being elected near the end of the book. After losing the presidential election so many times before, the Candidate knows he will win, and he tells Jaime as much. Jaime and the Candidate are close friends—they meet during a routine medical call—and spend much time playing chess and discussing socialism. After the election, the President is overthrown during a military coup d'état and later dies. While the official cause of death given by the opposition government is suicide, Pedro Tercero later tells Blanca that the President was murdered by the opposition. While it isn't explicitly stated, the character of the President is presumably based on Salvador Allende, the first socialist president of Chile and the real-life cousin of author Isabel Allende's father. Like the President, Salvador Allende was also overthrown in a military coup d'état and died under similar circumstances.

Rosa del Valle – Clara's sister, Severo and Nivea's daughter, and Esteban Trueba's first fiancé. Rosa is Severo and Nivea's oldest daughter, and she is incredibly beautiful. She has a greenish tint to her hair and resembles a mermaid, and from the moment she is born, Nivea knows Rosa is "not of this world." Rosa's family refers to her as a "heavenly being," and Nivea doesn't make her learn domestic skills because she suspects that Rosa's life will be short. Rosa is engaged to Esteban when she is just 16, but she doesn't see him for two years while he goes to work in the northern mines. Early in the novel, Rosa comes down with a fever, and after drinking poisoned brandy meant for her father, Severo, she dies. Clara witnesses Dr. Cuevas's assistant sexually assaulting Rosa's dead body during the autopsy, which traumatizes her and prompts her to stop talking entirely for many years. Like Clara, Rosa is an example of the supernatural within the novel. Her mermaid-like qualities and angelic nature make her appear not entirely human, yet she is oblivious to the power and hold she has over others—especially Esteban, who deeply loves her.

Old Pedro García – Pedro Segundo and Pancha García's father, and grandfather to Pedro Tercero and Esteban García. Old Pedro is a peasant at Tres Marías, and he is a respected healer, whom even the local doctors acknowledge. When an infestation of ants threatens Tres Marías and modern insecticides and exterminators fail, old Pedro leads the ants away simply by talking to them, thereby saving the *hacienda* from ruin. After Esteban Trueba is nearly killed in an earthquake, old Pedro carefully sets each of Esteban's broken bones and saves his life, gaining Esteban's lifelong respect. Old Pedro dies of natural causes when he is over 90 years old, at which time he is blind and deaf, but his ability to perfectly recall the past remains intact. Old Pedro frequently tells Pedro Tercero and Blanca stories—including the story about the hens

and foxes, which later becomes one of Pedro Tercero's socialist songs—and he represents the importance of storytelling in preserving the past.

Pancha García – Esteban García's grandmother, old Pedro's daughter, and Pedro Segundo's sister. Pancha is a peasant on Tres Marías, and Esteban Trueba rapes her in the bushes of the *hacienda*. During the attack, Pancha doesn't resist. Her mother and grandmother "suffered the same animal fate" before her, so she isn't surprised when it happens to her as well. She ends up pregnant after the assault, and while Esteban believes he is the father of her son, he doesn't acknowledge "bastard offspring." Pancha teaches her son, and later her grandson, to resent Esteban Trueba, and she tells them they would have inherited Tres Marías had they been born in place of Esteban's other children. The attack on Pancha García and her despicable treatment afterward underscores the oppression of women in patriarchal society and brings to light the abuse and sexual assault that women within the novel frequently suffer at the hands of men.

The Mora Sisters – Three sisters, who are also students of spiritualism and the supernatural. The Mora sisters are drawn to Clara and **the big house on the corner**, and they simply show up one day and move in. The Mora sisters have a photograph of a "misty, winged ectoplasm," which Clara considers definitive proof of spirits in the physical form. Clara and the Mora sisters spend their time communicating with ghosts and consulting tarot cards and Clara's three-legged table. They are an important part of Clara's children's lives, especially Nicolás, the only one of Clara's children to share her interest in spiritualism. Nicolás spends many weekends away from boarding school visiting the Mora sisters, and they even introduce him to his girlfriend, Amanda. The three Mora sisters are further examples of the supernatural within the book, and the power women have in the form of empathy and intuition.

Sebastián Gómez – A leftist professor at Alba's university. Sebastián Gómez is a man in his forties who looks "tubercular," and he has "crippled legs" from "machinegun fire in Bolivia." He is an inspiration to his students—an ideologue who "makes his students burn with the flame that in most of them extinguished itself as soon as they graduated and joined the world they had once hoped to change"—and when Miguel organizes the protest at the university, Sebastián is the only professor who stays until the very end. After the military coup d'état, Sebastián is killed, and numerous other professors and intellectuals are "fired, arrested, or simply disappear, in accordance with a blacklist in the hands of the political police." Sebastián Gómez is the embodiment of a left-wing, liberal professor, and his persecution and death represent the oppression of free thought and ideas at the hands of a corrupt government.

Luisa Mora – The only surviving Mora sister by the end of the novel. Luisa goes to **the big house on the corner** and warns Esteban Trueba that trouble is coming. She tells him that she

has been consulting astrological charts, and all signs point to death and destruction. Luisa claims that Esteban will be on the winning side, but his victory will be tainted in blood. Luisa also delivers Alba a message from Clara: she says Clara has been protecting Alba from the other side, but "death is at [her] heals." Soon after, the government is taken over in a military coup d'état, in which Esteban's son, Jaime, is killed and Alba is repeatedly tortured and raped. Luisa Mora is another example of spiritualism and the supernatural within the book, and her warnings represents the power of female intuition.

Dr. Cuevas's Assistant – The assistant who accompanies Dr. Cuevas to perform Rosa's autopsy. When Rosa's clothes are removed to begin the procedure, both Severo and Dr. Cuevas weep with grief, but the assistant stares at Rosa's beautiful body and "pants." At the end of the autopsy, Dr. Cuevas's assistant suggests they take their time and make sure Rosa's body is pristine for her family's viewing, and Dr. Cuevas agrees. Afterward, Dr. Cuevas leaves the room, and with Clara watching from a nearby window, the assistant kisses Rosa on the lips, the breasts, and between the legs. The trauma of witnessing the sexual assault of Rosa causes Clara to stop speaking for many years, and it teaches her that no woman is safe from the oppression of men in patriarchal society, not even in death.

The Kind Soldier – A military soldier working for the opposition during the coup d'état. After the Presidential Palace is bombed and Jaime is beaten and taken to the Ministry of Defense, the kind soldier tells Jaime to sit and rest, but warns Jaime to stand up the minute he says so. The soldier says that Jaime operated on his mother and saved her life, a story he later repeats to Blanca and Esteban Trueba when he goes to **the big house on the corner** to tell them that Jaime was killed at the Ministry of Defense. The kind soldier symbolizes the goodness that persists despite the cruelty and violence of the coup d'état, and he represents all the soldiers and police officers who are forced by intimidation and fear to participate in the coup.

Marcos – Nivea's brother and Clara and Rosa's uncle. When the novel begins, two men deliver Marcos's body to the del Valle residence, along with his personal possessions, including trunks full of books and a puppy named Barrabás. Marcos died overseas of a mysterious plague, and Nivea and the children are devastated. Marcos was an odd man who preserved exotic animals with taxidermy and spent the nighttime hours making strange movements meant to perfect his mind and improve digestion. He frequently stayed with his sister and her family, and the children grow up hearing stories of his adventures in faraway lands. After Marcos's death, Clara reads his magic books and travel journals, as do Clara's children and her granddaughter, Alba. This further underscores the profound connection between family members, even those of distant generations.

Father Jose Dulce María – A priest with revolutionary ideas,

who serves a parish near Tres Marías and befriends Pedro Tercero. Father Jose is known for spreading the word of socialism and labor unions along with the word of God, and Esteban Trueba doesn't like him coming around Tres Marías. Father Jose teaches Pedro Tercero how to play the guitar and write songs about equality, and when Esteban banishes Pedro from the *hacienda*, Father Jose gives Pedro a place to live. Father Jose oversees old Pedro's funeral rites, and since Esteban respects old Pedro, he says nothing of the priest's presence on his land. Father Jose stays at Tres Marías for the three-day mourning period, along with the parish priest sent to assist him, who is really Pedro Tercero in disguise.

Nana – A servant employed by the del Valle and Trueba families to care for their children. Nana takes care of Clara and Rosa when they are children, and she also takes care of Clara's children as well. Nana dies alone in her bed the night of the big earthquake, and in the chaos, she is hastily buried in a community grave without any of the children she cared for in attendance. When Clara returns from Tres Marías, she arranges for Nana's body to be moved to the del Valle tomb, which is where Nana always wanted to be buried. Nana is a major part of the lives of the del Valles and Truebas, though her neglect in death shows how class divisions can cause people to devalue even those they love.

Doña Ester Trueba – Esteban and Férula Trueba's mother. Doña Ester was once heir to the highest surname of the viceroyalty of Lima, but her husband (Esteban and Férula's father) wasted her dowry and inheritance. Tres Marías is handed down to Esteban from Doña Ester's side of the family, but it has fallen into disrepair since Esteban's father left. Doña Ester suffers from crippling arthritis, and Férula is expected to stay home and care for her. Doña Ester dies early in the novel, but before she does, she begs Esteban to marry a respectable girl and have sons to carry his name, which highlights the importance of family and the patriarchy within the novel.

Father Restrepo – A parish priest living in the capital city. Father Restrepo is a dramatic man and a religious fanatic who accuses the innocent members of his congregation of terrible sins. After Clara's outburst in church when she is 10 years old, Father Restrepo accuses her of being possessed by the devil.

Rostipov – A Rumanian magician. When Clara stops speaking and Dr. Cuevas's treatments fail to cure her, Nívea takes Clara to see Rostipov. He says Clara is silent because she simply does not want to speak, and claims that she will speak when she is ready, which is exactly what Clara does.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mustafá – The host at the Christopher Columbus, Tránsito Soto's brothel. Mustafá greets Esteban Trueba and his friends during Esteban's third encounter with Tránsito Soto; however, when Esteban goes back to the Christopher Columbus to ask

Tránsito's help in finding Alba, Mustafá is gone.



THEMES

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CLASS, POLITICS, AND CORRUPTION

Class struggle and politics are at the center of Isabel Allende's multi-generational novel *The House of the Spirits*. The book examines the social and political changes of an unnamed South American country as it transitions from a class-based oligarchy—a political system in which a small group of very wealthy people hold most of the power—to a full-blown Marxist revolution. Much of the story unfolds at Tres Marías, a country *hacienda* (estate) owned by Esteban Trueba, an extremely wealthy senator from the capital. Many peasants live and work on the *hacienda*, just as they have for generations, and Esteban prides himself on being the only landowner to provide peasant workers with solid brick homes. Despite this perceived luxury, the peasants have few rights, and they are constantly subjected to Esteban's explosive temper and abusive treatment. The peasants' discontent is mirrored in that of the working-class citizens in the cities, and whispers of social justice and equality soon spread across the nation. Through *The House of the Spirits*, Allende highlights the struggles faced by the lower classes in 20th-century Latin America and points to political corruption as a direct source of society's injustices and inequalities.

The nation described in *The House of the Spirits* is rife with corrupt politicians and government practices, all of which are aimed at keeping the wealthy in power and the lower classes in poverty. During elections, Esteban and the other landowners—known in the novel as *patrones*—coerce the peasants to vote for conservative candidates. The *patrones* promise the peasants bonuses if the conservative candidates win, and they threaten to fire the peasants if their candidates lose. While the peasants technically have the right to vote, their right to freely choose a candidate is constrained by threats and intimidation. Additionally, the *patrones* bribe the police, fix the ballot boxes, and transport the peasants to vote “under careful observation.” Through the corrupt practices of the *patrones*, the conservative candidates are all but guaranteed the peasant vote, which also guarantees that the *patrones* will maintain power over the peasants. After a massive earthquake rocks the nation, leaving 10,000 dead and the country in ruins, the people never see the aid sent by foreign countries: “[S]hiploads of medicine, blankets, food, and building material arrived, all of

which disappeared in the mysterious labyrinths of various bureaucracies, and were still available for purchase years later.” Instead of distributing the supplies to the suffering and dying people, the nation’s corrupt government intercepts the supplies and sells them for profit.

Resistance to such corruption and oppression—by both the peasant and upper classes—is present within the novel. This resistance is shaped largely by communism (a political and economic theory that promotes class war, publicly owned property, and work and wages based on need and ability) and socialism (a political and economic theory seen as the transitional state between capitalism and communism), ideologies that seek social equality and justice. Early in the novel, as Esteban is establishing himself as a powerful *patrón*, the country is “waking up,” and the “wave of discontent” that is stirring the people begins to “strike at the heart of that oligarchic society.” There is talk of unions and the minimum wage, and as communism and socialism begin to take hold, the peasants think of revolution and a chance for freedom and equality. At Esteban’s *hacienda*, a young peasant named Pedro Tercero García begins “talking about justice in Tres Marías.” He befriends outspoken communists and union leaders, and he spreads socialist propaganda around the *hacienda* through subversive pamphlets and coded songs written on his guitar. Like the rising resistance, Pedro Tercero seeks social justice and equality. Even Esteban’s own son, Jaime, joins the resistance—instead of becoming a conservative politician and landowner like his father, Jaime becomes a doctor who tirelessly serves the poor and talks “of justice, of equality, of the peasant movement and of Socialism.” Despite being of the upper class, Jaime, too, fights for the justice and equality of the lower classes.

Marxist ideas gather strength and popularity, and after several years of resistance, the country’s first Socialist president is elected; however, the corrupt far-right—including Senator Esteban Trueba—engineers a military coup d’état to seize power from the Socialists and return it to the Conservative Party. The Socialist president is murdered, and the military never relinquishes power to the Conservatives. At the conclusion of the novel, the de facto power of the corrupt and violent military continues, and there is no end in sight. As Esteban’s father-in-law, Severo del Valle, notes, politics is “a trade for butchers and bandits,” and corrupt politics are indeed to blame for many of the injustices and inequalities that occur throughout *The House of the Spirits*.



WOMEN AND THE PATRIARCHY

In addition to class struggle, *The House of the Spirits* also highlights the struggle of women in patriarchal society. The women of the novel’s unidentified

South American country are expected to occupy a very specific role in society during the mid-20th century, and that role rarely

leads out of the domestic sphere. Women are expected to be wives, mothers, and caregivers, and their education and upbringing are geared to that end. They are also expected to be obedient and dependent on their fathers, brothers, and husbands. The importance of the patriarchy is reflected in wealthy landowner Esteban Trueba’s desire for legitimate sons to carry his name and the string of ignored “bastards” he leaves in his wake, and it is further mirrored in the disrespectful and abusive way Esteban treats the women in his life. The novel’s women both submit to and resist this patriarchal power, but they are never weak, and they each exert their power and independence in different ways. With her portrayal of women and the patriarchy in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende lays bare women’s oppression, while also highlighting women’s innate strength and the importance of their relationships with one another.

The oppression of women in *The House of the Spirits* is most apparent in the extreme violence against women seen throughout most of the novel, which frequently humiliates the women and places them in a subordinate position to men. When Esteban first moves to Tres Marías, his family’s country *hacienda* (estate), he violently rapes Pancha García, a young peasant girl, with “unnecessary brutality.” Pancha does not fight during the assault. Allende writes, “Before her, her mother—and before her, her grandmother—had suffered the same animal fate.” Violence against women is experienced from generation to generation within their patriarchal society, and Pancha has come to expect it. When Esteban catches his daughter, Blanca, having an affair with Pedro Tercero García, a peasant from Tres Marías, Esteban savagely beats Blanca—and when Blanca’s mother, Clara, objects, Esteban knocks out several of Clara’s teeth. Esteban insists on having complete control over his wife and daughter, even if that requires violence. Lastly, when Esteban’s granddaughter, Alba, is arrested during the military coup d’état at the novel’s climax, she is beaten, tortured, and raped by the military police, especially by Colonel García—the illegitimate grandson of Esteban, who is looking for some added revenge against his absent grandfather. The violent treatment of Alba by the military police is rooted in both her identity as Senator Trueba’s granddaughter and her association with Miguel, a wanted revolutionary, and it highlights how no woman in 20th-century Latin America is safe from oppression and abuse.

Despite the violence and oppression of patriarchal society in *The House of the Spirits*, the novel’s women each display strength, which highlights the innate power of women. Clara’s mother, Nivea, plasters the town with suffragette posters at night and loudly calls “for women to have equal rights with men, to be allowed to vote and attend the university, and for all children, even bastards, to be granted the full protection of the law.” In short, Nivea advocates for values opposite her patriarchal society’s, a bold move that takes much bravery.

After Esteban beats Blanca and knocks out Clara's teeth, Clara takes Blanca and leaves Tres Marías, returning to their estate—"the **big house on the corner**"—in the capital. There, Clara changes the lock on her bedroom door and vows never to speak to Esteban again. She dies over seven years later, never once speaking to her husband. Because of her sexist society, there is little recourse or justice for Clara and Blanca, but Clara isn't exactly powerless, and she makes Esteban pay in the only way she can—by withholding her love and attention. When the country's first Socialist president is murdered in a military coup d'état, Alba assists in the revolutionary cause by hiding wanted revolutionaries in her grandfather's massive house until they can safely escape the country. Instead of filling the role of wife and mother, Alba goes to the university and expresses her own political beliefs, which violate both the law and her grandfather's rules. In this way, Alba resists the oppression of patriarchal society most strongly, despite the danger it poses to her both legally and personally.

Toward the end of the novel, after Alba is finally released from police custody (thanks to the help of Tránsito Soto, a powerful prostitute and another example of a strong woman in the novel), Alba discovers she is pregnant. "I carry this child in my womb," Alba says, "the daughter of so many rapes or perhaps of Miguel, but above all, my own daughter." Alba has no way of knowing who the father of her child is, but she implies that this isn't important. While the sexist nature of her patriarchal society places importance on fathers and sons, for Alba and the strong women who come before her, it is women's own power and their bonds with each other that matter most.



MAGIC AND THE SUPERNATURAL

As its title suggests, *The House of the Spirits* is imbued with supernatural elements. Clara, one of the novel's main characters, is a clairvoyant, and she has the added powers of predicting natural disasters and levitating furniture and saltshakers. Clara's magic is commonplace in the privacy of her home, but her family attempts to hide her powers—especially after an outburst in church as a young girl causes the parish priest, Father Restrepo, to declare Clara "possessed by the devil!" Clara's supernatural powers are present throughout her life, and she exposes her children and granddaughter, Alba, to her spiritualist lifestyle. Clara's husband, Esteban, and even her son, Jaime, are dismissive of Clara's abilities, which reflects the dismissiveness of women in the novel more broadly. Despite the dismissive way in which Clara's family approaches her magic, they often turn to her powers in times of great need, which suggests that Clara's supernatural abilities aren't as silly as her family first pretends. With the incorporation of magical elements in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende highlights the mysterious nature of the world and ultimately argues for the power of the supernatural to bring comfort in times of

suffering.

Clara's supernatural powers are an important part of her life; thus, her powers are a prominent part of her family's lives as well, even though they generally ignore them. From a young age, Clara can "predict the future and recognize people's intentions." She foresees her father, Severo's, hernia, predicts her brother's horseback riding accident, and even knows the identity of a local murderer before the police find the victims' bodies. Clara's supernatural abilities manifest early, and while her family largely ignores them, they only get stronger with age. By the time Clara and Esteban are married and have children, the three Mora sisters, local "students of spiritualism and supernatural phenomena," are inexplicably drawn to Clara. The sisters—who have a photograph of themselves seated around a table with a "misty, winged ectoplasm," which Clara sees as "irrefutable proof that souls can take on physical form"—spend an extended period living in Clara and Esteban's house, even though Esteban considers their spiritual beliefs nonsense. Like Clara, the Mora sisters believe wholeheartedly in the supernatural, and they spend their days and nights summoning spirits together. In the years that follow, "a group of Gurdjieff students, Rosicrucians, spiritualists, and sleepless bohemians" gather around Clara and the Mora sisters. This group of spiritualists and mystics live in Clara and Esteban's house, too, and they divide their time "between urgent consultations with the spirits of the three-legged table and reading the verses of the latest mystic poet." Clara's family tolerates this eclectic group, as they do with the Mora sisters, and accepts them as another one of Clara's eccentricities.

With the exception of Clara's son, Nicolás, who shares his mother's enthusiasm for the supernatural but none of her talent, Clara's family is largely dismissive of her powers. However, they often turn to her magical gifts for comfort, which implies that on some level they do respect the power of the supernatural after all. Esteban maintains that "magic, like cooking and religion," is a "particularly feminine affair," and he merely tolerates his wife's obsession with the supernatural out of his deep love for her. Within the novel, magic is symbolic of the strength of women and their real-life skills and abilities, and when Esteban dismisses Clara's magic, he dismisses her as a woman as well. When Esteban runs for senator, he grows increasingly nervous as the election nears, so he goes to Clara and asks if he will win. Clara only nods, and Esteban's fears are immediately relieved. "You're fantastic, Clara!" he exclaims. "If you say so, I'll be senator." While Esteban merely tolerates his wife's peculiarities much of the time, he clearly believes in her supernatural abilities and is happy to benefit from them when the occasion arises. Long after Clara is dead, and Esteban is alone in the **big house on the corner** with his granddaughter, Alba, he fears the sounds of lingering spirits and ghosts are evidence of senility. But these "doubts melt away" whenever Clara's ghost passes Esteban in the halls, or when he hears her

laughter on the terrace. In life, Clara easily communicated “with those of the Hereafter,” and in death, she is likewise able to communicate “with those of the Here-and-Now.” Esteban believes Clara has this power, and it is a comfort to him in his old age. Furthermore, when Alba is arrested during the military coup and is tortured and raped by the police, she invokes “the understanding spirits of her grandmother” to help her die. The spirits don’t come, but Clara does appear in Alba’s semi-consciousness and encourages strength and inner peace. Like her grandfather, Alba shows little interest in Clara’s magic—until she needs it, that is.

At the end of the novel, as Esteban dies an old man, bitter and angry, Alba is convinced of Clara’s presence at the very moment of his death. Initially, Clara is “just a mysterious glow,” but as Esteban slowly loses the rage that plagued him in life, Clara appears “as she had been at her best, laughing with all her teeth and stirring up the other spirits as she sails through the house.” Because of Clara’s ghostly presence and supernatural powers, Esteban is “able to die happy, murmuring her name: Clara, clearest, clairvoyant,” which further underscores the power of the supernatural to bring comfort during times of great suffering.



LOVE

Most of the characters in Isabel Allende’s *The House of the Spirits* are motivated in some way by love. The theme of love is first introduced with

Esteban Trueba’s engagement to Rosa del Valle, a beautiful and angelic young woman whose untimely death leaves Esteban heartbroken. Esteban later marries Rosa’s younger sister, Clara, a mysterious woman with whom he also falls madly in love. Love is not limited to Esteban; it is experienced deeply by each successive generation of the Trueba family. Nor is the power of love limited to romance between lovers: it is foundational in families and friendships within the novel, and love brings the characters peace, comfort, and inspiration. With the portrayal of these different kinds of love in *The House of the Spirits*, Allende highlights the power of love and ultimately argues that it has the ability to motivate and guide one’s actions more than any other emotion or desire.

Each generation of the Trueba family, including Esteban, is guided by romantic love, which underscores love’s vast influence and motivating power. After Rosa’s death, Esteban escapes to Tres Marías, his family’s estate, where he rapes a peasant woman and leaves behind a trail of abused women and illegitimate children. After meeting and falling in love with Clara, however, Esteban reforms his womanizing ways and attempts to keep Clara sheltered from his violent tendencies. Esteban ultimately ends up abusing Clara, too, but his deep love for her keeps his violence at bay for many years. Esteban and Clara’s daughter, Blanca, falls in forbidden love with Pedro Tercero García, one of the peasant workers on her father’s

hacienda. Esteban does not approve of their love, but Blanca and Pedro Tercero’s relationship begins when they are just children, and it is a complete “marriage of body and soul.” While Blanca and Pedro Tercero are never able to realize their love in the way they wish, they spend their lives pining for each other. Likewise, Esteban’s granddaughter, Alba (the secret lovechild of Blanca and Pedro Tercero), is similarly driven by love. Alba falls in love with Miguel, a revolutionary, whose association with Alba leads to her arrest and subsequent torture during the military coup at the novel’s climax. Alba is repeatedly raped and electrocuted, but in her deep love for Miguel, she refuses to give him up to the corrupt police.

In addition to romantic love, Allende also focuses on the love between family members and friends, which suggests that love is powerful in all its forms. After Clara and Esteban are married, Clara begins an unlikely friendship with Esteban’s sister, Férula. Férula and Clara’s relationship grows into one of deep love, and even after Esteban becomes jealous of their relationship and banishes Férula from their lives, Férula summons her ghost to say goodbye to Clara after she has died. Because of the deep love between Férula and Clara, not even death can separate them. Clara’s mother, Nívea, gives birth to 15 children, but she loves Clara “like an only child,” and this deep love between mother and daughter is repeated between Clara and her own daughter, Blanca. After Blanca is caught having an affair with Pedro Tercero, Esteban forces her to marry the Count Jean de Satigny and move north, but Clara knows that her separation from her daughter won’t last long. Blanca soon leaves Jean and returns to her mother, drawn back by their deep love. Esteban, too, shares a deep love and connection with his granddaughter, Alba, despite his relative indifference to his own children. Esteban has little connection with Alba’s mother, Blanca, or with his own twin sons, Jaime and Nicolás, but his love for Alba transforms Esteban from an abusive and greedy man to a loving and attentive grandfather.

Esteban’s love, especially his “exaggerated love” for Clara, is “without a doubt the most powerful emotion of his life, greater by far than his rage and pride.” The characters in *The House of the Spirits* are motivated by many emotions—among them fear, hate, and anger—and they are equally driven by political aspirations and the desire for social justice. But throughout the book, it is love that truly inspires them, and through their lives Allende effectively argues for the overwhelming power of love.



FAMILY

Families and their interconnections with one another are a complex theme within *The House of the Spirits*. Allende’s exploration of families begins with the del Valles, who suffer endlessly when the family’s eldest daughter, Rosa, is inadvertently murdered in an assassination attempt meant for her father, Severo, an up-and-coming politician of the Liberal party in an overwhelmingly

conservative country. The novel also examines the Trueba family, whose only son, Esteban, is first engaged to Rosa del Valle and later marries her younger sister, Clara, after Rosa's untimely death. On Esteban's *hacienda* (estate), Tres Marías, lives the García family, a peasant family including Esteban's trusted foreman, Pedro Segundo (who is also the brother of Pancha, the mother of Esteban's illegitimate son), and his son Pedro Tercero, the future lover of Esteban's daughter, Blanca. The interconnectedness of families is also a key part of the lives of Amanda and Miguel, an orphaned sister and brother. Amanda falls in love with Esteban's twin sons, Jaime and Nicolás, and Miguel ends up being the love of Esteban's granddaughter, Alba's, life. These complicated webs of connection sometimes lead to pain and loss for Allende's characters, but Allende nonetheless argues through their stories that family ties are a crucial source of love and meaning.

Family is at the center of much drama and pain in Allende's novel, which underscores the power of families to cause emotional pain and even violence. Esteban has a poor relationship with his sister Férula, who, prior to her death, curses Esteban so his body will shrink "in the same proportions as his soul." As Esteban ages, growing more disagreeable with each passing year, he indeed begins to shrink, a constant reminder of his strained relationship with Férula. Esteban's poor relationship with Férula is likewise reflected in the unfulfilling relationships he maintains with his wife and children, who largely ignore Esteban and rightfully blame him for their unhappiness. Esteban's wife, Clara, even refuses to speak to Esteban after he abuses her, a vow that lasts seven years until Clara's death. Even Esteban's illegitimate grandson, Esteban García, resents Esteban and his refusal to recognize Esteban García and his father as rightful heirs of the Trueba fortune. Esteban García's resentment causes him to target Alba, Esteban's legitimate granddaughter, whom Esteban García rapes and tortures during the military coup at the book's climax. Esteban García's anger towards his grandfather and his violent treatment of Alba further highlight the pain caused by family connections in the novel.

Despite the drama and pain caused by families in *The House of the Spirits*, family is nevertheless an important part of Allende's novel, and it is a source of deep love and meaningful connections for many of the characters. Even though Blanca's relationship with her father is often strained due to Esteban's refusal to accept Blanca's love for Pedro Tercero, Blanca never stops loving her father, regardless of the intense anger she feels for him. When Blanca sees Esteban for the last time, she throws her arms around him lovingly. "I love you so much, Papa!" Blanca cries, covering him with kisses. Esteban responds in kind, illustrating the deep love within all families, even those divided by disagreement and betrayal. Esteban's relationship with his son, Jaime, is also strained, due in part to Jaime's refusal to follow in his father's footsteps and become a wealthy

politician and landowner. Esteban and Jaime are at each other's throats for much of the novel, but when Jaime is killed during the military coup at the novel's climax, Esteban is inconsolable. After Jaime's death, Esteban waits for Jaime, his "eyes glued to the doorsill, calling to [Jaime] with [his] mind." Like his relationship with Blanca, Esteban's relationship with his son suffers, but he deeply loves Jaime, a fact which again stresses the connection and love within families. Like her mother and uncle, Alba blames Esteban for the many tragedies in her life. However, when she sees her grandfather crying out for his dead wife and son, Alba's "love for the old man returns and she runs to embrace him, running her hands through his white hair and comforting him." Despite the terrible things Esteban has done, his family still loves him.

After Alba is arrested during the military coup and is tortured and raped by Esteban García, the hatred she feels for him begins to soften with time, and she decides that her connection to Esteban García began long before her birth. "The day my grandfather tumbled his grandmother, Pancha García, among the rushes of the riverbank, he added another link to the chain of events that had to complete itself," Alba says. "Afterward the grandson of the woman who was raped repeats the gesture with the granddaughter of the rapist, and perhaps forty years from now my grandson will knock García's granddaughter down among the rushes, and so on down through the centuries in an unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love." Alba's reflections suggest that ultimately, family connections are neither inherently good nor inherently bad; made up of equal parts pain and love, they're simply an essential part of being human.



WRITING AND THE PAST

The importance of recording the past is prominent in *The House of the Spirits*. From the time Clara, one of the main characters, is young girl, she is "already in the habit of writing down important matters" in various **notebooks**, which her future husband, Esteban, eventually uses to "reclaim the past and overcome terrors of [his] own." For Clara, the recording of events bears "witness to life," even if she does enter events in her notebook and promptly forget them. The importance of writing and the past is also expressed in the travel notebooks of Clara's Uncle Marcos, and Clara's mother, Nívea, tells endless stories of past generations, a tradition that Clara continues with her own daughter, Blanca, and her granddaughter, Alba. *The House of the Spirits* is told through the lives of Esteban and Alba, who connect with the past through Clara's notebooks, and through their shared account Allende argues for the value of recording the past, which is otherwise lost to time and poor memory.

In addition to Clara's notebooks, writing is significant in other ways throughout the novel as well. When Blanca lives away from her family, during her short marriage to Count Jean de

Satigny, Blanca and Clara write each other every day. Blanca and Clara’s “abundant correspondence” bears “witness to life,” and they take the place of Clara’s notebooks during this difficult time. Nicolás’s girlfriend, Amanda, is initially fascinated with Clara’s spiritualist lifestyle, but Amanda soon grows tired of summoning spirits and instead takes a job as a newspaper reporter. Like Clara’s notebooks, Amanda’s choice reflects the importance of writing and recording history; in a way, it’s a concrete, mundane version of summoning the spirits of the past. Clara’s social circle isn’t complete without “the Poet,” a man whose love sonnets sweep the nation, along with his poems about revolution and social justice. Like Amanda’s job as a newspaper reporter, the Poet is dedicated to recording history, albeit in a different and more lyrical way.

For Allende’s characters, writing is also a means of coping and healing after tragic events. When Clara and Blanca stop talking to Esteban because of his violent and abusive ways, Esteban uses their letters and writing to “salvage events from the mists of improbable facts.” Without this recording of history, Esteban would have zero insight into the lives of his wife and daughter. After Clara’s death, when Esteban is heartbroken and further distanced from his family by his anger and violence, he uses writing to heal. “I can’t talk about it,” Esteban says of his pain. “But I’ll try to write it.” While nothing can completely relieve Esteban’s suffering, writing does enable him to better able to cope with his grief. When Alba is arrested by the police during the military coup, she invokes the spirit of her dead grandmother for strength. Clara’s ghost advises Alba to “write a testimony that might one day call attention to the terrible secret” Alba is living, so the world will know “this horror that is taking place parallel to the peaceful existence of those who do not want to know.” For Clara and Alba, the recording of events is evidence of the past, which otherwise is at risk of being ignored or forgotten.

According to Alba, “memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events.” This, Alba claims, is why Grandmother Clara writes in her notebooks, “in order to see things in their true dimension and to defy her own poor memory.” The past is at risk of being lost in *The House of the Spirits*, but over and over again, it is successfully reclaimed through writing.

Clara and her supernatural powers. Esteban begins construction on the mansion when he is engaged to Clara, and they move in—along with Esteban’s sister, Férula—after they are married. Esteban builds the sprawling mansion to reflect his family’s high social standing, and he intends for several generations of Truebas to live and prosper there. Clara, however, doesn’t take any real interest in the house until after her twins, Jaime and Nicolás, are born. Soon after, the Mora sisters and other students and enthusiasts of spiritualism arrive at the house and move in. Clara orders the construction of a new room with each new guest, and the house soon turns into a twisted web of crooked hallways and dead-end staircases—a complicated and eerie structure which reflects Clara’s mysterious powers, like her ability to levitate furniture and communicate with spirits.

Clara’s granddaughter, Alba, knows that Clara is the “soul” of the big house on the corner, which is something the rest of the family doesn’t appreciate until after Clara’s death. Clara dies when Alba is just seven years old, at which time the house begins to deteriorate. The curtains and windows remained closed, flowers wilt in their vases, and tiles begin to break from the roof. In the following years, the house falls into ruin, except for Clara’s bedroom, which Esteban keeps sealed and pristine so that he can find Clara’s spirit whenever he wants. At the end of the novel, as Esteban begins to slowly heal and mend family relationships he previously neglected, he orders the restoration of the house. The big house on the corner again resembles the grand mansion it once was, which, since Esteban built the house for the Truebas, underscores the unbreakable connection and resilience of family.



CLARA'S NOTEBOOKS

Clara keeps a series of notebooks in *The House of the Spirits*, which she claims bear witness to her life, and these notebooks symbolize the importance of recording history and preserving the past. From a young age, Clara habitually writes down all of life’s events, both big and small, and her notebooks are later used by her family (specifically Clara’s husband, Esteban, and her granddaughter, Alba) to “reclaim the past” and “overcome terrors.” Throughout Clara’s life, she writes everything in her notebooks—which she organizes by event because she never records the date—and then promptly forgets about them. She refuses to repeat names within her family (Clara won’t name her son Esteban after her husband or allow her daughter, Blanca, to name her own daughter Clara) because it creates confusion in her notebooks. “Memory is fragile,” Clara claims, and her notebooks allow her “to see things in their true dimension and to defy her own poor memory.”

When Alba is detained and tortured by the police during the coup d’état, she tries to summon Clara’s spirit to help her die.



SYMBOLS

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



THE BIG HOUSE ON THE CORNER

The big house on the corner, where generations of the Trueba family live, symbolizes family, as well as

Clara's spirit does come to Alba, but instead of helping her die, Clara suggests that Alba "write in her mind" a testimony of the terrible events unfolding in their country, so those who want to ignore them will know the truth. Later, at a concentration camp for women, Ana Díaz gives Alba a notebook, in which Alba immediately records her experiences. Again, the notebook represents the importance of preserving one's story for posterity. After Alba is released from police custody, Esteban suggests they write down their stories. When his story is finished, Esteban dies peacefully, free of the torments that plagued him in life. "The space of a life is brief," Clara writes, and it passes "so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events." Recording the past allows one to "gauge the consequences of our acts," which is exactly what Allende's characters attempt to do in *The House of the Spirits*.



CAGED BIRDS

Birds, especially birds in cages, are mentioned several times in *The House of the Spirits*, and they represent the oppression of women in patriarchal society. During the mid-20th century, women of the unnamed South American country where the book takes place are confined to a very specific role within the domestic sphere, and they are denied the right to vote or control their own bodies. Furthermore, women are frequently the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, and they are completely dependent upon men—often the same men who abuse them. This oppression is reflected in the caged birds that Clara keeps in the courtyard of **the big house on the corner**. Clara, who resists the oppression of her sexist society in any way she can, meticulously tends to the birds, and when the family goes to Tres Marías, their country *hacienda*, she refuses to leave them behind. In this vein, Clara's birds represent the oppression of fellow women, and Clara supports and stands with them in solidarity.

After Esteban is wounded in the massive earthquake that destroys Tres María and it is unclear if he will survive, Clara returns to the big house on the corner with her daughter, Blanca, and releases the birds from their cages. Without her husband, Clara will no longer be subjected to his controlling and abusive behavior, and the flying birds represent her own potential freedom. Esteban does survive and recover, however, and Clara soon replaces the birds, which again reflects her own confinement under his control. At the end of the novel, long after Clara dies, her granddaughter, Alba, survives repeated torture and rape during the military coup d'état. After Alba is released, she buys new birds for the cages and puts a caged canary in Clara's room, where Alba writes and pieces together her family's history using her grandmother's **notebooks**. The presence of the caged birds at the end of the novel metaphorically represents the continued oppression of women in patriarchal society, which remains widespread even during

Alba's time.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Atria edition of *The House of the Spirits* published in 1982.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☹☹ *Barrabás came to us by sea*, the child Clara wrote in her delicate calligraphy. She was already in the habit of writing down important matters, and afterward, when she was mute, she also recorded trivialities, never suspecting that fifty years later I would use her notebooks to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own.

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba (speaker), Marcos, Barrabás, Clara del Valle/Trueba

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

This quote opens *The House of the Spirits*, and it is important because it introduces Clara's notebooks and establishes the importance of writing and recording the past within the novel. Clara writes everything in her notebooks, even as a young child, and here she records the arrival of Barrabás, a puppy owned by her now-deceased Uncle Marcos. This quote also foreshadows Clara's years of silence. It is not yet known why Clara is silent, but her notebooks serve as a means for her to continue communicating and recording her experiences.


These lines are narrated by Esteban, Clara's future husband, and while the reader does not yet know who Esteban is, he will eventually use Clara's notebooks to "reclaim the past and overcome terrors." In this way, Allende draws attention to the value of personal narratives in reclaiming the past. Personal stories, often both honest and accurate, lend insight into the past that can be ignored or glossed over in history books. As Esteban also uses Clara's notebooks to "overcome terrors," Allende further implies that writing and personal narratives can also help one heal and cope after trauma, which becomes increasingly important as the novel progresses. The past is never lost in *The House of the Spirits*; instead, it is reclaimed through writing—even the "trivialities"—which has the power to inform, inspire, and comfort.

Chapter 2 Quotes

“I would like to have been born a man, so I could leave too,” she said, full of hatred.

“And I would not have liked to be a woman,” he said.

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba, Férula Trueba (speaker), Doña Ester Trueba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 50


Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Esteban tells his sister, Férula, that he won't be returning to the mines and will instead be going to Tres Marías. It is significant because it underscores both the sexist nature of the society within the novel, as well as the anger and resentment Férula feels because of it. As a man, Esteban enjoys the freedom to go and do as he pleases. He has worked the last two years in the northern mines, and now he wants to go to their family *hacienda*, Tres Marías. Férula, on the other hand, is a woman, so she is expected to stay home. Esteban and Férula's mother, Doña Ester, suffers from crippling arthritis, and because Férula is a woman, she must serve as her mother's caretaker.

Patriarchal society expects women to remain in the domestic sphere and be caregivers, regardless of whether they want to or not, and Férula deeply resents this sexist expectation. Furthermore, this resentment has extended to her brother, whom she speaks to with a voice “full of hatred.” Férula's claim that she would rather be a man so she can have her freedom is met with little sympathy from Esteban. Esteban's comment that he wouldn't like to be a woman implies that he recognizes Férula's oppression but isn't willing to do anything to ease her struggle, like stepping up and caring for their mother himself so Férula can try to salvage the rest of her young life. Instead, Esteban acknowledges Férula's oppression and perpetuates it, further expecting her to fill the confined role dictated by their patriarchal society.

Esteban did not remove his clothes. He attacked her savagely, thrusting himself into her without preamble, with unnecessary brutality. He realized too late, from the blood spattered on her dress, that the young girl was a virgin, but neither Pancha's humble origin nor the pressing demands of his desire allowed him to reconsider. Pancha García made no attempt to defend herself. She did not complain, nor did she shut her eyes. She lay on her back, staring at the sky with terror, until she felt the man drop to the ground beside her with a moan. She began to whimper softly. Before her, her mother—and before her, her grandmother—had suffered the same animal fate.

Related Characters: Alba de Satigny, Esteban García, Pancha García, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 64-5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at Tres Marías, when Esteban rapes Pancha García, and it is important because it is evidence of the extreme violence against women that is seen in the novel. However, this quote is also significant because it begins a chain of violence that continues for generations. Esteban's rape of Pancha is hasty and savage. He doesn't even bother to remove his clothes, and he thrusts “without preamble” and “with unnecessary brutality.” There is no conversation, no consent, and no mercy. Esteban has zero respect for Pancha as a woman or a person, and he regards her as little more than a sex object that exists only for his own needs and desires.

The fact that Pancha does not defend herself or complain does not mean she *accepts* Esteban's advances; however, she does *expect* such violent treatment. Both Pancha's mother and grandmother were victims of rape, which highlights just how common sexual assault is for the women in the novel. The words “animal fate” emphasize the profound insult and humiliation of rape, as victims are dehumanized and reduced to animals. Pancha's soft “whimper” suggests she is too scared to cry out, but Esteban is immune to her cries, just as he ignores her blood and virgin status. Esteban's rape of Pancha begins a cycle of violence that culminates with the rape of Esteban's granddaughter, Alba, by Pancha's grandson, Esteban García. Alba vows to break this chain of violence when she becomes pregnant herself, which further underscores the sexist nature of their society, as it is a woman who must stop the violence of men.

●● In vain, Pedro Segundo García and the old priest from the nuns' hospital tried to suggest to him that it was not little brick houses or pints of milk that made a man a good employer or an honest Christian, but rather giving his workers a decent salary instead of slips of pink paper, a workload that did not grind their bones to dust, and a little respect and dignity. Trueba would not listen to this sort of thing: it smacked, he said, of Communism.

Related Characters: Pedro Segundo García, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis


The quote also occurs at Tres Marías when Pedro Segundo tries to explain to Esteban what makes a good landowner and employer. It is significant because it highlights Esteban's poor treatment of his peasants and illustrates his distaste for communism. Esteban falsely believes he is a good *patrón*, or landowner, because he provides his peasants with houses made of bricks, essentials like soap and medicine, and occasional visits from the priest in town. In addition to this, however, Esteban also abuses his peasants, rapes the women, and expects workers to labor long hours with very little pay.


Pedro Segundo's claim that a good employer pays workers "a decent salary instead of slips of pink paper" is a reference to Esteban's system of payment. Instead of money, Esteban pays his peasants with slips of paper that can only be used to buy goods from the *hacienda's* general store. Esteban's system of payment doesn't allow the peasants extra luxuries like he believes it does; rather, it ensures the peasants remain beholden to Esteban. Without the nation's accepted currency, the peasants can never leave Tres Marías, and they can never save for a better life. To Esteban, a staunch conservative, treating the peasants with "respect and dignity" and acknowledging their equality is a communist ideal. He does not believe in the equality of people or in fair wages, which is reflected in the way Esteban exploits and oppresses the peasants.

Chapter 3 Quotes

●● At times Clara would accompany her mother and two or three of her suffragette friends on their visits to factories, where they would stand on soapboxes and make speeches to the women who worked there while the foremen and bosses, snickering and hostile, observed them from a prudent distance. Despite her tender age and complete ignorance of matters of this world, Clara grasped the absurdity of the situation and wrote in her notebook about the contrast of her mother and her friends, in their fur coats and suede boots, speaking of oppression, equality, and rights to a sad, resigned group of hard-working women in denim aprons, their hands red with chilblains.

Related Characters: Nivea del Valle, Clara del Valle/Trueba

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs during Clara's childhood, when her mother, Nivea, a suffragette, takes Clara along as she lectures on soapboxes about women's rights. It is important because it reflects the class and gender struggles that pervade Allende's novel. This quote takes place during a time in history when women, fighting for equality and voting rights, would stand on wooden crates, usually empty "soapboxes," to publicly air their grievances. Fighting for one's rights is never met without opposition, and even though Nivea and the other suffragettes aim their messages at working women, "the foremen and bosses"—i.e., the men—watch from a distance, "snickering and hostile." Women's rights place women on equal ground with men, but the men in the novel clearly aren't willing to share their status.


This quote also underscores class struggles and differences, and Clara notes the "absurdity" of Nivea and the other suffragettes' "fur coats and suede boots" while preaching to a "sad, resigned group of hard-working women in denim aprons." Nivea and the suffragettes are of the upper class, and they likely haven't labored a day in their lives, yet they presume to know the needs of working-class women. The working women's hands, "red with chilblains" (painful inflammation caused by prolonged exposure to cold) are evidence of their struggles, and such pain is completely unknown to Nivea and the suffragettes. In this way, Allende implies that women of the working class are doubly

oppressed, for both their gender and their class status.

☛ His house would be the reflection of himself, his family, and the prestige he planned to give the surname that his father had stained. [...] He could hardly guess that that solemn, cubic, dense, pompous house, which sat like a hat amid its green and geometric surroundings, would end up full of protuberances and incrustations, of twisted staircases that led to empty spaces, of turrets, of small windows that could not be opened, doors hanging in midair, crooked hallways, and portholes that linked the living quarters so that people could communicate during the siesta, all of which were Clara's inspiration. Every time a new guest arrived, she would have another room built in another part of the house, and if the spirits told her that there was a hidden treasure or an unburied body in the foundation, she would have a wall knocked down, until the mansion was transformed into an enchanted labyrinth that was impossible to clean and that defied any number of state and city laws.

Related Characters: Clara del Valle/Trueba, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 104-5

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Esteban builds the mansion, which comes to be referred to as “the big house on the corner.” It is important because it introduces the house, which is meant to be a symbol of Esteban’s success and family, but which is slowly transformed into a symbol of Clara and her supernatural powers. Class standing and wealth are extremely important to Esteban, whose father “stained” the family name years ago, and Esteban wants his new house to reflect the “prestige” he plans to bring back to his name. Of course, a “stain” connotes something permanent that can’t be erased—as such, the house is ultimately taken over by Clara and her spiritualist friends.

Under Esteban’s control, the house is “solemn, cubic, dense, [and] pompous,” which reflects his restrained and arrogant character; however, in Clara’s hands, the house takes on a life of its own. The “twisted staircases” and “crooked hallways” reflect Clara’s mysterious and magical nature, and the portholes meant for people to “communicate during siesta” connote a sense of community and togetherness that is all together absent in Esteban’s vision. Clara builds new

rooms and knocks down walls, completely making the house her own. The house grows until it is “impossible to clean,” which makes no difference to Clara, who refuses to do the household work that is delegated entirely to women according to patriarchal standards. The sprawling and mazelike nature of the home violates a “number of state and city laws,” much like Clara, who continually violates the social norms dictated by her sexist society.

☛ “Father, I don’t know how to say this. I think I committed a sin.”

“Of the flesh, my child?”

“My flesh is withered, Father, but not my spirit! The devil is tormenting me.”

“The mercy of the Lord is infinite.”

“You don’t know the thoughts that can run through the mind of a single woman, Father, a virgin who has never been with a man, not for any lack of opportunities but because God sent my mother a protracted illness and I had to be her nurse.”


“That sacrifice is recorded in heaven, my child.”

“Even if I sinned in my thoughts?”

“Well, it depends on your thoughts...”

“I can’t sleep at night. I feel as if I’m choking. I get up and walk around the garden and then I walk inside the house. I go to my sister-in-law’s room and put my ear to her door. Sometimes I tiptoe in and watch her while she sleeps. She looks like an angel. I want to climb into bed with her and feel the warmth of her skin and her gentle breathing.”

Related Characters: Férula Trueba (speaker), Doña Ester Trueba, Esteban Trueba, Clara del Valle/Trueba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Férula goes to confession, and it is important because it reflects the love Férula feels for Clara, as well as the constraints of their sexist society. Presumably, the “sin” Férula speaks of here is the romantic feelings she harbors for her sister-in-law. Férula is Catholic, a religion that considers homosexuality a sin, and even though she has not acted on her feelings, she has “sinned in [her] thoughts.” While she doesn’t state it explicitly, Allende implies that Férula is a lesbian, and by telling Férula’s story, Allende highlights the many forms love can take and further implies that all forms of love are valid and deserving of respect.

Férula's "flesh is withered," which is to say she has never known the intimate touch of another person. As patriarchal society expects women to remain in the domestic sphere and serve as caregivers, the best years of Férula's life were spent caring for her mother, Doña Ester. During this time, Férula was not allowed to live for herself, and she was even forced to turn down marriage proposals. Now, she is a middle-aged "virgin," and her thoughts are consumed by Clara. Férula's thoughts "choke" her, and her only reprieve is watching Clara sleep—but even this leaves Férula with an intense feeling of longing. *The House of the Spirits* highlights the beauty and power of love, but Allende suggests here that love also has the power to completely devastate and leave one miserable, especially when that love is forbidden.

they are treated. Esteban García's illegitimate status isn't uncommon, but his identity as Trueba's grandson is closely guarded. Such secrecy suggests shame or embarrassment, but this doesn't seem to be the case with Esteban García.

Instead of loudly proclaiming who he is, even if only for himself, Esteban's secret slowly fuels his hatred. Esteban García hates his "last name," which is to say he hates his "peasant fate." As a peasant, Esteban García is exploited, abused, and disregarded, yet the only thing that separates him from Trueba's legitimate children is his last name. Esteban García's hate is further fueled by the "poison" of Pancha's stories and her claims that in another life, her grandson could have been President. Peasant life is "inexorable," meaning it can't easily be escaped. Upward mobility for Esteban García is difficult and unlikely, and he grows angrier by the day.

Chapter 6 Quotes

●● He was the son of Esteban García, the only bastard offspring of the *patrón* named for him. No one knew his origin, or the reason he had that name, except himself, because his grandmother, Pancha García, had managed before she died to poison his childhood with the story that if only his father had been born in place of Blanca, Jaime, or Nicolás, he would have inherited Tres Marías, and could even have been President of the Republic if he wanted. In that part of the country, which was littered with illegitimate children and even legitimate ones who had never met their fathers, he was probably the only one to grow up hating his last name. He hated Esteban Trueba, his seduced grandmother, his bastard father, and his own inexorable peasant fate.

Related Characters: Jaime Trueba/del Valle, Nicolás Trueba, Blanca Trueba, Esteban Trueba, Pancha García, Esteban García

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

The quote occurs when Esteban Trueba's illegitimate grandson, Esteban García, is introduced. It is important because it highlights the patriarchal ideals that dictate Esteban García's life and lends insight into the resentment and anger he feels toward the Trueba family. Esteban García is the "bastard offspring" of the *patrón*, which, by society's standards, means Esteban García is nothing. He doesn't inherit his father's name, status, or property—the very foundation of patriarchal society. Illegitimate children "litter" the countryside like garbage, which is basically how

●● It was Pedro Tercero García, who hadn't wanted to miss his grandfather's funeral and took advantage of the borrowed cassock to harangue the workers house by house, explaining that the coming elections were their chance to shake off the yoke under which they had always lived. They listened in surprise and confusion. For them, time was measured in seasons, and thought by generations. They were slow and cautious. Only the very young ones, those who had radios and listened to the news, those who sometimes went to town and talked with the union men, were able to follow his train of thought. The others listened to him because he was the hero the owners were after, but they were convinced that he was talking nonsense.

Related Characters: Old Pedro García, Esteban Trueba, Pedro Tercero García

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after old Pedro García's death, when Pedro Tercero sneaks onto Tres Marías disguised as a priest, and it is important because it underscores both Pedro Tercero's political message and the oppression that keeps the peasants from absorbing it. Esteban Trueba has already banned Pedro Tercero from the *hacienda* for spreading subversive political messages, but Pedro won't be deterred. Dressed as a priest, he goes to each house on the estate, only he doesn't share blessings and prayers. The upcoming elections are a chance for the peasants "to shake off the yoke"—a word that expresses the burden of



oppression and reduces the peasants to livestock.

Pedro supports socialist and communist candidates, who promise equality, fair wages for fair work, and above all, respect and dignity. The peasants “listen in surprise and confusion” because they live their lives as they have for generations. They have always worked and lived in poverty, and with little to no contact with the outside the world, they have no reason to believe another way of living exists. Only the young peasants, who have access to radios and news, understand the importance of Pedro’s message, and by banning Pedro from Tres Mariás, Trueba all but ensures the peasants remain ignorant and under his control. Pedro risks his life to spread messages of hope, making him a “hero” on the estate, even if no one understands him.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ In Trueba’s opinion, the time had arrived for him to come out in defense of the national interest and of the Conservative Party, since no one better personified the honest, uncontaminated politician, as he himself declared, adding that he had pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, and not only that, had created jobs and a decent life for all his workers and owned the only hacienda with little brick houses. He respected the law, the nation, and tradition, and no one could accuse him of any greater offense than tax evasion.

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 249

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Esteban Trueba decides to run for political office, and it is important because it lends insight into Esteban’s conservative politics and underscores his hypocrisy and inability to look at himself honestly. Esteban fights for the “national interest,” which, in a patriarchal society, is to say that Esteban fights for himself. He is the personification of the Conservative Party—which places value on traditional family, wealth, and social status—and he works diligently to maintain these values. He claims to be an “honest, uncontaminated politician,” but he is really a skilled liar who constantly fears scandals.

It is true that Esteban pulls “himself up by his own bootstraps,” along with the help of countless peasants to do the work. He brings Tres Mariás back to life, but he doesn’t do it alone, and he doesn’t give “a decent life” to his peasants simply because he builds brick houses. Esteban is abusive

and cruel, and he rapes and beats his peasants whenever he wants. In this way, Esteban can’t respect the nation like he claims because he doesn’t respect the very people who live there. He admits only to evading his taxes, which he doesn’t consider a serious offense, but he fails to admit assault, attempted murder, or the myriad of other crimes he casually commits. As a personification of the Conservative Party, Esteban leaves much to be desired on the right, which Allende implies isn’t as “honest” and “uncontaminated” as it claims to be.



Chapter 10 Quotes

☝ “You’re a hopeless loser, son,” Trueba would say, sighing. “You have no sense of reality. You’ve never taken stock of how the world really is. You put your faith in utopian values that don’t even exist.”

“Helping one’s neighbor is a value that exists.”

“No. Charity, like Socialism, is an invention of the weak to exploit the strong and bring them to their knees.”

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba (speaker), Jaime Trueba/del Valle

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis



This exchange between Esteban and Jaime occurs when Jaime begins to donate his time as a doctor during the political uprising, and it is important because it underscores Jaime’s difficult relationship with his father and highlights Esteban’s conservative values and selfishness. Esteban insults Jaime and calls him “a hopeless loser” because Jaime refuses to go to law school and become a politician. Esteban’s “sense of reality,” where wealth and power are paramount, is lost in the Marxist ideals of Jaime’s “utopian values.” Jaime believes in equality and fairness, ideals Esteban claims don’t even exist.

Jaime believes in “helping one’s neighbor,” but Esteban thinks little of charity, except for how it affects him. Esteban claims that charity and socialism were invented by the weak “to exploit the strong and bring them to their knees,” which, ironically, is exactly what Esteban does to everyone else. It can easily be argued that Esteban’s conservative ideology does exactly what he accuses socialists of doing, but for Esteban to admit this, he would have to admit to fairness and equality. To Esteban, the upper class is simply better,

and they deserve to have power over the lower classes. The selfishness of Esteban and his political views are incompatible with Jaime, and their relationship suffers because of it.

●● He had finally come to accept—beaten into it by the tide of new ideas— that not all women were complete idiots, and he believed that Alba, who was too plain to attract a well-to-do husband, could enter one of the professions and make her living like a man.

Related Characters: Alba de Satigny, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 334

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after the birth of Esteban's granddaughter, Alba, and it is important because it illustrates the oppression of women in patriarchal society and reveals Esteban's evolving beliefs and values. Alba's birth causes the volatile Esteban to soften slightly, and he begins to reevaluate his previous opinions about love, family, and women. Esteban admittedly doesn't care for his own children, and he thinks even less of women, but Alba changes things. He loves her like no one else, and since she is a girl, he must adjust his sexist thinking.

Up until this point, Esteban has held the belief that women are "complete idiots," and didn't think they were as capable or as intelligent as men. With Alba, however, Esteban has "finally come to accept" that he is wrong, which implies that he didn't change his mind easily. Esteban is "beaten into it by the tide of new ideas"—an interesting choice of words considering the violence with which Esteban treats all the women in his life, except Alba. This passage is meant to impart Esteban's opinion that Alba is capable, but even in saying so, Esteban manages to insult her. Alba is "too plain to attract a well-to-do husband," which is to say she isn't pretty enough to get a rich husband, so she might as well "make her living like a man." For Esteban, Alba's competence is a merely back-up, something to fall back because of her physical shortcomings.

●● When the project was complete, I came up against an unexpected obstacle: I was unable to transfer Rosa to the new tomb because the del Valle family objected. I tried to convince them, using every argument I could think of along with gifts and pressure, even bringing my political power to bear, but it was all in vain. My brothers-in-law were unyielding. I think they must have heard about Nivea's head and were angry with me for having kept it in the basement all that time. In light of their obstinacy, I called Jaime in and told him to get ready to accompany me to the cemetery to steal Rosa's body. He didn't look surprised.

"If they won't give her to us, we'll have to take her by force," I told him.

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba (speaker), Jaime Trueba/del Valle, Clara del Valle/Trueba, Rosa del Valle

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 337-8

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Clara dies, when Esteban tries to move Rosa's body to the Trueba mausoleum, and it is important because it further illustrates Esteban's selfishness and summarizes his sexist attitude toward women. With Clara's death, Esteban wants both his loves in the same place. As sisters, they will be together, and he can visit them at the same time. The del Valles' objection is an "unexpected obstacle," as it never occurs to Esteban to consider the feelings and desires of others. Instead of respecting the decision of Rosa's family, he tries to convince them with "gifts and pressure," and he even tries to exert his power as Senator. Esteban never considers why the del Valles refuse, and when they don't consent, he simply does it anyway.

After Nivea's death, during which she is decapitated, her head is misplaced, and her family is forced to bury her without it. Clara's clairvoyance later enables her to find her mother's head, but Esteban never gives the head to the del Valle family—he fears a scandal if others find out how Clara was able to find it, so he puts the head in a box and throws it in the basement. Being buried without one's head is often associated with eternal unrest, as the body and soul are never complete, and Esteban forces this fate upon Nivea to selfishly serve his own interests. Esteban's comment that he will "take [Rosa] by force" is exactly how he takes most women in his life, either by rape or physical violence, and it perfectly sums up his sexist beliefs and self-importance.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ “We’re not interested in a military coup, General,” the head of Embassy intelligence replied in studied Spanish. “We want Marxism to be a colossal failure and for it to fall alone, so we can erase it from the people’s minds throughout the continent. You understand? We’re going to solve this problem with money. We can still buy a few members of Congress so they won’t confirm him as President. It’s in your Constitution: he didn’t get an absolute majority, and Congress has to make the final choice.”

“Get that idea out of your head, mister!” Trueba exclaimed. “You’re not going to bribe anyone around here! The Congress and the armed forces are above corruption. It would be better if we used the money to buy the mass media. That would give us a way to manipulate public opinion, which is the only thing that really counts.”

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba (speaker), The Candidate/the President

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 381

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after the President—a member of the Socialist Party—is democratically elected by the people, and it is significant because it reflects the corruption present in the novel’s unnamed South American country, as well as conservative politicians’ contempt for Marxist ideology. The head of Embassy intelligence speaks in “studied Spanish” and speaks of “your Constitution” (rather than “our Constitution”) which implies that he is a foreigner. A foreigner, who does not consider themselves part of the country they govern, likely doesn’t have the best interest of people at heart, and this is also indicated by the Embassy head’s unscrupulous suggestion to buy a Congressional vote. They want Marxism to be “a colossal failure,” even if it isn’t.

Esteban’s response is ironic, since he dismisses the politician’s idea on the grounds that it is corrupt only to suggest an approach that is equally corrupt. Buying the mass media to “manipulate public opinion” is highly dishonest and crooked, as it robs people of their right to make independent and informed decisions. Esteban claims the Congress and armed forces are “above corruption,” but they later stage a coup d’état to seize power from the President, after which the armed forces refuse to relinquish control. The faith Esteban puts in his government, which proves its corruption again and again throughout the novel,

is certainly misplaced.

☞ At first his long democratic experience impeded his ability to set traps for the new government, but he soon gave up the idea of obstructing it by legal means and came to accept the fact that the only way to unseat it was by using illegal ones. He was the first to declare in public that only a military coup could halt the advance of Marxism because people who had anxiously waited fifty years to be in power would not relinquish it because there was a chicken shortage.

Related Characters: The Candidate/the President, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 388

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Esteban first suggests the Conservative Party stage a coup d’état to seize power from the country’s Socialist President, and it is significant because it further highlights the corrupt nature of the Conservative Party and the extent they will go to regain power and maintain the status quo. Esteban’s “long democratic experience” implies that he knows the right, or legal, way in which to govern. However, since Esteban wants to take down a democratically elected president, he must do it through illegal and corrupt means. First, the Conservative Party works with foreign governments to cripple the country’s economy. Money is taken from banks and shops and stores are emptied of goods, all to seize power from the Socialist Party.

The Socialist Party, however, derives its power from working-class people and peasants who are used to being poor and hungry, which is why they won’t give up their power because of a “chicken shortage.” The working and peasant classes have been fighting for power for years, and Esteban knows it can only be taken back by force. In a military coup, political power is seized by force and the government is disposed, freeing up the Conservative Party to again enforce capitalist laws and policies and thereby keeping the wealthy on top and the lower classes dependent. It matters very little to Esteban and the Conservative Party that the President has been democratically elected by the people. Marxism is antithetical to conservative ideals, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to remove the threat.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live. She suggested that she write a testimony that might one day call attention to the terrible secret she was living through, so that the world would know about this horror that was taking place parallel to the peaceful existence of those who did not want to know, who could afford the illusion of a normal life, and of those who could deny that they were on a raft adrift in a sea of sorrow, ignoring, despite all evidence, that only blocks away from their happy world there were others, these others who live or die on the dark side. “You have a lot to do, so stop feeling sorry for yourself, drink some water, and start writing,” Clara told her granddaughter before disappearing the same way she had come.

Related Characters: Clara del Valle/Trueba, Alba de Satigny

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 460

Explanation and Analysis

After Alba is arrested and tortured by the new government after the coup d'état, she summons the spirit of her grandmother Clara to help her die. It is important because it further highlights the novel's sense of the supernatural, but it also underscores Allende's primary argument as to the importance of writing and preserving the past. Clara's ghost doesn't come to help Alba die, but she does appear to tell Alba to write, both to cope with the trauma of her imprisonment and to share her story with others. Alba's treatment by the new government is violent and traumatic: she is electrocuted, beaten, and raped, all for her connection and support of revolutionaries.

During the coup and subsequent social and political unrest, the upper classes are relatively sheltered from the violence and suffering. The upper classes can “afford the illusion of a normal life,” but for the lower classes and their advocates, like Alba, it is impossible to ignore the widespread suffering. Recording her story—even in her mind, since Alba doesn't have pen or paper—creates evidence of the “dark side” where others are forced to live, and all too often die. Despite the deep love Clara has for her granddaughter, she doesn't give Alba much sympathy. It is time for action, not tears and self-pity, and it starts with Alba sharing her story.

☛☛ [...] I've spent a whole month looking for her and I'm going crazy, these are the things that make the junta look so bad abroad and give the United Nations reason to screw around with human rights, at first I didn't want to hear about the dead, the tortured, and the disappeared, but now I can't keep thinking they're just Communist lies, because even the gringos, who were the first to help the military and sent their own pilots to bombard the Presidential Palace, are scandalized by all the killing, it's not that I'm against repression, I understand that in the beginning you have to be firm if you want a return to order, but things have gotten out of hand [...].

Related Characters: Esteban Trueba (speaker), Alba de Satigny, Tránsito Soto

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 466

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when Esteban goes to Tránsito Soto and asks for her help in finding Alba after she is arrested and tortured by the new government. It is important because it highlights Esteban's desperation to get his granddaughter back and illustrates the corruption and cruelty of the new government. Esteban has been frantically looking for Alba since receiving her severed fingers in the mail, and he is finally beginning to see the truth behind the coup he once politically and financially supported. Alba's arrest and torture by “the junta,” the dictatorship established after the coup, is a prime example of the human rights violations perpetrated by the new government; however, now that it is Esteban's own family being tortured, he can't ignore it any longer.

Word of widespread torture and violence has been dismissed by the junta as “Communist lies”—stories created by the opposition to discredit the new government—but Esteban can't believe this any longer. While Allende doesn't state it explicitly, she implies that the unnamed South American country depicted in the novel is her native Chile, and her mention of “gringos” is a reference to Americans. During the Chilean coup of 1973, the United States aided the Conservative Party and helped the military bomb the Presidential Palace, but even Americans grew uncomfortable with the amount of violence and cruelty perpetrated by the new Chilean government. Similarly, Esteban believes the coup has “gotten out of hand,” but there is nothing he can do to stop the corruption of the new government.

Epilogue Quotes

“If you want, I’ll tell you my story so you can write it down,” one said. Then they laughed and made jokes, arguing that everybody’s story was the same and that it would be better to write love stories because everyone likes them. They also forced me to eat. They divided up the servings with the strictest sense of justice, each according to her need; they gave me a little more because they said I was just skin and bones and not even the most desperate man would ever look at me. I shuddered, but Ana Díaz reminded me that I was not the only woman who had been raped, and that, along with many other things, it was something I had to forget. The women spent the whole day singing at the top of their lungs. The guards would pound on the wall.

“Shut up, whores!”

“Make us if you can, bastards! Let’s see if you dare!” And they sang even stronger but the guards did not come in, for they had learned that there is no way to avoid the unavoidable.

Related Characters: Alba de Satigny (speaker), Ana Díaz

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 474

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Alba is arrested by the new government and detained in a concentration camp for women, and it is significant because it underscores the strength, resilience, and solidarity of women in the novel. The women in the concentration camp are beaten, tortured, and raped; however, they are not defeated. They laugh and make jokes, and they encourage Alba to write, an activity which helps her cope and serves as evidence of their profound suffering. The women support each one another, and they divide up their food with a “sense of justice, each according to her need,” an approach that reflects their socialist ideals.

Ana Díaz is particularly supportive of Alba, even though they have a difficult past. Ana sees Alba, a member of the upper class, as the enemy bourgeoisie, but Ana still supports Alba as a fellow woman, and she refuses to leave her in her time of need. Despite the extreme violence and torture in which the women are forced to live, they still “sing at the top of their lungs,” and when the guards tell them be quiet and call them “whores,” the women won’t stand down. The women dare the guards to shut them up, but the guards know there is “no way to avoid the unavoidable.” The women won’t be silenced, like all the women in Allende’s novel.

“The day my grandfather tumbled his grandmother, Pancha García, among the rushes of the riverbank, he added another link to the chain of events that had to complete itself. Afterward the grandson of the woman who was raped repeats the gesture with the granddaughter of the rapist, and perhaps forty years from now my grandson will knock García’s granddaughter down among the rushes, and so on down through the centuries in an unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love.”

Related Characters: Alba de Satigny (speaker), Esteban García, Pancha García, Esteban Trueba

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 479-80



Explanation and Analysis


This quote occurs at the end of *The House of the Spirits*, once Alba’s anger at Esteban García for raping and torturing her begins to soften. It is important because it lends valuable insight into Esteban García’s violence and underscores the complicated and often painful nature of families. The cycle of violence in which Alba is caught up started long before she or her rapist were born. Esteban Trueba’s violent rape of Pancha García produced a son, “another link to the chain of events that had to complete itself,” and he went on to father Esteban García, Trueba’s illegitimate and neglected grandson.

The pain and resentment of Esteban García and his status as Trueba’s “bastard offspring” led him to target Alba, and it ultimately resulted in Esteban García raping Alba (and potentially fathering her unborn child). As this “unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love” continues, Alba questions if her own grandson will seek revenge on Esteban García’s granddaughter and violate her in the same way. While Alba doesn’t excuse Esteban García’s behavior, or her grandfather’s, she understands that Esteban García’s violence comes from a place of great pain and sadness, and she doesn’t hold it entirely against him. For Alba, family connections are neither inherently good nor inherently bad; they are made up equally of love and pain and are an essential part of being human.

●● I write, she wrote, that memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events; we cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously—as the three Mora sisters said, who could see the spirits of ail eras mingled in space. That’s why my Grandmother Clara wrote in her notebooks, in order to see things in their true dimension and to defy her own poor memory.

Related Characters: Alba de Satigny (speaker), The Mora Sisters, Pancha García, Clara del Valle/Trueba

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 480

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs at the end of *The House of the Spirits*, and

it is significant because it further underscores the novel’s sense of the supernatural and reflects the importance of writing and preserving the past. Just like Alba’s grandmother Clara, Alba records her experiences and stories. Alba’s writing bears witness to her life, and it helps her and others remember the past. In keeping a written record, Alba’s brief life is made immortal in way, just as Clara’s was, and it makes the “relationship between events” visible, like the relationship between Alba’s own rape and the rape of Pancha García years earlier.

Written records bring the past into the present and the future, reducing the “friction” of conflicting times, and it proves that everything “happens simultaneously,” which is to say that everything and everybody are connected. Through writing, multiple generations of Truebas, del Valles, and Garcías “mingle in space” like the Mora sisters conjuring spirits, which allows them to be viewed “in their true dimension.” Without the honesty of personal narratives, memories fade and history is lost, but in *The House of the Spirits*, history is relived and reevaluated over and over again.



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: ROSA THE BEAUTIFUL

“Barrabás came to us by sea,” Clara writes neatly in her **notebook**. She records all important matters—trivial matters, too—but she doesn’t know that the unnamed narrator will one day use the notebooks to “reclaim the past” and “overcome terrors.” It is Holy Thursday. The week of penitence and fasting has been long, and Father Restrepo, the parish priest, has been busy accusing innocent churchgoers of all sorts of sins. Clara’s father, Severo del Valle, is an atheist and a Mason, but he has political ambitions, and church is a great place to network. Clara’s mother, Nívea, has political aspirations as well, and she is hoping that if Severo is elected, she will finally be able to secure voting rights for women.

Nívea has given birth to 15 children, 11 of which are still living. Clara, her youngest, is just 10 years old. It is hot and oppressive in the crowded church, and the del Valle family takes up three whole rows. Nívea looks to Rosa, her oldest living daughter. Rosa is breathtakingly beautiful, and she has a strange, mysterious quality, as if she is not entirely human. Nívea dreamed of Rosa even before she was born, and she has always known that her daughter is “not of this world.” Rosa was born completely white and smooth, with shiny green hair, and rumors spread that she was born an angel. There is something fishlike about her, like a mermaid, but Rosa is oblivious to her own beauty.

Rosa is engaged to Esteban Trueba, but he has been gone nearly two years, working in the northern mines. Rosa spends most of her time reading romance novels and embroidering the world’s largest tablecloth. The tablecloth is full of dogs, cats, and other unlikely animals of Rosa’s creation. Severo thinks the tablecloth a waste of time and that Rosa should be learning useful domestic skills instead. Nívea, however, lets Rosa embroider as much as she wants. Rosa is a “heavenly being,” and Nívea knows Rosa’s time on Earth is short. Nívea shifts in the church pew, and her corset snaps and begins jabbing her in the ribs. Many of her suffragette friends refuse to wear corsets, but Nívea can’t break the habit. Suddenly, Clara’s voice breaks the silence of the church. “Psst! Father Restrepo!” Clara says. “If that story about hell is a lie, we’re all fucked, aren’t we...?”

Clara’s notebook and the early admission that it will later be used to “reclaim the past” and “overcome terrors” introduces the importance of recording events and preserving the past. The narrator implies that the notebook will serve a healing purpose, and that it will be used in some way to cope with trauma. From Nívea’s political aspirations and her passion for securing voting rights for women, the reader can infer that the book takes place during a time when women had considerably fewer rights than they do in the present day.



The hot and oppressive atmosphere in the church mirrors that of the sexist society in which the book takes place. From Nívea and her 15 pregnancies, it’s clear that women are expected to be wives and mothers. Meanwhile, Rosa’s mermaidlike appearance and her mysterious qualities make her appear magical and supernatural. She is more mythical than human, and this sets the stage for the supernatural elements in the book. Similarly, Nívea’s dream suggests that she, in a way, is able to see the future.



The fact that Esteban is working in the northern mines suggests that he is, at best, part of the middle or working class. If Esteban came from money, he likely wouldn’t be laboring. Severo’s desire for Rosa to learn useful domestic skills reflects the expectations of their patriarchal society, in which women like Rosa are expected to stay home and tend to domestic matters. Rosa’s description as a “heavenly being” and Nívea’s belief that Rosa’s time is short is a bit of foreshadowing that suggests Rosa will die young. Nívea’s reluctance to remove her corset again reflects society’s expectations. She doesn’t want to wear the corset but is compelled to, which suggests that even strong women are oppressed by the patriarchy. Clara’s outburst suggests that she is just as strong and willing to question authority as her mother.



The church is again silent. Severo stands up without speaking and begins to usher his family out of the church. "Possessed...She's possessed by the devil!" Father Restrepo yells of Clara. Nívea is humiliated. Father Restrepo's words hang in the air "with all the gravity of a diagnosis," and the del Valle family will remember them for many years to come. Clara, however, simply writes of Father Restrepo's words in her **notebook** and forgets them. Clara's "mental powers" are nothing out of the ordinary for the del Valles, but they try to keep her powers hidden from others. Clara can move the saltshaker across the table with her mind, and she can make plates and goblets shake with only a thought. She has frequent prophecies, and can predict earthquakes and accidents.

Clara is Nana's favorite. Nana is the servant who takes care of the children, and she waits on Clara hand and foot. Clara has asthma, and her lungs are always congested. Whenever she struggles to breathe, Nana wraps her in a strong, loving embrace, which Nana says is the only real cure for asthma. After church, Severo paces the house. Father Restrepo's words could harm Severo and his aspirations in the Liberal Party, especially when Clara's powers are considered. Severo thinks that only a fanatic could believe that a young girl is under satanic possession, but there are plenty of fanatics like Father Restrepo.

Nana enters and tells Severo and Nívea that a group of men have arrived with the dead body of Nívea's brother Marcos. Nívea runs outside and throws herself on the coffin, weeping. She begs the men to open the coffin; she has already buried her brother once before, so she must confirm it is really him. Clara hasn't seen her Uncle Marcos in two years, but he has stayed with the del Valles several times over the years. He always arrived with cases full of bizarre equipment and exotic animals preserved by taxidermy. Marcos slept during the day and spent the nighttime hours making odd movements, which he swore perfected his mind and improved digestion.

Years ago, during Marcos's longest stay with the del Valles, he spends two weeks building an airplane, which he plans to fly over the mountains as soon as the weather allowed. On the day of Marcos's flight, people from near and far gather to watch the nation's first flight. Such a crowd won't be seen again for another 50 years, when the country's first Marxist candidate runs for president. A week passes without sign of Marcos's plane. Nívea and the children pray for his safe return, but as time passes, Marcos is declared dead. The del Valles mourn—except for Clara, who keeps looking to the sky.

Clara's mysterious "mental powers" seem to distress her family; however, Clara's powers don't seem to bother her at all. After all, she forgets about Father Restrepo's words after she writes about him. Presumably, Clara's family worries that she might be possessed (what else explains her powers?), and the priest's words are the "diagnosis" that confirms this. The fact that Clara's family keeps her powers hidden suggests they are ashamed and don't want her secret to get out.



It is love, not medicine, that treats Clara's asthma, which underscores the power of love to heal and soothe. Severo's aspirations to be a Liberal politician suggest that he advocates for the equality and freedom of all people. This passage also suggests that Severo's fear of Clara's powers are rooted in the fears of others, not necessarily in his own. If the public finds out his daughter talks to ghosts and levitates, his political career will be over.



Marcos's odd movements are likely yoga or Tai chi, which must certainly seem strange to the del Valles, who are South American. His bizarre equipment and exotic animals further add to the novel's sense of the supernatural, and the fact that Nívea has already buried him once before makes Marcos appear magical or otherworldly. This passage implies that Marcos was once presumed dead and somehow defied it—but Nívea mourned him, nonetheless, which speaks to their closeness as family.



The very first airplane was flown by Wilbur and Orville Wright in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903, so the novel must take place sometime after this date. Marxism, in this case, is a political ideology that advocates social equality and justice through revolution and class warfare, and since the Marxist candidate gathers such a large crowd, it can be inferred that he has the support of many people. Meanwhile, Clara looks to the sky because her power, or intuition, tells her that Marcos isn't dead.



One day weeks after the flight, Marcos arrives on the del Valles' doorstep. He lost his plane and had to walk back, but Nivea's prayers were answered. He stays for weeks, as usual, and thinks Clara's special powers the perfect opportunity to hone his own clairvoyance. Marcos believes everyone—especially those in his family—have the same powers, and that they simply need to be developed. He buys a crystal ball and sets up shop to tell fortunes, kill the “evil eye,” and interpret dreams—all for five centavos. His business is a hit, and long lines of people gather outside the del Valles' home. Marcos gazes into the crystal ball, and Clara whispers prophecies into his ear, which he then elaborates on for good measure.

Clara enjoyed Marcos's stories more than any other del Valle. He kept several travel journals of his trips and experiences, as well as numerous books of stories and fairytales, and Clara read them in full. Now, Marcos has arrived again, this time dead of a mysterious African plague. Uncle Marcos's death would be the most painful experience of Clara's young life if not for the arrival of Barrabás with Marcos's possessions. Barrabás is a rather large puppy, and Clara loves him immediately.

Severo wants to get rid of the puppy, but Clara insists they keep him, so Barrabás settles in and begins to grow. They don't know his breed, although Clara is sure he is from China, and he has a tail the size of a golf club that can quickly clear tables and shelves. Barrabás won't stop growing, and he is soon the size of a horse. Imagination and the del Valles' ignorance as to where he came from adds to the dog's “mythological characteristics.” Nana, however, grows tired of the dog and tries to poison him with cod-liver oil, but it only gives Barrabás a case of diarrhea, which Nana is forced to clean.

The narrator, Esteban Trueba, is 25 years old, and he is miserable being away from Rosa. He has been working and living in the mines for the past two years, trying to make enough money to start their lives together. He writes Rosa often, always typing his letters. He keeps a copy for himself, which he files along with the few letters he has received from Rosa. He never really thought much of love before meeting Rosa. Esteban was too afraid of rejection and ridicule to approach women, and he thought love a pointless pursuit. But that all changed when he saw Rosa the Beautiful for the first time.

Marcos's belief that everyone has powers like Clara's can be viewed as a reference to “powers” such as intuition or empathy, with which women are often associated. The “evil eye” is a curse often seen in Mediterranean culture that is usually cast upon someone without their knowledge, and it is further evidence of the supernatural. Clara kills the evil eye, which suggests she also has the power to reverse curses, and this again speaks to her strength and mysterious abilities.



For Clara, who deeply loves her uncle, Barrabás is a consolation—like a living piece of Marcos. Clara's love for the dog is symbolic of her love for Marcos, and Barrabás helps her to cope with the trauma of such a loss. Marcos's travel journals and numerous books also reflect the importance of writing and recording the past: Marcos has experienced amazing things in his travels, and now his family can experience them too.



Barrabás's “mythological qualities” adds to the book's sense of the supernatural. His size and mysteriousness make him appear magical, and he, like Marcos, defies death when Nana tries to kill him. Severo seems to believe in patriarchal ideas—in that he believes women should learn useful domestic skills—but when it comes to Barrabás, Clara has the final word.



This is the first time Esteban Trueba is identified as the narrator, which means that he is the one to use Clara's notebooks to reclaim the past and heal. The letters that Esteban saves are another way of preserving the past. The letters tell a story, and the few letters Rosa sends compared to Esteban's imply that Rosa doesn't love Esteban quite as much as he loves her. Again, the fact that Esteban must work in the mines to get enough money to marry Rosa suggests he is of a lower class.



The first time Esteban saw Rosa walking down the street with her siblings and Nana, he was mesmerized. The other men in the street were mesmerized, too, and Esteban followed Rosa home. From that day on, Esteban waited outside the del Valle residence, looking for an excuse to talk to Rosa. He enlisted Nana to take messages to her, and he bought poems and songs from a Spanish bookseller to express his feelings. When he first met Rosa, he was afraid to speak, but Rosa fell in love with him anyway. Then, through a bank loan, Esteban obtained the concession for the mine—he had to strike it rich for Rosa’s sake.

By the end of autumn, after the del Valles have mourned Marcos’s death, Severo’s plans in the Liberal Party begin to progress. He is running in the Congressional elections to represent a southern province, which he has never been to. The invitation to run in the election arrives on a Tuesday with a roasted pig—a gift from the southern voters—along with a decanter of the country’s best brandy. By Friday, the pig is gone, and Clara announces that an accidental death will soon plague their family.

On Saturday, Rosa comes down with a chill and takes to her bed. Dr. Cuevas, the local physician, comes to examine her and orders rest and sugared lemonade with a splash of liquor. Severo gives Nana permission to give Rosa some of the expensive brandy sent by the voters, and Rosa drinks the spiked lemonade and goes to sleep. The next morning, Nana wakes as usual to make breakfast before going to Sunday mass. She arranges a tray for Rosa and delivers it to her room, but she is struck by a terrible premonition outside Rosa’s door. Nana opens the door and walks in. She crosses the room, draws back the drapes, and discovers Rosa dead in her bed, looking more beautiful than ever.

Dr. Cuevas is called and declares that no ordinary fever killed Rosa. He begins to tear the house apart looking for anything out of the ordinary and stops at the brandy decanter, which he assesses with extreme suspicion. Dr. Cuevas tells Severo that there is enough poison in the brandy to kill an ox, but he must perform an autopsy to be sure. That evening, Severo sends the children to bed early and gives the servants the night off. Dr. Cuevas and his assistant arrive shortly after, and they help Severo lift Rosa’s body onto the marble slab in the kitchen where Nana prepares the daily meals.

Esteban’s love for Rosa is clear. He obsessively waits outside her house and sends her poems—another form of writing and reclaiming the past that is seen throughout the novel. Here, Esteban appears intimidated, self-conscious, and afraid, which further reflects just how in love with Rosa he is. Again, Esteban’s need for a bank loan to obtain the claim for the mine suggests that he doesn’t have much money of his own, whereas the de Valles seem to be well-off given Severo’s political influence.



Severo is a member of the Liberal Party, which means he supports and advocates for equal rights and social justice, but his representation of the southern province further oppresses the impoverished voters who live there. The voters are not represented by a peer who truly knows their needs, but by another wealthy politician from the capital. Meanwhile, Clara’s premonition suggests an upcoming tragedy and, worryingly, hearkens to her previous feeling that Rosa’s time is limited.



Nana’s premonition suggests that she, too, has “powers,” or at least that she has a powerful sense of empathy and strong intuition. Nana knows that Clara predicted someone would die—and given Rosa’s recent fever, she is the most likely candidate. Nana seems to be the only one who goes to Sunday mass, which signals to Severo’s atheism as well as his political beliefs. Religion is often associated with right-wing politics, which Severo seems to oppose as a member of the Liberal Party.



The spiked brandy was clearly meant to kill Severo, and since Severo is running for Congress, this attempt on his life is likely motivated by politics. Dr. Cuevas doesn’t ask Severo and Nivea if they want an autopsy—he simply tells them he must perform one. The fact that Dr. Cuevas feels comfortable acting on his own accord, without consulting others, reflects the ideals of their patriarchal society. As a highly-educated man of influence in the community, Dr. Cuevas is able to do whatever he feels is necessary, regardless of others’ wishes.



As Dr. Cuevas lifts Rosa's nightgown and reveals her beautiful mermaid-like body, Severo is overcome with grief and leaves the room. Dr. Cuevas, too, is struck with grief and sits crying, his head in his hands. Dr. Cuevas's assistant, however, can't take his eyes off Rosa's body and begins to breathe heavily—a "pant" that will stay with him for many years to come each time he thinks of Rosa's naked body. Despite Dr. Cuevas's obvious grief, he goes to work with his assistant, exploring the most intimate parts of Rosa's body.

Dr. Cuevas knows without a doubt that Rosa's poisoning was meant for Severo. When their work is done, Dr. Cuevas's assistant can't stand the thought of crudely sewing up Rosa's body, and he suggests they work a little more carefully with her. Dr. Cuevas agrees, and they spend several hours neatly sewing Rosa up and filling in the gaps with mortician's paste. Dr. Cuevas leaves the room, unable to take anymore, and the assistant wipes the blood from Rosa, covers her beautiful body with a nightgown, and fixes her hair.

Dr. Cuevas tells Severo that Rosa was murdered with rat poisoning, and Severo collapses to the floor. He renounces his candidacy and resigns from the Liberal Party, hoping that none of his descendants ever become politicians. Politics, according to Severo, are nothing but "a trade for butchers and bandits." That morning, the del Valle residence is draped in mourning, and Rosa's white coffin is placed on the big dining room table. Relatives and friends begin to arrive at noon, and everyone is truly devastated, including the president of the Conservative Party.

Everyone says goodbye to Rosa, except for Clara, who refuses to even enter the dining room. She goes to the garden and curls up with Barrabás, and over the ensuing days grows increasingly distant from everyone, even Nana. Severo tries to keep the gossip concerning Rosa's cause of death at bay; Dr. Cuevas tells everyone that Rosa died of pneumonia. Political assassinations are unheard of in their country, and most crimes of passion are committed face to face. Even with Severo's attempts to stop a scandal, the opposition newspapers soon publish that Rosa was murdered by the oligarchy and the conservatives, who were looking to kill Severo for joining the liberals despite his high social standing. Such accusations are never confirmed—the only thing anyone knows for sure is that the brandy did not come from the southern voters.

Dr. Cuevas's assistant is extremely inappropriate. Even in death, he seems to view Rosa as a sexual object, not a human being, which again reflects the sexist society in which the novel takes place. This passage also reflects the deep love others feel for Rosa, as even Dr. Cuevas is overcome with grief. Still, Rosa's autopsy is the ultimate invasion of her privacy and body—a decision that Dr. Cuevas made on his own.



Dr. Cuevas's suggestion to take more time preparing Rosa for her family implies that they don't give others the same treatment. Likely, servants, peasants, and those of the working class aren't treated with close attention, which reflects the discrimination of the lower classes. Rosa, on the other hand, is given special treatment because she is wealthy and beautiful.



The attempt on Severo's life reflects the corrupt nature of politics. Severo's comment that politics are "a trade for butchers and bandits" suggests that politics are corrupt in general—even the Liberal Party and the left, which supposedly fights for the people. The mention of the Conservative Party president implies that he is suspected of involvement in Rosa's murder.



Severo is very concerned with scandals of any kind, which suggests that he fears the judgement of others and what that might mean for his social status. Scandals—like Rosa's death or Clara's supernatural powers—threaten the del Valles' standing in society, which he goes to great lengths to protect. The oligarchy is the handful of wealthy men who have ultimate political power over the rest of the country, and they often act in their own best interest. As a wealthy man, the oligarchy believes Severo should side with them. Instead, Severo advocates for the lower classes, which threatens the oligarchy's power over those individuals.



In the meantime, Esteban is sure that he will have enough money to marry Rosa in six months, and he is happy thinking about the future. When the telegram from Esteban's sister, Férula, arrives with news of Rosa's death, Esteban must read it three times before it sinks in. It has never occurred to him that Rosa might be mortal. Without Rosa, Esteban's life has no meaning, and he immediately returns to the del Valles' residence.

Esteban arrives at the del Valles' just as the carriage comes to take Rosa to the cemetery for the funeral. Esteban, Severo, and Rosa's brothers follow to the cemetery. Women and children do not attend funerals, as such events are "considered a male province." Esteban, unable to take his eyes off Rosa's gravestone, spends the night in the cemetery, talking to her and mourning her death. He decides he will never love, or even laugh, again. "But never is a long time," Esteban says. "I've learned that much in my long life.

The night of Rosa's death, Clara could not sleep. She was feeling lonely and guilty, and Clara worried that Rosa died because she said she would. The house was dark, so Clara headed to the kitchen, thinking Nana would comfort her. Clara felt a wave of apprehension, pushed a box to the kitchen window, and peered in. She saw Dr. Cuevas and an assistant she did not know covered in blood and standing over Rosa's naked body. Clara was horrified but couldn't look away. She stayed there all night until Dr. Cuevas finished his work and left. Clara watched as the assistant kissed Rosa on the lips, breasts, and between the legs before wiping the blood from her body. Clara stood in the window until dawn, feeling silence fill her soul. She will not speak again for nine years, until she declares she is going to be married.

CHAPTER 2: THE THREE MARÍAS

In the dining room of what had been a superb Victorian home, Esteban sits at the breakfast table with Férula. Their mother, Doña Ester Trueba, does not join them. Doña Ester Trueba spends her mornings immobile in a chair, watching from the window as the neighborhood declines. After breakfast, she is assisted back to bed, where she stays in a semi-seated position until the next morning, when the process begins again. Esteban places his silverware on his empty plate. He sits stiffly, just as he walks. He is strong, and he is known for his quick temper and violence. Esteban tells his sister that he won't be returning to the mine.

Esteban's surprise that Rosa is a mortal being again speaks to her magical qualities and the novel's sense of the supernatural. This passage also reflects Esteban's immense love for Rosa, as he must read the letter three times before he finally begins to accept her death.



Esteban's interruption suggests that he will love and laugh again, even though he is clearly devastated by Rosa's death. The fact that only men are allowed to attend funerals again reflects the oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Nivea deserves to bury and mourn her daughter in the same way Severo and Esteban do, as do Clara and Nana, but their needs are ignored.



Clara's apprehension when she reaches the window again speaks to her special powers, as she seems to know that something isn't right. Witnessing Rosa's autopsy alone is likely traumatic for Clara—a 10-year-old girl—but she is also forced to witness the sexual assault of her sister's dead body. The assistant's despicable behavior and his complete disrespect for Rosa's body and the person she was is further evidence of their sexist society. Dr. Cuevas's assistant again sees Rosa as nothing but a sexual object, and he takes from her what he wants.



The Truebas' rundown home, which was once a great Victorian house, suggests the Truebas were very wealthy at one point. The declining neighborhood, however, implies that the Truebas are not the only people to suffer from an economic downturn, which again points to widespread class struggle. Doña Ester is obviously a very sick woman and likely needs someone to care for her 24 hours a day. Since the Truebas don't have much money, it can be assumed that Férula must take care of her mother.



Férula reminds Esteban that he must do something to make money. Doña Ester's medications are expensive, she says. Esteban looks at his sister. She is still a beautiful woman, but she has resigned herself to the role of their mother's fulltime nurse. Férula is a miserable woman, and while she will never tell Esteban, she has already turned down two marriage proposals. She adored Esteban as a child, but he has been pulling away from her since the first time he put on "long pants." Now, Férula sits and watches the clock, waiting for mother's scheduled medication times, angry that her brother isn't obligated to the same fate.

Esteban tells Férula that he has decided to go to Tres Marías, but Férula tries to talk him out of it. The place is in ruins, she says, and Esteban would do well to sell it for the price of the land. Esteban refuses. Land, he says, is all that is left when everything else is gone. "I would like to have been born a man," Férula says with venom and hatred in her voice, "so I could leave too." Esteban can't relate; he has never wanted to be a woman.

Doña Ester has suffered with crippling arthritis for several years, but she [was once heir to the highest surname of the viceroyalty of Lima](#). That all changed, however, when she met and fell in love with Esteban and Férula's father, a "good-for-nothing immigrant" who wasted her dowry and inheritance. Now, there isn't enough money to pay the grocer, and Tres Marías, a country *hacienda*, is all that is left of their once-great fortune. Esteban leaves two days later for the country, and Férula kisses him coldly on the cheek. Esteban tells his sister that he will never be poor again and climbs onto the train.

Esteban arrives in the town of San Lucas, a terrible place nestled in the valley of a large volcano. He played at Tres Marías during school breaks as a boy, but that was a long time ago and memory has all but erased those summers. San Lucas is like a ghost town, and Esteban walks around the entire town without seeing another soul. Then, he notices a woodcutter in a wobbly cart and asks for a ride to Tres Marías. The man tells Esteban that Tres Marías is "a no-man's-land," but Esteban insists. As they approach the *hacienda*, the inhabitants come out of their huts and watch.

The roles that Esteban and Férula assume again speak to the nature of their patriarchal society. As a man, Esteban is expected to make money, and as a woman, Férula is expected to be a caretaker. Férula's role is confined and oppressive—it doesn't allow her to live for herself, which she clearly resents. Furthermore, from the moment Esteban wore "long pants"—meaning from the moment he became a man—he has pulled away from Férula, which suggests that he views himself as superior to her.



Férula's comment, and the resentment with which she says it, again reflects their sexist society. She isn't free in the same way Esteban is to live her life as she pleases—she can't just up and move to Tres Marías on whim because she must care for Doña Ester. Esteban, on the other hand, is unsympathetic to his sister's complaints and takes his freedom completely for granted.



Lima is the capital city of Peru, but Allende implies that the story takes place in a different country. The House of the Spirits is a semiautobiographical novel, and Allende herself was born in Lima, Peru, before moving to Chile as a child. Allende never explicitly states that the story takes place in Chile; however, she refers to many events in Chilean history. Regardless of the book's setting, the experience of Esteban and Férula's father is universally experienced by immigrants around the world. Immigrants are often of the lower classes, and the description of Esteban and Férula's father as a "good-for-nothing immigrant" suggests the classist nature of their society. Férula's cold kiss further reflects her resentment of Esteban's freedom as a man.



Several countries in Central and South American have cities named San Lucas, including Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras, which implies that Allende's story could take place anywhere in that general location. San Lucas's placement at the foot of a large volcano suggests it isn't a sought-after location to live or own property—if the volcano erupts, the people and the town will be wiped out. Meanwhile, Esteban's inability to remember Tres Marías reflects the unreliability of memory when trying to recall the past.



The cart pulls up to the main house of Tres Marías, and Esteban goes inside. The house is covered in dust and cobwebs, and he marvels at how time has worn the house away, leaving only dirt and poverty. To Esteban, Tres Marías looks worse than the mine. He walks through the entire house, and when he is done, Esteban goes outside. Looking around, he sees only women and children and asks where the men are. A man, Pedro Segundo García, steps forward and tells Esteban that all the other men have left. Esteban says he is the new *patrón*, and he tells them all that it is time to get to work.

No one can convince Esteban that he isn't a good *patrón*, which is why he refuses to believe in "class struggle." Esteban thinks the peasants are much better off with him than without him. He uses all the money he saved to marry Rosa to fix up Tres Marías, and with hard work and organization, it begins to resemble the estate it once was. The livestock flourishes, and they rebuild the main house. The peasants' wives take turns working in the main house, and they tend to the orchards as well. The old fields are replanted, and they build stables and chicken coops, and even a new irrigation system. Anyone who falls ill is taken to the hospital, and Esteban even arranges for a priest to come bless the property and people and perform baptisms.

Soon, Esteban begins to feel at home at Tres Marías, and he especially enjoys the solitude and the work. Despite this, however, Esteban's bad character only grows worse, and he treats the peasants and their children badly. The only thing that calms Esteban's foul mood is hunting, and he takes frequent horseback rides with his rifle. Still, Esteban maintains that he is a very good *patrón*, and no one will ever convince him otherwise.

During his first months at Tres Marías, Esteban goes to bed exhausted each night and wakes before dawn ready to work. However, the nights soon grow difficult, and the blankets feel too heavy and the sheets too thin. Esteban's horse begins to play tricks on him and turns into "a formidable female," which he rides until his body aches. At night, he wakes from terrible nightmares of "rotten shellfish, of enormous slabs of raw beef, of blood, semen, and tears," always with a massive erection that he must jump into the icy river to relieve. It is clear to Esteban that he needs a woman, and he smiles for the first time in months.

A patrón is a wealthy landowner, although the condition of Tres Marías doesn't exactly reflect wealth. The men have likely gone in search of work elsewhere, which underscores the extreme poverty of the peasants living on Tres Marías. This, too, reflects patriarchal ideals, as it is the men who are expected to go out and earn. Esteban wastes no time telling the peasants he is in charge, and this further feeds into his feelings of superiority.



Esteban's refusal to believe in "class struggle" and his belief that the peasants are better off with him again underscores his feelings of superiority. To Esteban, the peasants need him to ensure a better life. In his opinion, he isn't oppressing the peasants, and they don't "struggle" because of him. He orders the women to work in the main house, which again reflects traditional gender roles within their patriarchal society. The women are expected to keep mostly to the domestic sphere while the men work in the fields.



Esteban is convinced he is a good patrón because he provides the peasants with healthcare and a priest, but he clearly doesn't treat them well. Allende implies that a good patrón both provides such services and treats his peasants well. If Esteban subjects the peasants to his violence and temper, he isn't a good patrón at all.



Esteban speaks of his horse in near-erotic terms, and his description of the animal as "a formidable female" further reflects his sexism. He views women—and even female animals—as difficult and troublesome, yet he needs women to fulfill his sexual desires. His dreams of raw meat and semen are also highly animalistic and sexual, which reflects Esteban's selfishness: he doesn't desire a woman until he desires sex. It seems, then, that Esteban largely views women as sexual objects rather than as people.



Esteban has seen the peasant girl, Pancha García, many times on the *hacienda*, washing clothes in the river, and it is late afternoon when he goes out to look for her. He finds her, bent over a kitchen hearth. She doesn't look up at him (peasant women always bow their head as a sign of respect in front of Esteban), but he rides his horse right up to the hearth and, placing his arm firmly around her waist, pulls Pancha up into the saddle.

Esteban rides with Pancha in the saddle down to the river, and they climb down from the horse. Without removing his clothes, Esteban attacks her, "savagely thrusting himself into her without preamble, with unnecessary brutality." He can tell she is a virgin, but Pancha makes no attempt to resist him, as both Pancha's mother and grandmother before her "suffered the same animal fate." When Esteban is satisfied, he stops and whistles as Pancha weeps. From that day on, Esteban orders Pancha to work in the main house, where he takes his time with her, making sure she enjoys their sexual encounters, too.

Esteban begins construction on a six-room schoolhouse so that everyone on Tres Marías will know how to read, write, and do simple arithmetic. Esteban isn't exactly comfortable with the peasants learning and filling their minds with new ideas, but he builds the school anyway, and he even finds a teacher to work for him. He considers building a dining hall where all the *hacienda*'s children can get one good meal a day, but he doesn't think the children will come from all over the property just for a plate of food, so he scraps the idea. Instead, Esteban builds a sewing workshop and introduces Pancha to her first sewing machine.

Esteban builds a general store, where the peasants can buy whatever they need, and he sets up a voucher system using pink slips of paper. The pink paper serves as legal tender on the *hacienda*, and Esteban pays each of the peasants with the small pieces of paper. Women are expected to work just like the men, but Esteban doesn't pay them. He only pays the widows, who are considered heads of family. Esteban gives everyone free soap, knitting wool, and medicine, since he doesn't want dirty, cold, or sick peasants. He even gets a short-wave radio and listens to news of a great war, but Pedro Segundo García is the only peasant interested in outside events.

Pancha's chores at the kitchen hearth again reflect society's gender roles, as laundry and cooking are largely viewed as a woman's job. Esteban's actions again reflect his feelings of superiority. He desires a woman, so he finds one and takes her—without even thinking to ask her permission.



Esteban doesn't just rape Pancha—he "savagely" rapes her with "unnecessary brutality." What's worse, Pancha isn't the least bit surprised by the violent assault, as both her mother and grandmother were raped as well. This implies that women are frequently subjected to such horrendous treatment in the society of the novel, which again speaks to the overall oppression of women in a patriarchal system.



Esteban isn't comfortable with the peasants learning to read and write because such skills open them up to new ideas like equality and justice, which could lead to a revolt and trouble for Esteban. The fact that Esteban doesn't think the children will come from all over to eat reflects his own privilege. Esteban has likely never been hungry and is too selfish to realize the children would probably go to great lengths to get a good meal.



Esteban's system of paying the peasants with pink vouchers ensures that the peasants can never be free. The pink paper is worthless anywhere besides Tres María, and this makes the peasants completely dependent upon Esteban, just as he wants them to be. Furthermore, he only provides the peasants with things that make them more valuable to him, since healthy peasants who can work harder. Everything else they must pay for, which again reflects Esteban's selfishness.



Esteban and Pedro Segundo spend a lot of time together, listening to the radio and working, and he is the closest Esteban has to a friend. Esteban's pride, however, won't recognize a peasant as a friend. Pedro Segundo was the unofficial foreman of the *hacienda* in the years before Esteban arrived, and sometimes Esteban thinks he can see "murderous hatred" in Pedro Segundo's eyes. Still, Pedro Segundo is honest and loyal, and says nothing when he sees his sister, Pancha, in the main house.

Soon, Esteban realizes that Pancha is obviously pregnant, although he is certainly the last one to notice. He cares very little and only uses her to relieve tension and get a good night's sleep. In truth, he is "repulsed" by Pancha, and he can't view any child she gives birth to as his own. Esteban looks out the window to another young peasant girl, about 13 or 14 years old, and smiles.

Over the next ten years, Esteban continues to improve Tres Marías. He builds brick houses for the peasants and raises their standard of living, but his bad temper is well-known. There isn't a peasant girl around that isn't taken into the woods by Esteban, and the entire region is soon overflowing with Esteban's "bastard offspring." Pedro Segundo tries to convince Esteban that it isn't brick houses and free milk that makes a good *patrón*, but a good salary not paid in pink paper and a workload that doesn't break one's back. Esteban refuses to listen. Such ideas are "Bolshevik" nonsense, Esteban says. Peasants are like children, he maintains. What would they do without him?

Esteban claims that the peasants can't properly care for themselves, yet they want the right to vote. They will likely vote for communists, Esteban thinks, because they don't understand that governments must be ran by strong men. It is nice to think that all humankind is created equal, but Esteban knows this isn't true. In fact, the idea of equality is so ridiculous, it makes Esteban laugh.

*Esteban's inability to consider a peasant a friend again reflects his classism, while the "murderous hatred" in Pedro's eyes implies that he resents Esteban and that Esteban isn't a good *patrón* like he believes. Pedro is forced to work for Esteban for little pay, and he must sit back as Esteban mistreats his sister. Pedro has every reason to hate Esteban.*



This passage is further proof of Esteban's classism and sexism. He is "repulsed" by Pancha and won't acknowledge their child because she is a peasant and beneath him in class standing. Esteban sees Pancha and the other peasant girls as little more than objects to fulfill his sexual desires.



Again, Esteban clearly thinks he is better than the peasants. He refuses to associate with any of the peasant women he rapes and impregnates, and his reference to their babies as "bastard offspring" further reflects society's patriarchal ideals. Children are only considered legitimate if they come from marriage between two people of the same class. A "Bolshevik" is a member of Russia's Marxist Party, which implies that Esteban considers fair pay for fair work a strictly communist idea.



Esteban does not believe in equality and freedom—he clearly doesn't support communist ideals, which seek to make everyone in society equal. To Esteban, equality is a joke worth laughing at, and any political ideology which seeks to place Esteban on equal ground with peasants is likewise a joke.



In the meantime, Esteban sends Férula and Doña Ester money and food, because he has plenty, but he has no desire to see them. He can tell them whatever he wants by letter, but he doesn't mention his string of illegitimate children. Every peasant girl Esteban conquers seems to get pregnant, although he doesn't believe they are his children. He *does* believe that Pancha's son (also named Esteban) is his—Pancha was a virgin before they began having sex, after all. But Esteban still doesn't take responsibility for the boy. Whenever a new peasant girl accuses him of fathering her child, he gives her a few banknotes, threatens her with his whip, and tells her never to come back. Esteban wants a woman of his own class to birth his children, so they can have his surname and the blessing of the church.

Esteban thinks of Rosa's mother, Nívea, who campaigned for women's rights with the other suffragettes. Such women made their husbands look ridiculous, and Esteban always thought Nívea was "sick in the head." A woman's role is in the home, Esteban believes, not as doctors or presidents of nations. What women like Nívea really need, according to Esteban, is a "strong hand." That year, the country begins "waking up," and discontent spreads far and wide that strikes fear in their oligarchic society. The upper classes, however, are largely unaware of this looming threat. Esteban and the other landowners devise a plan for dealing with the upcoming presidential election. Their peasants still live like they did in colonial times, and the landowners want to keep it that way. Still, there is talk of unions, and Marxist pamphlets somehow find their way into circulation.

Esteban begins to frequent the Red Lantern, a local brothel, where the best dancer, Tránsito Soto, is his favorite. Even though he hates paying for something he can simply take whenever he wants, Esteban likes Tránsito because she isn't afraid of the "brutalities of love." One day, Tránsito asks to borrow 50 pesos, so she can move on. She is meant for bigger things, Tránsito says, and she promises to pay him back with interest. Esteban agrees, disappointed that he won't see her anymore, but Tránsito says their paths will cross again. Life is full of the unexpected twists, she says.

In the meantime, Esteban and the other landowners promise the peasants a bonus if the conservative candidate wins the presidential election, and they promise to fire them if their candidate doesn't win. They rig ballot boxes and bribe the police, and they even transport the peasants to vote "under careful observation." Liberals and radicals, Esteban says, are idiots, and communists are "atheist bastards who eat little children."

Esteban claims to want the blessing of the church, but he never personally attends church, and he later says that religion is a feminine pursuit. Esteban only wants the blessing of the church because it is important to society and furthers the sexist assumption that only children born from married mothers are worth recognizing. Esteban's abuse of the women he rapes is made worse by his threats to beat them if they dare ask help in raising their children—the very children he fathered. He kicks them out and essentially accuses them of sleeping with multiple men, since he denies that the children are his.



Esteban implies that Nívea and other suffragettes (women who fight for the rights of other women) are insane—"sick in the head"—for daring to believe they can and should have the same rights as men. Esteban further implies that women should be beaten (they need a "strong hand") for such beliefs, which again reflects his misogyny and violence. The country is "waking up" because the country, which is largely made up the working and peasant classes, is coming to the realization that they deserve the exact same rights as their wealthy counterparts. This belief is reflected in the Marxist pamphlets, which advocate for class equality and warfare—notions that make the wealthy oligarchy nervous.



Esteban hates paying for a prostitute because he can simply rape his peasants for free; however, the fact that Tránsito isn't afraid of the "brutalities of love" suggests that she lets Esteban abuse her without putting up a fuss. Tránsito, like Esteban, is looking to climb in social status, which is reflected in her desire for greater things. She wants more in life and isn't content to remain at the Red Lantern.



The Liberal Party is concerned with the needs of the lower classes, so Esteban and the other landowners resort to intimidation and corruption to ensure the Conservative Party stays in power, keeping the upper classes rich and the lower classes poor. Communism, which doesn't recognize formal religion, is branded as evil (they "eat little children," after all) by the Conservative Party.



One morning, after a particularly disturbing dream in which a tiny girl without eyes keeps calling him “Papa,” Esteban wakes to a telegram from Férula. Doña Ester is sick, the telegram says, and she wants to see her son before she dies. Esteban doesn’t really love his mother, but the telegram still bothers him. He calls Pedro Segundo, explains the situation, and leaves him in charge. As Esteban hands over the keys—except the keys to the wine cellar—Pedro Segundo smiles without happiness.

Esteban’s dream of the little girl calling him “Papa” suggests that deep down, he feels guilty about denying the children he’s fathered with peasant women. Furthermore, Esteban’s desire to go home even though he claims not to care about his family also suggests he feels guilty for abandoning Férula and Doña Ester. If Esteban truly didn’t care, he likely wouldn’t waste his time going back, which speaks to the infallible strength and depth of familial connections.



CHAPTER 3: CLARA THE CLAIRVOYANT

Clara is 10 years old when she decides to stop speaking. Severo and Nivea call Dr. Cuevas, but his failed treatments only manage to terrify Clara. Finally, Severo and Nivea take Clara to see a Rumanian magician named Rostipov, who tells them that Clara does not speak because she doesn’t want to. Clara’s parents are forced to remove her from the convent school where all the del Valle girls were educated, and she begins homeschooling. She is especially interested in reading: she reads all of Marcos’s old books and Severo’s Liberal Party pamphlets. She also writes diligently in her **notebooks**, which, Esteban narrates, is a good thing, since he will later use the notebooks to reclaim Clara’s memory.

Esteban’s interjection again underscores the importance of recording the past, since all of Clara’s early life would likely be lost to him and future generations of her family had she not written it down. In this way, Allende implies that history would also be lost without personal narratives, which further suggests that stories contain more truth than official history. A Rumanian is someone of Romanian descent from Southeastern Europe. Romania, where Transylvania is located, has a rich culture rooted in Gothic style and mystery, which is reflected in the magician Rostipov.



Clara has a knack for interpreting dreams, and she can foretell the future and intuit people’s intentions. She predicts earthquakes and unusual weather, and warns Severo when a business partner plans to swindle him. Severo, however, doesn’t listen, and he is relieved of half his money. Nana believes that Clara’s powers will resolve when she begins to menstruate, but that milestone comes and goes, and Clara’s powers only grow. Severo forbids Clara to predict the future or talk to ghosts, and Dr. Cuevas recommends cold baths and electric shocks, the accepted treatment in Europe for insanity.

Severo clearly doesn’t respect Clara’s abilities, which is why he doesn’t heed her warnings about his dishonest business partner. Clara’s powers strengthen as she grows up, which implies that although women are relatively powerless in society, they still possess inherent strength in other ways. Throughout history, insanity has long since been a way for patriarchal societies to oppress and control women. Women seen as abnormally strong or different were often accused of insanity and locked away in institutions, where they were further tortured with ineffective treatments like electroshock therapy.



Barrabás follows Clara everywhere, and if Clara isn’t foretelling the future or knitting (the only domestic skill Clara masters), she is listening to one of Nivea’s many stories of their family’s past. Nivea points to old pictures of dead relatives and tells little anecdotes, like those about Clara’s uncle, who accidentally farted in public and was forced to leave the country in humiliation. He went to Easter Island to minister to the lepers and was never seen or heard from again.

Nivea’s stories dovetail with Allende’s argument as to the importance of preserving the past. Because of Nivea’s stories, the past is alive in Clara, and the reader knows that Esteban will one day use Clara’s own writings to make sense of her memories. Without such personal anecdotes, much of the del Valle family’s personal history would be lost. Additionally, the fact that Clara only masters knitting suggests that she doesn’t live according to society’s sexist expectations—if she did, she would likely master as many domestic skills as possible.



Nívea takes Clara to the city tenements to give food and clothing to the poor. Other times, Nívea takes her to stand on soapboxes with Nívea's suffragette friends. Later, Clara writes in her **notebook** how absurd it is that her mother and her friends speak of oppression and equality while wearing fur coats and suede boots. Time passes and Clara grows into a young woman, and one day she finally breaks her silence. Clara tells her parents that she will soon be married to Rosa's fiancé, Esteban.

In the meantime, Esteban arrives at the city station. He has been gone for years, and the city looks unfamiliar. He decides that the place is a "shithole" and goes to meet Férula, who looks much older to Esteban and gives off an aura of sadness. She immediately takes Esteban to see Doña Ester, and when Férula opens the door, Esteban is struck by the smell of medicine and rotting flesh. He goes to greet his mother, sitting semi-upright in the bed as usual, but she stops him. Férula explains that it is the smell. "It clings," she says.

Esteban pulls the covers back from Doña Ester's legs and exposes her ulcerated flesh, loaded with maggots and flies. Doña Ester says the doctors want to amputate, but she is too old for all that and prefers simply to die. Esteban grows visibly upset, and his mother makes him promise to marry and have a nice family. He is 35 years old, and it is time he settles down, Doña Ester says. Two days later, Doña Ester dies, but Esteban isn't there because he has gone to Severo del Valle's house to see if he has any more available daughters. That night, Férula and Esteban find their mother dead with a smile on her face.

Severo explains to Esteban that his daughters are each married, nuns, or sick. Clara is the right age to marry, but she sees ghosts and doesn't speak. Esteban isn't afraid of ghosts and considers a mute wife a good thing, so he asks to meet Clara. When Nívea brings Clara out to meet Esteban, Clara says that she has been expecting him and immediately asks if he wants to marry her. Nívea and Severo are mortified, but Esteban doesn't seem to mind and says he indeed wants to marry her. Clara escorts him outside, and Esteban knows that she has accepted him. What Esteban doesn't know, however, is that Clara has already resigned to marry without love.

In the early days of women's rights, suffragettes like Nívea stood on raised platforms—often wooden boxes used to ship soap—and publicly preach gender equality. Nívea also advocates on behalf of the lower classes, which Clara can't take seriously because of Nívea's expensive clothes. In this way, Clara exposes the hypocrisy that can arise within social activism, and implies that if Nívea really cared about the poor, she wouldn't buy expensive boots while others are starving.



Esteban's description of the city as a "shithole" again reflects his cruelty and privilege. Many of the people in the city are suffering under poverty and starvation, but all Esteban thinks about is how the city offends his superiority. The "clinging" smell of Doña Ester's rotting flesh is symbolic of the rotting city: the city is decaying, and its people can't escape it.



Esteban clearly loves his mother, even though he claims he doesn't. He runs to her despite the smell of her wounds, which again speaks to the profound connection that exists among family members. Doña Ester's dying wish for Esteban to marry and have a family reflects the patriarchal ideals of their society, as this seems to be the only acceptable path for him. Doña Ester's her smile in death, meanwhile, implies that she knows Esteban has listened— she, like other women in the novel, seems to have a powerful intuition.



Nívea and Severo are mortified because as a woman, Clara is expected to be reserved and demure, and her candor toward Esteban here is the exact opposite of such expectations. Clearly, neither Esteban nor Clara are concerned with matters of love when it comes to marriage. Esteban is looking for a suitable and quick fix, and Clara, on account of her supernatural powers, knows she is connected to Esteban regardless of how she feels about him.



A few months after Doña Ester's death, Clara and Esteban announced their engagement with a lavish party. As Clara and Esteban dance beneath the lighted canopies, Clara is so happy that she fails to hear the whispered warnings of the spirits. As the night comes to an end and Clara begins to pay more attention to the spirits, she realizes it has been hours since she last saw Barrabás. Suddenly, a scream of horror cuts through the crowd, and the people part as Barrabás, stumbling with a large knife buried in his back, lumbers toward Clara. He falls dead at her feet, and Nivea and Severo are terrified at such a bad omen.

The next year is spent preparing for the wedding. Nivea meticulously packs Clara's wedding trunks, filling them with the latest fashions, but Clara shows little interest. At the same time, Esteban begins construction on the biggest, most luxurious home the city has ever seen. He hires a French architect, lays Italian marble floors, and imports the finest furnishings and draperies from around the world. As she watches, Férua grows more and more irate. It is a sin, she says, to spend money on "nouveau riche vulgarities" and ignore the poor.

Esteban cares nothing about architecture or design, but he wants his new house, which quickly becomes known as "**the big house on the corner**," to reflect himself and his family. Esteban insists the house be fabulous, and it must reveal the prestige that generations of his family will enjoy. Little does Esteban know that the house will grow to include twisted staircases that lead to dead ends, hanging doors, and crooked hallways. Esteban doesn't know that Clara will build new rooms for each of her eccentric guests, that she will order complete walls and rooms demolished on the recommendations of spirits, or that the house will eventually violate several state and city laws. Despite this, Clara never goes to see the house during its construction.

After Doña Ester's death, Férua finds herself alone with nothing to do. She is too old to hope to marry, and she is completely dependent on Esteban, but he doesn't invite her to move into **the big house on the corner**. Férua knows that Clara is incompetent in domestic matters and won't be able to run such a large house, so she decides to befriend her new sister-in-law in hopes that Clara will invite her to live with them. One day, the two women go to lunch, and Clara reaches tenderly across the table and grabs Férua's hand. "Don't worry," Clara says. "You're going to live with us and the two of us will be just like sisters."

Clara might not love Esteban, but she certainly seems happy to be marrying him. However, the whispered warnings of the spirits and Nivea and Severo's worry that Barrabás death is a bad omen suggests that Clara and Esteban's marriage is destined for bad luck. It is never revealed who kills the dog or why, which further adds to the novel's sense of mystery.



"Nouveau riche" is one who is newly rich and spending to reflect their new status, as Esteban is here. Clara, however, doesn't seem to be impressed with material wealth. She ignores her wedding trunks and has no interest in the expensive clothes Nivea fills them with.



To Esteban, the big house on the corner is a symbol of his wealth and status in society, as well as a symbol of his growing family. However, Esteban's description of what the house eventually turns into suggests that despite his intentions, the big house on the corner actually turns out to be more symbolic of Clara and her mysterious powers. The twisting staircases and crooked hallways hearken to the strange nature of Clara's abilities, and the reference to her eccentric guests suggests the house will be full of supernatural oddities instead of a big family.



Clara's words reflect her kindness, but they also reflect her supernatural powers: Clara knows that Férua is worried about her future, so she immediately sets her mind at ease. Férua's fears also reflect their sexist society, which assumes that only young women are beautiful and desirable. Férua gave up most of her life to take care of her mother, and now she is left homeless and alone.



Clara and Esteban are married in a modest ceremony, and Esteban falls madly in love with Clara. He vows that Clara will love him as he needs to be loved, even if he must take it from her with “extreme measures.” Esteban knows that Clara can never belong to him because she belongs to the spirit world of ghosts and objects that move “of their own volition.” Still, he wants more than her body; he wants the most intimate parts of her. With Clara, Esteban’s hands feel too heavy and his voice is too harsh. His old desire to rape women remains, but he is prepared to seduce Clara if he must.

Three months later, Esteban and Clara return from their honeymoon to Férula and **the big house on the corner**. Clara looks around the house quickly and says only that it is “very lovely.” Esteban tells Clara to look down, and she notices that she is standing on a rug made of Barrabás. She takes one look into the dog’s glass eyes and faints. Férula reminds Esteban that she said Clara would hate the rug, and they roll it up and take it the basement, placing it next to Marcos’s old trunks.

Clara soon becomes pregnant, and Férula tends to her with close attention. After so long with Doña Ester, all Férula knows is taking care of others, so she lovingly bathes Clara, powders her, and brushes her hair. Esteban returns to Tres Marías, and while he is gone, **the big house on the corner** settles into a “gentle routine without men.” Férula hates when Esteban returns from the country, filling the house with his rough ways, disrupting the “harmony” established in his absence. Hatred for Esteban consumes Férula, so she goes to confession and tells the priest she has committed a sin. She says that her sister-in-law is an angel and that she wants to climb into bed with her and feel her warmth. Férula claims she listens at Esteban and Clara’s bedroom door, and that she even watches them having sex through a crack in the door.

Clara has endless conversations with her unborn baby and declares the child will be a girl named Blanca. Long after Clara’s due date, Dr. Cuevas realizes that Clara has no intention of having her baby, so he delivers the child by cesarean section. Blanca is born hairy and ugly, looking much like an armadillo. Esteban is horrified by the sight of his new child and thinks his wife has birthed “a monster, and a female one to boot.” With time and Clara’s milk, Blanca transforms into an “almost pretty child,” and Férula is so busy taking care of her that she doesn’t have time to listen at Clara and Esteban’s door.

By “extreme measures,” Esteban implies that wants to rape Clara and violently force her to love him. It seems Esteban only relents to seducing Clara because he knows that forcing her won’t elicit genuine affection, which again speaks to Esteban’s misogyny—he only puts up a front of caring for her because he wants her to care about him.



Again, Clara’s quick assessment of the big house on the corner as “very lovely” suggests she isn’t impressed with material wealth. She barely gives the fancy house a cursory glance before dismissing it, which likely isn’t the response Esteban is hoping for. He wants Clara to gush over the house and the rug, but she clearly doesn’t feel the same way.



The attention Férula gives Clara borders on obsessive, as does her spying on Clara and Esteban while they have sex. Férula’s attention to Clara and her resentment of Esteban for disrupting their “gentle routine without men” suggests that Férula is attracted to Clara in a romantic way. Allende never explicitly states that Férula is a lesbian; however, Férula’s confession to the priest suggests that she is, since homosexuality is viewed as a sin by the Catholic church. In this way, Allende acknowledges the different forms love takes beyond heterosexual relationships or the bonds between friends or family.



Clara seems to refuse to give birth to Blanca; given the way women are treated in the society of the novel, it seems as if she is protecting Blanca from the oppression she will be born into. As an example, Dr. Cuevas takes it upon himself to decide that Clara needs a C-section. Much like he performed an autopsy on Rosa without asking anyone’s permission, Dr. Cuevas doesn’t ask Clara’s opinion or input concerning her own body or her baby. Instead, Dr. Cuevas makes the decision for her, which further reflects their sexist society. Similarly, Esteban’s reference to Blanca as a female “monster” suggests that his estimation of his daughter rests solely on her looks. Even as Blanca grows, Esteban only admits she is “almost pretty.”



CHAPTER 4: THE TIME OF THE SPIRITS

From the time Blanca is an infant, Clara talks to her like an adult, and Blanca is well-spoken even as a toddler. Around this time, Clara and Esteban decide to spend the summer at Tres Marías. Férula thinks this is a terrible idea, but Clara thinks the countryside sounds romantic. They pack their bags, including Blanca's toys and the **birds in cages** that Clara refuses to leave behind, and the family heads to the country. When they arrive, Pedro Segundo unloads the carriage. Only Blanca notices Pedro Tercero, Pedro Segundo's son, standing nearby, naked with a runny nose and swollen belly. Blanca strips naked and runs after Pedro Tercero, and the two children play for hours, until Clara finds them sleeping under the dining room table.

Clara immediately feels as if there is a place for her at Tres Marías, and she writes in her **notebook** that the *hacienda* is her "mission in life." She can sense the peasants' fear and resentment, and she can also sense Esteban's violent character and past. Esteban has given up prostitutes, raping, and his violent outbursts, which the peasants attribute to Clara, and Clara has stopped talking to ghosts and moving furniture with her mind. At sundown each day, Férula gathers the peasant women to say the rosary, and when she is done, Clara takes the opportunity to repeat Nivea's messages of equality. The women smile and listen, but they know that their husbands will beat them if they ever put Clara's ideas into action.

When Esteban finds out about Clara's messages of equality and justice, he is infuriated. No wife of his will espouse the same nonsense Nivea preached, and he tells Clara that if she doesn't stop immediately, he will take down her pants and spank her. The meetings continue anyway, and Férula begins to hate the country. She doesn't like Blanca playing with Pedro Tercero, but unfortunately there aren't any children of their own class for Blanca to play with, so she says nothing. While living at Tres Marías, Férula keeps her same immaculate style of dress and hair, and she keeps her keys hanging from a ring at the waist of her perfectly ironed dress. She never sweats or scratches, until the day she finds a mouse inside her corset and has a nervous breakdown.

Even though Férula detests living at Tres Marías, she can't stand the idea of being separated from Clara. She no longer bathes Clara or sleeps in the same bed with her, but she still dedicates her entire life to Clara. Férula's years with Clara are the happiest of her life. She tells Clara her deepest secrets and thoughts, and Clara writes in her **notebook** that Férula loves her far more than she deserves or can ever repay.

Clara's caged birds are symbolize patriarchal society's oppression of women. In the society of the novel, women are controlled and have their freedom limited by men, much like birds confined to cages. Clara's refusal to leave the birds behind reflects the solidarity she feels for other creatures who are similarly oppressed. At Tres Marías, Pedro Tercero's swollen belly (a sign of malnutrition) and runny nose suggest he isn't very healthy and likely isn't getting enough to eat. It seems that the quality of life on the hacienda has deteriorated in Esteban's absence.



Because of her powers, Clara knows how badly Esteban treats the peasants. It becomes her "mission in life" to save them from his violence, which suggests that Clara has an ingrained passion for social equality. Invoking Nivea's political messages of gender equality, Clara presumably tells the female peasants they are equal to their husbands and deserve the same rights as men. The fact that the women are afraid their husbands will beat them if they support such ideas again reflects their sexist society. This passage also speaks to the motivating power of love. Because of Esteban's love for Clara, he stops raping and exploiting other women.



Esteban's outburst at Clara's meeting with the peasants reflects both his classism and his sexism. He considers gender equality nonsense and completely dismisses and demeans Clara. His wife is a grown woman, yet Esteban treats her like a child he can control. Férula, too, is classist and doesn't want Blanca playing with Pedro Tercero because he is a peasant. Furthermore, Férula's attempt to maintain her city lifestyle in the country implies that she believes city living superior to the country life of the peasants.



Clearly, Clara and Férula share a deep connection and love, which again suggests that love isn't limited to romantic love or love between family and friends. Clara, however, seems almost incapable of loving anyone as they love her: she doesn't love Esteban, and while she does love Férula, Férula obviously loves Clara more.



During their stay, an infestation of ants threatens to cripple Tre Marías. The ants eat through crops and gardens, find their way into the milk, and eat through the orchards. Esteban buys pesticides, but nothing works, so he is forced to hire a man in town who works with insecticides. The man says his work will take over a month, but Esteban doesn't think the *hacienda* can last that long. Old Pedro García, Pedro Segundo's father, offers to help. He climbs on a horse and rides out of sight, talking to the ants along the way. He returns at nightfall, and the next day the ants are gone.

Clara soon begins having visions and talking to ghosts again, and she spends hours writing in her **notebook**. It is clear to everyone that she is pregnant again, and Férula is furious. She takes Clara's pregnancy as a personal insult and arranges for them all to return to the **big house on the corner**. Clara again stops speaking, and spends months wandering silently through the house. Around this time, Esteban begins to grow interested in politics, but he stays close to home, believing such "hysterical women" need the stability of a man.

Dr. Cuevas worries that Clara's labor will again be difficult, but Clara, speaking for the first time in months, assures Esteban and the doctor that everything will be fine. Esteban hopes he gets a son after all this trouble, and Clara says she will have two sons—twins named Jaime and Nicolás. Esteban hates such foreign names and demands one of his sons be named Esteban, but Clara won't hear of it. Repeated names confuse things in her **notebooks**, which she says bear "witness to her life."

That night, Esteban treats himself to the Christopher Columbus, the best brothel in the city. Esteban interrupts his story and explains that he is not really "a man for whores," but he is annoyed with Clara and must get away. The madame brings him the house's best prostitute, and Esteban is pleasantly surprised to find Tránsito Soto standing before him. He says that it looks as if she is moving up in the world, and Tránsito nods and offers to repay his 50 pesos. Esteban laughs, and says he would rather she owe him a favor.

Tránsito Soto is the same woman Esteban remembers. She is independent and has never been supported by a man. She works for herself, which isn't easy at the Christopher Columbus because the madame prefers to deal with pimps. Tránsito has big plans for the brothel and hopes to one day turn it into a "whores' cooperative" and "tell the madame to go to hell." Esteban and Tránsito make love and, when they say goodbye, Esteban knows he will see her again.

While Esteban doesn't think much of the peasants and believes they can't live without him, old Pedro proves that the peasants are quite capable and have much to offer besides physical labor. Furthermore, old Pedro's ability to talk to the ants further adds to the sense of magic and the supernatural within the novel. Old Pedro saves Tres Marías, which forces Esteban to reevaluate his opinion of the peasants.



There is an implied connection between pregnancy and Clara's magic, which further suggests the inherent power that women possess in spite of their oppression. Férula's obvious jealousy and resentment of Clara's pregnancy again implies that she loves Clara in a romantic way, and Esteban's reference to the women as "hysterical" points to his sexism. Women have long been oppressed by men because they are made out to be insane and unstable, which Esteban does here.



Esteban's desire for one of his sons to carry his name again reflects patriarchal ideals, which places importance on fathers passing down their legacies to sons. Clara's silence, which she is prone to in times of trauma or stress, echoes her general unhappiness as Esteban's wife. However, her insistence on the twins' names suggests that Clara has the final say despite Esteban's obvious sexism.



Each time Esteban goes to a brothel, he claims he isn't "a man for whores," but Esteban's constant excuses for his actions suggest that he knows his misogynistic behavior is wrong. Esteban, however, makes no effort to change his ways, which implies he is weak and can't fight his desires despite his claims of superior strength and fortitude.



Like many of the women in Allende's novel, Tránsito resists traditional notions of femininity and womanhood. Society—including the madame at the Christopher Columbus—expects Tránsito to be dependent upon a man, but she absolutely refuses. Tránsito's desire to turn the brothel into a "whores' cooperative," which puts everyone on equal ground, mirrors the Marxist ideology that pervades most of the novel.



As Dr. Cuevas makes plans to perform another cesarean section on Clara, Severo and Nívea del Valle are killed in an accident. Esteban tells Férula that he doesn't want to inform Clara until after she gives birth, but Clara already knows. She dreamt of her parents' death exactly the way it happened. For many years, Severo owned an old Sunbeam automobile, which was the first modern car in town. He spent years taking it apart and fixing it, and he lovingly referred to the car as Covadonga. One day, while driving the car, the breaks went out, and Severo and Nívea were sent careening into a truck loaded with construction iron. Nívea was decapitated, and despite the work of several bloodhounds, the police were unable to locate her missing head.

When Severo and Nívea's bodies begin to decompose, they are buried without Nívea's head. People come from near and far to attend the funeral of the country's first feminist, but it isn't long before Clara has a vision as to the location of her mother's head. Clara and Férula hire a driver, and Clara tells the driver to go straight and do as she says. They drive quite a distance, much farther than the site of the accident, and Férula tells Clara she must be mistaken. Clara, impossibly pregnant, asks the driver to stop and retrieve the severed head just on the other side of the tall bush, and he quickly returns with it. Clara tells him to drive home fast; she is in labor.

Once Clara and Férula return to **the big house on the corner**, Férula calmly delivers Clara's two healthy baby boys before Dr. Cuevas or the midwife arrive. Esteban puts Nívea's head in a hatbox, which is sure to be a problem. A proper burial of the head will lead to questions about how Clara was able to find it; fearing a scandal, Esteban stores the head in the basement next to Marcos's trunks and the Barrabás rug. Nana moves in to help Férula with Nicolás and Jaime, but the only thing the two women can agree on is their faith; otherwise, Férula and Nana hate each other.

One Friday, the three Mora sisters arrive at **the big house on the corner**. The women are strangers, but they are drawn to Clara and the house, and together the women begin a spiritual friendship that will last into "the Hereafter." The Mora sisters are students of spiritualism and the supernatural, and they have a photograph of a ghost, which Clara sees as proof of spirits in the physical form. Esteban agrees to the Mora sisters' presence in the house, provided they are discreet and don't go into his study or use the children for psychic experiments.

The disregard with which Clara is treated here again reflects her oppression in a sexist society. Dr. Cuevas makes plans for her pregnancy and birth without consulting her, and Esteban takes it upon himself to keep the death of Clara's parents from her on the grounds that she isn't fit to handle it. Nívea's decapitation is highly symbolic, especially since Esteban previously accused her of being "sick in the head." In this way, Nívea's decapitation suggests that she has "lost her head" or gone irreparably crazy in daring to think women are equal to men. Additionally, Covadonga is a reference to a city in Spain, and is a nod to Severo's Spanish heritage.



Being buried without one's head is often associated with eternal suffering, as the soul is not able to rest if the body and head remain disconnected. Nívea's identity as the country's first feminist suggests that she is being punished for speaking out against the patriarchy. Clara's psychic powers and her ability to find Nívea's head when even bloodhounds—known for their superior tracking skills—fail again suggests that Clara possesses more inner power than even the most influential men in her society.



By delivering the twins before Dr. Cuevas arrives, Clara takes the power out of his hands, and the fact that she delivers calmly suggests she is better off without him. Esteban's unilateral decision to keep Nívea's head in the basement and deny her a proper burial again reflects his misogyny and selfishness; Esteban makes decisions that affect women based on what is best for him. He worries that burying the head will lead others to suspect Clara's magic. Such a scandal could hurt his career, so he selfishly hides the head.



Presumably, the Mora sisters are drawn to Clara because of her magic and their shared interest in the supernatural, which speaks to the connection women share with each other more broadly. For Clara, who has lost many people close her—Marcos, Rosa, and her parents—she is comforted by the idea of spirits in the physical form, which suggests that her loved ones are still with her even in death.



Férula doesn't like the Mora sisters, either, and she fights incessantly with Nana; however, both Férula and Nana agree not to fight in front of Clara. Férula comes up with new ways to come between Clara and Esteban, and Clara grows more and more distant from her husband. Esteban's love for Clara, however, becomes more obsessive. The children grow, too, and Clara tells Blanca stories just as Nívea did before her, and Jaime and Nicolás become young men and go off to school. Esteban returns to his former bad character and starts raping peasant women in the woods, and he is convinced that Férula is to blame for Clara's indifference toward him.

One night, after a small earthquake, Férula, who has always been afraid of earthquakes, climbs into bed with Clara for comfort. Esteban finds the two sleeping women and loses his temper. He calls Férula "everything from a dyke to a whore" and throws her out of the house. As Férula leaves, she curses Esteban, so his body and soul will "shriveled up" and he'll "die like a dog." Clara is miserable without Férula. She consults her three-legged table, her tarot cards, and her spirit guide for Férula's new address, but nothing comes through. According to the Mora sisters, Clara can't find someone who doesn't want to be found.

Despite the economic crisis that strikes the nation, Esteban continues to prosper. Plagues and sickness begin to spread, and Esteban suggests they all go to Tres Marías, but Clara refuses and insists on staying to serve the sick and the poor. Férula's absence is deeply felt in **the big house on the corner**, especially by Nana, since Clara still doesn't tend to any domestic matters. Clara begins to walk in her sleep, and her **notebooks**, which bear "witness to life," become sloppy and nonsensical.

One day, "a group of Gurdjieff students, Rosicrucians, spiritualists, and sleepless bohemians" arrive at **the big house on the corner**, and the eclectic group moves in, just as the Mora sister did. Esteban doesn't approve, but he has learned not to interfere with his Clara's spiritualism. However, Esteban is determined to keep Nicolás and Jaime sheltered from such nonsense, so he sends them to an English boarding school. The Victorian school is known to cane students for the slightest offense, which Jaime quickly learns because of his insults of the Royal family and his interest in reading Marx. Nicolás shares his mother's love of the spirit world, but since such an obsession isn't considered a crime at the school, he escapes the canings.

This passage reflects the power of love to drive people to extremes, as evidenced by Férula and Esteban's mutual obsession with Clara. Férula's love for Clara drives her to hate her brother, and Clara's refusal to love Esteban the way he loves her causes him to act out and abuse the peasants. This passage also reflects how quickly time passes, and the importance of recording experiences to preserve the past.



Esteban's crass language, meant to insult and marginalize Férula, further suggests that Férula's love for Clara is romantic. Of course, Férula gets into bed with Clara merely because she is scared and doesn't want to be alone, but Esteban doesn't stop to consider the circumstances. Férula's curse that Esteban will "shriveled up" and "die like a dog" harkens back to Barrabás's death and suggests that Férula has supernatural abilities as well, which further implies that all women possess innate power.



Clara repeatedly says that her notebooks bear "witness to life," which implies that life is, in a way, more valuable if it is witnessed by others. In this way, Clara's pain (such as her emotional pain at losing Férula) is not in vain since it is being recorded for posterity. Meanwhile, Esteban's continued prosperity in the face of widespread suffering further reflects the classist and corrupt nature of society and politics, which ensures that men like Esteban stay rich at the expense of the lower classes.



*George Gurdjieff was a mystic and teacher of spiritualism from Armenia who died in the late 1940s, and Rosicrucians are followers of Rosicrucianism, a spiritual movement that began in Europe in the early 1600s. Like the Mora sisters, this group of spiritualists are seemingly drawn to Clara because of her supernatural powers. Meanwhile, Jaime's punishment at school for insulting Royals and reading Marx—who cowrote **The Communist Manifesto**—again reflects the classist nature of society, which clearly favors the upper classes.*



Esteban doesn't care about Blanca's education, so she spends all her time with Clara. Esteban believes that "magic, like cooking and religion," is a "particularly feminine affair." Clara takes Blanca everywhere, including down to the tenements to serve the poor. As Clara hands out food and clothing, she explains to Blanca that such charity is for her own conscience. The poor don't need charity, Clara says, but justice. Esteban, however, considers justice a laughing matter. The poor don't deserve the same life and opportunities as the rich and the intelligent, Esteban maintains. He says that Clara and Blanca can feed and clothe the poor if they want to, but he won't allow them to bring "Bolshevik ideas" into his home, like that no-good Pedro Tercero García on Tres Marías.

Pedro Tercero indeed speaks of justice on Tres Marías, and he is the only one brave enough to stand up to Esteban. Pedro Tercero befriends communists and meets with union leaders, and he spends much time with Father Jose Dulce María, a priest with revolutionary ideas. When Esteban catches Pedro Tercero handing out subversive pamphlets to the peasants, Esteban beats him with a snakeskin whip and threatens to lock him up if he continues to spread such ideas. Pedro Tercero, however, is undeterred.

Pedro Tercero loves only his father, Pedro Segundo, and Blanca. He has loved Blanca ever since they were children and fell asleep naked under the table. Blanca loves him, too, and even though Nana hates when she spends time with him, Clara insists that Nana leave them alone. Blanca and Pedro Tercero spend hours reading Marcos's old books and travel journals, and they listen to Pedro Tercero's grandfather, old Pedro García's, stories. Old Pedro teaches Blanca and Pedro Tercero to search for water using an old stick, and he teaches them all about the natural remedies and medicines of the land. Old Pedro García is a respected healer, and even the local doctors call on his skills occasionally.

Sadly, when old Pedro's daughter, Pancha, falls ill, there is nothing he can do to help. Pancha dies and is buried at the foot of the volcano because she was, in a way, the *patrón's* wife, even if only for a little while. Pancha leaves behind Esteban's son and grandson, Esteban García, who both carry Esteban's name but not his surname. Old Pedro tells Blanca and Pedro Tercero a story about hens who join forces and confront a fox, but Blanca laughs, finding it ridiculous. Hens are stupid and foxes are smart and strong, Blanca says, noticing that Pedro Tercero doesn't laugh with her.

This passage further reflects Esteban's sexism and classism: he doesn't care about Blanca's education because she is a girl and is expected to stay home and tend to domestic matters, not go to school and have a career. Clara understands that the lower classes deserve respect rather than a handout, although Esteban clearly disagrees. He views the lower classes as inherently inferior to the upper classes, which also reflects his conservative politics. Esteban considers equality to be a "Bolshevik idea," which is to say that equality is a strictly communist ideal.



Esteban hates Pedro Tercero and his communist ideals because they spread messages of equality and fair wages for fair work. If the peasants begin to believe that they are equal and deserving of respect, Esteban won't be able to exploit them as easily—and they might even revolt against him.



Presumably, Nana hates Blanca spending time with Pedro because he is a peasant of the lower class, but Clara doesn't share this opinion. She respects Blanca and Pedro's relationship, even though she must know how badly Esteban will react if he finds out. Blanca and Pedro's interest in Marcos's travel journals and old Pedro's stories suggest they both find value in preserving the past, which is also accomplished when old Pedro shares their culture and ways.



Old Pedro's stories of the hens who join forces to overcome the fox is a metaphor for Marxism and the suffering of the peasants at the hands of wealthy landowners like Esteban. Blanca thinks that the story is ridiculous because she is of the upper class and has never suffered in such a way. Pedro, on the other hand, has suffered, which is why he doesn't laugh with Blanca.



CHAPTER 5: THE LOVERS

Blanca's childhood passes without major incident. She spends summers at Tres María and goes to a convent school during the year like all the other girls. Nana gets Blanca ready for school each morning and warns her not to be misled by the nuns—they lure the prettiest girls to the convent, where they are forced to spend their lives baking and taking care of old folks. Each school day begins with mass, and Blanca sits miserable, tortured by “nausea, guilt, and boredom.” At Tres Marías, where Clara says the “real Blanca” emerges, Blanca is tan and happy.

Summer comes early, and Clara and Esteban decide to go to Tres Marías two weeks early to escape the heat. When they arrive, Blanca immediately goes to find Pedro Tercero, but she doesn't have any luck. She wanders the property calling his name, and when she can't find him, Blanca goes back to the main house and cries. Nana instantly knows the reason behind Blanca's tears and is overjoyed. “It's about time!” Nana yells. “You're too old to be playing with that flea-ridden brat.” Clara finds her daughter crying in bed, and, suspecting love is culprit, quietly sits and caresses Blanca's hair until she calms down.

Blanca wakes at dawn and goes downstairs. The house is dark and quiet, so she slips out the door and goes down to the river, where she spent many summers with Pedro Tercero. Pedro Tercero is there, and he quietly motions for Blanca to come closer; he wants to show her something. Down by the river, in a small clearing on the hillside, is a lovely bay mare birthing a calf. Blanca watches in wonder, and then tells Pedro Tercero that she is going to marry him and that they will live together at Tres Marías. He looks at her with “his sad old man's look” and shakes his head. Blanca is innocent, but Pedro already knows “his place in the world.”

Pedro Tercero and Blanca spend the summer “awakening as man and woman.” They spend hours in homemade beds of leaves kissing and touching, and they stop holding hands and showing affection in front of others as to not draw suspicion to this new phase in their relationship. Nana is relieved that Blanca doesn't seem interested in Pedro Tercero anymore, but Clara begins to watch them more closely. When the time comes for Blanca to go back to **the big house on the corner**, she spends the afternoon saying goodbye to Pedro Tercero, kissing and swearing eternal love.

Blanca is particularly aware of the oppression of her sexist society while living in the city, where she is expected to attend a religious school (like all the other girls), where she learns to either dedicate her life to God or to her future husband. Blanca's feelings of “nausea, guilt, and boredom” reflect her unhappiness and oppression, as she has no desire to live such a confined life.



Blanca is becoming a woman, and Nana therefore believes that Blanca's continued friendship with Pedro is inappropriate. Furthermore, Nana's reference to Pedro as a “flea-ridden brat” again reflects her classism. Nana believes that Pedro is unworthy because he is a poor peasant. Clara, however, is supportive of Blanca and her heartache, even though she must know that Blanca is crying over Pedro.



Pedro has “sad eyes” because he knows that he will never marry Blanca. Pedro's “place in the world” is as peasant, whereas Blanca's place is with the upper class, and he suggests that their lives can never work together. Pedro's feelings reflect the deep classism that pervades their society, as not even their love for each other can overcome such assumptions. On another note, the mare birthing a calf mirrors Blanca's transition to womanhood. Becoming an adult means she'll likely develop an interest in sex and will soon be of marrying age, her relationship with Pedro is sure to become even more complicated and riskier.



Clara's powerful intuition tells her that Blanca and Pedro's relationship has advanced to a new level, even though Blanca and Pedro both try to hide it by avoiding each other. Blanca and Pedro's “awakening as man and woman” implies that their relationship is now sexual, and Clara is clearly worried that Blanca will become pregnant.



Back at **the big house on the corner**, everyone sits down to dinner at the table, and just as Esteban begins to carve the meat, Férula walks in. No one has seen her for six years. Jaime and Nicolás are home from school—a fact, Esteban interrupts, that is important because their life away from Clara’s spiritualist lifestyle makes their testimony more valuable. Férula is clearly older, but she is still perfectly dressed and ironed, and her keys still hang from her waist. Without speaking, Férula approaches Clara. Clara stands up, and Férula kisses her on forehead. Férula turns and leaves; the only sound breaking the silence is her keys gently clinking as she walks.

Clara immediately announces that Férula is dead and insists Esteban take her to Férula’s priest, so they can find her. Esteban agrees, knowing he has little choice, and takes Clara to the parish near the tenements. Clara tells the priest that Férula is dead and that he must take them to her, but he doesn’t believe it. He saw Férula just the other day, and she was fine. Clara insists, so the priest finally agrees to take them to Férula’s tenement home. He goes inside alone and finds Férula dead in her bed, where she has clearly been for several hours. Clara insists the men leave her alone, and she quietly and tenderly performs the rites of the dead.

As Clara washes and dresses Férula, she tells her how much they all miss her, and she says that no one has ever loved her as much as Férula did. She stays late into the night, until Esteban finally drags her away. He is irate thinking that his sister still has the power to make him feel guilty, even in death. “Go to hell, bitch!” Esteban thinks, and asks Clara why Férula insisted on living in such squalor when she had plenty of money. “Because she didn’t have anything else,” Clara says quietly.

Since the age of 10, Pedro Tercero has known more than the teacher at Tres Marías, and he has been going to the school in town ever since, leaving each morning at five o’clock just to get there in time. He has read all of Marcos’s books, as well as political pamphlets from local union organizers and Father José Dulce María, who teaches Pedro Tercero all about the guitar. Pedro Tercero writes songs about unions and strength; he believes that if the hens can overcome the fox, humans can do the same. Esteban doesn’t trust Pedro Tercero and keeps a close eye on him. That summer, Esteban whips Pedro Tercero in front of Pedro Segundo for giving the other peasants ideas of Sundays off and minimum wage.

Esteban’s interruption and the emphasis he puts on Jaime and Nicolás’s testimony and ability to confirm Férula’s presence suggests that his sister’s visit is supernatural in nature—but it also reflects the importance Esteban puts on his sons’ testimony because they are men. Esteban implies that it is Férula’s ghost that enters the dining room, a claim which gains credibility, in Esteban’s opinion, if confirmed by other men.



The fact that Férula has been dead for several hours means that it was Férula’s ghost that came to say goodbye to Clara, which is why Esteban thought it so important to point out the number of witnesses to the event—especially male witnesses. In addition to being evidence of the supernatural, Férula’s ghost also underscores the power of love. Férula’s love for Clara is so great that it transcends even death.



Clara’s comment that Férula didn’t have anything else speaks to the importance of love in one’s life. As Esteban banished Férula from the house and those that she loves, she lived a lonely life with very little, regardless of how much money she had. Esteban’s hateful comment about his sister underscores his resentment for her—it seems that he devalues her merely because she is a woman.



Pedro Tercero’s efforts to learn as much as possible and his desire to go to school in town are evidence of his class struggle. Pedro, like many characters in the novel, is determined to be achieve upward social mobile. He wants to progress out of the peasant class, but Esteban is determined to hold him back. Again, the story of the hens and the fox is a metaphor for the class struggles of the peasant class, and Pedro believes they can rise. Esteban not only punishes Pedro for spreading political ideas to the peasants, he beats Pedro in front of his father to humiliate him and control both Pedro and his father.



For the first time ever, Blanca doesn't run to meet Pedro Tercero the moment she arrives at Tres Marías; however, that night when Blanca goes to bed, she locks her door and slips out the window. She meets Pedro Tercero near the river, and they spend the night having sex. Every night after that, Blanca sneaks out her window to meet Pedro, and Clara can sense a change in Blanca's aura. Three years pass in much the same way—summers at Tres Marías, winters at **the big house on the corner**—until the year of the big earthquake.

Clara wakes one night after a terrible premonition and announces there is going to be a huge earthquake. She tells Esteban that 10,000 people will be killed and runs to Blanca's room to warn her. The door, however, is locked, and when Blanca doesn't answer, Clara goes outside and finds the window wide open. Blanca has gone to meet Pedro Tercero, just as she does every night. Suddenly, the ground begins to shake violently, and the earth opens with a fierce growl. Clara is knocked from her feet, and as she crawls to the house yelling Blanca's name, she sees Esteban standing in the doorway. Then, the entire house collapses, burying Esteban in a massive pile of rubble.

After the earthquake—the strongest ever in the nation's history—the peasants begin to excavate Esteban from the rubble, convinced he is dead. Clara, on the other hand, knows he is alive and is frantic to get him out. Blanca and Pedro Tercero appear unharmed and help to dig Esteban from the destroyed house. They finally reach him, but he has too many broken bones to be counted. Pedro Segundo says they must get him to a doctor, but old Pedro says Esteban won't survive the trip. Old Pedro, blind and nearly deaf, takes to carefully setting each of Esteban's broken bones, praying to the healing saints and the Virgin Mary. When he is finished, Esteban's bones are so neatly joined that the doctors in town can't believe it. "I wouldn't have even tried," Dr. Cuevas says.

After the earthquake, a huge tsunami hits the country and thousands are killed. The military must take control of the chaos, and they shoot anyone who steals or breaks the law. Due to another world war, most other places are too busy to notice what the weather is doing in South America, but much-needed supplies still arrive from foreign countries. However, the food, medicine, and blankets disappear in "the mysterious labyrinths of various bureaucracies," and they are still available for purchase years later. Meanwhile, as Esteban recovers from his injuries, he grows more and more disagreeable.

Blanca doesn't run to meet Pedro Tercero because she is growing into a woman and is no longer a young, impatient girl. She knows Pedro will be waiting by the river, and also knows she also be careful to hide their relationship from Esteban. Blanca can't hide from Clara, however, as Clara's special powers give her insight into Blanca and Pedro's relationship.



While Allende doesn't state it explicitly, she is likely referring to the 1939 Chillán earthquake. At 8.3 on the magnitude scale, the earthquake began at roughly 11:30 at night on January 24 near Chillán, a city just south of Chile's capital, Santiago. The death toll of the earthquake was roughly 28,000, and while it was not the strongest earthquake in Chile's history, it did have the highest death toll.



Like the situation with the ants, old Pedro proves that he is capable and has much to offer, which is at odds with the way Esteban traditionally views the peasants. Esteban believes the peasants can't live without him, but old Pedro repeatedly proves that it is Esteban who can't live without him. Furthermore, the fact that old Pedro sets Esteban's bones (something Dr. Cuevas wouldn't have even tried) when he is blind and nearly deaf makes old Pedro seem magical and almost supernatural.



Allende seems to be referring to World War II here, which occurred between 1939 and 1945. The military's excessive violence after the earthquake, as well as the disappearing supplies, are further proof of the country's corrupt government. Instead of giving the dying people the supplies they need, the government hoards them and sells them for a profit.



The big house on the corner survived the earthquake without major damage, except for Nana, who died in her bed the same night. In the chaos, she is not given a proper funeral and is buried without any of the children she raised in attendance. At Tres Marías, Pedro Segundo is again made foreman, and the peasants quickly take to burying the dead and rebuilding the *hacienda*. Pedro Tercero can't understand why his father works so hard for a rich man, but Pedro Segundo tells his son that is the way it is, and he can't change the world. "Yes, you can, Papa," Pedro Tercero says.

The main house at Tres Marías is rebuilt exactly as before, except hot water is added to the bathrooms and a new kerosene stove is put in the kitchen, which all the cooks hate and refuse to use. Clara works closely with Pedro Segundo, taking charge of the *hacienda*, and she also serves as Esteban's nurse. Clara comes to fear Esteban's outbursts and soon grows to hate him. She is exhausted, but each night she shares a quiet cup of tea with Pedro Segundo, who cherishes the strange, mystic woman about as much as he hates Esteban. Clara soon receives a call that Blanca is sick at school, and, fearing tuberculosis, she goes to pick her up.

When Clara arrives at Blanca's school, the nuns tell her that Blanca has been seen by the doctor and doesn't have tuberculosis, but they prefer she leave all the same. Clara and Blanca go to **the big house on the corner**, and find it in complete disarray since Nana's death, so they decide to dismiss the servants and close the house. They cover the furniture with sheets and release the **caged birds** in the courtyard, letting them all fly to freedom. Blanca looks at her mother and comments on how she has changed. Clara says it is the world, not her, that has changed.

Clara arranges for Nana to be transferred to the del Valle family tomb, which is where Nana always wanted to be buried, and returns to Tres Marías with Blanca. When they arrive, Esteban is up in a chair, ordering the completion of the new main house. For the first time in Blanca's life, she watches as her mother serves dinner. Esteban talks through the meal, and Blanca remembers very little, except for the part when Esteban tells them that he fired Pedro Tercero for spreading communist ideas among the peasants.

Nana's death and her improper funeral are further proof of how the lower classes are oppressed in the novel. Nana dedicated her life to the children she cared for, yet none of them bother to pay their respects to her after she dies. Pedro Tercero's comment that the world can be changed foreshadows potential political shifts in the future, which may disrupt the power of the wealthy over the lower classes.



Clara completely takes charge of Tres Marías—contrary to Esteban's opinion of the shortcomings of women, Clara is just as capable as any man. And, unlike Esteban, Clara is a good patrón who clearly has the respect of Pedro Segundo. Clara's concern for Blanca's health also provides a bit of historical context: during the early and mid-20th century, tuberculosis (a bacterial infection that generally affects the lungs) was widespread and often deadly. Symptoms include fever, cough, and weight loss.



Again, the caged birds are symbolic of patriarchal society's oppression of women; Clara's gesture of letting the birds go symbolizes her own newfound freedom. Esteban's injuries have put him out of commission, and with him out of the picture, Clara has increased freedom to run Tres Marías and live her life as she pleases. Much like the birds she frees, Clara is similarly free from Esteban—at least for the time being.



Blanca has never seen her mother serve dinner because, until now, Clara has refused to do domestic work. Now, Clara is required to do it (many of the servants and peasants were likely killed in the earthquake), which also speaks to Clara's evolution. Clara easily responds to changes in her environment, which again illustrates her inner capabilities and strengths despite the oppression she faces as a woman.



Blanca does not let Pedro Tercero's absence upset her, and she continues to go to the river each night. She knows Pedro will soon get word of her return and come to her, and just as she suspects, he arrives on the fifth night. They make love passionately, and Blanca confesses that she made herself sick with banana peels and blotting paper to fake her fever and drank ground chalk to develop a cough so the nuns would think she had tuberculosis. She had to be with him, she tells Pedro Tercero, and he holds her close. Pedro tells Blanca about workers in Europe and the United States who have rights and governments that don't steal supplies meant for disaster victims.

Pedro Tercero explains that the peasants on Tres Marías won't organize a revolt because they are afraid of Esteban. He tells Blanca that the peasants hate her father, and Blanca understands—she hates and fears her father, too. She reminds Pedro Tercero of the socialist who distributed pamphlets and organized peasants a few years back. He was beaten to death and hanged at the crossroads in town, so everyone could see what happens to socialists who rile up the workers. "They could kill you," Blanca says to Pedro Tercero, and he hugs her, holding her close and professing his love.

Blanca manages to stay at Tres Marías and away from school by convincing everyone she has a sickly constitution. She makes herself sick with hot brine and green plums, and she soon gains a reputation for poor health. Old Pedro, who believes the best treatment for anything is busy hands, gives Blanca a ball of clay to make kitchen crockery, and she soon creates an entire miniature world of people and animals. Esteban thinks the hobby is a waste of time, but Clara tries to find a use for it and encourages Blanca to make crèches for their Christmas manger. Blanca begins to make strange hybrid animals, not unlike the animals of Rosa's tablecloth, and her crèches become a tourist attraction.

Pedro Tercero's visits to Blanca become less frequent, but she still waits for him, like the peasants on nearby *haciendas*, who all consider Pedro a hero. He sneaks back to Tres Marías as often as he can, dressed as a preacher or a pagan, but Blanca always knows him by his eyes. Pedro Segundo suspects that his son is disobeying Esteban's order to stay away from the *hacienda*, and he is torn between his role as a father and his responsibilities at Tres Marías. He only talks of his son at home, where he secretly tells his family how proud he is of Pedro Tercero. Whenever Pedro Segundo hears the other peasants whistling songs about hens and foxes, he smiles to himself. Pedro Tercero's song is more subversive than any pamphlet could ever be.

Blanca's willingness to make herself sick just to get back to Pedro highlights the deep love she obviously feels for him, as does her belief that he will eventually come back to her. Blanca knows that Pedro cannot stay away indefinitely and will find a way back to her, so she doesn't worry when Esteban fires him. The new rights of workers abroad fuels Pedro's desire for freedom and equality.



Blanca's story about the dead socialist underscores the danger of Pedro's actions and political beliefs. Advocating for fair work and fair wages isn't just a threat to Pedro's job—activists have been killed for such beliefs, and Blanca fears the same could happen to Pedro. Pedro obviously knows the risks as well, but it isn't enough to get him to stop.



Like Rosa's tablecloth, Blanca's crèches reflect her limited role in society, as both tablecloths and kitchen crockery connote the domestic sphere. Esteban only thinks Blanca's hobby is a waste of time because she isn't making anything useful, like plates or bowls. The similarities between Blanca's crèches and Rosa's tablecloth underscores the connection between family members, even those of different generations—as women from the same family line, Blanca and Rosa seem to share an inherent connection.



Pedro Tercero has the eyes of a sad, old man, and he can never hide them from Blanca. The other peasants consider Pedro a hero because he is the only peasant with enough courage to stand up to Esteban and fight for their respect and equality. Pedro Segundo smiles to himself when he hears the peasants humming Pedro Tercero's songs because Esteban kicked Pedro Tercero off the hacienda for spreading subversive political pamphlets and ideas, which are clearly still spreading with Pedro's songs that contain the same controversial messages of justice and equality.



CHAPTER 6: REVENGE

A year and a half after the earthquake, Tres Marías is again a thriving estate. Esteban, now fully recovered, barges around the *hacienda*, throwing tantrums and threatening people. Even Clara fears him, which deeply upsets Esteban. As Clara grows more distant, Esteban's love and need for her increases, but she spends all her time alone, writing in her **notebooks**. Esteban stops trying to build a relationship with Blanca, who has resisted him since birth. Esteban narrates that he now knows Blanca's hate for him is rooted in her love for Pedro Tercero.

Hoping to win back Clara's love, Esteban stops using the slips of pink paper to pay the peasants. Clara is pleased, but it does nothing to make her love him. She has a bolt installed on her bedroom door and never lets Esteban in her bed again, except for when he forces himself on her. He tries flattering her with praise and gifts to win her love, and when that doesn't work, he threatens to kick in the door and "beat her to a pulp." Esteban knows Clara doesn't love him, but he loves everything about her. He drills a hole in the wall so he can watch her undress, and he even returns to raping peasants to get a rise out of her, but Clara is unmoved.

Esteban tells no one when he starts to shrink. It is a matter of pride for Esteban, so he keeps it to himself, along with his crippling pain. As the country readies for the Presidential election, Esteban meets Count Jean de Satigny, a wealthy Frenchman looking for a partner in his chinchilla business. Esteban has seen many chinchillas on his land, but he never once considered making them into coats. Jean picks Esteban as his partner, and Esteban becomes the envy of all the other landowners. Even Blanca is impressed with Jean and puts on her fancy dress when he comes to dinner. She claims that Jean is civilizing them and puts out silver candlesticks.

One night, while Jean is outside smoking, he catches movement and sees Blanca sneak from her window and disappear into the brush. He doesn't follow, but Jean is worried that Blanca's little escape will ruin his plans. The next day, Jean asks Esteban for Blanca's hand in marriage, and Esteban is ecstatic. Mistaking her fancy dress and candlesticks for love, Esteban assumes that Blanca will want to marry Jean and asks her to meet him in his office. Blanca goes to her father's office and throws the door open five minutes later, shooting Jean a hateful look.

Esteban continually interrupts his retrospective narrative with interjections from his current perspective, which reminds the reader that he is telling a story. Tres Marías is again a thriving estate, in large part because of Clara and her hard work, which Esteban doesn't seem to realize or appreciate at this time. Esteban is upset by Clara's fear of him because he deeply loves her, whereas he seems unfazed by (or even unaware of) Blanca's fear of him.



The hole Esteban drills in the wall hearkens to Férula and the great lengths she went to in order to spy on Clara and Esteban. The more Clara pulls away from Esteban, the more he loves her, which reflects his own self-consciousness and insecurities. Despite Esteban's obvious love for Clara, he still threatens her with violence, which further speaks to Esteban's insecurities. He can't win Clara over in a romantic way, so he plans to take her by force.



Presumably, Esteban's shrinking stature is a result of Férula's curse that Esteban would "shrivel up" and "die like a dog." However, Esteban's refusal to tell anyone about his shrinking or his extreme pain (as many of his bones were shattered in the earthquake, his pain must be severe) suggests he is afraid of appearing weak. As a man, Esteban feels he must always be strong, and to admit otherwise is a hit to his masculinity.



Obviously, Blanca is sneaking out her window to meet Pedro. Jean clearly hopes to marry Blanca, but he doesn't speak of love in the way Pedro does, which suggests Jean is only interested in marrying Blanca because she is the daughter of a rich landowner and likely has a large dowry and inheritance. Furthermore, Blanca is completely excluded from the decision to marry Jean, which again reflects the sexist nature of society.



Even Jaime and Nicolás are won over by Jean's good humor, and while they initially make fun of his manners and feminine clothing, they try to convince Blanca to marry him. After all, Blanca is 24 years old, her brothers remind her. Jaime is a quiet young man with strange habits. He doesn't like anyone to breathe on him or stand too close, and he hates shaking hands and personal questions. Still, when any of the peasants come to him with a problem, he listens closely and promptly fixes it. He is extremely sentimental, and instead of studying to be lawyer and going into politics like Esteban wants, Jaime goes to medical school. He is close friends with Pedro Tercero, and together they talk ["of justice, of equality, of the peasant movement and of Socialism."](#)

Nicolás is a handsome young man and incredibly smart. He fights with his brother constantly, though Jaime instantly feels guilty whenever he beats up the much smaller Nicolás. Nicolás makes up for his size with a big mouth, and Jaime is constantly fighting to defend him. Other than girls, Nicolás's main interest is Clara's supernatural powers, which he hopes to develop himself. On weekends, Nicolás visits the Mora sisters, where he meets Amanda. Amanda is beautiful and even smarter than Nicolás, and she teaches him all about yoga and acupuncture. He sends her love poems, which Amanda corrects and returns, but this doesn't diminish his love for her.

A few days before the Presidential election, old Pedro García dies. He was blind and deaf but retained a perfect memory of past and recent events. He sat each night on the porch, feeling the sun go down, with his great-grandson Esteban García at his feet. Esteban García and his father are the only "bastard offspring" to share Esteban Trueba's name. Before Pancha died, she managed to convince Esteban García that if his father had been born in place of Blanca, Jaime, or Nicolás, he would own Tres Mariás and maybe even be President of the Republic. As such, Esteban García hates Esteban Trueba, and he blames him for his miserable life on the *hacienda*. Esteban Trueba, however, has forgotten all about Pancha and his bastard son.

Jean is described in nearly feminine terms, which initially makes Jaime and Nicolás standoffish, as men are expected to be masculine and strong in their society. Jaime and Nicolás's reminder to Blanca that she is 24 years old also underscores society's sexist assumptions that women of age should get married and start families as soon as possible. Meanwhile, Jaime's friendship with Pedro, his interests in justice and equality, and his refusal to follow in Esteban's footsteps suggests that Jaime believes in socialist ideals.



Despite being twins, Nicolás and Jaime are very different, and they obviously don't get along; however, Jaime's protectiveness of Nicolás speaks to their connection as brothers. Nicolás's interest in the supernatural, yoga, and acupuncture mirrors Marcos's earlier interests, which again illustrates the connection between family members, even those of distant generations. Amanda is also an example of a strong and independent woman, as she is intelligent and capable and does not conform to societal expectations.



The fact that Esteban forgets so easily about the son he fathered with Pancha again reflects Esteban's selfishness and feelings of superiority. As Esteban Trueba's "bastard offspring," Esteban García isn't acknowledged by Esteban Trueba because he is a peasant. Pancha's belief that her son and grandson would have the same opportunities as Blanca and the twins had they been born in their place again underscores the country's class struggle—it suggests Esteban García is only of a lower status because Pancha is a peasant and not an upper-class woman like Clara. Ironically, old Pedro is the only character who can claim perfect memory, which is another way in which old Pedro is superior to those of the upper classes.



Esteban García is 10 years old and in the habit of driving nails through the eyes of chickens, so when old Pedro García drops dead in front of him, he considers driving a nail through the dead man's eye. Blanca arrives just as Esteban raises the nail and shoves him out of the way, never guessing that the boy is her nephew. The *hacienda* observes a three-day wake for old Pedro, and Esteban Trueba spares no expense. Jean is excited about the funeral and arrives with a camera and tripod. He snaps so many pictures of the dead man that the peasants destroy the plates, fearing so many pictures may steal his soul.

Two priests, one of them Father José Dulce María, arrive to oversee old Pedro's funeral rites. Esteban has heard of Father José and goes to throw him out, but Clara convinces Esteban not to make a scene. That night, Blanca sneaks out her window and goes to the river to meet one of the priests, just as she does for the three days of the funeral. Everyone but Esteban and Clara know that the priest with Father José is Pedro Tercero in disguise.

Pedro Tercero takes the opportunity to tell the peasants that the presidential election is their chance to change their lives and “shake off the yoke under which they have always lived.” The peasants know that voting for the Socialist candidate is sure to get them in trouble with Esteban, but Pedro Tercero says Esteban can't fire all of them. If they all vote for the Socialist candidate, they will be safe. Blanca reminds Pedro Tercero that the Conservative Party changes the ballots, but he says they will have someone to stand watch this time. The peasants listen politely, but when the time comes, they are too afraid to vote for the Socialist candidate.

In the meantime, Jean doesn't give up on Blanca. No one seems to know much about Jean, and they have no idea how old he is or where in France he comes from. Clara turns to her tarot cards for answers, but Jean refuses to have his fortune read, and she doesn't even know his astrological sign. Soon, Blanca begins to soften toward Jean, and she brings the silver candlesticks back out. She even goes on walks with him, during which they talk about literature. Blanca gives Jean a book by “the Poet,” and he falls in love with it, declaring it better than any French book ever written. Every chance Blanca gets, she reminds Jean that she will never marry him—though despite her bluntness, their friendship grows.

Esteban García's hobby of torturing chickens and his desire to do the same to old Pedro's dead body suggests that Esteban García cares little about others and may have inherited Esteban Trueba's violent ways. Since old Pedro saved Esteban Trueba's life after the earthquake and saved the hacienda from the ant infestation, Esteban has great respect for the old man, which is reflected in his desire to give him an appropriate wake. Many cultures believe that having one's picture taken can trap the soul, which is reflected in their destruction of the Jean's photography plates.



Esteban doesn't want Father José on his property because Father José is a socialist known to spread ideas of equality and fair wages, which Esteban clearly doesn't want on his land. If Father José's message takes hold, Esteban won't be able to exploit his peasants as easily.



This passage illustrates the corruption of the nation's government. Even if the people do vote fairly for a more liberal candidate, their votes are switched out for conservative votes, which maintains the nation's status quo and keeps the lower classes beneath the upper classes. Pedro Tercero's message to “shake off the yoke under which they have always lived” encourages the peasants to rise. However, the fact that they are too scared illustrates the level of intimidation under which they live.



The fact that no one knows anything about Jean, in addition to his refusal to have his fortune read, suggests he is hiding something. Presumably, Jean isn't who he says he is—he may not even be French—but the Truebas don't suspect much yet. The character of the Poet is thought to be based on real-life Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who also served as Senator in the Chilean Communist Party.



Esteban gets two chinchillas as a test run, but within two weeks, they die from a strange disease Jean knows nothing about. The rodents' fur turns black and falls out, and Esteban can't even tan their skins. In the meantime, Blanca has no idea that Jean is spying on her; when she sneaks out her window to meet Pedro Tercero, Jean is watching in the darkness. He follows, and when he approaches the river, he finds Blanca having sex with the priest who officiated old Pedro's funeral. Jean finds it a strange pairing, but he can tell it is not a chance meeting—Blanca and the priest seem to have a complete "marriage of body and soul."

Jean sneaks quietly back to the house and bangs on the front door. When Esteban answers, Jean tells him all about Blanca and the priest. Esteban is confused, but he instantly realizes Pedro Tercero has tricked him. He orders Jean to wait at the house and jumps on his horse. "I'm going to kill them both," Esteban says. He meets Blanca on the trail home and savagely beats her with his horse whip. She falls to the ground, and Esteban demands she tell him the truth, but she refuses.

Clara is alerted to the drama by barking dogs and finds Blanca bleeding in the mud. Pedro Segundo helps Clara get Blanca upstairs, where Clara gently cleans her cuts and applies cold compresses to her bruises. Clara later finds Esteban pacing in his library with his whip, and he accuses her of raising Blanca without any morals, principles, religion, or (most importantly) any sense of her own class. Esteban says he should have killed Pedro Tercero when he had the chance, but Clara reminds him that Pedro Tercero has done nothing Esteban hasn't done himself. Esteban has slept with many women not of his class, Clara says—the only difference is that Esteban raped them, whereas Pedro Tercero acts out of love.

Esteban reaches up and strikes Clara in the face, knocking her violently against the wall. He instantly begs her for forgiveness. Clara, bleeding profusely from the nose, spits out several of her teeth and walks as tall as she possibly can to the door. As she walks out the door, Clara collapses and falls into the arms of Pedro Segundo. Clara never speaks to Esteban again. Two days later, Clara and Blanca return to **the big house on the corner**, leaving Esteban at Tres Marías. After Pedro Segundo takes the women to the train station, he returns to his small brick house, packs his personal belongings, and leaves.

Jean clearly knows nothing about chinchillas, which further suggests he isn't who he says he is. Jean's continued spying on Blanca also suggest he isn't completely honest, as he tries to win Blanca through dishonest means rather than directly. Jean knows nothing about Pedro Tercero, but the love between Pedro and Blanca is more than apparent when Jean finds them together near the river.



This passage is further evidence of Esteban's violence. He doesn't just want to punish Blanca and Pedro, he wants to "kill them both," which Esteban would likely do if not for Clara. Likely, Jean knew that Esteban would react in such a way (Esteban's temper is apparent to everyone else, so it must be to Jean as well), but Jean selfishly betrays Blanca anyway.



Esteban's comment that Clara has raised Blanca without any sense of her own class again identifies Esteban as both a classist and a sexist. He doesn't want his daughter involved with a peasant, and when she disappoints him and falls in love with Pedro anyway, Esteban completely blames Clara. Esteban refuses to take any responsibility for his children, which he considers a woman's job, and when things don't work out the way he plans, he never takes the blame.



While Esteban frequently abuses the female peasants, this is the first time he is physically abusive to Clara. Despite the physical pain Clara is obviously feeling, she stands tall and refuses to let Esteban have power over her. As a woman, Clara has limited freedom, but she makes Esteban suffer for treating her and Blanca so badly by withholding her love from him—the only weapon she has to leverage.



Afterward, Esteban is so lonely that Rosa begins to haunt his dreams. He can't stop crying and blames Pedro Tercero for everything. One day, a peasant boy named Esteban García tells Esteban that he knows where Pedro Tercero is. He asks Esteban Trueba if he gets a reward for telling him, and Esteban tells him to take him to Pedro Tercero, then they will talk about a reward. He takes Esteban to the sawmill just outside the *hacienda*, where he finds Pedro Tercero sleeping.

Esteban raises his rifle, and Pedro Tercero, sensing danger, opens his eyes. He jumps out of the way as Esteban fires, narrowly avoiding the bullet. Esteban sees a nearby axe and grabs it. He raises the axe and lets it fall, a spray of blood hitting him in the face. Pedro raised his hand at the last moment, and the blow strikes his right hand, severing three fingers. Pedro runs, leaving behind a trail of blood, and Esteban García picks up the fingers. Esteban Trueba vomits on the ground and tells the boy to drop the fingers.

Back at Tres Marías, Esteban is horrified by his own violence and is thankful that Pedro Tercero was able to run away. Esteban knows what people say about him—that he has killed many men—but Esteban swears this isn't true. "I've never killed anyone," Esteban says. When Esteban García asks about a reward, Esteban Trueba tells him he doesn't reward traitors and slaps him in the face. He forbids the boy to ever speak of what he just saw and pushes him out the door. Esteban Trueba slams the door, and they both stand there weeping.

CHAPTER 7: THE BROTHERS

Clara and Blanca arrive at **the big house on the corner** and immediately go to work removing sheets from the furniture and opening drapes and windows. Clara says they will have to get some **birds** for the empty cages, and Blanca is surprised her mother is worried about birds when she is missing so many teeth. Soon, the Mora sisters arrive, as well as Clara's other spiritualist friends—the Rosicrucians, the acupuncturists, and the telepathists—and they all settle into the house. Clara begins trying to communicate with extraterrestrial beings, but the Mora sisters, who are more conservative, think her attempts are nonsense.

Again, Esteban absolutely refuses to take responsibility for his own actions. Clara and Blanca have left, and Esteban's marriage has been ruined because of Esteban's violence and cruelty, not because of Pedro Tercero. Esteban García is obviously trying to get in Esteban Trueba's good graces, which is why he is willing to betray Pedro.



From the way Esteban García picks up the severed fingers, it's clear that he's not put off by violence and torture, although Esteban Trueba seems to be negatively affected. Esteban Trueba nearly kills Pedro, but the fact that he vomits afterward suggests that Esteban wasn't quite prepared to kill him, despite all his talk to the contrary.



Obviously, Esteban García and Esteban Trueba aren't weeping for the same reasons. Esteban Trueba is having a rare moment of insight into his poor character and violent ways, whereas Esteban García is weeping because his biological grandfather has rejected him. Esteban's confession that he has never killed anyone suggests that his violence and poor temper are just a front, and he feels differently deep down.



The caged birds again represent the oppression of women in patriarchal society. Now that Clara is not free from Esteban in the way she was immediately after the earthquake, she puts the birds back into the cages. Like the birds, Clara is confined—she must live under Esteban's thumb and can't leave him like she wants. Still, Clara does what she wants within the house, including hosting her spiritualist guests, which Esteban has resisted in the past.



Jaime, who is studying at the university, and Nicolás, who is in search of his destiny, both move into **the big house on the corner**, and Clara is ecstatic to live with her sons again. The boys pool their money and buy an old car, which they call “Covadonga” in honor of Severo and Nívea del Valle. One day, Jaime says that he thinks Blanca is pregnant, and Clara confirms that she thinks so, too, so she writes it in her **notebook**. Nicolás composes a cryptic message, and when a confused telegraph operator calls Esteban with the message, he immediately understands and smashes the phone in anger.

Esteban goes to find Jean de Satigny and orders him to marry Blanca. Later, Esteban arrives at **the big house on the corner** and angrily bursts through the door. Nicolás meets him in the foyer, and when he tries to explain, Esteban slaps him. Esteban doesn't want to see Blanca—he insists she stay locked up until her wedding day, so she doesn't cause a scandal with her condition—and Clara refuses to come out of her room. Esteban tries to break the door down without success, and the house is so full of arguments and anxiety that even the **caged birds** are silent.

Jean can't decide if he is lucky to be marrying a rich heiress or cursed to be joining such a volatile family. In the meantime, Esteban decides a big party is what is needed to avoid a scandal. Blanca tries to resist, but Esteban tells her there will be no bastards in his family. Blanca says it is too late for that. After all, Esteban already has many bastards. Esteban angrily orders Blanca not to talk back to him and tells her that he killed Pedro Tercero. Blanca begins to weep and doesn't stop for several days. Blanca and Jean's wedding is a lavish affair and 500 guests flood **the big house on the corner**. Clara, however, still refuses to come out of her room.

Esteban finally convinces Clara to come down to the party for the sake of appearance, and she agrees. Blanca spends the entire party sitting in a chair alone, wearing a dress that's specially designed to hide her pregnancy, with tears streaming down her face. Before Blanca and Jean leave the party, Clara pulls Blanca aside and tells her that Pedro Tercero isn't dead. Clara has seen the truth in a dream, and Blanca instantly feels better and stops crying.

Jaime and Nicolás naming their car Covadonga to honor Severo again reflects the deep connections across different generations of the del Valle family. Jaime and Nicolás never met their grandparents—they died before the twins were born—but they still feel an obvious connection to them. As Clara's notebook bears witness to her life, Blanca's pregnancy doesn't seem fully real until Clara writes it in her notebook.



The silence of the caged birds reflects Clara and Blanca's oppression. Esteban orders Jean to marry Blanca because she has defied Esteban and society's expectations in getting pregnant before marriage, which is sure to ruin her standing in society. Blanca, whose name means “white” or “pure,” is no longer pure by society's sexist expectations, so Esteban forces her to marry Jean to cover up the truth.



Obviously, Esteban has not killed Pedro Tercero—he simply wants Blanca to believe he has so that he can further torture her. Esteban's lie is further evidence of his despicable character. Instead of wanting Blanca to be happy, Esteban cares only about his own life and wishes, and completely disregards Blanca. Furthermore, Blanca has zero input in her wedding or life. She doesn't want to marry Jean, but Esteban makes that decision for her as well.



Even though Blanca has little interest in Clara's spiritualist lifestyle, she clearly believes that Clara has the power to see the truth about Pedro's death. Blanca's tears are further evidence of her unhappiness, but Esteban is so concerned with avoiding a scandal and maintaining the family's social standing that he doesn't care about his daughter's misery.



After the wedding, Blanca moves out of **the big house on the corner**, and Clara grows depressed. She tries communicating with Blanca telepathically, but Blanca never put much stock into Clara's powers, which blocks Clara's ability to communicate with her. They write each other daily, and these many letters take the place of Clara's **notebooks** for a time. Jaime and Nicolás grow apart, too: while Jaime is busy studying medicine, Nicolás is dances flamenco, preaches free love, and quotes Freud.

Nicolás continues his interest in Clara's spiritualist lifestyle, but Esteban insists it is not a suitable pastime for men. Nicolás grows closer with the Mora sisters, and they encourage his relationship with Amanda, who has recently started a job as a newspaper reporter. Amanda is a pessimist, so she smokes hashish to temper her depression, and Nicolás joins her.

Jaime approaches the study of medicine as if it is a religion, and Clara remarks that Jaime should have been a priest. Clara's comment angers Jaime, who believes that Christianity is just superstition that makes men weaker. The only thing Jaime is interested in other than medicine is Amanda. Jaime loves Amanda with all his heart, but he keeps his distance out of respect for Nicolás. Amanda frequently visits **the big house on the corner**, always with her five-year-old brother Miguel in tow.

In the meantime, Esteban decides to devote his life to politics. He is the perfect candidate for the Conservative Party, mostly because he is a self-made man and provides his peasants with a good and comfortable life. He has a healthy respect for the law and the nation, and other than tax evasion, he has never broken a serious law. **The big house on the corner** begins to fill with politicians and propaganda leaflets, and Clara and her following of spiritualists are pushed to the back of the house. Each time a new guest arrives to stay with Clara and call the spirits, she has a new room built, and the house begins to look like a "labyrinth."

Like the notebooks, Clara and Blanca's letters are way of preserving the past. Clara's depression after Blanca leaves is evidence of their connection and love as mother and daughter, as is their constant letter-writing. While Blanca doesn't really respect Clara's magical abilities, she was certainly thankful for them when they allowed Clara to know the truth about Pedro's death.



Again, Nicolás does not conform to Esteban's idea of a man, and their relationship suffers because of it. Amanda's job as a newspaper reporter also reflects the importance of writing and preserving the past. In a sense, like Clara, Amanda also summons the spirits of the past—albeit in a more mundane way.



Jaime is a socialist and believes in Marxist ideals, which claim religion is nothing more than a creation of the upper class to placate the lower class. According to Marx, religion is "the opium of the people"—a calming salve to apply to the wounds afflicted by the upper class, and a distraction which allows the rich to continue exploiting the poor. Jaime's feelings for Amanda again underscore the power of love and the connection of family—he very clearly loves Amanda, but doesn't act on his feelings out of respect for his brother. This suggests that familial connections can be even stronger than romantic love.



Esteban is incapable of looking at himself in an honest way. Just because he builds the peasants brick houses doesn't mean he gives them a good life—especially since he also exploits, rapes, and abuses them. Furthermore, if Esteban really respected the law and the nation—which is to say, the people—he wouldn't evade his taxes. The fact that Esteban is the perfect candidate for the Conservative Party doesn't say much of their respect for the nation or the people. Meanwhile, the house morphs into a mysterious "labyrinth" which is more symbolic of Clara's supernatural powers than of the legacy Esteban intended for the home.



As the elections draw near, Esteban grows increasingly nervous and knocks on Clara's door. She opens the door, and Esteban asks her if he is going to win. Clara nods without speaking, and Esteban kisses her in a moment of joy. "You're fantastic, Clara!" he says. "If you say so, I'll be senator." Esteban is elected Senator of the Republic 10 days later, and even though Clara still won't talk to him, she is seen as the most charming and elegant politician's wife in the whole nation.

In the following months, Esteban greatly enjoys his new position of power, and has no idea that Jaime meets frequently with Pedro Tercero, whom Jaime considers a close friend. After Esteban's assault on Pedro with the axe, Pedro ran to Father José Dulce María, who tended to his severed fingers and helped him to heal. Now, Pedro Tercero lives in the capital with an important member of the Socialist Party. He pines for Blanca and is angry that she married Jean, even though Jaime tries to convince him that she didn't have a choice. Pedro Tercero continues to write popular songs about hens and foxes, which Esteban has no idea about because he doesn't allow radios in the house.

One day, Jaime comes home and says he wants to change his last name to del Valle. Ever since Esteban was elected, the other students at the university have been giving Jaime a hard time. Esteban is furious. He got married so he would have legitimate sons to bear his name, Esteban yells. But after Jaime gives his pants to a beggar and walks all the way home in his underwear, Esteban finally agrees to let him change his name, though he weeps in disappointment and anger.

Nicolás continues moving from one interest to the next, and eventually decides that he wants to fly just as Uncle Marcos did years ago. Nicolás decides to go over the mountains in an air balloon, and he is so busy preparing that he doesn't notice Amanda has stopped visiting. Clara's friends and family worry about Nicolás's safety flying the air balloon, but Clara has a "hunch" that he will never lift off. Just as she suspects, Nicolás's takeoff is stopped by the local police, who, unbeknownst to Nicolás, were dispatched by Esteban.

After this incident, Jaime asks Nicolás where Amanda has been, but he doesn't know. He has been so busy with his air balloon that he didn't even notice her absence. Nicolás asks Clara where Amanda is, but she has already forgotten about the girl. Nicolás decides, for the first time, to visit Amanda at her house, and he goes to the tenement where she lives with Miguel. Miguel opens the door and Nicolás sees Amanda is in bed, looking very ill. Nicolás approaches her, concerned for her health, but Amanda tells him she isn't sick—she is pregnant.

Like Blanca, Esteban doesn't put much stock into Clara's power until he needs it. Esteban forbids Clara from openly using magic, yet he goes to her when he wants to know the future. As magic is symbolic of the natural power of women, Allende seems to suggest that women are often treated in the same way—they are generally dismissed until they are needed.



As the Senator of the Republic and a member of the Conservative Party, Esteban obviously wouldn't approve of Jaime's friendship with an important member of the Socialist Party. The Conservative Party, like Esteban, is rooted in tradition and capitalism; whereas the Socialist Party, like Pedro, is devoted to dismantling such institutions. Naturally, then, the Conservative and Socialists Parties are enemies. Just like on Tres Mariás, Pedro's subversive message of equality is spreading, even though Esteban ignores it.



Esteban's initial refusal to let Jaime change his name again reflects the importance of the patriarchal structure within the novel's society. The fact that the other students give Jaime a hard time because he is Esteban's son suggests that the younger generation is not supportive of conservative politics and that they align more with liberal or socialist views. Esteban's tears imply that he still loves his son, regardless of how angry he makes Esteban.



Nicolás's interest in flying the hot air balloon because of Marcos's flight again underscores the unbreakable and even somewhat mystical connection between even distant family members. Clara's "hunch" is her telepathic powers telling her the future; however, she probably doesn't need to be a clairvoyant to know that Esteban would never let Nicolás do anything that might embarrass Esteban or tarnish his political career.



Obviously, Nicolás doesn't love Amanda quite like he says he does, since he doesn't even notice when she is gone. Furthermore, if Nicolás really loved Amanda, he would likely have been to her house before, even if only to visit. Jaime, however, does love Amanda, which is why he notices her absence immediately.



Nicolás asks Amanda what they are going to do. “An abortion, of course,” Amanda says calmly. Nicolás is relieved, but he tells her they can get married if she wants. Amanda laughs. She doesn’t love him that much, she says. Nicolás is shocked. It never occurred to him that Amanda didn’t want to marry him. Nicolás looks around the room. To him, poverty has always been an abstract concept, and Amanda suddenly becomes a stranger.

Amanda makes tea, and as they sit and talk, she tells Nicolás that after her mother died, she took responsibility for Miguel. Nicolás feels his love for Amanda intensify, and he has a burning desire to protect her. Still, Nicolás doesn’t quite know how to handle Amanda’s pregnancy or the abortion, so Amanda suggests they go to Jaime for help. When Nicolás knocks on his brother’s door, Jaime is reading a book of love sonnets written by the Poet, who is a frequent guest of Clara’s at **the big house on the corner**. Jaime is irritated—he sees Nicolás’s frivolous lifestyle as a personal insult—and Nicolás wastes no time telling Jaime that Amanda is pregnant.

On Sunday, Jaime waits outside the clinic where he does his training, and Nicolás goes to pick up Amanda in the Covadonga. When they arrive, Jaime helps Amanda to the surgical table. He has never administered anesthesia before and he is extremely nervous as he turns on the ether. When Amanda falls asleep, Nicolás removes her clothing and straps her to the table, thinking that this is much worse than rape. Jaime immediately goes to work. Nicolás begins violently vomiting, so Jaime orders Nicolás to leave the room and finishes the procedure alone. Jaime gently dresses Amanda and cleans up the blood, and when she wakes, she asks him if she will still be able to have children. He answers yes, but he tells her she should find a more responsible father.

Jaime and Nicolás take Amanda back to **the big house on the corner** so that Clara can keep an eye on her as she heals. Clara immediately tells them to go get Miguel, and she takes to pampering Amanda. Over the next few days, Amanda runs a fever, and Jaime diligently watches over her and gives her antibiotics. Clara notices that Nicolás asks about Amanda’s wellbeing but makes no effort to see her. Jaime, however, lends her his favorite books, and come Thursday night, he forgets all about his Socialist Party meeting.

Nicolás’s behavior here clearly underscores his classism and sexism. He just assumes that Amanda will want to marry him, and is obviously turned off by her poverty. Presumably, abortions are illegal in their country, so Amanda will have to break the law in order to get one.



Amanda’s care of Miguel again underscores the deep connection within families. Miguel isn’t technically Amanda’s responsibility, but she gladly takes care of him on her own even though it must be difficult to do so. Amanda suggests they go to Jaime because he is studying to be a doctor, but also because they suspect he will be sympathetic to her needs. The book of love sonnets mirrors Jaime’s love for Amanda, and since they are written by the Poet, the poems also mirror Jaime’s political views.



Jaime takes a considerable risk in helping Amanda. In addition to performing a procedure that is presumably illegal, Jaime stands to be kicked out of medical school if he is found to be practicing medicine without a license. If caught, it is likely Jaime would never be allowed to finish school and become a doctor, which is his lifelong dream and passion. Jaime’s decision to help Amanda is therefore evidence of his love for her, and it highlights the power of love to drive one to extremes.



Clara’s willingness to take care of Amanda and Miguel is evidence of her support and connection to other women. Amanda is in trouble, so Clara takes it upon herself to help her. Again, Nicolás makes no effort to see Amanda because he doesn’t truly love her. By contrast, Jaime lends her books and forgets his political meeting—two things he never does—because he deeply loves her.



In the meantime, Esteban travels to the United States to see a foreign doctor about his secret shrinking problem. His clothes continue to get bigger and bigger, and Esteban worries that his brain is shrinking, too. After the American doctor pokes and prods at Esteban for days, he claims there is nothing at all wrong with him. He has always been the same size, and his shrinking problem is all in his head. Esteban returns to his country and decides to ignore his shrinking stature. After all, Esteban thinks, all the greatest politicians in the world, like Napoleon and Hitler, have been short.

Esteban's reverence of Napoleon and Hitler—two of the cruelest dictators in history—reflects his own cruelty, and since Napoleon came to power during a coup d'état, this reference also hearkens to the growing threat of political in the novel. Again, Esteban is shrinking because of Férula's curse, and his diminishing stature also reflects his diminishing importance within his own family despite his growing political influence. Ironically, the American doctors dismiss Esteban just as he dismissed Férula and continues to dismiss the other women in his life.



CHAPTER 8: THE COUNT

If not for Clara and Blanca's letters, Esteban narrates, he would have remained completely ignorant of the events during this time. Clara is devastated with Blanca gone, but she knows that their separation will only be for a short time. Blanca doesn't know exactly why she agreed to marry Jean, but she knows it had something to do with her fear of her father. To Blanca, it seems safer to have married Jean than to run off with Pedro, but she knows she will never consummate their marriage. Blanca will never give her love and intimacy to Jean.

Esteban again points out the fact that he is writing the story, and that he is able to write it because of Clara's notebooks, which further underscores the importance of writing and preserving the past. Blanca will never give her love to Jean because she is still in love with Pedro, even if she can't be with him. This mirrors Clara's own acceptance of a loveless marriage to Esteban when she was a young woman. And, like Clara, Blanca fears Esteban. This again underscores Blanca's oppression as a woman—Esteban can't technically force her to marry against her will, so instead he scares her into it.



On their first night as husband and wife, Jean goes into the bathroom, where he stays for a long time. When he emerges—wearing silk pajamas and a velvet Pompeian robe—he explains to Blanca that he is only in love with the arts and cannot love her in the traditional way. Blanca is relieved. “Thank you, Jean!” she cries, throwing her arms around him. “You're welcome,” he says pleasantly.

Allende implies that Jean is not heterosexual. His elaborate clothes and time spent getting dressed aligns with common stereotypes of gay men, and he clearly isn't interested in having sex with Blanca.



The next day, Jean cashes the enormous check Esteban gave them as a wedding present and proceeds to spend nearly all of it buying clothes and accessories to match his new status. While he is gone, Blanca goes to **the big house on the corner** to visit Clara. Esteban meets her in the kitchen and screams at her. He tells Blanca that she is crazy for coming; if anyone sees her pregnant, they will know she wasn't a virgin when she married. Blanca replies that she *wasn't* a virgin when she married, and Esteban begins to fume. He raises his arm to strike her, but Jaime suddenly steps between them, silently daring his father. Esteban drops his hand and leaves the room.

Jean immediately cashes Esteban's check and spends it on himself, which, along with the fact that he obviously doesn't love Blanca, suggests that Jean only married Blanca to become upwardly mobile and improve his class standing. Like Pedro Tercero, Blanca and Jaime aren't afraid to stand up to Esteban, and Esteban's silent exit suggests that he is losing his grip on the power he holds over them.



That same day, Jean and Blanca take a British ocean liner to the farthest northern province, where Jean rents an old mansion. He decorates according to his own tastes, so the house reflects his new status, and he hires several Indian servants. Blanca dislikes the house, and she doesn't trust the servants. They never seem to do any work, and when she talks to them, it is like they don't understand Spanish. After Blanca sees one of the male servants wearing a pair of antique heels with velvet laces, she writes Clara about her concerns, but Clara says it is just Blanca's pregnancy playing tricks on her mind.

The first few months of Jean and Blanca's marriage are quiet. Blanca keeps to the house, but Jean begins a busy social life. He frequents the local casino, where he loses large sums of money, and he develops a taste for baroque French porcelain. Jean and Blanca get along just fine—unless she tries to look into their finances, which Jean insists is a man's concern. Despite Blanca's dowry, they never seem to have any money, and bill collectors line up at the end of every month. Blanca slowly stops thinking about Pedro Tercero and believes she has lost her ability to love.

Blanca grows curious as to the contents of Jean's "laboratory," which he has ordered her to stay out of. Once Jean leaves for his morning walk, Blanca devises a plan. She tells the servant in the high-heeled shoes to go to town and get her some papaya, and once he leaves, she breaks down the door to Jean's secret room. Blanca is stunned. There is a golden trapeze suspended from the middle of the room with a life-size puppet hanging from it; however, Blanca is most alarmed by the pictures. On every wall hangs erotic photographs, in which Blanca recognizes the household servants, naked and aroused. She leaves the room and heads right to the train station. Blanca is going home to Clara; she just hopes she doesn't go into labor first.

CHAPTER 9: LITTLE ALBA

When Blanca gives birth, her daughter, Alba, is born feet first—a sign of good luck. Clara carefully inspects the baby for the star-shaped mark of "true happiness," which she finds on her back. They make no effort to prepare Alba for life, since her happiness is written in the stars, and Clara writes about the birth in her **notebook**. She pastes a lock of Alba's greenish hair in the pages, along with some fingernail clippings. Blanca wants to name the baby Clara, but her mother insists such a name will only create confusion in her notebooks.

Jean and Blanca move to the farthest northern province so they can more easily hide Blanca's pregnancy from their social circle. No one knows Blanca or Jean in the north, which again reflects Blanca's oppression as a woman, as she is forced to uproot her entire life to cover up her pregnancy and protect her reputation. Again, the feminine shoes worn by the male servant reflect homosexual stereotypes, which suggests that Jean isn't heterosexual and that he didn't marry Blanca for love.



Jean's belief that finances are a man's concern again demonstrates the sexist nature of society in the novel, especially since it is Blanca's money in the first place. Obviously, Jean has spent all of Blanca's dowry and Esteban's wedding present (both of which were presumably substantial), and he doesn't want Blanca to look into the finances because she will discover that they are broke—and that Jean isn't a wealthy count like he claims to be.



Jean's "laboratory" is proof that he isn't who he says he is, and that he married Blanca for her money, not because he loves her. Jean hired the servants as sex workers rather than as domestic help, which is why they never seem to do any housework. While Blanca is clearly uncomfortable with Jean's sexuality, it is the perfect excuse for her to leave him and go back to Clara and the big house on the corner, which is exactly what she wants to do.



Alba has greenish hair, just as Rosa did, which again underscores the connection between even distant family members. While it is previously said that Blanca doesn't put much stock into Clara's powers, she seems to believe in Clara's assessment that Alba will have a happy life, since she makes no preparations for her daughter's upbringing. Clara again writes in her notebook, preserving the event for future generations.



When Blanca arrived at **the big house on the corner**, she was immediately taken to Clara's room, where Jaime (with Clara and Amanda's help) delivered Alba and Miguel hid in the closet watching. Afterward, Clara asks Blanca where Alba got her "old man's eyes," and Blanca says from her father, Pedro Tercero. Pedro is never spoken of again. They never see Jean de Satigny again, either—not even to obtain a legal divorce from Blanca. Blanca later tells her daughter that her father was a distinguished aristocrat who died of a fever before she was born.

In the meantime, Amanda and Miguel leave **the big house on the corner**. Amanda has healed completely from her abortion, and she has grown increasingly aware of Jaime's feelings for her. She quietly leaves without a word, and Jaime resumes living like a hermit, spending all his time alone in his room. Esteban's harsh character is softened ever so slightly by the arrival of Alba, whom he adores. For the most part, Esteban's change in character goes unnoticed—by everyone but Clara. As always, the house is full of politicians and spiritualists, and Clara perfects her ability to levitate around the room while sitting in a chair.

Alba grows up around the spirits and Clara's telepathy, and she is educated by Jaime, Nicolás, and the three Mora sisters. Clara is still incompetent when it comes to domestic matters, so the everyday running of **the big house on the corner** falls to Blanca, who makes crèches in her pottery shop when she isn't tending to household matters. From a young age, it is Alba's responsibility to open the drapes and windows and put fresh flowers in the vases every day. Even though Alba is alone most of the time, she isn't lonely. She spends all her time playing in the basement among the old furniture, pieces of Covadonga, Marcos's old trunks, and the Barrabás rug.

On Christmas Eve, Clara gives Alba a gift of paints and brushes and tells her she can have one whole wall in her room to paint as she likes. In time, Alba transforms her bedroom wall into a massive fresco, filled with invented animals—just like the ones Blanca bakes in her kiln and that Rosa stitched onto her tablecloth. As Alba grows up in **the house on the corner**, surrounded by Clara's eccentricities and Nicolás's strange hobbies, Esteban worries that she will end up "stark raving mad," just like the rest of his family.

The fact that Blanca doesn't tell Alba who her real father is implies that Blanca doesn't think the identity of Alba's father is that important. Alba's life will be the same regardless of who her real father is, which, runs counter to patriarchal ideals. Blanca never obtains a divorce from Jean, and this is made even more dramatic by her lifelong love for Pedro.



When Amanda leaves the big house on the corner, it is a silent response to Jaime's love. She knows how he feels about her, but instead of staying and fostering those feelings, she leaves. Jaime's return to solitude implies that he knows Amanda doesn't love him, which is why he doesn't go after her or pursue her in any way. Unlike his father, Jaime clearly respects Amanda's boundaries and has no desire to force her into loving him back. Meanwhile, Esteban's slight improvement in character is further proof of the power of love to move people, and Clara's powers again reflect her inherent strength as a woman.



Alba isn't lonely because she has the history of her family, which is preserved in the basement through Marcos's trunk, Covadonga, and Barrabás. Each of these items tells a story, and to Alba, they seem alive. Blanca is expected to manage the house because she is a woman, which again illustrates the oppression of women in patriarchal society. Neither Nicolás nor Jaime are expected to take responsibility for the house, and they are free to do as they please. Blanca, on the other hand, is effectively forced to stay at home.



Each of the things that Esteban worries will lead Alba to insanity—Nicolás's interest in spiritualism and alternative lifestyle, and Clara's magic powers—are things that Esteban considers feminine, which aligns with sexist assumptions that women are hysterical or otherwise insane. Alba's painted fresco again underscores the inherent connection between family members, as it shows that she is following in the footsteps of her mother as well as her great-aunt Rosa, who died long before Alba was born.



When Alba is five, Nicolás returns from a trip to India, where he spent a year as a beggar, walking the path across the Himalayas into Katmandu. When he returns, Nicolás doesn't eat meat, milk, or eggs, and insists that he can walk across a bed of hot coals. His only real interest is the world of spiritualism, and he spends all his time writing a book on the subject that ends up being 1,500 pages long. After much begging, Nicolás finally convinces Esteban to pay to have the book published. With editing, the book shrinks to 600 pages, and it is not the success Nicolás hoped. The remaining books—of which there are many—are packed into boxes and stored in the basement, where Alba uses them to build the walls of her fort.

Esteban, who has never been good at expressing his emotions, loves Alba with a tenderness that no Trueba has ever seen. He showers her with gifts and chocolates, which Alba hates but eats anyway. Despite his close relationship with his granddaughter, Esteban's relationships with the rest of his family continue to suffer. The family eats dinner each night on the massive table inherited from the del Valles, but no one speaks. At times, Alba notices her grandfather staring at Clara with love his eyes; other times, Esteban ruins the meal completely, screaming and throwing jugs of water against the wall.

During this time, Blanca is at her most beautiful, and many men vie for her attention. Esteban still hasn't forgotten his anger over Pedro Tercero, and he won't let Blanca forget that he allows her to live in the **big house on the corner**. Esteban can't understand why so many men want to spend time with Blanca—she has none of the qualities he looks for in a woman—but she goes on plenty of dates. She breaks off each relationship before it gets too serious, but Alba still worries that her mother will get married and leave her.

Alba worries that Blanca will fall in love and marry until the day Alba meets Pedro Tercero. Blanca tells Alba that she is taking her to meet someone famous, and they go to the Japanese Gardens, where a man with a long beard wearing overalls and sandals sits feeding the birds. Blanca explains that the man is Pedro Tercero, the singer from the radio. They have a nice visit, and when they go to leave, Pedro kisses Blanca on the mouth. Alba is shocked. Since no one in **the big house on the corner** is in love, she has never seen an intimate kiss between two people.

Nicolás's overseas trips to exotic locations, his specific diet, and his interest in spiritualism hearkens to Uncle Marcos, who also traveled extensively and had an alternative lifestyle. Nicolás's relationship with Alba also mirrors the relationship Clara had with Marcos, which again underscores the connection between family members. Furthermore, Nicolás's book is another example of writing and preserving the past. The book isn't a success, but it is still a reflection of Nicolás, which will one day be important to his family.



The table the which the Truebas eat every night is the same table Rosa's body was placed on for her wake, and it is a physical reminder of the pain Esteban has been forced to live with. Allende implies that Esteban's anger and cruelty is, at least in part, due to the initial heartbreak of Rosa's death. He doesn't begin to harden until after Rosa's death, and even though Esteban deeply loves Clara, he can't escape his grief over Rosa.



Technically, Blanca can't marry anyone since she is still legally married to Jean. This fact, along with Esteban's continued torture, is further evidence of their sexist society. Blanca wasn't given a choice in marrying Jean in the first place, and Esteban seems intent on making her miserable, even though she is the one who does the work of maintaining the house. Likely, Blanca breaks off her relationships because she is still in love with Pedro.



Even Alba, who has never seen romantic affection, can tell that Blanca and Pedro Tercero are in love, just like Jean knew the night he followed Blanca to the river. This underscores just how powerful their connection is—even a naïve child and a relative stranger can perceive it.



Blanca lives a poor life in **the big house on the corner**; she is careful to never ask Esteban for anything. She makes a miserable salary selling the occasional crèche and teaching pottery classes, most of which she spends on doctors for her imaginary illnesses that have manifested into the real thing. Sometimes, Clara or Jaime give Blanca money, but for the most part, she can't even afford socks—a stark contrast to the lavishness Esteban showers on Alba.

As Blanca is busy most days running **the big house on the corner**, Alba spends her time with Clara. She grows used to her grandmother's eccentricities, and she thinks nothing of seeing Clara levitate or her jumping three-legged table. Alba sits in on spiritualists meetings and listens to the Poet read his sonnets, not knowing that years later he will be considered the greatest writer of the century.

Clara is still young, but she looks old to Alba on account of her missing teeth, and she is still prone to asthma attacks. When Clara feels short of breath, she rings a little silver bell for Alba to come to her—after all, the best cure for asthma is “the prolonged embrace of a loved one.” During their days together, Clara tells Alba stories and teaches her to take care of the **caged birds** in the courtyard. Alba knows that Clara is “the soul of **the big house on the corner**,” but the rest of the family doesn't appreciate this fact until after Clara is dead.

Alba is six years old the first time she meets Esteban García. She probably saw him before that at Tres Marías—Esteban Trueba takes her there frequently and promises she will inherit the *hacienda*—but she has very little contact with the peasants, so she doesn't recognize Esteban García when he knocks on the door of **the big house on the corner**. The young man says he would like to see Senator Trueba, and he is escorted to Esteban's library to wait. Alba wanders into the library and introduces herself to Esteban García, and when she is comfortable, she begins to move closer.

Esteban García sits down in a leather chair and pulls Alba into his lap. Without knowing it, his eyes fill with tears, and he feels an intense hate for the little girl. He wants to hurt or kill her, and as he closes his eyes, he thinks about putting his hands around her tiny neck. He imagines strangling her and becomes aroused. Esteban García takes the girl's hand and places it on the stiffness between his legs.

Again, Blanca does more work around the house than anyone, yet Esteban refuses to pay Blanca what she is worth, which mirrors Esteban's treatment of his peasants. Blanca is exploited and mistreated by Esteban, and she likely endures her father's poor treatment in large part for Alba benefit.



Again, the character of the Poet is presumably inspired by Chilean writer Pablo Neruda, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Neruda is considered Chile's national poet and was hailed as the greatest writer of the century by many of his contemporaries.



The big house on the corner is symbolic of Clara and her magic, which is reflected in Alba's opinion that Clara is “the soul” of the house. Clara continues Nana's belief that a loving embrace is the best cure for asthma, which again underscores the power of love to comfort and heal. In teaching Alba to care for the caged birds, Clara, in a way, teaches Alba to support fellow women and take care of them when she can.



Of course, Esteban García is technically Alba's cousin, and his grandmother, Pancha, has raised him to resent Esteban Trueba's legitimate children and grandchild because they—unlike Esteban García—will one day inherit Tres Marías. Esteban García knows precisely who Alba is, and he hates her for it.



Esteban García seems to have inherited his grandfather's proclivity for sexual violence, and takes this a step further in abusing Alba, who is a young child and a family member. This grotesque display of abuse again underscores the oppression of women, who are particularly vulnerable to violence—especially sexual violence—within patriarchal society. Esteban García's hate is again rooted in Esteban Trueba's failure to recognize him has his grandson, and abusing Alba in this way is likely a way for him to regain the power he feels he's owed.



Esteban García jumps from the chair just as Esteban Trueba enters the room. The Senator remembers Esteban García from the night he took him to Pedro Tercero. Esteban García explains that he wants to become a police officer, and a recommendation from the nation's Senator will go a long way in getting him into the program. Esteban Trueba agrees—after all, he does owe the young man a reward, and it will be nice to know someone on the inside at the police department. He quickly writes the recommendation, and as he hands it over, he asks the young man why he is called Esteban. “Because of you, sir,” he answers. Esteban Trueba thinks nothing of it; many peasants named their offspring after the *patrón*.

On Alba's seventh birthday, Clara dies. Clara is the only one who suspects her upcoming death, and she immediately begins to prepare. She gathers all her **notebooks** and arranges them according to event, as she never records the date. She writes letters to each of her family members and places them in a box beneath her bed, releases the **caged birds**, and begins to slowly suffocate. Jaime goes to examine his mother, and while he can find nothing wrong with her, he knows beyond a doubt that she is dying.

Clara tells her family that dying is just like being born, and she assures them that if she can talk to spirits, she will be able to talk to her family after death. She slips quietly into a deep sleep, and Alba never once leaves her side. Surrounded by Alba, Blanca, Jaime, Nicolás, and Esteban, Clara takes her last breath. Jaime places his stethoscope on her chest to confirm her death and breaks down in tears.

CHAPTER 10: THE EPOCH OF DECLINE

“I can't talk about it,” Esteban narrates, “But I'll try to write it.” After Clara's death, Esteban locks himself in Clara's room with her body and tells her all the things he has wanted to say since she stopped talking to him after he beat Blanca and knocked out Clara's teeth. He examines her body for any signs of sickness or death but finds nothing. He lies down next to her body, and they are “finally reconciled.”

Just before daybreak, Esteban fixes Clara's body so she will be presentable for her family. He dresses her in a white tunic and puts socks on her feet, so she won't be cold. He brushes her hair and slides his gold ring on her finger to replace the one she threw out so many years before. He leaves the room and informs the servants they may bury her, and he tells them to bury Nivea's head with her. The funeral is an event, and people come from everywhere to pay their final respects. Even the peasants from Tres Marías show up, and Esteban notices Pedro Segundo in the crowd, weeping.

Esteban Trueba obviously has no idea that Esteban García is his grandson, which reflects how little Esteban Trueba cares about Pancha and their son (Esteban García's father). Here, Esteban García uses Esteban Trueba to become a police officer, and Esteban Trueba likewise uses him to have a contact inside the police force. Esteban Trueba's desire to know someone at the police station speaks to his corruption and, since Esteban is a senator, to the broader corruption of their nation's government.



Clara's decision to accept her death is much like her decision not to speak or give birth. Clara can seemingly control her body with her mind, and even though Jaime is a medical doctor, he firmly believes in Clara's ability to die simply because she has decided to. It is unclear why Clara decides to die now, other than that it is her time to be free, as evidenced by her release of the caged birds.



From Clara's promise that she will be able to talk to her family after death, the reader can infer that Clara will return in spirit form. Clara dies surrounded by her family, which again reflects the importance of family and demonstrates their deep connection and love despite the disagreements they shared in life.



While it isn't explicitly stated, it is implied that Esteban has sex with Clara's dead body, which again suggests that love can transcend all things, even death. Furthermore, Esteban's claim that talking is difficult but writing is possible reflects the therapeutic effects of writing and its ability to help one cope and heal after trauma.



Again, Clara was a good patrón, unlike Esteban, and the fact that the peasants make the trip all the way from Tres Marías to attend her funeral implies they had great respect for her. Pedro Segundo's tears go beyond mere respect and again suggest that he loved Clara in a romantic way, and Esteban's tender treatment of Clara's body reflects his own love for her, as does finally giving Nivea's head a proper burial.



After Clara's death, **the big house on the corner** begins to decline. The flowers wilt in the vases, and Esteban wanders around the house dressed all in black, wearing Clara's dentures on a chain around his neck. The house slowly decays: the faucets leak, the roof tiles crack, and stains spread across the wall. Only Clara's room remains unaffected from the general deterioration of the rest of the house.

Jaime and Nicolás remain distant from their father, and Jaime spends most of his free time working as a doctor for the poor. Esteban says Jaime is a "hopeless loser," whose "utopian values" don't exist. According to Esteban, "charity, like socialism, is an invention of the weak to exploit the strong and bring them to their knees." Nicolás begins to teach Spanish dance classes at the house, but his students are mostly young people in search of a philosophy to help them understand life's meaninglessness. Nicolás soon begins to charge for these sessions, which allows him to rent a house and open his own school, the Institute for Union with Nothingness.

When Esteban finds out that Nicolás is operating an eccentric school, he says nothing, even when the newspapers find out the school is operated by the Senator's son. However, when Esteban finds Alba with her head shaved bald, repeating the word "Om," he has a violent outburst like no other. After Nicolás stages a naked protest at the gates of Congress, Esteban puts him on a plane, sends him overseas, and tells him never to come back.

Once Alba's hair grows back, Esteban sends her to a British boarding school. Blanca doesn't object, since she knows Alba's future is already written in the stars. At school, Alba is introduced to tennis and the Bible; however, Alba is used to Clara levitating and playing Chopin without lifting the cover of the piano, so she is incredibly bored. The school's headmistress calls Blanca and says that Alba is better suited for a school run by Spanish nuns, but Esteban uses his power to ensure his granddaughter stays enrolled at the school. He finds English far superior to Spanish, and he has finally accepted that not all women are "complete idiots," so he believes that Alba can have a profession like a man.

As the house is symbolic of Clara and her powers, it begins to deteriorate with her death. Esteban's prolonged mourning and keeping Clara's dentures around his neck again speaks to his deep love for her and the guilt he clearly feels for abusing her like he did.



The "utopian values" Esteban refers to here are Jaime's socialist politics and his belief in Marxist ideals, which ultimately seek to build a utopian society. Esteban claims such a society doesn't exist, and he calls Jaime a "hopeless loser" for believing such things. Ironically, it is Esteban who exploits the lower class, but he is convinced "charity" was invented to exploit money from the rich, which makes him appear even more classist and cruel.



The fact that Esteban is initially willing to let Nicolás's eccentric lifestyle go suggests that Esteban deeply loves his son despite the abuse he levels at him, and his outburst over Alba's shaved head likewise illustrates his love and concern. However, Esteban's rejection of his son when Nicolás's actions threaten his political career implies that Esteban's love has limits.



Again, the fact that Blanca doesn't object over Alba's schooling because she believes Alba's future is already written in the stars suggests that she puts a lot of stock in Clara's magic after all. Esteban's sexist assumption that women are "complete idiots" is beginning to soften because of Alba, which again demonstrates love's power to transform people. Esteban's transformation is slow, but love nevertheless forces him to see the error of his ways.



For Alba, Blanca is the only stable person in her life at **the big house on the corner**. Esteban still lives there, but his political cronies stop visiting, and he confines himself to his bedroom and library. He doesn't seem to notice the house falling down around him, and he has no interest in his family. He gives Blanca money to run the house, but it is never enough, and she must always borrow from Jaime. Alba begins to suffer nightmares and starts sleeping in Blanca's room. Every night, when Blanca gets into bed, she holds Alba's hand and tells her bizarre stories from Uncle Marcos's books. When Alba asks her to repeat the stories, Blanca can never remember them, so Alba begins writing them down.

It takes nearly two years for the construction to be completed on the mausoleum for Clara, and Esteban asks the del Valle family to transfer Rosa's body to the mausoleum, but they refuse. When Esteban goes to Jaime and tells him they must steal Rosa's body, Jaime isn't surprised. "If they won't give her to us," Esteban says, "we'll have to take her by force." They wait until nightfall and go to the cemetery, where Esteban bribes the nightguard to help them. Once they excavate the coffin, Esteban opens it. Rosa is perfectly preserved, looking much like the day she died, and Esteban leans over and kisses her lips. Suddenly, a breeze blows through, and Rosa, who had been hermetically sealed, turns to dust. He closes the coffin and places her in the mausoleum next to Clara.

Despite pulling away from his political friends, Esteban is still very much involved in politics, and he fears the Marxist support that is sweeping the country. "The day we can't get our hands on the ballot boxes before the vote is counted we're done for," Esteban says. To Esteban all political parties except the Conservative Party are Marxist, and he calls the left "the enemy of the democracy," not knowing that same phrase will later become the slogan of the nation's dictatorship.

Esteban's wealth begins to dwindle after Clara's death, and the foreman at Tres Mariás urges him to sell. The peasants are disgruntled and issue new demands daily, but Esteban refuses to sell. The following years are rocky, socially and politically, and the struggle is reflected in Pedro Tercero's songs, which can constantly be heard on the radio. He sings of hens, foxes, and of revolution, and Esteban has no idea that the singer is Jaime's best friend, or that Blanca frequently takes Alba to see him.

Esteban is clearly spiraling into a depression after the loss of Clara, and he even seems to be losing his interest in politics. Alba and Blanca's close relationship again underscores the connection between family members, especially mothers and daughters. Like Clara's stories, Blanca's stories connect Alba to the past, and Alba writes the stories down just as Clara did before her. The sharing and recording of stories highlights the role personal narratives play in preserving history and family traditions.



Esteban's comment that he will just "take [Rosa] by force" if her family won't give her to him again underscores Esteban's sexist belief that he is superior and can do whatever he wants, especially to women. Esteban doesn't have any right to Rosa's body, but he wants her, so he takes her. Obviously, Esteban deeply loves Rosa, but he is selfish in his love, and such behavior ends up turning Rosa to dust. Rosa's body has been repeatedly violated since death, and Esteban's theft of her here is no different.



Esteban's reference to the ballot boxes again points to the corruption of the nation's government. Esteban is the nation's Senator, and even he advocates for tampering with ballot boxes to ensure the Conservative Party stays in power. The admission that the country will soon be a dictatorship and "the enemy of democracy" hints to upcoming political unrest.



Esteban's disgruntled peasants and their willingness to make demands suggests they aren't as afraid of Esteban as they once were, which means their desire for revolution is growing. The country is socially and politically unstable because support for socialism is growing, as is the opposition of the conservatives, which is reflected in Pedro's songs.



Despite their frequent trips to see Pedro Tercero, Blanca doesn't tell Alba that he is her father. She doesn't want to complicate Alba's life with the truth about her birth, but that doesn't keep Pedro from begging her to change her mind. Blanca does dream of packing her bags, taking Alba, and running away with Pedro, but she never finds the courage. Alba quickly learns not to mention Pedro's name at home, and she suspects something awful happened between the singer and Esteban, but she never asks about it.

After Esteban and Jaime successfully move Rosa into Clara's mausoleum, Esteban begins to feel better. He keeps Clara's room locked up, however, so he can find her spirit whenever he wants. He has only two friends, and one night to cheer Esteban up, they take him to the upscale brothel: the Christopher Columbus. When they arrive, they are greeted by a man named Mustafá, who provides them with catalogs of the women and young men available for hire, but none of the pictures appeal to Esteban. After his friends are led to their private rooms, Esteban sits, undecided. Mustafá offers Esteban the "best in the house" and leaves the room to fetch her. When Mustafá comes back, he is accompanied by Tránsito Soto.

Esteban is delighted to see Tránsito, and she leads him to a private room behind a curtain. Tránsito is completely in charge of the Christopher Columbus now, and all the good ideas—like adding homosexuals to the catalogue and changing the décor—have been hers. The brothel is a raging success, and all the workers are partners. No one is exploited, and they all make more than enough money. Esteban and Tránsito have sex and soak in hot bathtub afterward. Esteban closes his eyes, and without realizing it, he begins to cry and call Clara's name. Tránsito gently washes and dries Esteban, and then helps him into the bed. She gently kisses his forehead and leaves the room. "I wonder who Clara is," Esteban hears her say as she exits.

CHAPTER 11: THE AWAKENING

At age 18, Alba becomes a woman. She goes to her room, mixes some red paint with some white paint, and paints a big pint heart on her wall. Alba is in love with Miguel, a leftist leader in his last year of law school with a serious passion for justice. Alba is in her first year at university, studying philosophy and music to annoy Esteban. Her grandfather says that marriage is usually a good thing for women, but for girls like Alba, marriage only hurts them. She knows he will never understand her feelings for Miguel.

Again, the fact that Blanca refuses to tell Alba that Pedro Tercero is her father implies that she doesn't think it is important. Blanca never finds the courage to run away with Pedro because they are of different classes, and they likely wouldn't be readily accepted in each other's social circles.



Like Blanca, Esteban has largely regarded Clara's spirituality as nonsense, but his desire to find her spirit after death suggests that he believes in it now. The presence of Mustafá and the catalogue of prostitutes suggests that business is good at the Christopher Columbus, and Tránsito's status as the "best in the house" suggests she is doing well, too. However, Esteban's inability to choose a woman is evidence of his misery and heartache over Clara's death.



The Christopher Columbus is a small-scale representation of a socialist society, in which everyone has an equal stake, and no one is held above the others. This equality ensures that no one is exploited and that everyone is given fair wages for fair work. Tránsito, who successfully guides the Christopher Columbus to such prosperity, is another example of a strong woman within the novel. She is capable and independent, and she refuses to conform to society's sexist expectations of a proper woman.



While Esteban is clearly still sexist, he believes that Alba can do whatever she wants in life, which is why he doesn't want her to marry. Miguel is obviously Amanda's little brother, whom Alba and her family knew years ago, but they don't initially realize this. Like Pedro, Miguel is a leftist leader, and Esteban, a conservative, will never approve of Alba's relationship with him.



The first time Alba meets Miguel, she notices the tiny insignia of a raised fist on his sleeve. He talks of revolution and of answering the violence of their oppressive system with more violence. He is inspiring, and after a night with Miguel, Alba is convinced she would give her life for a noble cause. But when the students at the university seize a building in solidarity with striking workers, Alba joins the protest out of love for Miguel, not ideological conviction.

To Alba, the protest feels like a game. The students barricade themselves in the building, along with Sebastián Gómez, a disabled professor. Miguel, however, is the unofficial leader of the operation. He drains the toilets, reserving the water, and organizes a makeshift kitchen that provides them with cookies and instant coffee. Sebastián is hopeful that other students and unions will join their protest and that they can bring down the government, but Miguel thinks it unlikely.

After a day barricaded in the building, Alba calls home. She tells Blanca that she will be staying “until victory or death,” which feels ridiculous coming out of her mouth, and Esteban grabs the phone. He tells her to come home immediately, or he will send the police in to get her. Alba has no business being with “all those communists,” Esteban says, and Alba hangs up the phone. Sebastián doesn’t think the police will come in to get them. The public won’t stand for it. “It’s not a dictatorship and it never will be,” he says.

That night, Alba begins to feel terrible stomach cramps, which only seem to grow worse. It is cold, too, and the students are looking tired. The only one who seems unaffected is Sebastián Gómez, who is rumored to have taken machinegun fire to the legs while in Bolivia. Suddenly, Alba feels warm fluid leak between her legs. She is mortified, so she curls up in the corner in misery. Ana Díaz, one of the student protestors, comments that Alba’s pains are evidence of her class status—“proletarian women” don’t even complain during childbirth, Ana says.

Sebastián approaches and, finding Alba curled up in the corner, is instantly irritated. “That’s what happens when you let women get involved in men’s affairs!” he says. No, Ana corrects, this is what happens when you let the bourgeoisie get involved. Sebastián tells Alba that she must go home, and Alba is secretly relieved. Miguel helps her to the door, and despite her recent criticism, Ana helps, too. They escort Alba to the front door, where the police are waiting to meet them. A gun is pointed directly at Alba’s face, and she finds herself looking into the eyes of Esteban García.

A raised fist is symbolic of unity and resistance, which is also reflected in the protest Miguel organizes in solidarity with the striking workers. Miguel clearly advocates for Marxist ideals and for the violent revolution of the people to take back power held by the upper classes. The fact that Alba joins the protest for Miguel again illustrates love’s power to guide one’s actions.



The goal of Marxism is to dismantle the capitalist power structure, which is why Sebastián is hoping their protest will eventually bring down the government. Miguel, however, thinks this is unlikely because he believes that the government can only be brought down through violence and class warfare.



Esteban’s reference to the student activists as “communists” reflects his hatred for those who don’t share his conservative beliefs and his opinion that he and his family are superior to such people. As Allende has already hinted that the country will become a dictatorship, Sebastián’s words again foreshadow the political unrest to come.



During the 1960s and early 1970s, there were three coup d’états in Bolivia connected with peasant revolutions, and it is implied here that Sebastián was injured fighting on behalf of the peasants. Obviously, Alba has started her period, and Ana implies that Alba is weak because she is of the upper class. According to Ana, “proletarian women”—those of the working class—are stronger than the wealthy.



Sebastián’s words reflect society’s sexist assumptions that women aren’t equipped to fight in wars, but Ana again claims Alba is weak because she is rich, not because she is a woman. However, Ana’s support of Alba as she helps her outside illustrates the importance of women supporting each other, even when they don’t agree.



Esteban García laughs. “I see it’s Senator Trueba’s granddaughter!” he says. He asks Alba what is wrong with her and says it looks as if she has just had an abortion. Alba tells him it is none of his business and demands to be taken home. He hesitates. Esteban García isn’t used to people talking to him like that, but he orders another officer to take Alba home. When she arrives, Blanca begins to scream, and she doesn’t calm down until Jaime assures her that Alba is fine.

Alba stays in bed for two days, and the student protest is resolved peacefully. She thinks about Esteban García. She remembers the incident with him in the library, but her most vivid memory of Esteban García is from her 14th birthday. Alba was in the garden waiting for Jaime, who was taking her shopping for a present, and she could see Esteban García talking to Esteban Trueba through the window of his library. She recognized Esteban García immediately in his police uniform, and when he left, she ran into him in the garden on his way out. He asked her if she remembered him, and she lied and said no.

Alba told Esteban García that it was her 14th birthday, and he said he had a present for her. He smiled, and even though she tried to look away, he grabbed her firmly by the face and kissed her. He smelled of tobacco and violence, and when he let go, he grabbed her by the throat. He tightened his grip before releasing her and began to laugh. Esteban García left the garden, laughing all the while, and Alba sat and cried. She felt “dirty and humiliated,” and she immediately ran into the house and washed her mouth out with soap. While Alba doesn’t know it, her thoughts about Esteban García are “a premonition.”

Miguel’s anger at Alba for not telling him she is Esteban Trueba’s granddaughter doesn’t last long, and their relationship heats up. They sneak around together, but Alba soon discovers that the safest place for them to have sex is **the big house on the corner**. If the servants hear anything, Alba says, they will just think it is the ghosts. They have sex in each of the empty rooms, and then they move to the basement. Alba constructs a bed out of old mattresses and sheets from damask curtains, and they spend hours together in the dark. For the first time, Alba wants to be beautiful; looking at herself through Miguel’s eyes, she believes that she is. One day, Miguel tells Alba that he will be joining the guerrillas, and that it is too dangerous for her to come along.

Esteban García’s crass comment reflects his hate for Alba as well as his disrespect for women in general, and her disrespect for him likely fuels this hate. Blanca begins to scream at the sight Alba covered in blood because she likely assumes that Alba has been seriously hurt during the protest, when really she’s just started her period.



The fact that the student protest is resolved peacefully while Alba stays in bed reflects her privilege as a member of the upper class and as the Senator’s granddaughter. Likely, had Alba been just another student, she would have been arrested instead of being allowed to simply go home. Furthermore, those of the lower classes can’t just go home; their fight continues regardless of how they physically feel.



Alba’s “premonition” suggests that she has inherited Clara’s supernatural powers, although Alba doesn’t yet realize this. In Alba’s flashback, Esteban García again sexually assaults her in order to exert power over her and to make her feel “dirty and humiliated.” Esteban’s actions demonstrate his hatred for Alba, and more broadly reflect his general disrespect for woman and his belief that he can treat them however he wants.



Like Blanca’s relationship with Pedro Tercero, Alba’s relationship with Miguel goes on right under Esteban’s nose. Esteban distances himself from his family and doesn’t acknowledge things he doesn’t want to see, like Pedro’s songs on the radio. Meanwhile, Alba clearly loves Miguel, and she begins to see herself differently because of that love. Miguel is going to war to fight for the revolution, which is why he believes it is too dangerous for Alba to come along with him.



Jaime believes that after so many years of struggle, the Socialist Party is finally going to win an election. Alba laughs at his optimism. She repeats Miguel's beliefs and informs Jaime that the Socialist Party will never win without a revolution. Violent oppression can only be resolved with violence she says, but Jaime disagrees. He believes in a peaceful approach to progress. Later that night, Jaime says again that the Socialist Party will win the election, but since he rarely speaks, no one pays attention to him.

Jaime, however, knows for a fact that the Socialist Party will win. He knows this because of his close friendship with the Candidate, who has been vying for the presidency for the last 18 years. Jaime met the Candidate years ago on a routine medical call, and they struck up a friendship. The Candidate's experience with losing tells him that this time he is going to win, but he asked Jaime to keep it quiet. Jaime said no one would believe it if he did talk about it, so to prove it, he tells Esteban.

Jaime is not involved at all in politics and talk of a violent revolution makes him uncomfortable. Esteban, however, takes every chance he gets to warn Jaime of the dangers of communism and the evil they are headed for if the left wins the election. When Jaime discovers Esteban is organizing a terror campaign, he decides it is all too much and goes to live at the hospital. During this time, political tensions begin to escalate, and posters of the candidates are hung all over town. Jaime worries excessively about Alba and her relationship with Miguel, a known revolutionary.

One day, Alba comes to Jaime and begs him to talk to Miguel. His sister is sick, and she hopes that Miguel will open up to Jaime and tell him what is wrong. Jaime agrees, and when he sees Miguel, a young kid obviously worried about his sister, Jaime begins to soften. He tells Miguel to take him to his sister, and he leads Jaime to a small apartment in the bohemian quarter. Inside, Jaime finds Amanda. She is 20 years older and skin and bones, but she is the woman Jaime remembers. Miguel is surprised that they know each other, and Jaime is struck with a feeling of profound loss. He understands that years of poverty and frustration have brought Amanda here, and he tells Miguel they must get her to a hospital. "Only a detoxification program can save her now," Jaime says.

Jaime's self-imposed silence is like Clara's own silence, which she used to punish Esteban; however, Jaime's silence likely doesn't have the same effect on Esteban. Unlike Miguel, Jaime supports a nonviolent approach to revolution through legal, political channels and the Socialist Party.



Allende repeatedly implies that the unnamed country in the novel is Chile, and it is thought that the inspiration for the Candidate is Salvador Allende, author Allende's second cousin and an important politician in Chile's Socialist Party. Like the Candidate, Salvador Allende ran for the presidency of Chile for 18 years before finally being elected in 1970.



Jaime is not comfortable with Miguel or talk of violent revolution because he is a pacifist, and thus believes in peacefully obtaining justice and equality. Esteban's involvement in a terror campaign again suggests that the country's government is corrupt and willing to do whatever it takes to remove the threat of communism, even if that means overthrowing a democratically elected official.



Jaime doesn't initially like Miguel, but Miguel's obvious love for Amanda changes Jaime's mind. Allende implies that Amanda is sick because she is addicted to drugs of some kind, which Amanda likely turned to as a coping mechanism for living her life in poverty. In this way, Allende underscores the risk factors of poverty and the overall effect it can have on one's life. Jaime feels a profound sense of loss because he no longer has any of the feelings of love for Amanda that previously dominated his life.



CHAPTER 12: THE CONSPIRACY

When election day arrives, the Socialist Party wins, just as the Candidate predicted. After the ballots are counted, the working-class take to the streets and march toward the center of the city, to the “well-tended avenues of the bourgeoisie.” The upper class tremble with fear, and in the crowd, Alba runs into Miguel. They celebrate the historic win, but Miguel assures her it isn’t over. “We’ve won,” Miguel says to Alba, “but now we’ll have to defend our victory.”

The next morning, the upper-class storm the local banks and demand their money. They no longer trust the banks to keep their money safe, and within the next 24 hours, the value of property is cut in half and complete hysteria settles over the nation. The people split into two polarized groups, and Esteban worries he will be hanged in the street. He can’t believe that his country has turned socialist. Esteban and the other conservative politicians meet and come up with a strategy of “economic destabilization” to take down the new government, and then they toast “the fatherland.”

As Pedro Tercero watches the chaos unfold, he is unable to write any new songs. Writing songs requires “anxiety and sorrow,” and he has found “great inner peace.” He thinks only of Blanca, until the new government approaches him and offers him a job. Pedro Tercero tells them he isn’t qualified—he is only a peasant—but they insist. The new government claims that Pedro is famous and popular, and that is all that matters. So, Pedro Tercero gets an office and a personal secretary and goes to work. He continues to see Blanca as often as he can, but they are both tired—Pedro from the demands of government and Blanca from the demands of Esteban—and they often just meet to sleep next to each other.

One day, Pedro Tercero again tells Blanca that he wants to marry her and be together once and for all. As always, Blanca says she’ll think about it—but Pedro says he’s done with thinking about it. Blanca has been thinking about it for 50 years, and it is time to act. “It’s now or never,” Pedro Tercero says. Blanca is surprised. She never considered that he would give her an ultimatum. She leaves angrily, with Pedro’s eyes on her the entire time, but he doesn’t stop her. Pedro doesn’t try to contact Blanca, and it will be two years before they see each other again.

The working class takes to the “well-tended avenues of the bourgeoisie” as a show of class equality under a socialist government. Miguel’s comment that they will have to “defend [their] victory” speaks to the violence to come and again suggests that true victory for the working class can only be achieved through violence.



Allende’s description of the country after the election of the President closely follows the social and political unrest experienced in Chile after the election of Salvador Allende. In the months after President Allende’s election, the conservative opposition government worked closely with the United States government to cripple Chile’s economy and bring down the Socialist government from the inside.



Pedro Tercero has found “great inner peace” because socialism has finally won, which diminishes his “anxiety and sorrow” and desire for social equality and justice. Blanca and Pedro clearly still love each other, which reflects the power of love to endure years of separation. The character of Pedro Tercero is thought to be based on Víctor Jara, a real-life Chilean songwriter and communist, who worked as a cultural ambassador under President Salvador Allende.



Pedro’s ultimatum reflects their patriarchal society’s sexist ideals, as Pedro thinks he can simply tell Blanca what to do. Blanca, however, won’t be controlled by any man—even one she truly loves—so she leaves Pedro, even though it must be very difficult for Blanca to do so.



In the meantime, Blanca continues teaching pottery classes, but she also takes an active role in political and social life. The “road to Socialism” is a “battlefield,” and secret meetings take place all over the country. The right is wealthy and has unlimited resources, and they also control the mass media. Soon, there is a widespread shortage of goods, and stores everywhere have nothing but empty shelves. Gasoline is rationed, and the demand for black market goods increases. Then, the teamsters go on strike. In short, it is a nightmare.

The President asks the country for patience. He tells the people that the teamsters are “in the pay of imperialists” and won’t be going back to work any time soon. He encourages people to plant gardens and become more self-sufficient. The President acknowledges that things are bad, but he reminds the people that if they stand united, they will not be defeated. In the meantime, Esteban is the first politician on the right to suggest a military coup to stop the progression of Marxism in the country. He suggests it so often and so aggressively that it becomes necessary for him to travel with two bodyguards. The bodyguards aren’t to protect Esteban from others; they are to protect Esteban from himself.

In the meantime, Blanca runs a network for moving black-market goods. She stocks the empty rooms in **the big house on the corner** with useful goods, like soap and sugar. Blanca even has two barrels of soy sauce. She runs a tight business, and she locks each of the rooms with a padlock and carries the keys on a ring she keeps clipped to her waist. Jaime tries to convince Blanca to share her goods, especially perishable goods, but Blanca refuses. Alba makes a secret hole in the wall and pilfers her mother’s goods. She gives everything she takes to Miguel to distribute to the poor, which he delivers along with revolutionary pamphlets telling the people to rise and bring down the oligarchy.

Esteban is stockpiling goods, too—specifically, guns. Alba is the first to notice this, and she tells Jaime, who is hesitant to believe her. Alba cuts another hole in the wall and finds various “pistols, submachine guns, rifles, and hand grenades.” They take the weapons, replace them with rocks for weight, and hide them in Jaime’s room until Alba takes them out in a cello case. She wants to give the arsenal to Miguel, but Jaime won’t allow it, so they bury all the guns in safe place.

Blanca’s interest in politics mirrors Nivea and Clara’s, even though Clara’s interest in politics was less official and limited only to the peasants at Tres Marías. The “battlefield” that is the “road to Socialism” reflects the power of the right despite having lost the election. Because of their wealth, the right collapses the economy, which weakens the new Socialist government.



The fact that Esteban is the first conservative politician to suggest a military coup d’état is important, as it further reveals Esteban’s corruption and suggests he is personally responsible for the impending violence. The fact that Esteban needs bodyguards to protect him from himself again points to Esteban’s violence and bad temper, as he is constantly fighting with his political opponents.



Blanca’s black-market network again defies society’s sexist expectations. Blanca is clearly a capable businesswoman; which society assumes is a role better left to men. The keys hanging from Blanca’s waist hearken to Férula and her keys, which again underscores the connection between family members. Still, Blanca is selfishly hoarding the goods she collects and refuses to share, which is why Alba steals Blanca’s good and distributes them to the poor.



Esteban isn’t just collecting guns—he is building an arsenal, which speaks to the coup he is obviously planning. Jaime won’t allow Alba to give the guns to Miguel because Jaime is a pacifist, and he knows Miguel will use the weapons to stage a violent uprising.



Tres Marías is one of the last *haciendas* to expropriate under the agrarian reform. The peasants form a cooperative and take over the property, and the foreman, who tried to warn Esteban, leaves without a word. Esteban finds out when the government notifies him with payment (the amount Esteban listed on his taxes) in the form of government bonds with a 30-year maturation. He is furious. Esteban slips his bodyguards and goes to Tres Marías. Upon his arrival, Esteban is immediately overpowered by the peasants and taken hostage. The media is present and reports on the whole thing, and when the President finds out, he sends in the national guard to save the Senator.

The national guard arrives, and the peasants insist the soldiers obtain a warrant; however, the country judge has gone fishing, and they can't reach him. When Blanca finds out that Esteban has been taken hostage, she takes Alba and goes to see Pedro Tercero at his government job. Blanca walks right into his office, past the secretary. "Your daughter and I are going to Tres Marías to rescue the old man," Blanca says to Pedro—telling Alba (albeit indirectly) for the first time that Pedro is her father. Blanca asks Pedro to come with them, and he agrees, but he will need to stop and get his guitar first.

When Blanca and Alba arrive at Tres Marías with Pedro Tercero, Pedro is escorted to the kitchen, where guards stand outside the door. Esteban is inside, but they won't let Pedro in. Pedro informs them that the national guard will come tomorrow with a court order and take him by force. It is better, Pedro says, if he takes the Senator now. They let him in, and Pedro Tercero finds Esteban looking worn and dejected. They stare at each other without speaking, and Pedro tells him he has come to take him home. Esteban resists, but Pedro unties him and walks him out through the front gate. Alba has never seen her grandfather look so defeated, at least not since Clara's death, and she runs to hug him.

Over the next months, tensions continue to run high, especially among the women of the opposition. They march through the streets banging pots and pans, protesting the shortage of goods in stores. One day, Alba watches as a vanload of youth brigade members plaster the city walls with graffiti. They paint butterflies and bloody roses, verses by the Poet, and the word "Djakarta." Alba asks one of them what it means, but no one seems to know. Alba hasn't been to class in ages; the professors are striking, and all the school's buildings have been taken over by students. When Alba isn't with Miguel, she helps Jaime, who, along with a handful of other doctors, is still working in this clinic despite the school's order to stop.

To expropriate is to relieve someone of their property, which is exactly what the peasants at Tres Marías finally do to Esteban. Agrarian reform is the formal redistribution of land, and since the peasants have lived and worked on Tres Marías for generations, the hacienda is officially given to the people under the new government. This passage implies that Esteban lied on his taxes concerning the actual worth of Tres Marías; however, the bond the government pays him with is worthless anyway.



Blanca is hoping that by finally telling Alba that Pedro is her father, Blanca will be able to convince Pedro to help Esteban. Pedro is highly respected by the peasants on Tres Marías, and they will likely listen to him and let Esteban go. Blanca's concern for Esteban, and the fact that she finally tells Alba the truth, suggests that Blanca deeply loves her father, despite their fraught relationship.



The stare between Pedro Tercero and Esteban suggests that Esteban still recognizes Pedro and is hesitant to accept his help, even if it does save Esteban's life. Pedro walks Esteban out through the front gate so that everyone can see the patrón saved by a peasant, which for Pedro is the ultimate payback for all Esteban has put him through.



The resistance of the women of the opposition again underscores the power and strength of women—they refuse to quietly suffer and instead take to the streets to loudly protest their mistreatment. Djakarta (which the protestors misspell) is the capital city of Indonesia, which was also overtaken in a military coup and suffered immensely under the imposed government. In Djakarta, the people and culture were slowly destroyed by the opposition government, so the word serves as a warning to the country depicted in Allende's novel.



Amanda volunteers at the clinic, too. Jaime is happy she is there, and he wishes terribly that he still loved her. The President makes announcements on television nearly every night. He claims that the teamsters are getting \$50 per day from a foreign source to continue striking, and he warns the country that work likely won't resume any time soon. The President says that his enemies, who would rather see democracy die than him in office, are planning a coup d'état to seize the power of the government. Despite the President's efforts to warn the people, they accuse him of paranoia and drinking, and they say his cupboards are stocked while the people starve.

One day, Luisa, the last remaining Mora sister, visits **the big house on the corner**. When she enters, Esteban feels the spirit of Clara enter with her. She has come to bring him bad news, Luisa says. She has been reading the astrological charts, and everything points to "blood, pain, and death." Luisa says Esteban will be on the winning side, but his victory will bring only "suffering and loneliness." Luisa then asks to speak to Alba; she has a message from Clara. Luisa tells Alba that Clara has been trying to protect her, but that Alba must be careful. "Death is at your heels," Luisa says.

CHAPTER 13: THE TERROR

The first day of the coup d'état, Jaime wakes at dawn to a call from the President's secretary. The President isn't ill, she says, but he has asked for all his doctors to come to the palace. Jaime arrives at eight o'clock and is stunned to see the city empty. A group of soldiers is standing guard outside the castle, and after Jaime identifies himself as a doctor, they let him through. Inside, the President tells Jaime that "the Navy has revolted."

Jaime quickly calls Alba, warns her not to leave the house, and tells her to call Amanda. Jaime never speaks to Alba again. An hour and a half later, all branches of the military have joined the coup, quickly followed by the police. The President tells the guards at the palace to leave—without their weapons—and they exit, "confused and ashamed." One of the guards stops at the door. "I'm staying with you, *Compañero* President," he says. By midmorning, the President goes on the radio to address the nation. He tells them he won't resign. He is prepared to repay their loyalty with his life. "Long live the people!" the President cries. "Long live the workers!"

The teamsters' corruption further underscores the broader political corruption that is rampant throughout the novel. The teamsters are an important workers' union, and they are clearly in cahoots with the conservative government, which is attempting to destroy the socialist government by crippling the economy. Again, the events of Allende's book closely follow the events of the 1973 Chilean coup d'état, which was made possible in large part because the United States helped conservative politicians destroy the Chilean economy.



Luisa's visit serves as a warning and foreshadows the novel's upcoming violence. Like Clara, Luisa is a gifted clairvoyant, and Clara is clearly trying to get a message to her family. Just as Clara promised, she finds a way to communicate with her family from the other side. Luisa's warning suggests that Esteban's coup will be successful, but she also predicts that it will cause "blood, pain, and death," especially for Alba.



Jaime's character is thought to be based on Arturo Jirón, a real-life Chilean physician and the personal doctor of President Salvador Allende. Like Jaime, Jirón was at the Presidential Palace on the morning of September 11, 1973 when the coup d'état began. Jirón was arrested and detained at a detention camp but was later released.



The President clearly supports the people, and, evidenced by the "confused and ashamed" guards who are forced to turn on him during the coup, including the guard who refuses, the President seems to have the support of the people as well. The President was democratically elected by the people, and he refuses to betray their loyalty, even under the violent threats of the conservative opposition.



Soon, the bombing begins. As Jaime takes cover, he can't believe it has come to this. He always thought that the military respected the law. The President is quickly on his feet, firing a bazooka out the window at the military tanks below. The bombing doesn't last long, but the palace is demolished. An officer outside orders them to surrender, and the President turns to Jaime and the others and shakes their hands. "I'll go last," he says. Jaime never sees him alive again.

Outside, the soldiers fire guns into the air, and one of them punches Jaime in the stomach so hard that he soils himself. "Make way, we're going to run the tank over these bastards!" yells a colonel. Jaime looks up at the man and thinks that he recognizes him from Tres Marías. Jaime and the others are loaded into a van and taken to the Ministry of Defense. There, a kind soldier tells Jaime to sit and rest but to get up immediately when the soldier says so. "You operated on my mother and saved her life," the kind soldier says. Within minutes, the soldier tells Jaime to stand, and two men handcuff Jaime and take him to be interrogated.

Jaime's interrogators know that he doesn't have anything to do with politics or what is happening, but they want him to go on television and say the President is an alcoholic and that he committed suicide. Jaime refuses, so they hold him down and beat him. Afterward, they take him to a military building, and, after tying his hands and feet with barbed wire, throw him face-first into an animal stall. The other stalls are filled with people, too, and Jaime is left there for two days without food or water. Then the stalls are emptied, and everyone, Jaime included, is taken to an empty lot near the airport and shot.

At **the big house on the corner**, Esteban pours a glass of champagne in celebration. Alba grabs the glass from his hand and throws it against the wall, shattering it. Blanca smiles. In the middle of the night, the phone rings. Alba answers, and Miguel tells her that he is leaving to fight. She must not talk about him with anyone, and he instructs her destroy her address book and stop seeing all their friends. He tells her he loves her and hangs up. A curfew is enforced over the next two days, and when it is lifted, goods have magically appeared in stores and shops everywhere. Meat and produce fill the shelves, but free pricing has been decreed, and everything is priced three times as high as it was before.

The President is dedicated to protecting the country and their government, and he holds out until the very end. During the Chilean coup of 1973, the Presidential Palace was destroyed by bombings early in the takeover, and President Allende was never seen or heard from again.



While it isn't confirmed, Allende implies that the colonel who wants to "run the tank over these bastards!" is Esteban García. It seems like Esteban García should have some sympathy for the President and his men, since Esteban García is himself a peasant from Tres Marías, but he is again portrayed as entirely violent and unforgiving. On the other hand, the kind soldier represents those who are forced to participate in the coup and do so reluctantly.



Jaime's death is the evidence of the "blood, pain, and death" that Luisa Mora warns Esteban his victory will bring. Due in part to Esteban's support and enthusiasm for the coup, his own son is dead. The violent way in which Jaime is treated and ultimately killed reflects the extreme corruption of the opposition government, and their desire to completely take over the socialist government at any cost.



Blanca smiles when Alba throws Esteban's glass against the wall because she has never seen anyone stand up to Esteban in such a way. Miguel's phone call means that the revolution is beginning, and that it will meet the opposition with equal violence. The fact that goods appear in stores implies that there wasn't really a shortage after all—the opposition government was simply holding out on the people to damage the economy and weaken the socialist government.



Soldiers patrol the streets, and some of them beat men with beards and harass women wearing slacks. The new government condemns their actions and says the offending soldiers are communists in disguise. Over the next few days, word spread that the President has committed suicide, but no one really believes it. Three days later, Esteban goes to the Ministry of Defense, wondering why no one has invited him to take part in the new government. Esteban used his name and money to buy arms for the coup, and while he isn't necessarily interested in political power, he would like to be an advisor. He believes wholeheartedly that the coup was their only way to regain control and get rid of Marxism for good.

At the Ministry of Defense, Esteban is surprised to find it a complete disorganized mess. A soldier with his feet on the desk greets him, and without allowing Esteban to speak, tells him to hand over the keys to his car. Congress has been suspended, the soldier says, and all Congressional privileges have been suspended, too. It is obvious to Esteban that the new government has no intention of reopening Congress. Without a way to get home, Esteban gets a ride from a lieutenant, who tells him that there has been very little resistance to the coup, but many have been arrested, and the people are scared. Esteban can tell the soldier feels guilty, so he tells him they had no choice. A coup d'état was necessary to rid the country of Marxism, but even as he says the words, Esteban isn't so sure.

Two weeks later, the kind soldier goes to **the big house on the corner** and tells Blanca all about Jaime's death. Blanca calls for Esteban so he can hear, too, but Esteban doesn't believe him. Esteban goes to his library, sits in a chair, and calls Jaime's name. Finally, Jaime's spirit comes to him, covered in blood and rags, and Esteban knows that Jaime is dead. After Jaime's death, Esteban begins to speak of tyranny, which Alba has known about all along—she has inherited Clara's gift.

Alba blames Esteban for everything, and she believes he is the reason why she will never see Jaime or Miguel again. However, when Alba sees her grandfather slumped in a chair, calling out to Clara and Jaime, she realizes how much she loves him. Alba helps wanted revolutionaries sneak out of the country, and she suspects her grandfather knows it. Amanda introduces Alba to some priests who are trying to feed the poor with very few supplies, so Blanca lets Alba raid the stockpile of goods she still has hidden in the back of the house. Like most people of the upper class, Esteban ignores the poor, but when women and children begin begging door to door, he orders the cook to always have something hot available.

The soldiers beat men with beards and harass women wearing slacks because slacks and beards violate traditional views (men should be clean shaven and women should wear dresses) and are likely indicators of support for the socialist government. As the soldiers are working for the opposition—the conservatives—they target those they think are against them. Allende implies that the President was murdered, just as many Chileans believed President Allende was murdered during the Chilean coup of 1973.



Obviously, Esteban's support of the coup is beginning to wane. According to the official plan, the military is supposed to relinquish power back to the conservatives, but the military has obviously betrayed the conservatives. Without Congress, the country is officially a dictatorship, which Sebastián Gómez swore would never happen. The lieutenant feels guilty because the military is exerting force on innocent people who aren't even trying to resist, which further underscores the military's cruelty and corruption.



Esteban's inability to initially accept Jaime's death reflects his deep love for his son, despite their obvious differences. Unfortunately, it takes Jaime's death for Esteban to finally accept that the coup was a bad idea; however, Alba has always known the coup would lead to a dictatorship because she is clairvoyant just like Clara was.



The fact that Esteban orders the cook to always have food prepared for the poor implies that his cruelty and resentment for the lower class are beginning to resolve, and that he isn't as hateful as he once was. In many ways, Esteban is the reason why Alba will never see Jaime again, but even Alba can't hate Esteban for long. Alba's love for her grandfather again underscores the deep connection and love between family members, even in the face of serious disagreements.



The new government erases any history that the regime disapproves of, and they change maps to suit their desires. They appropriate distant countries in geography books, and the United Nations threatens to send in tanks if they don't stop. The new government censors all books, movies, and songs, and they outlaw words like "freedom," "justice," and "trade union." Most of the professors at Alba's school have been arrested or killed, including Sebastián Gómez.

Still believing the coup a necessary evil, Esteban decides to go to Tres Marías and get his land back. When he arrives, he finds the remaining peasants miserable and starving. He dismisses them and chases them from the *hacienda*—the very land they have lived on for generations. That night, Esteban looks around and, seeing nothing but death, curses his temper. He knows he can rebuild Tres Marías again, so he sends word to the peasants that they are welcome to return; however, no one comes back. Esteban leaves for the capital with a heavy soul.

In the meantime, the Poet lies dying in his seaside home. He has been sick for some time, but that doesn't stop the police from ransacking his home in search of hidden communists and subversive poetry. They take the Poet from his deathbed to the capital, where he dies four days later of heart failure. A wake is held for those with enough courage to go, and even though Esteban doesn't support the Poet's ideological convictions, he attends with Alba. At the small funeral, shouts of the Poet's name begin, along with calls of "Here! Now and forever!" and "Compañero President!" As the Poet is put to rest, his funeral is a "symbolic burial of freedom."

Months pass, and Alba is busy hiding revolutionaries and feeding the poor. It becomes obvious to everyone, even Esteban, that the military has no intention of handing over power. One day, Blanca drops to her knees in front of Esteban and confesses that Pedro Tercero is hiding in one of the house's abandoned rooms, where he has been since the coup started. He snuck in Blanca's window after he was placed on the wanted list and told her the President had been killed. Blanca begs Esteban to help her get him out of the country.

This passage reflects the totalitarian control of the military after the coup. The people are allowed few liberties, which is reflected in the outlawed words of "freedom," "justice," and "trade union." As free thought has been outlawed, intellectuals like Sebastián are removed from society.



Esteban is reluctant to fully admit that he was wrong about the coup, but his behavior at Tres Marías helps him see the error of his ways. Esteban is beginning to realize that Tres Marías belongs more to the peasants than to him, but it is too late to get the peasants back after he has mistreated them for so many years.



The Poet represents intellectualism and free thought, which is eliminated with the coup. Pablo Neruda, the poet thought to be the inspiration for Allende's Poet, was killed in much the same way in the months following the Chilean coup of 1973. Authorities searched Neruda's home and forced him to go to the capital, where he died days later. While the Chilean government initially said Neruda died of a heart attack, they have since admitted that he likely died due to his treatment by the police.



Alba's efforts on behalf of the revolutionaries further challenges the traditional gendered assumptions of her sexist society, which expects women to be quiet and obedient. Pedro Tercero's claim that the President has been murdered aligns historically with the 1973 Chilean coup, in which President Allende was said to have committed suicide but was thought by many to have been murdered. Blanca's pleas for Esteban to save Pedro suggest that she is still deeply in love with Pedro despite their long separation.



Esteban goes to the room in which Pedro Tercero is hiding and opens the door. He stands there, and the two men stare at each other. Esteban tells Pedro he has come to get him out of the country, and Pedro initially resists, telling Esteban to “Go to hell.” But when Esteban tells Pedro that that’s where they’re going and to come with him, both men smile and leave the room together. Esteban quickly arranges for both Blanca and Pedro to leave the country, and as he says goodbye, he admits to Blanca that he hasn’t been a very good father. “I love you so much, Papa!” Blanca cries and hugs him. They never see each other again.

Alba decides to start hiding wanted revolutionaries in the abandoned rooms of **the big house on the corner**, just as Blanca hid Pedro Tercero. Esteban, who has come across Clara’s spirit many times in the house, tells the servants that the strange noises are just the ghosts. One day, Miguel appears, and Alba hides him in the basement, where they have sex and hold each other for days. She tells him about the weapons she buried with Jaime and offers to take him there. Miguel tells Alba that her grandfather is a “bastard.” He says Esteban will get killed one day and admits he has even considered killing him himself. “God forbid, Miguel,” Alba says, “because then I’d have to do the same to you.”

Two weeks later, Alba takes the children from the soup kitchen where she volunteers on an outing, and on the way, she picks up Miguel in disguise. They go for a picnic near the spot where the weapons are buried, and Alba asks what is next. Miguel won’t say; it is better for Alba if she knows nothing. That way, if the police interrogate her, she won’t know anything. In the meantime, Esteban is feeling old and tired. The line between right and wrong is blurry to him, and he has no idea the police have Alba and the house under surveillance.

The police barge into **the big house on the corner** in the middle of the night and force Esteban and Alba outside. Luckily, there aren’t any wanted revolutionaries hiding in the house, but the police trash the house and burn all of Jaime’s books, the contents of Marcos’s trunks, and various papers and pamphlets in a massive bonfire in the courtyard. The police tell Esteban that Alba is “the whore of a guerrilla” and throw her into a van. They tape her eyelids closed and begin to drive, grabbing and fondling her along the way. They finally stop and tell their colonel they have arrested Senator Trueba’s granddaughter. “So I see,” a voice says, and Alba immediately recognizes the voice of Esteban García.

This interaction between Pedro and Esteban mirrors their interaction at Tres Mariás when Pedro saves Esteban, and their knowing smiles suggest their resentment for each other is beginning to fade. Esteban’s willingness to help Blanca and her cries of love suggests that Esteban and Blanca deeply care for each other, despite their difficult history.



Alba’s promise to kill Miguel should he kill Esteban suggests that Alba’s love for her grandfather surpasses even the love she feels for Miguel, which speaks to the deep, unbreakable connection between family members. While Esteban clearly believes in Clara’s ghost, he presumably knows that Alba is hiding revolutionaries in the house, and his explanation to the servants is simply a coverup. Miguel’s description of Esteban as a “bastard” is particularly loaded, given Esteban’s refusal to recognize his illegitimate children or grandchildren, like Esteban García.



The line between right and wrong is becoming blurry for Esteban because his conservative politics, which he has supported his entire adult life, are proving to be so terribly wrong. He knows that the coup was the wrong decision, and he is beginning to realize that conservative politics can be just as dangerous and corrupt as any other political ideology or party.



The fact that the police barge into Esteban house proves that no one is safe from the new government. Esteban aided and supported the coup, but it matters little to the police now. The massive bonfire, made mainly of books, represents the destruction of free thought and alternative ideas under an authoritarian government. Furthermore, Alba’s treatment by the police underscores her vulnerability as a woman in a sexist society. She is branded a “whore” and sexually assaulted by the police merely because she is female.



CHAPTER 14: THE HOUR OF TRUTH

Alba is thrown into a dark cell, and the tape on her eyelids is replaced with a blindfold. It is cold and quiet, but she can hear screams and moans in the distance. After about a day, the cell door opens, and Alba is led to a room where she again recognizes the voice of Esteban García. He asks her where Miguel is, but Alba refuses to talk. A violent slap knocks her off her feet, and he asks again, but Alba still refuses to talk. The men beat her on Esteban García's order and throw her back in the cell.

The third time Alba is taken to Esteban García, she is more prepared. Esteban orders her to strip, and when she refuses, the men rip the clothes from her body. They strap her to a metal cot and immense pain consumes her body. She wakes later, wet and naked. Her blindfold is gone, and a woman named Ana Díaz is comforting her. She says she knows Alba, but Alba doesn't remember. "It's because of the electricity," Ana says, reassuring Alba that her memory will return.

Alba is held by Esteban García for a long time. She comes to understand that Esteban's treatment of her has more to do with revenge than his desire to make her confess anything about Miguel. Ana was arrested with her boyfriend, and the police raped her in front of him before separating them. Soon, Esteban García throws Alba in "the doghouse," one of six small sealed cells used for punishment, where she somehow manages to keep her sanity. She calls to Clara's ghost to help her die, and when Clara finally comes, she suggests Alba write "in her mind," as a testimony of this terrible time. That way, those who try to ignore what is happening will know the truth.

Esteban Trueba stands outside the Christopher Columbus. Inside, Mustafá is gone, and the woman at the desk informs Esteban that Tránsito Soto doesn't take customers. Esteban raises his silver cane, threatening to trash the place if he doesn't see her, and Tránsito steps into the room. She is happy to see Esteban and shows him to her office. Tránsito knows Esteban has not come to have sex, so she asks him how she can help. Esteban quickly tells her everything—about Alba's arrest and Férula's curse, about Tres Marías, and about the three severed fingers he received in the mail. Esteban figures Tránsito is successful because she knows how to repay a debt, and that her line of work means she knows many important people. Two days later, Tránsito calls Esteban and says she has found Alba.

The police's treatment of Alba again underscores the corruption of the new government. They torture Alba, blindfolding her and leaving her isolated in a cell, and beat her when she refuses to talk. Esteban García is all too eager to torture Alba, which reflects the resentment he feels for Esteban Trueba's legitimate children and grandchildren.



Ana Díaz is the same woman from the student protest at Alba's university, and she implies that Alba has been electrocuted by the police as another form of torture. Ana's concern and attention for Alba again underscores the connection and solidarity between women, even those who don't always agree.



Clara's ghost implies that Alba has a responsibility to tell her story. Alba's story exposes the truth about the coup and the new government—an important truth for the upper classes, who generally support the new government—which further underscores the importance of writing and recording the past. Ana's arrest and rape again highlights the oppression of women in a sexist society. Ana isn't just arrested—she is sexually assaulted and humiliated.



Esteban Trueba glosses over getting the severed fingers in the mail, but it is implied that the fingers belonged to Alba. Furthermore, the reader can infer that since Esteban García was present when Esteban Trueba severed Pedro Tercero's fingers, Esteban García likewise severed Alba's fingers to torture both her and Esteban Trueba. This connection likely isn't lost on Esteban Trueba, and he is aware that Alba's arrest and torture is his fault in more ways than one. After all, Esteban Trueba organized the coup and abandoned Esteban García and his father, which is the source of Esteban García's resentment.



EPILOGUE

“My grandfather died last night,” Alba writes. Esteban died peacefully in her arms; he was happy and lucid, and he wasn’t in any pain. Since Esteban’s death, Alba has opened Clara’s bedroom, and she sits writing in a **notebook** in the middle of the room, a **canary in a cage** in the corner and Barrabás’s head staring at her from the rug below. When Alba arrived back at **the big house on the corner**, she went immediately to the library, where she knew Esteban would be waiting, and ran into his arms. They hugged and cried, and he said he was getting them out of the country, but Alba refused. She would be like a tree chopped down at Christmastime without her country, Alba said.

Esteban knew that Alba was really waiting for Miguel, and when he said as much, she was shocked that he even knew about Miguel. After Alba’s arrest, Miguel showed up at **the big house on the corner** and tried to help Esteban find her. It was Miguel’s idea to go to Tránsito Soto in the first place, Esteban said. Alba told her grandfather everything. After her hand became infected, she was put in a clinic where the doctor hated her and refused to give her painkillers, but a kind male nurse took pity on her and slipped her medicine. It was that nurse who told her that Amanda was dead. Amanda was loyal to Miguel to the end and never told the police anything about her brother.

Alba told Esteban how the police took her to a concentration camp for women, where the women watched over each other and never let her be alone. She told him about Ana Díaz, who gave Alba a **notebook** to write in and helped her to remember that she wasn’t the only woman who was raped. After a few days, the police dumped Alba in a street near the city, where a young boy helped her to his tenement house. There, the boy’s mother sat with Alba all night, waiting for curfew to pass. That night, Alba understood that the evil of men like Esteban García can’t destroy the spirit of such remarkable women.

When Alba returned home, Esteban went to work fixing up **the big house on the corner**. It was thoroughly cleaned, and a fresh coat of paint applied, and even the garden was replanted. Esteban and Alba went together to buy new **birds in cages**, and Alba put fresh flowers in the vases, just as she did when she was a child. It was Esteban’s idea to write their story down, and after writing all he had to say, Esteban laid down in Clara’s bed. At first, Clara was “a mysterious glow,” but as Esteban died and slowly let go of his anger, she finally appeared, looking as she did in the prime of her life. He died muttering Clara’s name.

After Esteban’s death, the narrator switches to Alba. The fact that Alba sits in Clara’s room, writing in a notebook with the Barrabás rug nearby underscores Alba’s deep connection to her grandmother, and their shared belief in the importance of writing and recording history. The caged canary suggests that while Alba may be free from the police, she will still have to struggle with the oppression of her sexist society. Alba’s refusal to leave the country is interesting, especially since author Allende was forced into exile in Venezuela after the Chilean coup of 1973.



Like Esteban, Alba glosses over the amputation of her fingers by Esteban García, barely mentioning it other than to confirm it happened. The kind male nurse mirrors the kind soldier who told Blanca and Esteban about Jaime’s death, and he further represents those who are forced to participate in the coup. Amanda’s unyielding loyalty and love for Miguel again underscores the profound connection between family members, as Amanda was willing to die to protect her brother.



The support of Ana and the women in the concentration camp, as well as the kindness of the woman in the tenement house, again underscores the solidarity of women and the strength this connection gives them to overcome the oppression of their sexist society. Furthermore, the notebook Ana gives Alba to record her experiences again suggests that writing can be therapeutic in coping with trauma.



The restoration of the big house on the corner is completed in honor of Clara, and it helps Esteban to further heal and cope with the loss of his family. Esteban dies comfortable and content after writing his story, and this, too, implies that writing is therapeutic and can help one cope with tragedy or trauma. The appearance of Clara’s ghost as Esteban dies implies that Clara has finally forgiven him for the pain he caused her in life. In this way, Clara and Esteban both let go of their pain and resentment.



In the doghouse, Alba dreamed of seeking revenge on Esteban García for all he had done to her, but now her anger has softened. The day Esteban Trueba raped Pancha García in the bushes, he started a chain of events that must be completed, Alba says. Now, the grandson of that woman has raped the granddaughter of the rapist. Alba wonders if, years from now, her own grandson will attack García's granddaughter in the bushes and continue the "unending tale of sorrow, blood, and love." Alba understands that everyone—even Esteban García—has reasons for being the way they are.

Alba writes in the **notebook**, just as Clara did, because memory fails and life is short. It is difficult to see how events are connected to each other when they are quickly passing by, which is why Clara kept her notebooks. Alba is determined to "break that terrible chain" started by Esteban Trueba in the bushes with Pancha García, but for now, she waits for Miguel and better times. Alba carries a child she knows is a girl, and while she doesn't know who the child's father is, the important thing is that she is Alba's daughter. Clara wrote in her notebooks so Alba could one day reclaim the past, and Alba does the same now. "Barrabás came to us by sea..." she begins.

Alba's reflection and her waning resentment for Esteban García suggests that ultimately, family connections are neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Rather, families are made up of equal parts pain and love, and they are an essential part of being human. Esteban García isn't simply a monster for no reason—he was made that way by Esteban's abandonment and his grandmother's attempts to turn him against the Truebas.



Like Blanca, Alba implies that the identity of her daughter's father isn't important. What matters to Alba, and to Blanca as well, is the connection between women, and between mothers and daughters specifically. Alba's life is uncertain—the coup is still in progress and she doesn't know where Miguel is—but the novel ends on an optimistic note. Alba is determined to "break the terrible chain" of abuse and sexism started by her grandfather, and she is planning to achieve this through the powerful connection between women—starting with her own daughter.





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