

Jane Doe

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Short Stories Unit Project

Gabriel García Márquez's *Tuesday Siesta* is a startling narrative about a bereaved mother visiting an inhospitable town to pay respects to her son, shot for an attempted break-in. García Márquez, a significant Colombian author, grew up after the Banana Massacre. The banana workers' poverty influenced his works on social oppression.

Mrs Centeno is fearless and self-respecting, acting on her own terms despite the limited agency of her social status. Poverty creates friction between her and the wealthier townsfolk living outside the banana plantations. Distrustful and spurning their help, she finds it demeaning to show weakness. "Don't take a drink anywhere even if you're dying of thirst. Above all, no crying," she tells her daughter (García Márquez, 91). She "[goes] out into the street" (97) to pay respects in an act of commitment to her son and defiance against the townsfolk. She symbolizes the dignity of the poor in face of injustice and suspicion. The priest is apathetic and morally condescending, as shown from "Didn't you ever try to get him on the right path?" (95). Insensitively criticizing her parenting, he dismisses her poverty and blames her son for committing a crime against the townsfolk. However, struck by her unexpected composure, he attempts to stall her from leaving out of sympathy.

The mood is tense and suspenseful. One feels a sense of tension as the mother and daughter, dressed "in severe and poor mourning clothes" (90), travel to an unknown destination – a far cry from the familial domestic scene expected in rural Colombia. The town's oppressive

heat and stillness rouse a sense of danger even as they walk to a presumably safe, well-kept parish house. Suspense arises from the conflict being hidden for most of the story. When the mother reveals that her son was “the thief who was killed here” (94), the conflict is exposed. One finally understands the tense mood earlier created to foreshadow the townsfolk’s hostility.

Much of the imagery describes the setting and the mother’s body language. From the “tiles split apart by the grass growing up between” and the houses with “their doors locked from the inside and the blinds drawn” (92), the town is dreary and destitute. Even the parish house with “a worktable, a plain one with an oilcloth cover, and on top of the table a primitive typewriter” (93) shows poverty but such possessions are a luxury, and the priest is already considered the wealthy class. The Colombians’ suffering is thus depicted. The mother “[rode] with her spinal column braced firmly against the back of the seat” (90) and later, “remained standing, absent-mindedly, with both hands clutching the handbag” (93). Her posture and refusal to sit show an instinct to present a dignified and unemotional front against the townspeople.

Tuesday Siesta is about maintaining dignity regardless of social status. When the woman explains that her son was a thief, she “stared at [the priest] with quiet self-control” (94). Instead of waiting for the townsfolk to disperse, she “took the girl by the hand and went out into the street” (97). These courageous acts show that she was unreservedly unashamed of her son and their poverty, refusing to be demeaned by the priest or the watching crowd. The woman’s self-respect, despite her circumstances, emphasizes the theme of dignity. The tense mood contributes to the theme by highlighting the precariousness of her social position; she is almost a pariah. To be dignified nonetheless is a significant act. Lastly, the imagery of her body language conveys her dignity. The imagery of the town brings out the existing social stratification she faces.

Work Cited

García Márquez, Gabriel. "Tuesday Siesta." *Collected Stories*, Penguin Books, 2014, pp. 91-97.