

## **The handsomest drowned man in the world - PDF**

The handsomest drowned man in the world is a short story written by the Spanish author **Gabriel García Márquez**. Originally written in Spanish, as “El ahogado más hermoso del mundo”. It is quite famous and is included into the High school curriculum in the USA.

The handsomest drowned man in the world starts off with some children finding a body in the beach and about how their lives are changed forever. It has a cheery tongue in cheek writing style while underplaying the very dark and depressing nature of the story.

## **Table of contents - The handsomest drowned man in the world**

1. About the author
2. The handsomest drowned man in the sea
3. Summary – The handsomest drowned man in the world
4. Questions and Answers

## **About the author - W. W. Jacobs**

Gabriel José de la Concordia García Márquez was considered as one of the best writers in Colombia and is considered a legend in Colombia as well as across South America. He was born in March 6 1927 in a small town called Aracataca and is well known for his many Spanish novels and short stories. In 1982 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature for his novels and short stories. He is one of the key persons who formed part of the Latin American boom and is considered one of the creators of magical realism in Spanish.

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## **The drowned man**

The first children who saw the dark and slinky bulge approaching through the sea let themselves think it was an enemy ship. Then they saw it had no flags or masts and they thought it was a whale. But when it washed up on the beach, they removed the clumps of seaweed, the jellyfish tentacles, and the remains of fish and flotsam, and only then did they see that it was a drowned man.

They had been playing with him all afternoon, burying him in the sand and digging him up again, when someone chanced to see them and spread the alarm in the village. The men who carried him to the nearest house noticed that he weighed more than any dead man they had ever known, almost as much as a horse, and they said to each other that maybe he'd been floating too long and the water had got into his bones.

When they laid him on the floor they said he'd been taller than all other men because there was barely enough room for him in the house, but they thought that maybe the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men. He had the smell of the sea about him and only his shape gave one to suppose that it was the corpse of a human being, because the skin was covered with a crust of mud and scales.

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

There was so little land that mothers always went about with the fear that the wind would carry off their children and the few dead that the years had caused among them had to be thrown off the cliffs. But the sea was calm and bountiful and all the men fitted into seven boats. So when they found the drowned man they simply had to look at one another to see that they were all there.

### **Who he was, who was he?**

That night they did not go out to work at sea. While the men went to find out if anyone was missing in neighboring villages, the women stayed behind to care for the drowned man. They took the mud off with grass swabs, they removed the underwater stones entangled in his hair, and they scraped the crust off with tools used for scaling fish.

As they were doing that they noticed that the vegetation on him came from faraway oceans and deep water and that his clothes were in tatters, as if he had sailed through labyrinths of coral. They noticed too that he bore his death with pride, for he did not have the lonely look of other drowned men who came out of the sea or that haggard, needy look of men who drowned in rivers.

Only when they finished cleaning him off did they become aware of the kind of man he was and it left them breathless. Not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination.

They could not find a bed in the village large enough to lay him on nor was there a table solid enough to use for his wake. The tallest men's holiday pants would not fit him, or the fattest ones' Sunday shirts, or the shoes of the one with the biggest feet.

### A name for the nameless

Fascinated by his huge size and his beauty, the women then decided to make him some pants from a large piece of sail and a shirt from some bridal linen so that he could continue through his death with dignity. As they sewed, sitting in a circle and gazing at the corpse between stitches, it seemed to them that the wind had never been so steady nor the sea so restless as on that night and they supposed that the change had something to do with the dead man.

They thought that if that magnificent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor, his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame held together by iron bolts, and his wife would have been the happiest woman.

They thought that he would have had so much authority that he could have drawn fish out of the sea simply by calling their names and that he would have put so much work into his land that springs would have burst forth from among the rocks so that he would have been able to plant flowers on the cliffs.

They secretly compared him to their own men, thinking that for all their lives theirs were incapable of doing what he could do in one night, and they ended up dismissing them deep in their hearts as the weakest, meanest and most useless creatures on earth. They were wandering through that maze of fantasy when the oldest woman, who as the oldest had looked upon the drowned man with more compassion than passion, sighed: 'He has the face of someone called Esteban.'

### Esteban

It was true. Most of them had only to take another look at him to see that he could not have any other name. The more stubborn among them, who were the youngest, still lived for a few hours with the illusion that when they put his clothes on and he lay among the flowers in patent leather shoes his name might be Lautaro. But it was a vain illusion. There had not been enough canvas, the poorly cut and worse sewn pants were too tight, and the hidden strength of his heart popped the buttons on his shirt.

After midnight the whistling of the wind died down and the sea fell into its Wednesday drowsiness. The silence put an end to any last doubts: he was Esteban. The women who had dressed him, who had combed his hair, had cut his nails and shaved him were unable to hold back a shudder of pity when they had to resign themselves to his being dragged along the ground.

It was then that they understood how unhappy he must have been with that huge body since it bothered him even after death. They could see him in life, condemned to going through doors sideways, cracking his head on crossbeams, remaining on his feet during visits, not knowing what to do with his soft, pink, sea lion hands while the lady of the house looked for her most resistant chair and begged him, frightened to death, sit here, Esteban, please. He would, leaning against the wall, smiling, don't bother, ma'am, I'm fine where I am, his heels raw and his back roasted from having done the same thing so many times whenever he paid a visit, don't bother, ma'am, I'm fine where I

am, just to avoid the embarrassment of breaking up the chair, and never knowing perhaps that the ones who said don't go, Esteban, at least wait till the coffee's ready, were the ones who later on would whisper the big boob finally left, how nice, the handsome fool has gone.

### **He's ours and ours alone..**

That was what the women were thinking beside the body a little before dawn. Later, when they covered his face with a handkerchief so that the light would not bother him, he looked so forever dead, so defenceless, so much like their men that the first furrows of tears opened in their hearts. It was one of the younger ones who began the weeping.

The others, coming to, went from sighs to wails, and the more they sobbed the more they felt like weeping, because the drowned man was becoming all the more Esteban for them, and so they wept so much, for he was the more destitute, most peaceful, and most obliging man on earth, poor Esteban. So when the men returned with the news that the drowned man was not from the neighboring villages either, the women felt an opening of jubilation in the midst of their tears. 'Praise the Lord,' they sighed, 'he's ours!'

### **The men**

The men thought the fuss was only womanish frivolity. Fatigued because of the difficult nighttime inquiries, all they wanted was to get rid of the bother of the newcomer once and for all before the sun grew strong on that arid, windless day. They improvised a litter with the remains of foremasts and gaffs, tying it together with rigging so that it would bear the weight of the body until they reached the cliffs.

They wanted to tie the anchor from a cargo ship to him so that he would sink easily into the deepest waves, where fish are blind and divers die of nostalgia, and bad currents would not bring him back to shore, as had happened with other bodies. But the more they hurried, the more the women thought of ways to waste time.

They walked about like startled hens, pecking with the sea charms on their breasts, some interfering on one side to put a scapular of the good wind on the drowned man, some on the other side to put a wrist compass on him, and after a great deal of get away from there, woman, stay out of the way, look, you almost made me fall on top of the dead man, the men began to feel mistrust in their livers and started grumbling about why so many main-altar decorations for a stranger, because no matter how many nails and holy-water jars he had on him, the sharks would chew him all the same, but the women kept piling on their junk relics, running back and forth, stumbling, while they released in sighs what they did not in tears, so that the men finally exploded with since when has there ever been such a fuss over a drifting corpse, a drowned nobody, a piece of cold Wednesday meat.

One of the women, mortified by so much lack of care, then removed the handkerchief from the dead man's face and the men were left breathless too.

### **The handsomest drowned man in the world**

He was Esteban. It was not necessary to repeat it for them to recognize him. If they had been told Sir Walter Raleigh, even they might have been impressed with his gringo accent, the macaw on his shoulder, his cannibal-killing blunderbuss, but there could be only one Esteban in the world and there he was, stretched out like a sperm whale, shoeless, wearing the pants of an undersized child, and with those stony nails that had to be cut with a knife.

They only had to take the handkerchief off his face to see that he was ashamed, that it was not his fault that he was so big or so heavy or so handsome, and if he had known that this was going to happen, he would have looked for a more discreet place to drown in, seriously, I even would have tied the anchor off a galleon around my neck and staggered off a cliff like someone who doesn't like things in order not to be upsetting people now with this Wednesday dead body, as you people say, in order not to be bothering anyone with this filthy piece of cold meat that doesn't have anything to do with me.

There was so much truth in his manner that even the most mistrustful men, the ones who felt the bitterness of endless nights at sea fearing that their women would tire of dreaming about them and begin to dream of drowned men, even they and others who were harder still shuddered in the marrow of their bones at Esteban's sincerity.

### **Funeral**

That was how they came to hold the most splendid funeral they could ever conceive of for an abandoned drowned man. Some women who had gone to get flowers in the neighbouring villages returned with other women who could not believe what they had been told, and those women went back for more flowers when they saw the dead man, and they brought more and more until there were so many flowers and so many people that it was hard to walk about.

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

Some sailors who heard the weeping from a distance went off course and people heard of one who had himself tied to the mainmast, remembering ancient fables about sirens. While they fought for the privilege of carrying him on their shoulders along the steep escarpment by the cliffs, men and women became aware for the first time of the desolation of their streets, the dryness of their courtyards, the narrowness of their dreams as they faced the splendour and beauty of their drowned man.

### **Esteban's village**

They let him go without an anchor so that he could come back if he wished and whenever he wished, and they all held their breath for the fraction of centuries the body took to fall into the

abyss. They did not need to look at one another to realize that they were no longer all present, that they would never be.

But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal and they were going to break their backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers on the cliffs so that in future years at dawn the passengers on great liners would awaken, suffocated by the smell of gardens on the high seas, and the captain would have to come down from the bridge in his dress uniform, with his astrolabe, his pole star, and his row of war medals and, pointing to the promontory of roses on the horizon, he would say in fourteen languages, look there, where the wind is so peaceful now that it's gone to sleep beneath the beds, over there, where the sun's so bright that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn, yes, over there, that's Esteban's village.

### **Summary and Analysis – The Handsomest Drowned Man In The World**

The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World is a small yet powerful short story which talks in depth about the transformative effect caused by the body of one unknown drowned man on an entire village. The story in essence says that a truly great person even if they are dead and long gone and unknown to others, has the power to change others and to inspire them to be better.

When the villagers find the body of the man, they know nothing about him besides his appearance and his great size. His life, who he was and his history, his family and his upbringing, his personality and how he behaved are all unknown to the villagers. However he is so magnificent to the eyes of the villagers that they imagine and fantasize about him, give him a name, a family and a grand funeral.

The short story is amazing since it initially starts off with the smallest of details such as how the giant man would have to duck when passing under doorways. But as the story progresses, the body takes on a life, the man has been given a name Esteban and also an identity. He lives again, in the minds of the villagers.

In the end of the story, the drowned man although unknown to all and is unidentifiable, causes an intense effect on the lives of all the villagers and how they change for better because of him. The villagers adopt him and honour him with a great funeral. They let Esteban go off into the sea once more without attaching an anchor with the hope that he could come back if and whenever he wished.

### **Questions and Answers - The handsomest drowned man in the world –Set 1**

1. Who discover the drowned man?

1. The drowned man was discovered by some children playing in the beach.

2. What did the men feel about the drowned man when they carried him to the village?
  1. The men noticed that he weighed more than any dead man they had ever known, almost as much as a horse. They said to each other that maybe he'd been floating too long and the water had got into his bones.
3. What is the message of The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World?
  1. The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World is a small short story which talks in depth about the transformative effect caused by one dead man on an entire village. The story in essence says that a truly great person even if they are dead and long gone, has the power to change others and to inspire them to be better.
4. What does The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World symbolism?
  1. In the story, Esteban, the Drowned Man, symbolizes an overwhelming experience for the villagers on seeing someone truly extraordinary and magnificent. The drowned even though he is long gone and is unknown to all manages to get the villagers to gather and change their way of living.
5. What is the conclusion of The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World?
  1. In the end of the story, the drowned man although unknown to all, causes an intense effect on the lives of all the villagers and how they change for better because of him.
  2. The villagers let Esteban go off into the sea without attaching an anchor so that he could come back if and whenever he wished.

### **Questions and Answers - The handsomest drowned man in the world –Set 2**

6. What do the villagers do with the body of the drowned man?
  1. They decide in the end to not anchor him down and instead honour him with a grand funeral and set him off to sea again.
  2. The villagers let Esteban go off into the sea without attaching an anchor so that he could come back if and whenever he wished.
7. What is unusual about the drowned man?
  1. He was the tallest, strongest, most virile, and the best built man that the villagers had ever seen. Even though they were looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination. They could not find a bed in the village large enough to lay him on. There was no table solid enough to use for his wake. The tallest men's holiday pants would not fit him, or the fattest ones' Sunday shirts, or the shoes of the one with the biggest feet.

8. How do people feel in the town when they discovered that the drowned man does not come from any neighbouring town?
  1. They rejoiced since they knew nobody could claim him and he was theirs and theirs alone.
9. How did Esteban change the life of the villagers?
  1. The villagers in the end work together to beautify their village since they wish to honor the magnificent and the handsomest drowned man in the world.
  2. The drowned even though he is long gone and is unknown to all manages to get the villagers to gather and change their way of living.
10. Who is Esteban in the handsomest drowned man?
  1. The man is so handsome and tall that the villagers fall in love with him. They name him as Esteban though he has no name. They treat him with love and affection as if he was one of their own and even adopt him into their families.
11. What are the men's attitudes toward the drowned man?
  1. The men are irritated by the women's interest and attraction and are sceptical of the drowned man's greatness. This is of course until they see his face.