

## A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings

After days of relentless rain, Pelayo, a poor villager, discovers a very old man with enormous wings lying face-down in the mud of his courtyard. The old man looks frail, dirty, and almost pitiful—more like a beggar than a divine being. Despite his wings, he cannot fly or even stand. Pelayo and his wife Elisenda are at first frightened, but after observing him closely, they begin to feel oddly familiar with the figure.

A neighbor woman sees the winged man and confidently declares him to be an angel, supposedly sent to take away their sick child. Ironically, the child recovers soon after, but the angel remains weak and grounded. The couple, unsure what to do with him, locks him in a chicken coop, treating him more like an animal than a celestial figure.

News of the strange winged man spreads quickly. Curious villagers and pilgrims flock to see him, throwing him food, poking him, and pulling his feathers. People come hoping to be healed by touching him, but their focus is more on spectacle than spirituality. Despite being labeled an “angel,” he is mistreated and humiliated, reduced to a mere source of amusement.

Realizing the opportunity to make money, Pelayo and Elisenda start charging admission. The angel becomes a sensation. The couple grows rich from the endless stream of visitors. They build a grand house, buy luxurious items, and forget their earlier poverty. Meanwhile, the angel is neglected, surviving on scraps and enduring all the abuse with quiet patience.

Eventually, a new attraction appears: a woman turned into a spider for disobeying her parents. Her story is clear and moralistic, which makes her more appealing to the crowd. Visitors abandon the angel to hear her story. The winged man, once the center of attention, is now forgotten.

Seasons change. The angel weakens further. The chicken coop collapses, and Pelayo allows him to sleep in the shed. One winter, he becomes gravely ill, and the family fears he may die. But unexpectedly, he begins to recover. New feathers grow, stronger than before, and he regains the ability to stand and move about.

Finally, one morning, Elisenda sees the angel attempting to fly. His clumsy, awkward flight makes him look more like an old bird than a majestic being, but he manages to rise into the sky and disappear over the horizon. Elisenda watches him go—not with sadness or wonder, but with relief, as if a burden had been lifted from her life.

---

### Key Themes and Symbolism:

1.

### **Human Nature and Exploitation**

Rather than feeling awe or reverence, people exploit the angel for profit and entertainment. Even Elisenda and Pelayo, who benefit the most, see him as a source of income rather than a miracle.

2.

### **Faith vs. Folklore**

The townspeople are more drawn to the spider woman because her tale has a clear moral. The angel, who never explains himself, is too mysterious. This reflects how people often prefer simple, comforting stories over the complex or inexplicable.

3.

### **Suffering and Dignity**

Despite abuse, starvation, and humiliation, the angel never retaliates. His only supernatural quality seems to be his immense patience, which contrasts sharply with the cruelty of the humans.

4.

### **Ambiguity of the Divine**

Marquez presents the angel not as a majestic figure but as weak, dirty, and almost pathetic. This undermines typical religious imagery and forces readers to question: What makes someone divine? Appearance or behavior?

5.

### **Magical Realism**

This story is a classic example of magical realism, where magical elements (a man with wings) exist in a realistic, ordinary setting and are treated matter-of-factly. The contrast between the extraordinary and the mundane is central to the story's power.

### **Ending Note:**

In the end, the angel escapes, and life returns to normal for the family. But what they had once seen as a miracle, they now treat as an inconvenience. The story subtly critiques how society treats the unknown, the weak, and the divine—not with awe, but with greed, skepticism, and apathy.

## **Textual questions and answers**

### **1. What is the old man's role in the story? How does his presence affect Pelayo's family?**

The old man, believed to be an angel, represents the mysterious and miraculous in an ordinary world. His presence brings unexpected change to Pelayo's family. Initially frightened, they imprison him and later exploit him for money by charging people to see him. As a result, they become wealthy, building a large house and improving their lifestyle. Despite his suffering, the old man becomes the source of their fortune, showing how people can gain materially even from what they don't understand or respect.

---

### **2. Mention any two traits of the old man that impress you.**

- **Patience:** Despite being caged, mistreated, and mocked by crowds, the old man never complains or fights back. His quiet endurance is remarkable.
  - **Resilience:** Even after severe illness, weakness, and neglect, he survives and slowly regains strength, eventually flying away. His ability to recover and leave peacefully is deeply inspiring.
- 

### **3. What elements of the story do you consider magical? Why?**

- The most magical element is the old man's wings—a human with bird-like wings is impossible in real life.
- Another magical element is the appearance of a woman turned into a spider because she disobeyed her parents—clearly a fantastical transformation.

These elements blend the ordinary with the extraordinary, a key feature of magical realism, making the magical seem normal and believable in the story's world.

---

### **4. Describe the old man's first clumsy attempts at flight.**

The old man's first attempts at flight are awkward and ungraceful. He bumps into things and can't seem to control his movement in the air. His wings flap like those of a senile vulture, and he almost knocks down the shed while trying to take off. Still, he manages to gain

altitude and slowly disappears into the sky, leaving Elisenda watching him as he fades into the horizon.

---

## 5. What happens to the old man's popularity in the course of time?

At first, the old man is famous and widely visited, as people believe he is a real angel. Crowds come from far away, and Pelayo and Elisenda profit from this attention. However, his popularity fades over time, especially when the spider-woman becomes the new attraction. People lose interest in the angel, and he becomes forgotten, neglected, and ignored, left to survive quietly in the background.

---

## 6. Pick out instances of the following from the story:

### a. Imagery

Imagery is language that appeals to the senses (sight, sound, touch, etc.). Marquez uses rich imagery to create vivid scenes.

Examples:

- "The man was lying face down in the mud... entangled in the mud."  
→ Creates a visual image of the old man's helpless condition.
- "There were only a few faded hairs left on his bald skull and very few teeth in his mouth."  
→ Describes the old man's age and frailty using visual and tactile imagery.
- "The dung-heap stench from the coop was turning the new house into an old one."  
→ This is an example of olfactory (smell) imagery showing how the angel's presence lingers unpleasantly.

### b. Simile

A simile is a comparison using "like" or "as."

Examples:

- "His pitiful condition seemed that of a drenched great-grandfather."

→ Compares the angel's appearance to a wet old man.

- "He was holding himself up in some way with the risky flapping of a senile vulture."

→ Compares his flight to that of an old vulture, emphasizing his weakness.

- "His huge buzzard wings, dirty and half-plucked..."

→ While not a direct simile, this metaphor-like phrase compares his wings to those of a buzzard, suggesting decay and scavenging.

### c. Magical Elements

These are parts of the story that are fantastical or supernatural, yet treated as normal.

Examples:

- The old man's wings

→ A human with wings is a magical and impossible concept, yet it is never fully explained.

- The child's sudden recovery after the angel arrives

→ Implies a miraculous healing associated with the angel's presence.

- The spider-woman

→ A girl punished by God and transformed into a giant spider for disobeying her parents. This is a clearly magical and folkloric element.

---

Here are thoughtful and detailed responses to your questions based on "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings":

---

**7. The old man finally manages to fly away. Elisenda watches him till he disappears. You may discuss in groups and attempt alternative endings to the story.**

### **Ending 1: Redemption and Realization**

Just before the old man flies away, the child—now older—runs after him, calling him back. The angel turns and touches the child one last time, blessing him. Elisenda suddenly realizes the grace and wonder they had taken for granted. She regrets how they treated him and looks up, not with relief, but with tears of guilt and awe.

### **Ending 2: The Angel's Revenge**

As the angel grows stronger, he no longer remains silent. Before flying away, he unleashes a storm, destroying the family's new house as a symbol of divine punishment. He then vanishes into the sky, leaving the family poor again. This version offers a moral lesson on greed and cruelty.

### **Ending 3: The Angel Stays**

Instead of flying away, the angel miraculously regains full strength and becomes a part of the community, silently healing people and teaching compassion through his actions. Over time, the townspeople change and begin to treat him with respect and kindness.

### **Ending 4: The Child Becomes Like the Angel**

As the angel disappears, the child grows up and begins to grow small wings himself. This magical ending suggests that kindness, innocence, or the angel's blessing has passed on to the next generation.

---

## **8. Who suffers the most in the story? What does the story tell us about the need for compassion?**

### **Who suffers the most?**

The old man (the angel) suffers the most. He is:

- Misunderstood and treated like a freak or a burden
- Locked in a chicken coop and mocked by crowds
- Neglected, even as he falls sick and weakens

- Used for financial gain without receiving any care or respect

Despite his suffering, he never complains or retaliates—he just endures it silently.

### **What does the story teach about compassion?**

The story is a powerful commentary on human cruelty and lack of empathy. It shows how people:

- Exploit what they don't understand
- Ignore suffering when it doesn't benefit them
- Prefer entertaining stories (like the spider-woman) over uncomfortable truths

True compassion is absent in the story, which makes the reader reflect on how we treat the vulnerable in real life. It suggests that compassion shouldn't depend on appearance or usefulness—it should be extended to all beings, especially those who are silent, helpless, or different.

---

# Old Man / Angel

## Physical Traits:

- Very old and frail
- Bald with just a few faded hairs
- Toothless or nearly toothless
- Large, dirty, half-plucked wings
- Lying face down in mud when first seen
- Wings entangled and useless at first
- Appeared like a “drenched great-grandfather”
- Ate only eggplant mush
- Later grows large stiff feathers like those of a scarecrow
- Eyes become foggy, and he bumps into things
- Heart and kidneys make strange sounds, according to the doctor
- Wings appear natural on him, despite being magical

## Other Traits:

- Patient and enduring
  - Never resists or complains, even when caged, mocked, or hurt
- Silent and mysterious
  - Speaks in an unknown dialect, rarely communicates
- Resilient
  - Survives illness, neglect, cold, and physical abuse
- Unbothered by fame or attention
  - Unlike humans, he never shows pride, anger, or entitlement

- Symbolic
    - Represents the divine, the misunderstood, or the “outsider”
- 

## Pelayo

### Physical Traits:

- Not much is described physically; appears to be a working-class man
- Husband of Elisenda, lives in a small house at the beginning
- Carries a bailiff’s club at one point (symbol of his job/authority)

### Other Traits:

- Fearful at first, runs to get Elisenda when he sees the old man
  - Becomes greedy after realizing the angel can make them money
  - Practical and opportunistic
    - Fences the yard, charges admission to see the angel
  - Uncompassionate
    - Locks the angel in the chicken coop, later ignores him
  - Enjoys wealth
    - Quits his job and starts a rabbit farm with the money earned
- 

## Elisenda

### Physical Traits:

- Physical appearance is not described in detail
- Buys satin pumps and silk dresses after becoming rich (shows taste for luxury)

### **Other Traits:**

- Clever and business-minded
    - Comes up with the idea to charge people for seeing the angel
  - Uncaring and emotionally distant
    - Views the angel as a burden and is relieved when he finally flies away
  - Represents materialism
    - Obsessed with making money and improving her lifestyle
  - Insensitive
    - Watches the angel leave not with sorrow or gratitude, but with a sigh of relief
- 

Certainly! Here are brief character sketches of the Old Man (Angel), Pelayo, and Elisenda based on the story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" by Gabriel García Márquez:

---

## **Character sketches**

### **The Old Man / Angel – A Symbol of Suffering and Patience**

The old man is a mysterious, winged figure who appears unexpectedly in Pelayo and Elisenda's courtyard. He is described as extremely old, fragile, toothless, and covered in mud, with large, dirty wings that make him look pitiful rather than majestic. Though he may be an angel, he behaves like a weary, silent man—eating little, speaking in an unknown language, and showing no supernatural power except his deep patience. He endures cruel treatment with quiet dignity: caged like an animal, mocked by crowds, and neglected by the people he visits. Despite all this, he survives, recovers, and ultimately regains the strength to

fly away. He represents the misunderstood and the ignored divine—his presence is a test of human kindness, which most fail.

---

### **Pelayo – Practical but Morally Weak**

Pelayo is a simple, working-class man who lives with his wife and child. At first, he is frightened by the old man but quickly becomes desensitized. When he realizes the crowd's curiosity in the angel, he joins Elisenda in turning the angel into a source of profit. Pelayo is practical and easily swayed by opportunity. He neglects the suffering of the old man, even locking him in a chicken coop and leaving him in filth. After earning enough money from visitors, he quits his job and enjoys a better life. While not cruel by nature, Pelayo shows a lack of empathy, failing to recognize the angel's suffering or spiritual value.

---

### **Elisenda – Cold, Opportunistic, and Self-Centered**

Elisenda is a sharp, business-minded woman who quickly sees the economic potential of the angel's presence. She suggests charging admission to see him and uses the money to transform her lifestyle—buying luxurious clothes and building a large house. She views the angel not as a miracle, but as a nuisance and burden. When he finally flies away, she watches him disappear with a sigh of relief, not sadness. Elisenda's character reflects materialism and human indifference to suffering. Her lack of compassion stands in contrast to the angel's quiet endurance, highlighting the moral message of the story.

---

# News report

## **Mysterious Winged Old Man Caged and Exploited: Residents Shocked by Inhumane Treatment**

By Staff Reporter

(Name of Newspaper)

(Date)

[Village Name]: In a shocking and unusual incident, a mysterious elderly man with enormous wings has been discovered in the backyard of a local couple, Pelayo and Elisenda. Believed by some to be an angel, the old man is currently being held in a dilapidated chicken coop, attracting large crowds who pay five cents for a glimpse.

Eyewitnesses describe the man as extremely old, frail, and unkempt, with large, feathered wings protruding from his back. Despite his unusual appearance, the man has shown no signs of aggression or miraculous behavior. Locals are divided in opinion—some believe he is a fallen angel, while others see him as a sickly castaway affected by the recent storm.

The couple, rather than seeking help or offering care, chose to capitalize on the spectacle by charging admission. Within days, their yard resembled a marketplace, drawing visitors and even sick pilgrims from neighboring towns. The situation worsened as the old man was subjected to ridicule, physical poking, and even stone-throwing by those hoping to witness something “divine.”

Concerned citizens have condemned this behavior as deeply inhumane. One resident, in a letter to this newspaper, wrote: “Our lack of compassion and respect for the dignity of others is deplorable. This is a shameful reflection on the character of our society.”

Despite his suffering, the old man has endured silently, displaying remarkable patience. A local doctor who examined him was baffled by the natural structure of his wings and questioned why such features were not more common among humans.

In recent days, the man’s health seemed to worsen, but with the return of sunshine, he slowly regained strength. Witnesses observed him making clumsy attempts at flight, and yesterday, he finally took off, disappearing over the sea horizon, leaving behind a stunned yet strangely indifferent community.

This incident raises important questions about how society treats the vulnerable and the unknown. While some profited, others are now left wondering whether they missed the presence of something truly extraordinary.

---

---

## **Pelayo's Diary Entry**

Date: [Insert Suitable Date]

I can hardly believe what has happened to us. Just a few days ago, life was simple—hard, but simple. I was just a bailiff, living with Elisenda and our sick child, struggling through the days. And then, that stormy afternoon, everything changed.

I still remember the moment I saw him—lying face down in the mud, groaning, with those enormous, dirty wings tangled around him. An old man, no strength left in him, looking more pitiful than powerful. At first, we were terrified. Who wouldn't be? But the longer we stared at him, the more human he looked... until we didn't know what to believe.

The neighbour said he was an angel. I laughed at first. But then, our child's fever vanished overnight. Coincidence? Miracle? I don't know. Still, we locked him up in the chicken coop. We didn't know what else to do. And when the people started coming, offering money just to see him, we gave in. Five cents at first, and then the coins started piling up. We were exhausted, but rich. Richer than I ever imagined.

I should feel grateful. We built a beautiful house, I left my job, Elisenda wears silk. But something doesn't sit right with me. The old man never asked for anything. He never spoke against the way we treated him. He just... endured. Even when the people poked him, threw food at him, or plucked his feathers.

Today, he flew away.

It was clumsy and strange—like a wounded bird finding the wind again—but he flew. I watched him until he was just a speck in the sky. I should feel relieved, but part of me feels hollow. Maybe he was an angel. Maybe we failed a test we didn't even recognize.

Whatever he was, he left silently. And now, I can't stop wondering if we'll ever be the same again.

– Pelayo

---

---

### Question 5:

#### Table on How Characters Treat the Old Man

Character	Instances from the story on how they treat the old man	Attitude to the old man
Pelayo	Finds the old man in the mud and locks him in a chicken coop. Later profits from exhibiting him.	Exploitative and indifferent
Elisenda	Sees the old man as a burden and later a source of income. Sighs in relief when he flies away.	Selfish, materialistic
Neighbour woman	Claims he is an angel and suggests beating him to death if he doesn't speak their language.	Superstitious and cruel
Crowd	Comes to see the old man as entertainment; throws food, plucks feathers, mocks him.	Inhumane, curious, lacking empathy
Doctor	Inspects him more out of curiosity than care; puzzled by his anatomy.	Scientific detachment, no compassion

Child	Shows some connection with the old man and recovers from illness, sleeps near him.	Innocent and accepting
-------	--	------------------------

---

### Write-up (Based on the Table)

The story presents a powerful reflection on human nature, particularly on how society treats the weak and vulnerable. The old man, though possibly angelic or supernatural, is not treated with reverence or kindness. Instead, most characters use him for their gain or mock him out of ignorance and fear. Pelayo and Elisenda, despite being his finders, exploit him financially. The crowd treats him like a circus attraction, showing no empathy. Even the doctor views him merely as a strange medical case. Only the child expresses any genuine warmth, which stems from innocence rather than judgment.

This reveals a deep flaw in human behavior—the tendency to dehumanize what we don't understand and to ignore suffering when it doesn't directly affect us. The story urges us to look inward and reflect on our need for compassion, empathy, and dignity for all beings, especially the helpless and marginalized.

---

### Question 6:

#### Short Script for a Skit Based on the Conversation

Title: "You Are Not Alone"

Characters:

- Ms. Sudha (elderly woman)
- Ritu (young caregiver)

Scene: A small room in an old age home. Ms. Sudha is sitting on a chair by the window, looking out blankly. Ritu enters.

Ritu: (cheerfully) Good morning, Sudha aunty! How are you today?

Ms. Sudha: (sighs) Just another day, dear. Another day without my family.

Ritu: I'm so sorry, aunty. I know it's hard.

Can you tell me more about what's on your mind?

Ms. Sudha: You know, they brought me here and left.

They said they couldn't take care of me anymore.

After everything I did for them, this is what I get.

Ritu: Aunty... I understand your feelings.

Ms. Sudha: Understand? No one understands.

I gave up my life for them. And now I sit here... alone.

Ritu: Oh aunty, I know you're hurting. But please remember, you're not alone here.

We all care about you. You are loved and valued.

Ms. Sudha: (bitterly) Do you really care? Or are you just doing your job?

Ritu: Not just a job, aunty. We are your family now.

We are here to listen to your stories, to comfort you.

You will never be alone again. Never.

(Ms. Sudha looks at her, eyes softening. A faint smile appears.)

Ms. Sudha: Thank you, dear. Maybe... I can believe that someday.

(They hold hands as the light fades.)

[End of Skit]

---