

# The moths

[Health & Medicine](#), [Disease](#)



"The Moths" is a short story by Helena Viramontes, which reflects the life led by the Latin American women, and depicts how Chicana women were differentiated because of their sex. Women were exploited because of their gender from most of the organizations like royal families, the church, dictatorial governments, and those women who dared to oppose these organizations and follow their rules were also demoralized. The author also observes, how a women's reproductive system was also under scrutiny, and how women had to make an effort to achieve power over their own bodies.

The story, unlike the title, is regarding a little girl who has to face the realities of her grandmother's ailments and death. The title of the story, "The Moths," shows how these moths help in depicting a feeling of mysticism, reincarnation, and which in the end become a personification of the grandmother. The connection between the moths and the major characters in the story helps to express the main subject of the feature; the theme is not only the death of a much loved person, but also a sacred and growing experience underwent by the young girl.

This story is a perfect example of how a girl fears her father and finds solace with her grandmother. The girl is supposed to follow the principles imposed by her father, who is a strong believer in the effect on society, his public standing and his religious standards. It is clear from this story that the girl is trying to escape the social and religious principles that have been imposed on her, and is looking for someone, to whom she can look up to. And she finds this in her grandmother.

Basically the girl's family was strict, and she and her sisters were terrified of their father. All the girls had to help around the house, and one of the jobs

was to do embroidery, at which she was very poor, and her sisters could do it very well, and they in turn made fun of her." My hands were too big to handle the fineries of crocheting or embroidery and I always pricked my fingers or knotted my colored threads time and time again while my sister laughed and called me bull hands with there cute waterlike voices".

One can see from the story, that the girl was very troubled and angry with her family, and that she didn't get along with the family. This girl was unusual, and she knew that any fault in her day to day chores would only get her whippings. To help her get out of these whippings, her family would send her to her grandmother's place, which is where the girl found peace and comfort, which helped her to move closer to her ailing grandmother.

The young girl enjoyed in helping her grandmother, and also found out how religious and devout her grandmother was, and how she feared the church. The young girl remembers how her father would be angry if she didn't go to the mass on Sunday, and would hurt her, so that she comes to know of the significance of going to church. The stress between the father and daughter was noticeable. The story also shows how the girl must have been forced to follow the religion and go to church, which also could be the reason for her to revolt against going to church. By sending the girl to help her grandmother, it favored the girl in such a manner that, she came to know about herself also from her grandmother.

The grandmother used very old remedies for most of the physical illnesses which were a result of her sacred and holy nature. The girl was very doubtful and apprehensive of her grandmother using these practices to cure

illnesses, but all these remedies always worked. As a result of which the girl also started following these spiritual beliefs.

More importance has been given to the position of a man in this story. Wherever there is a reference to a male, it is in the negative context only, and shows how men are supposed to be more powerful than women. The sole woman, who is shown in a different context is the grandmother, who is seen as a nurturer. There is a rude father who is a strong believer in maintaining his stance in the society, for which he even hurts his own children, and there is a mother, who is always abused by her husband. The grandmother is the only person who tenderly applies medicine to the girl's hand, which was hurt by her father.

The death of the girl's grandmother makes the girl realize what is right, and think in a matured manner. The girl regrets for not believing her grandmother's power to heal illnesses by simple remedies. One can notice the regret the girl feels when cleaning the body of her grandmother. "The scars on her back which were as thin as the life lines on the palms of her hands made me realize how little I really knew of Abuelita". By reading this line we come to know that how much the girl regretted not appreciating the time she spent with her grandmother, and not having learnt more values in life when her grandmother was strong enough to teach her.

In the beginning when the girl goes to stay with her grandmother, she doesn't feel the necessity to be reassured and doesn't like to convey her love to the grandmother. But as the grandmother's end nears, the behavior of the girl towards her grandmother changes, and she reassures her grandmother while bathing her in the tub, and also that she would like to

cuddle her grandmother, so that she doesn't feel lonely. When the grandmother dies, the girl realizes that how lonely it is to die, and also comes to know the fact, the value and affect her grandmother has had on her, and how she would like to be with her forever. All this shows the changes the girl has undergone, and the rebirth of her.

The young girl by taking up the role of a caretaker for her ailing grandmother, made her grow faster, feel a sense of compassion, and makes her realize the importance of being kind and considerate to older people, even when she was facing oppression from the society. There is a noticeable transformation in the girl, in the form of acquiring more knowledge and knowing how to value life after staying with her grandmother.

The comparison of the moth to the grandmother is very significant, because it is the influence of the grandmother on the girl that helps her to become more religious and matured. The reference of the author to the moths as gray, relates the grandmother to the moths by mentioning her aged and dreary eyes. The girl also supports the comparison between her grandmother and the moths, as the girl believes her grandmother is her guardian and light, as she heals her diseases, promotes values and religion in her life.

What the girl experiences is an obvious opposition in the values followed by her conservative family and the comparative freedom she gets in her grandmother's house is not the outcome of a normal pressure prevailing but it is an existing pressure linking two societies, that of restriction and that of some freedom. All this type of restriction can be seen when the girl is punished for simple mistakes, and for not attending church.

This story also shows the differences between women who lived under restriction and those who were free to do what they wanted. An example for this would be the reference to the girl's mother, who was always abused and lived under the firm control of her husband, and the grandmother who had the power to cure all illnesses on her own, as she had the freedom to experiment. This shows the cultural boundaries one has created among them.

All this shows the prospects and the opportunities of Chicana women, which allows the readers to notice the available choice for women in a particular society, and also notice the way the woman is supposed to perform. This story shows that in the Latin American society, any woman cannot break away from the dictatorial rule of a male. But the only opportunity available to a person to convert into a better person would be by taking care of the poor and the elderly, and finding proper opportunities that would put them in comparative role of power, control and authority.

### Conclusion

This story "The Moths" gives a good message by following the girl's change by properly dealing with suppression by society, by relative freedom obtained from her grandmother, and the grief of the girl, due to her grandmother's death. The author succeeds in showing an appealing change in the girl by the end of the story. The story describes the girl's oppression through her father and the society's culture and religion. And the freedom experienced by the girl while staying with her grandmother. The author succeeds in showing the harsh rearing of the young girl, which reflects the plight of Latin American women.

The young girl finds a considerate and caring path due to the freedom she got in the journey of her life. This caring path of life helped her to cure the injuries and the sorrows she underwent. The girl's position was much better when compared to that of her sisters, who had to live within the rules and regulations of the society. This story is a perfect example of how dictatorship and tyranny change a person and creates pressure between those who don't like to be dominated, and those who would like to dominate.

This story shows the importance of love and caring in a person's life. It shows how the girl becomes determined and confident in the end, and how she was not even scared by the death of her grandmother. Staying with her grandmother, made the girl more positive and confident in life, and made her to lead her life with inspiration. One can see that the girl believed that her grandmother was there with her wherever she went, like a moth.

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