

The inevitable end of familial relationships



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Francis Scott Fitzgerald, a celebrated U. S. author, once alleged, " Family quarrels are bitter things. They don't go according to any rules. They're not like aches or wounds, they're more like splits in the skin that won't heal" (1927). The Trueba family in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* reflects this through incessant bickering, which eventually forces most of the family apart. The remaining relationships are severed through death. While the termination of physical familial relations is inevitable, some contact may live on in a plane of spirituality. The bond between Alba and Esteban Trueba comes to a close because of his demise. Since they had a pleasant relationship in life, Alba "[sits] beside him to wait with him, and death [is] not long in coming, taking him by surprise as he [lies] sleeping peacefully"(430). After this point, Alba no longer thinks of him, but of more important matters, such as the story of her family. She only considers him for the role he plays in the story Clara chronicles in her notebooks. She does, however, attempt to portray him in an objective manner. Unlike Clara, Esteban lacks the ability to communicate with the living after his death. This leaves Alba clutching nothing more than memories and her grandfather's belongings. Although neither one desires this separation, life's inevitability takes its course. The relationship between Senator Trueba and Nicols comes to a halt due to a disagreement that grows out of proportion. For example, Esteban, ashamed of his child, proclaims, " If you don't die of a snakebite or some foreign plague, I hope you return a man, because I'm fed up with all your eccentricities" (271). Esteban does not care about the fate of his own son so long as Nicols does not cause him any further embarrassment. This self-centered disposition leads to the alienation of various members of his family, especially Nicols. A bitter resentment begins to grow between the two of

them. The last time Esteban sees him, he “[grabs] Nicols by the collar, [pushes] him onto an airplane, and [ships] him overseas with the instructions not to return for the rest of his life” (299). Esteban despises his son to the point that he never wishes to set eyes on him again because of the disgrace Nicols brings upon his family. Instead of trying to reconcile his connection with his family, the senator chooses to break off all ties to him. All of the relationships that end because of quarreling involve Esteban in some way, primarily due to his narrow-mindedness and his rejection of other people’s ideas. Although she has died, Clara has the ability to communicate with the living after her death. For instance, when Alba is in the doghouse, “ her Grandmother Clara, whom she had invoked so many times to help her die, [appears] with the novel idea that the point [is] not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle” (414). Clara’s spirit speaks to Alba to give her the hope necessary to go on living. This message also shows Clara’s rationale for keeping her essence among the living; she wants to survive past her own death. Furthermore, Esteban senses Clara’s presence many times after her death. At the time of his own passing, “ she [does] not leave him for a second” (431). As his rage and temper wane with his old age, Clara’s spirit increasingly tries to reconcile her relationship with Esteban. They begin to spend much more time with each other and they eventually become even closer than they had been in life. Clara wishes for her loved ones to remember her, so she visits them often through her spirit. Relationships between the members of a household are bound to conclude at some point; the way in which they end is the choice of the individuals involved. They could face the natural separation brought about by death or they could face the agony of spending years of their life apart when they

know the other is still alive. Death is a natural part of life, but it does not necessitate loneliness. The premature severing of familial ties is an easily avoidable event, however, many people lack the foresight to acknowledge this before it is too late. Ultimately, familial relationships are broken far too often for unjustifiable reasons.