

The Chamber Study Guide

The Chamber by John Grisham

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Plot Summary

The Chamber is a novel about redemption. Sam Cayhall is involved in a bombing and, after being convicted by a jury, lives in Parchman Prison awaiting his execution. At the time of the bombing, Sam is a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His family had been members for many generations and membership in the organization was part of his upbringing. Sam had also been involved in other crimes for which he had not been prosecuted. He and his brothers had participated in lynchings and he had murdered three men. At the time of his sentencing, Sam believes that his actions were acceptable. Over time, he develops remorse.

In addition to his clan family Sam has a nuclear family. He married and had two children. His son's name is Eddie, and his daughter Lee. Eddie and Lee do not share their father's sentiments regarding minorities. In fact, as a child, Eddie's best friend is a black boy who lives on the Cayhall property. When Sam kills the boy's father, Eddie is beside himself. The father-son relationship deteriorates, culminating in Eddie leaving Mississippi. After Eddie marries his wife, Evelyn, and they have their first child, Alan, Eddie decides to renounce the Cayhall family. He and Evelyn relocate to California, change their last name to Hall, and legally change Alan's first name to Adam. Later a daughter, Carmen, is born. Eddie never returns home and tell his children nothing about his side of the family. When Sam is convicted and sent to jail, Eddie can't stand the shame and commits suicide. Following his father's funeral, Adam is introduced to his Aunt Lee, Eddie's sister, who tells him the truth about his family. She, too, was scarred by her father's past, and has become a functioning alcoholic. Adam goes on to attend college and law school.

After graduating from law school, Adam applies for employment at the prestigious firm of Kravitz and Bane and is hired. Kravitz and Bane's pro bono department had been handling Sam's case for seven years. They had done a wonderful job, but Sam is guilty and is rapidly approaching his execution date. Adam asks to represent Sam, and travels to Mississippi to meet his grandfather. At the time that Adam first introduces himself, Sam has approximately one month left to live. Through hours of visits and sleepless nights, Adam battles hard for Sam's defense. Adam is unable to convince the courts to spare Sam, and his execution is carried out. Along the way, though, Adam moves through horror, disillusionment, and shame to arrive at an understanding and acceptance of Sam and his family's history. They develop a fondness for each other and Sam realizes that his crimes were wrong. He repents and dies at peace.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Marvin Kramer is an exemplary citizen. He is a lawyer of Jewish descent and lives with his wife and two children in Greenville, Mississippi. He had been educated in well known schools up north and returned to practice law amidst the Civil Rights movement of the '60s. His representation for the black population angers the local Ku Klux Klan group. As retaliation, they decide to bomb his law office. The Imperial Wizard who plans the bombing is named Jeremiah Dogan. Sam Cayhall is the follow through man—he stakes out the area, plans the entrance and exit strategy, and drivee the car arranged by Dogan. The third and final member of the bombing squad is named Rollie Wedge. Rollie Wedge is in charge of the explosives. The three communicate only as much as was required.

The bomb is placed and Sam expects it to detonate within fifteen minutes of their departure. On that particular morning, the bomb does not detonate immediately and Sam returns to the town to investigate. Apparently, Rollie had decided to try something new—a timing device. Rollie set the timing device and didn't share his plan with his associates. The bomb finally detonates at 7:46 a.m. on Friday, April 21st. Unfortunately, by the time the bomb explodes, Marvin Kramer has already arrived for work and has unexpectedly brought his two children with him. What was intended as a scare tactic becomes two murders and an assault—the Kramer twins are killed instantly and Marvin Kramer's legs subsequently require amputation. Sam is present at the time of the blast. He is hit by flying glass shards, and in his rush to leave he is stopped and arrested by local law enforcement. Clovis Brazelton, Sam's lawyer and a secret Ku Klux Klan member, argues admirably on behalf of Cayhall and Dogan. The fiasco is determined a mistrial and a second trial commences, but it also results in a mistrial.

Marvin Kramer's life has been reduced to only a vague resemblance of its previous richness. In addition to losing his sons and his legs, he and his wife, Ruth, have separated. Shortly after their separation, Marvin is admitted to a mental hospital, and within a year he commits suicide. Despite Marvin's death, the community rallies hard for a third trial. By then, Dogan has been indicted for tax evasion. Facing jail time, Dogan decides to cut a deal, and indicates Sam as the mastermind behind the Kramer bombing. With this new evidence and a more balanced jury, Sam is found guilty and is sentenced to the death penalty.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Chapters one through three introduce Sam Cayhall and his Ku Klux Klan brethren. The text in these chapters is pivotal in understanding the plot. The crimes that Sam Cayhall commits and for which he is now awaiting the death penalty are described in detail. Some of the details, such as the timing device and blood smear, are the clues that



cement the case at trial. In the following chapters, the idea of Sam having an accomplice will be questioned repeatedly. Sam will slowly denounce the Ku Klux Klan and its ideology, but he will never break the oath he took while a member. Primarily, he will not divulge the identity of his colleagues, although they would prove to be less loyal.

It is important to note that three trials were required to convict Sam Cayhall of murder. This says little about the evidence, which did not change significantly, but says much about society. Over time, equality between the races was spreading and the jury selection process became a fair one. It was this difference, a jury that was equally divided among white and black, as opposed to a white supremacist majority, that returned a guilty verdict. Violence against blacks and Jews was less commonplace. Society was making a statement that such behavior would not be tolerated or dismissed.



Chapters 4-8

Chapters 4-8 Summary

Kravitz and Bane is the third largest law firm in the country. It is situated in Chicago and its pro bono department has the privilege of representing Sam Cayhall. As his law firm for the last seven years, they had spent countless hours representing him and filed many appeals in an attempt to overturn his conviction. They had tried nearly every avenue, but it seems that the execution is inevitable. Sam's death is planned for August 8 and he plans to represent himself in his final days.

A relatively new employee of Kravitz and Bane named Adam Hall is eager to represent Sam Cayhall. Adam understands that Sam had fired E. Garner Goodman, who had successfully represented him for years, and in doing so, Sam is no longer a client with Kravitz and Bane. Adam hopes that Sam might reconsider legal representation by Kravitz and Bane when he discovers that Adam is his grandson. Sam had had two children, a son named Eddie and a daughter named Lee. Eddie was Adam's father. He and his wife, Evelyn, raised Adam in Mississippi until he was three years old. At that time, Eddie decides to break free from his family's sordid past. He relocates his family to California and legally changes their last names to Hall. Adam's first name is also changed—it had previously been Alan.

Adam grows up in a dark home where the past is not discussed. His parent's relationship is tumultuous. Adam has no knowledge of Sam's existence nor his crimes until his aunt tells him after his father's death. Adam is sixteen at the time and appreciates his Aunt Lee's candor. This information shapes Adam—he goes to college and then law school and purposely takes a job with Kravitz and Bane in the hope of representing Sam. As an adult, he again turns to Lee for faith and sincerity. She invites him to stay with her indefinitely while he works on Sam's case. Before commencing work, however, Adam needs to convince Sam to rehire the law firm. With this intention, he approaches the Mississippi State Penitentiary Maximum Security Unit, otherwise known as Unit 17, or Death Row.

Chapters 4-8 Analysis

Adam Hall is introduced in these chapters. He is the main character in *The Chamber*. Adam is twenty-six years old and a recent graduate from law school. He still has much to learn but boldly asks permission to transfer into the pro bono department. To convince his boss of his idea's merit, he has to explain the extenuating circumstances. Admitting his relationship to Sam (he is Sam's paternal grandson) is potentially career limiting. This complication almost comes to pass as Daniel Rosen, the managing partner, strongly disagrees with Adam's request, despite the approval of Adam's direct boss and Garner Goodman, the head of the pro bono department. Rosen promises to challenge the transfer and the subject will arise again later in the book.



Adam's family history is also shared. Sam's children were scarred by his affiliation with the Klan. Adam's father tried to live a normal, healthy life, but he was deeply troubled. His depression resulted in an unhappy marriage and, eventually, his suicide. As a child, Adam was forced to navigate this turbulent man, and the reader wonders how it will manifest in Adam. Eddie never shared family information with Adam, but after his death, Lee disclosed Sam's identity and crimes. Lee was also troubled, although she numbed her problems with alcohol.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Adam's first meeting with his paternal grandfather is nerve wracking. The prison itself is massive. It has so many units that one has to drive between them. It is settled among soybean and cotton fields. With the exception of the maximum security unit, the rest appears almost scenic. The Death Row building is surrounded by tall fences, razor wire, double gates, and watch stations at all four corners of the property. It is stifling hot and lacks air conditioning. The forty-seven inmates of Death Row are all condemned to solitary confinement. When Sam finally emerges, his stare is intimidating.

Sam does not appear pleased to have a visitor. He is abrupt, if not downright rude. He chain smokes Montclair cigarettes and insults the Kravitz and Bane law firm. He makes it clear that he does not think a young lawyer like Adam could be of any help. Although he lacks interpersonal skills, Sam is smart. He reviews law literature regularly and quizzes Adam on cases that he feels are relevant. He finds Adam to be lacking in knowledge. Additionally, Sam sees through Adam's ruse. He correctly guesses Adam's true identity. Sam urges Adam to go home and forget about the case, but Adam refuses. He is determined to represent his grandfather. Sam finally relents, but only after making his own demands and modifications to the contract Adam presents to him.

Adam's boss back at the Chicago office, Emmitt Wycoff, had written a letter of recommendation and offered his sincere belief in Adam's abilities, which had won Adam the favor of E. Garner Goodman. After passing that hurdle, Adam expects to likewise receive the cooperation of the Memphis office. He is mistaken. Baker Cooley, the managing partner at the Memphis branch, is reluctant to help Adam. He doesn't want his office to be involved in the sensational media coverage that he fears will follow.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

Adam realizes how raw his emotions are upon visiting his grandfather. He does not consider himself naive, yet he is unprepared for what he found at Parchman. Sam is not pleased to have a visitor. He clearly does not have any inclination to rehire the Kravitz and Bane firm for his defense, and his anti-semitic remarks towards the firm are offensive. The caustic remarks underline what the jury had surmised—Sam is an angry man who does not view minorities as equals. The reader understands that Sam is not a man to be liked nor sympathized. He does possess the admirable trait of being clever. As a self educated man with ample spare time, he learns much about law during his confinement and literally quizzes Adam on court cases and law history. He enjoys rattling Adam and watching Adam's discomfort rise. While Adam feels the need to fill in the silent gaps in conversation, Sam is more willing to wait and study his visitor. He recognizes Adam's true identity and calls him on it. Adam admits the obvious, and in a surprising turn of events, Sam shields his eyes from Adam and becomes introverted. In

the ensuing days, Sam consents to legal representation by Kravitz and Bane, but he agrees only to speak with Adam and none of Adam's colleagues. This suits the local branch just fine, as they hesitate to be associated with death penalty case in every way.



Chapters 13-16

Chapters 13-16 Summary

The following day Adam returns to see Sam. He arrives at 9:30 in the morning. This is unfortunate because it coincides with Sam's exercise hour—the only time he spends outside of his isolation cell every twenty-four hours. The single hour of recreational time is prized by the inmates. They rarely see a soul and never see each other, with the exception of their hands, which can be seen dangling out through the bars on the front of their cells. Like the others, Sam looks forward to his hour out, as it was known, but he agrees to meet with Adam and hopes that the prison guard will allow him to make up the outside time later. At their meeting, Sam presents Adam with his own rendition of their legal agreement. Sam wants to make changes to the standard Kravitz and Bane agreement that Adam had proposed. He had therefore typed his own document the previous evening from inside his cell. He had become quite adept at creating similar court documents from his time representing himself.

It doesn't take long for the press to discover Adam's presence and his relationship to Sam. It is public knowledge that the supreme court had lifted the stay on Sam's case, meaning that nothing remains in the way of his being executed. He is a legend of sorts and the media follows his case closely. Sam agrees to meet one of the reporters, Todd Marks, off the record. Adam answers only the questions that can be corroborated elsewhere. Adam refuses to comment on many of the questions out of respect for the contract Sam had designed—it forbade Adam from talking to the press. Sam had acquired much knowledge about the law from his multiple trials and all of the paperwork each required. The result is a legal agreement of good quality. Although Sam can't see his comrades, they pass notes back and forth along the corridor. Sam is the unofficial lawyerly consult on death row and the younger inmates look to him for guidance.

Chapters 13-16 Analysis

It is easy to recall the crimes for which inmates are convicted and assume that prison is a violent place. When one's assumptions of violence, terror, and general poor behavior are projected against the background of Parchman, the reader discovers that the two do not agree. Sam enjoys a sort of make-shift camaraderie on death row. He developed friendships of an unlikely sort. As the oldest prisoner on death row, he is admired by the other inmates. He also possesses a bright mind and helps the other inmates with their defense cases, which further adds to his popularity. When he occasionally encounters other inmates, Sam is happy to engage in a game of checkers. He rarely loses and it helps to keep his mind sharp. The inmates' favorite part of the day is the one hour during which they are allowed outside in the fresh air. To ensure that the outdoor privilege is not curtailed, good behavior is kept. The exception to the rule is if a prisoner is manhandled or otherwise treated poorly, at which point the other prisoners would not hesitate to make rude jokes and comments to the guards in their neighbor's defense. At

times like these, frustration is vented against the men who enforce the prison rules, but rarely is there discord between inmates. The idea of Sam's impending execution further subdues the crowd.



Chapters 17-20

Chapters 17-20 Summary

Adam's aunt, Lee, has managed to live a fulfilling life despite her family's past. She married into a wealthy family by hiding her father's shameful past. As the wife of Phelps Booth, Lee is well known and liked in social circles. The love in her marriage eventually subsides, and she and Phelps live apart but are content with their arrangement. They make a handful of appearances together every year and stay married because divorcing late in life would be distasteful to his family. Lee works as a counselor at the Auburn house, a home for young, unwed mothers. Her time there is on a volunteer basis and she also donates large sums of Phelps' money to keep it running. She finds her work there rewarding, but she has difficult times as well. Lee is a functioning alcoholic, an artifact of her painful upbringing and unhappy marriage. Her son, Walt, has been raised in the Booth way. Following a legacy of every generation before him, he attends prestigious, private schools and is introduced to people of the proper social class. Per his father's instructions, he associates only with people who also belong to this elite group, and is essentially a snob. Phelps encourages him to participate in sports, but Walt is not athletically inclined. Phelps is busy at work and rapidly becomes disillusioned with parenting. Walt is sent away to boarding school at fifteen years old. This is followed by a year of college before he drops out and never returned home. Walt travels to Europe and falls in love. He decides to live permanently in Amsterdam. Lee looks forward to her once a year visits with her son. She always arrives alone, however, because the discovery that their son was gay was intolerable to Phelps.

Adam is dismayed by Lee's admissions. He wonders how his family could be so dysfunctional, and it is a lot of information to learn at once. The following morning he learns even more. He arrives at the prison and meets with Sam in the law library. Sam chides his grandson for speaking to the press and pretends to be angry. Once they settle that matter, they focus on the execution process. Adam hopes to challenge the gas chamber as Sam's place of death. He doesn't expect to overturn Sam's conviction right away, but wants to file appeals on any ground possible. The purpose is to gain some extra time to thoroughly research Sam's history. Eyewitnesses had reported that the last two gas chamber deaths in Mississippi had not gone according to plan and the supreme court had since then ruled the gas chamber inhumane. The gas chamber had been replaced with lethal injection at the court's suggestion, yet Sam is still scheduled to die by gas inhalation. While Sam searches the law library for more relevant cases, Adam researches another angle. He visited with Wyn Lettner, the FBI agent who had led an intense investigation encompassing the Klan in Mississippi in the '60s. After an afternoon of fishing and a long night of drinking, Adam does discover that, just like himself, Wyn also believes that Sam had had an accomplice for the Kramer bombing.

The one person who could truly stop Sam's execution is hiding deep in the countryside. Rollie Wedge, the man who actually planted and detonated the explosives in the Kramer bombing for which Sam was found guilty, is now going by the name of Roland.



He possesses many forged documents and has at least three different identities. He no longer considers himself a member of the Klan, but instead is a fascist. Rollie has threatened both Dogan and Sam. Dogan is dead and Sam has never revealed Rollie's identity. It appears that he would take their secret to his grave, but if he was going to tell the truth, he would be likely to do so as his date of execution approached. This makes Roland nervous and he follows the newspapers closely.

Chapters 17-20 Analysis

These chapters delve deep into the life of Adam's aunt, Lee. Lee confesses to being an alcoholic. For her, alcohol is an escape from her father's sordid past and her marriage. Although her marriage seemed happy to outsiders, Lee admits that she and her husband live apart. He had a voracious appetite for younger women and she does not enjoy the life of a socialite. Their son made choices which his father found disagreeable, so Lee's only child lives abroad, which is another source of pain for her. The reader comes to understand that Lee grew up in a dysfunctional family and, despite her best intentions, her own nuclear family has also evolved to be dysfunctional. Lee recognizes her alcoholism and is not proud of it. She tries to stay sober, enters and completes rehab repeatedly, and volunteers for worthy organizations, most notably the Auburn House. She wants to be a strong, healthy woman. Although Lee loves her nephew, his presence and constant line of questioning revive memories that Lee has buried deep within herself. For this reason, Adam's visit signals the collapse of Lee's sobriety. In all fairness, as Sam's execution date drew closer, Lee might have relapsed whether or not Adam had arrived. Lee was not the only one contemplating her life's path.

Sam has much to consider from his cell. A welcome thunderstorm temporarily cools the temperature inside the prison, which ordinarily is squelching. Sam enjoys the storm and considers it a triumph over the state of Mississippi, which so poorly designed the prison in which he was forced to live out the rest of his life. The paragraph reads, "But the state of Mississippi could not control the weather, and when rains came and cooled the air, Sam smiled to himself and offered a small prayer of thanks". The idea of Sam praying to and believing in a higher being causes the reader to pause. One wonders if he has always believed in a higher being, and if so, how does he justify the crimes he committed. Alternatively, maybe he has found spirituality since being convicted and sentenced to die.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary

While Adam is interviewing Wyn Lettner over the weekend, Garner Goodman has been busy in Chicago. He has drafted, on behalf of Adam, the petition arguing that the gas chamber is not appropriate. Adam files the petition in court on Monday morning and visits Sam later that day. Adam informs Sam that he isn't the only one with reservations about Sam's stories—Wyn also believes that Sam had an accomplice. The conversation turns personal and becomes heated. Adam has trouble believing that his grandfather committed the crimes he had been convicted of. However, since Sam would not name an accomplice, and takes responsibility for the crime as his own, Adam is left to ponder what that says about his grandfather's moral character. He wonders why Sam could kill so easily, and demands truthful answers to tough questions. He wonders aloud why his father refused the traditional Klan upbringing that had been a part of his family's heritage for at least four generations. The subject of his father, Eddie, arouses curiosity in Sam. He had never witnessed his son as a father and wants to know about Adam's childhood and Eddie's death. They both ask many questions and receive some, but not all, of the answers to their questions. Sam becomes agitated and requests that Adam leave for the day.

When Adam leaves the prison, he searches for space in which to think. He drives to the town of Greenville and parks his car. A park had been created where Marvin Kramer's law office had once stood. Adam walks to and sits beneath the Kramer memorial. He reserves a room at the local motel and ruminates. He didn't expect a response from the petition very quickly and is surprised to find out upon his return that not only had his petition been denied, but it had already been forwarded to the federal court. This is a routine order of events, and Adam would have filed similarly, but he finds it odd and insulting that the court system did so without his assistance.

When he arrives at Judge Slattery's office at the appointed time, he is admitted into a room that is already full of people. He surmises that the real meeting had been conducted in his absence. The governor of Mississippi, David McAllister, is present, as well as Steve Roxburgh, the Attorney General. Following the meeting, Adam speaks with the governor. They speak off the record because Adam's contract with Sam forbids him to speak with McAllister, a man Sam does not trust. McAllister, however, wishes to speak to Adam about the possibility of clemency. It appears that even the governor is not convinced by Sam's version of events.

When Adam enters his office, he is met by Garner Goodman, who bears bad news. It seems that they had underestimated Daniel Rosen. He was not kidding when he suggested that Adam should be terminated for not disclosing his birth name with the firm and accepting the job under false pretenses. Goodman and Wycoff have assured Adam that they could appease Rosen, but that is not the case. Rosen had spent the week scheduling a meeting of the Personnel Committee and calling in favors to sway



the vote in his favor. However, Adam prevails, and his job remains secure. Another complication comes in the form of Rollie Wedge. He arrives unannounced in the United Sates and stakes out the Kravitz and Bane offices as well as Lee's place of employment and condominium complex.

Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Despite his grandfather's determination to take responsibility for the deaths of the Kramers, Adam still genuinely wishes to find a scapegoat. He has had the chance to learn more about Sam, and although he vehemently disagrees with his grandfather's crimes and the ideals he believed in, he also disagrees with the death penalty. Adam's family was kept from him for the first sixteen years of his life, and now that he has finally had the opportunity to meet Sam, Adam feels that to lose yet another family member is cruel. He holds on to the idea of an accomplice and presses Sam hard for information. When he finds Sam not forthcoming, he spends the weekend with Wyn Lettner, peppering him with a similar line of questioning. Adam is disappointed to find no solid leads there, either. Adam is further disappointed to learn that Rosen's threat, that had appeared in chapter five, rears its ugly head. He could not be pacified by Wycoff and Goodman. So, in addition to the stress of defending his first death penalty client, reuniting with and then possibly losing his grandfather, Adam is faced with the prospect of losing his job. A further complication is that losing his position at Kravitz and Bane would mean losing the support of such a massive firm, and at that point Adam needs their resources to launch a successful defense for Sam.



Chapters 26-29

Chapters 26-29 Summary

Adam and Lee decide to spend their weekend in Clanton, Mississippi. It was her hometown, a place filled with many memories. She shows him the cemetery where her mother and grandmother were buried, as well as many other not so kind Cayhall relatives. They discuss where they should bury Sam when his time comes. They discuss her childhood and her memories of Adam's father, Eddie, as a child. She takes Adam to see the home where they grew up. It is now abandoned and overgrown with weeds, but it still renders strong emotions from Lee. She recalls witnessing her father murder Joe Lincoln, the father of Eddie's childhood best friend, Quince. Joe worked on Sam's property and was a family man. He and his wife had twelve children and they were good people. Like all friends, Adam and Quince had the occasional quarrel. Adam had misplaced his toy and blamed its loss on Quince, although he denied any wrong doing. Sam saw this as an opportunity to put Quince in his place, considering that he was an African American and the son of a worker. When Joe found out that Sam had abused his child he took offense and confronted Sam, who wrestled him to the ground and then shot him. Lee hid quietly in the branches of a nearby tree and witnessed the whole scene. Sam and his Ku Klux Klan friends gathered on the porch to celebrate as Joe's wife and children grieved. Sam was never charged with the crime—he claimed it was self defense. This was not unusual for that period in history. Sam had never been particularly close to his children, but the damage created on that day was irreparable. The rift grew deeper in the ensuing years.

As Adam continues to learn about his family's sordid past, he realizes that his search may not be a healthy one. His desire for information forces both Lee and Sam to relive memories that they would prefer to forget. Lee reverts to the use of alcohol to numb the pain they have uncovered, and Adam knows he is partially to blame. Following their trip, Lee disappears for an entire day and evening. She claims to have been attending the birth of one of the unwed teens whom she counseled. Adam worries about her. He is less worried about Sam—the information about Joe Lincoln's death has hardened Adam, and it is difficult for him to feel empathy. Adam stays away from Sam for six full days, during which time Judge Slattery denies Adam's petition and sends it along to a higher court. He fully expects Adam to appeal it. Adam meets with Mr. Olander, the Supreme Court's Death Clerk, whose job it is to manage all last minute petitions for death row inmates. In Mr. Olander's professional opinion, Sam has run out of options. When Adam finally meets with Sam again, he is surprised to hear what his grandfather has to say. Even though he is quickly approaching his execution day, he still refuses to ask the governor for clemency. He also deeply regrets having killed Joe Lincoln.



Chapters 26-29 Analysis

As promised, Lee confronts her childhood in an effort to introduce Adam to his father's side of the family. Their return to Clanton, Mississippi, is a dangerous trip for Lee. She recalls the murder of Joe Lincoln, and tells Adam how she witnessed her father murder him in their front yard. Lee has always struggled with these memories, but has moved forward in such a way that she is able to live what appears to be a normal life. Her literal trip down memory lane causes her to plunge back into a dark place. With those memories comes her desire to drink heavily. She retires to her bedroom for days at a time in alcoholic binges. Lee regrets her father's actions, which clearly shadowed her childhood and continue to affect her choices as an adult. Surprisingly, Sam also had regrets. One would expect him to regret getting caught, as no one would want to be sentenced to die. However, Sam's regrets are not self-centered. During a heartfelt talk with Adam, Sam reveals that he regretted killing Joe Lincoln. He goes on further to say that Joe was "a good man" and that his family would be happy once Sam is killed. This confession is a huge breakthrough, both personally for Sam and also for his relationship with Adam. More than ever before, Adam wishes he could gain Sam more time to live, but so far his petitions have not been successful.



Chapters 30-34

Chapters 30-34 Summary

Adam decides that visiting Marvin Kramer's family would be a good idea. Not only does he feel the need to apologize for his grandfather's crimes, he also thinks it is a good strategy in his grandfather's defense. Adam correctly assumes that Mr. Kramer is looking forward to Sam's death. He had even been quoted as saying that he hoped to be in attendance. When Mr. Kramer thinks about Sam, he rightfully thinks about the family members Sam was convicted of killing. Adam thinks that it is important for Mr. Kramer to realize that Sam has a family, too. Adam's father had been so tormented by Sam's crimes that he had committed suicide. Adam had lost his father and is now likely to lose his grandfather. Adam hopes that Kramer would consider this angle. It is rumored that Mr. Kramer and the governor are friends, and Adam figures that Mr. Kramer could likely influence the governor's decision regarding clemency.

While Adam works on yet another petition in his office, he has the pleasure of an unexpected visitor. Wyn Lettner arrived to provide Adam with some additional information and words of caution. He tells Adam that all of the witnesses associated with Sam's case have died over the years, and that many of the deaths had been unexplained. He wants Adam to proceed with caution and recognize that if Sam did in fact have an accomplice, that person is likely to resurface in the next few weeks, which could mean danger for Adam. Adam hears what was being said but doesn't feel there is any real threat. When he arrives home, he finds a scribbled note on the counter. Lee has written a note to say that she is sick in bed with the flu.

The following day Adam receives word from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. They want to hear his oral argument regarding the ethics of the gas chamber as Sam's mode of death. He is happy to oblige and travels to New Orleans. Although nervous, he argues well in court. He does not enjoy his time in the city, however, because he is too worried about Sam and Lee. Adam does not entirely believe Lee's flu alibi. After all, it was July, an unlikely season for the flu, and a self-admitted alcoholic had just confronted her difficult past. Adam thinks Lee is more likely suffering from an alcoholic binge and hangover. The stench emanating from Lee and her entire bedroom was awful, and Adam had needed to physically bar the door to cut off her supply of alcohol. It is three days before Lee emerges, refreshed, and sober again.

Following his trip to New Orleans, Adam visits his grandfather. They agree that many other avenues, including the insanity defense, should be pursued. Sam delivers to Adam his week's worth of mail. He had been receiving letters from admirers for years but had grown tired of reading them. They briefly discuss Sam's plans for burial and then turn to lighter chat. Sam fondly remembers an ice cream treat called an Eskimo pie. Adam promises to bring a dozen on his next visit. At the end of their visit, Sam returns to his cell to work on his case, but is disturbed by yet another visitor. He is told that one of his brothers has come to visit. Of his two living brothers, one, named Donnie,



regularly sent cigarettes and letters, and sometimes cash. He thinks it must be Donnie that was visiting but finds this not to be true. The visitor is not someone he immediately recognizes. The man he had once called Rollie Wedge is using his brother's name to gain entrance. He warns Sam that as long as he continues to keep his silence, no one would get hurt. However, he is watching Sam, and if Sam tells anyone about his existence he would act. Sam knows he means every word.

Chapters 30-34 Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Sam's character seemed unaffected by his crimes as well as by the punishment they brought. His character becomes more complex and the reader sees that he is not as straightforward as he originally appeared. He has confessed and expressed remorse for killing Joe Lincoln. His confession forces the reader to consider him as more than a bigoted, old, racist man. Now, for the first time, the reader sees a hint of his desperation. Gone are the days of the unaffected, stoic Sam. He literally demands that Adam do something to stop the countdown towards his death. In Sam's words, " My X's are getting closer to the circle [around August 8]". He now wishes to live longer. Ironically, the one thing that could help him extend his life is new evidence. He demands that Adam stop the execution, but Sam has the power to stop it himself. If he provided accurate information regarding his accomplice it would be likely that a court would view him as culpable as an accessory to the crime, but not guilty for murder. This path is preempted by a visit from Rollie Wedge. His visit and accompanying threat ensure that Sam stays quiet to protect his remaining family members. When seen in this light, the reader finds sympathy for Sam. If he is willing to sacrifice his freedom, and even his own life, to keep his family safe then maybe he is not as bad a man as he was originally perceived.



Chapters 35-39

Chapters 35-39 Summary

Philip Naifeh, the prison warden, wakes up on Sunday morning with chest pain. It is diagnosed as a heart attack and his doctors forbid him to oversee the Cayhall execution. His substitute, the assistant superintendent at Parchman Prison, is named George Nugent. He is a retired military colonel and is a very organized man. As such, he had revised and organized the execution protocol book. He is looking forward to efficiently handling Sam's final day. He is also hoping to eventually be promoted into Naifeh's position.

Lee is feeling better following her renewed sobriety. Adam is hopeful that she will remain that way. His hopes are crushed when he wakes up and finds her absent again. On the couch lay the local paper. Its metro section focuses on Lee and exposes her as Sam's daughter. It also calls to attention her relationship with Phelps Booth and the Auburn House. Adam knows that she had fled after reading it. She does not come home all evening. At three thirty in the morning, Phelps calls and wakes Adam. He informs him that Lee had been arrested for drunk driving but had posted bail before he arrived at the police station. Now he cannot locate her, although he expects her to show up at a posh detox center. Phelps seems to know her habits, since this was not her first bout with alcoholism. Unfortunately, she is not showing up at her favored spots.

Sam is visited by the new chaplain, a Mr. Ralph Griffin. His manner appeals to Sam, and Sam enjoys their conversation. He accepts the chaplain's offer of support. Sam's conversations with Adam do not go as smoothly. Adam is shocked to learn that Sam no longer wants to pursue other defense avenues. Because he was already present, Dr. Swinn did complete his mental assessment of Sam. Adam cannot understand Sam's change of heart. Despite Sam's reluctance, Adam moves forward with some new ideas. He had asked for the assistance of Garner Goodman, who flies south from his Chicago office to help. He rents some space and furnishes it with secondhand furniture and cell phones, all courtesy of Kravitz and Bane. He meets with a local law professor, John Bryan Glass, and recruits some of his law students to help with Adam's new plan. Goodman also visits with the governor about a clemency hearing. Sam is still not interested in clemency, so the meeting is purely hypothetical. Governor McAllister assures Goodman that if they secure the name of Sam's alleged accomplice, he would agree to a clemency hearing, although he couldn't promise to commute the sentence. Because Sam is so against cooperating with the governor, his attorneys figure the only way to convince him to do so might be through a closed clemency hearing, where the governor has nothing to gain. Unfortunately, for his own reasons, the governor wants an open hearing so that he can garner press time and be seen favorably by his constituents. If he is lucky, his ratings might even improve.



Chapters 35-39 Analysis

These chapters speak to the technical process of execution in the State of Mississippi. Phillip Naifeh hopes to retire without having to execute another inmate. Like many of his peers, although he works at a prison, he hated the process of executing an inmate. His heart attack ensures that responsibility for the execution would not be his. His successor, George Nugent, feels very differently. He revels in the idea of executing Sam and all of the details associated with it. His brusque manner is not appreciated by any of the inmates, least of all Sam. With the militant Nugent in charge, Sam is forced to face the reality of his imminent death. Adam's petitions on Sam's behalf are moving through the Mississippi Supreme Court, the federal district court, the Fifth Circuit, and the United States Supreme Court, but are not received favorably. Journalists include Sam in their breaking news broadcasts around the clock, which is a further insult. They search even deeper and dig up information about Lee's relationship to Sam. This pushes her over the edge. Again, she loses her sobriety, then flees. Among this chaos, Sam finds solace in speaking with the new chaplain, Ralph Griffin, and the reader understands Sam's motivations to do so. Although Adam is hopeful, he clearly recognizes that he may not be victorious in the courtroom. He hatches a plan to circumvent the system. He hopes that by applying pressure to the governor through his popularity polls, clemency might be granted to Sam, regardless of decisions of the court.



Chapters 40-44

Chapters 40-44 Summary

Outside of Parchman Prison, things are getting rowdy. Groups of people forming all facets of life are gathering. There are Klansmen, pro-death penalty demonstrators, Nazis, and religious people as well. Not only do they voice their opinions pertaining to Sam's future, they voice their opinions about each other as well. The pro-death penalty spectators are segregated from those trying to preserve his life. Extra security is placed around the prison, and in other areas of controversy, such as courthouses, as well. Everyone seems interested in the outcome of Sam's petitions. One man, a well-known author, is willing to pay Sam tens of thousands of dollars to record his life story and publish a book after his death. Sam is not interested in talking to anyone other than Adam. He is busy reflecting on his past and has come to some conclusions. He no longer believes that he had acted appropriately. Sam has come to denounce many of the ideals he used to believe in. Rather than glorify his behavior, he prefers to die without comment. In his cell, he takes the time to write sincere apologies to the families he had hurt. He asks Adam to deliver them posthumously.

In an effort to communicate with his voters, Governor McAllister has installed phone lines that are answered seven days a week. Constituents are free to call and give their opinions about any subject. Goodman follows Adam's plan. He directs the law students to call the governor's hotline and give an opinion denouncing Sam's execution. They pretend to be voters from all across the state, and they jam the phone lines with their frequent calls. McAllister is shocked to learn that the people in the state are in favor of him giving Sam clemency when the state is usually in favor of the death penalty.

Sam enjoys a visit from his brother, Donnie. They had shared a good relationship, even after Sam's conviction, and his visit is sincere. Sam asks Donnie if he could find some new clothes for him to wear at the time of execution. He is preparing to die, but wishes to do so with dignity if possible. Donnie is happy to help. Sam's relationships with his other family members are improving as well. Lee is still missing, which is unfortunate because Sam wants to see her. Adam is coming to terms with his family's history. He has come to realize that his grandfather was a combined product of a bigoted upbringing and a distant society. Carmen is traveling to meet her grandfather for the first time. Sam is heartened by these improvements. Thinking about his mortality and his family compels him to confess his sins to God, with Ralph Griffin as his witness.

Chapters 40-44 Analysis

During Sam's final days he made some last minute requests. Sam recalls dreaming of traveling to California to find his grandchildren. After Eddie left, Sam missed seeing Adam, and then Carmen, grow up, but he was too proud to chase them. Then, when he was finally convicted, reaching out to them was no longer an option. Sam recalls how



much he used to enjoy the daily sunrise. Against Nugent's judgment, Sam is escorted outside to view a sunrise. These examples show that Sam is full of reflection. Over the years, meditation has replaced anger and Sam is no longer the violent man who committed the acts for which he is being killed. His character has truly redeemed itself. This may be a natural act of time, a gift that is not usually afforded to inmates. Sam is the oldest man on death row and has lived there the longest. The combination of age and time on death row have clearly softened him. Sam confesses his crimes to the minister, even those for which he was not accused. He asks for God's forgiveness and apologizes to Adam for the poor legacy he leaves behind. Sam expresses mild jealousy that Adam is successful and that Sam could not share in the same success, although he recognizes that he is to blame for his life's path.



Chapters 45-47

Chapters 45-47 Summary

As part of the preparations, Sam is moved from his long term cell into the observation cell, where he is monitored twenty-four hours per day to ensure that he doesn't attempt suicide. Eight burly guards escort him between the cells, with Nugent leading the way. From the observation cell he will eventually be moved to the isolation room and then the gas chamber.

With just forty-two hours left before Sam is scheduled to enter the death chamber, Adam is still busily working to halt the execution. Although most of his petitions have been systematically denied—first by the the Mississippi Supreme Court, then the federal district court, the Fifth Circuit, and finally by the US Supreme Court—one had found an audience. Adam's claim that Sam was mentally incompetent to be executed is supported by Dr. Swinn, whose credentials are excellent. Judge Slattery is forced to seriously consider that particular petition.

Carmen arrives to meet her grandfather. Adam had prepared her for what she would find, but is surprised to see that Sam had groomed himself. He had shaved his beard and cut his hair. Overall, he appears much more tidy. Their meeting is cut short by news that Adam is needed in Jackson for a hearing pertaining to Sam's mental incompetence claim. Before arriving at the hearing, Adam has other business to attend to. He needs to meet with the governor, who expresses the immense pressure he is feeling about the overwhelming response of the people. He does not reveal his inner turmoil about whether or not to grant Sam clemency and how it could affect his ratings in the polls, and most importantly, his long term career plans. Adam also stops by the temporary office, which is conducting what he broadly called his "marketing analysis" scheme. Carmen is still with him and is not impressed by what she sees. She ponders aloud whether or not it is appropriate, but does not make an issue out of it. The short trip is already wrought with emotion, and she is leaving that afternoon to return to California.

Adam arrives at the courthouse for the appointed hearing. Dr. Swinn is a sound witness. Adam calls Goodman to the stand. He asks questions about the depth of knowledge Sam had shared with his attorneys. It is Adam's last opportunity to plant a seed of doubt as to Sam's involvement in the bombing. Colonel Nugent, the minister, the prison psychiatrist, and various guards also testify. Roland sits quietly in the back of the courtroom and does his best to blend in with the reporters in attendance. With nothing left to do but wait, Adam heads back to Parchman. On the way there, Adam heard the news broadcast stating the the judge has denied the incompetency petition. Sam is now on his last day and Adam does not have enough time to file any more petitions. Sam also hears the news. He prepares for death by changing into his new clothes and casting away his prison garb. Sam asks Adam to deliver another letter. It is addressed to the clansmen who had gathered out front. He denounces the organization and



recognizes that they had only gathered to gain publicity for their own benefit. Sam insists that they leave the premises.

Chapters 45-47 Analysis

When Adam brings his sister to meet Sam, he notices a change in his grandfather. Sam must have wanted to make a good impression because he has made changes in his appearance. He has cleaned himself up and made an attempt to be more grandfatherly. His demeanor is pleasant, too. Adam notes that Sam's new-found sincerity extends to Carmen as well as Adam. Carmen would like to spend more time with her grandfather, but their visit is cut short by a call from Garner Goodman. The governor wishes to speak with Adam, and he is needed at the courthouse for one of his many petitions. On the way there, Adam stops at the studio to check on the market analysis project. Carmen is not impressed and expresses her exasperation with her brother. She, too, hoped for extra time to get to know Sam before he died, preferably from natural causes, but she doubts the ethics of tricking the governor and impersonating the citizens of Mississippi. While his grandchildren hope for more time, Sam knows his time has come. Symbolism can be seen as he sheds his prison jumpsuit and dresses in street clothes purchased by his brother Donnie. It is as if he is making a statement about his freedom to choose and also about his identity—he wants to be remembered as a man instead of a prisoner.



Chapters 48-52

Chapters 48-52 Summary

Sam's last day is a busy one. The prison doctor visits him and performs the required medical exam. The irony of the situation is apparent to Sam—he has to be fit enough to die. Adam is with Sam all day, but takes frequent breaks to attend to business. The final petitions are still cycling through the courts, and he is in constant contact with Garner Goodman about them. Goodman has called an end to the market analysis project after five days. By then all of the petitions have run their course. The governor's phone lines have been thoroughly jammed. They have the desired effect of putting pressure on the governor, but only time could reveal whether or not he would grant Sam clemency.

The numerous journalists congregate at the prison and hope to witness the execution. The law provides for only eight journalists to be present. Nugent chooses the names randomly from a bucket. Donnie also comes to visit Sam. Adam had not been interested in meeting his great uncle but is forced to do so. He is pleasantly surprised. Donnie is not the villain Adam had imagined. He is just an old man in normal clothes. Donnie and Sam truly care for one another. They exchange childhood memories and Adam catches a glimpse of boyhood mirth. For his last dinner, Sam consumes three of his favorite treats—Eskimo pie ice cream desserts along with a thermos of coffee.

While Sam speaks quietly with Adam and his minister, the state executioner, Bill Monday, prepares for his task. Nugent enjoys overseeing this matter. His military training had taught him to appreciate detail-oriented tasks. As agreed upon earlier, none of Sam's family would witness his death. Mr. Elliot Kramer is allowed by law, but declines for health reasons. Ruth Kramer has also declined from attending. Governor McAllister is pleased to make his appearance. He denies clemency, then attends the execution as a witness.

Following the reading of the death warrant, Adam has an intense desire to flee. He buys beer and drives aimlessly with no planned destination. The sunrise finds him sitting amongst the Cayhall tombstones in the Clanton cemetery. Lee finds him there. Adam is initially perturbed at her presence, and vents his anger at her for having left at such a sensitive time. She replies that she had been in treatment and had also gone to the prison to see Sam, but had been unable to gain admittance. She shares the news that she had bought and then burned down her childhood home. Adam has news of his own—he has decided to accept Hez Kerry's job offer. He plans to resign from Kravitz and Bane, practice death penalty litigation for Kerry's organization, and help his aunt to heal. As Adam and Lee exit the cemetery, workers prepare to dig Sam's grave.



Chapters 48-52 Analysis

The state executioner, Bill Monday, is introduced in chapter forty-nine. Like Nugent, he is a stickler for organization. While Monday repeatedly checks and double checks his supplies, tension builds in Sam's cell. The stress of the last few weeks culminates, and for the first time Adam loses his composure. He lashes out at Nugent, who is not an ally, but not really an enemy either. Adam's misdirected anger is an outward sign of his vulnerability. During a private conversation, Sam admits to Adam that he had an accomplice. Little time is left before the execution and there is no legal action that Adam could take to save Sam. Furthermore, Sam has accepted his death as punishment for his willingness to take part in the bombings and his reluctance to alert authorities of the bomb's presence, even when the daylight hours progressed and it became evident that people would be arriving at Kramer's law office. Adam realizes at that moment that Lettner's theory about an accomplice who was slowly killing witnesses is not as far fetched as he had thought. The danger is real and should not have been so easily dismissed. Sam goes on to question why he couldn't have turned out differently. He would have liked to be a better role model for both his children and his grandchildren. In a strong statement about her past, Lee returns to Clanton and burns down her childhood house. The destruction is symbolic. She is defining an end to the violence. Within hours, her father is also killed and the victims have their retribution, something that Lee understood would be necessary and had alluded to in chapter seven.



Characters

Sam Cayhall

Sam Cayhall is a complicated man. He is the son of Lydia and Lucas Cayhall. Lydia, a Christian woman, focused on her family. Lucas, however, was a mean and violent man. Like most of the men in his family, he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. His sons, Sam, Donnie, and Albert, were raised in the presence of the Klan. This upbringing may have led Sam astray. Like most white men of the time, Sam's family believed that blacks were inferior and meant to serve. Popular culture at that time was not concerned with assaults against blacks. When such assaults did occur, the parties were rarely punished because the authorities were in agreement with the perpetrators.

Sam commits many crimes, including lynchings and murders, but is only accused of one. The Kramer bombing is organized by the Ku Klux Klan's imperial wizard and involves Sam, who acts as driver and look-out, and an accomplice who is in charge of detonating the bomb. When the bomb fails to immediately explode, Sam returns to the scene of the crime to investigate. This proves to be a big mistake. His accomplice goes into hiding and is never caught, but when Sam returns he is arrested. The bomb explodes at the opening of the business day, and the Jewish lawyer who was targeted and his two children, innocent victims, are all harmed. The children die immediately, which prompts public outcry, and the father's legs require amputation. The civil rights movement coincides with the bombing, and public opinion is split. Sam is prosecuted for murder. The first two trials are declared mistrials because the mainly white juries leaned heavily in favor of Sam.

Sam lives as a free man for many years, then an ambitious lawyer vows to prosecute him again. Times have changed, and at the third trial a racially balanced jury find Sam guilty and calls for the death penalty. While Sam's lawyers try to manipulate a decreased sentence, Sam spends years thinking about his crimes. In his adult years he had mellowed and no longer subscribes to the tenants of the Klan. With just one month remaining before Sam's execution, his grandson arrives to defend him. Although Adam is unsuccessful at saving Sam's life, other, less tangible things are gained. As Sam approaches the end of his life, he begins to value life more and becomes remorseful. Having Adam as his lawyer allows them to create a relationship that had previously been prevented. When Sam's execution occurs, he dies at peace. He is able to do this because he has confessed his sins and reached out to his remaining family. Sam had the distinction of being the oldest inmate executed at the prison.

Adam Hall

Adam Hall is the daughter of Eddie and Evelyn Hall and the paternal grandson of Sam and Anna Cayhall. Adam had a painful childhood. He was born Alan Cayhall and his father later relocated the family and changed Alan's name to Adam Hall. His father



suffers bouts of depression and his parents subsequently fight often. His father refuses to acknowledge his side of the family, so Adam always feels as though he had no family history, an idea that troubles him. He does, however, have a great relationship with his younger sister, Carmen. When Adam is sixteen years old, his father commits suicide. Following the funeral, Eddie's sister, Lee, arrives and shares with Adam everything she knows about their family's sordid history. He learns that his father's death was precipitated by the conviction of Sam Cayhall for murder charges, and that his grandfather, Sam, had been an active Ku Klux Klan member. Adam finishes high school and continues on to Pepperdine College and law school at Michigan. He applies for and acquires a junior position at the third largest law firm in the United States, Kravitz and Bane.

The majority of the story occurs when Adam is twenty-six years old. At that time, he transfers from Kravitz and Bane's criminal defense department to the pro bono department so that he can defend his grandfather, Sam Cayhall, as he faces the death penalty. Adam moves to Memphis with his aunt so that they can support each other and he can be closer to the prison. Adam tries unsuccessfully to save his grandfather, but learns a lot about him and his family along the way. When Adam first seeks out his grandfather, he is fascinated by the story and selfishly wants family history. Later, when he learns of the many crimes his grandfather committed, he is repulsed by him. Adam finally comes to understand that the man who now resides in prison is very different from the man who entered prison. Sam recognizes and repents for his many sins, and Adam develops sympathy for him. Adam is troubled by his death and by the idea of government ordained execution. Following his grandfather's death, Adam accepts a position with an organization that specializes in death penalty litigation and whose ultimate purpose is the abolition of the death penalty.

Eddie and Evelyn Hall

Eddie Hall is Sam Cayhall's son. As a child, Eddie's best friend was a black boy who lives on the Cayhall property. His friend's name is Quince, and although he doesn't fully understand it, Quince's family are employees of the Cayhall family. Eddie's father, Sam, is exceedingly rude to Quince's family and eventually murders Quince's father, a crime for which he is never punished. Eddie does not share his father's racist tendencies and despised his father for them. Eddie marries his sweetheart, Evelyn, and they have two children, Alan and Carmen. Alan is born when the family still lives in Mississippi. In an effort to escape his father, Eddie relocates his family, assumes the last name Hall, and legally changes Alan's name to Adam. Eddie only returns to Mississippi once. The occasion is his mother's funeral; she was a doting woman whom he loved despite his father. Carmen is born in California, where Eddie's children spend the majority of their childhood. Eddie works off and on, but is plagued by secrets. He never speaks of his family, and after a while the children learn not to ask. Eddie has periods of depression and Evelyn tries to hold the family together. As a result, their marriage is tumultuous—they often talk about separating and fights are commonplace. Following Sam's final trial and conviction, Eddie commits suicide and leaves instructions for Adam to clean the mess. When Eddie dies, Adam is sixteen and Carmen fourteen. Their Aunt Lee explains



to the children Eddie's troubles and Sam's affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan. Evelyn eventually remarries to a wealthy man with whom she travels and enjoys retirement.

Lee Cayhall Booth

Lee Cayhall Booth is the daughter of Sam Cayhall and sister of Eddie Hall. Like Eddie, she hides many family secrets. Her father's identity is a secret to nearly everyone she knew. She chose to separate her past from her present because the past was so painful. Lee resents her family's affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan, an organization that Lee does not agree with. As a child, Lee watches her father participate in acts of violence against multiple black men. She is confused, angry, and sad. These feelings cement, and as an adult she can more aptly be described as sympathetic. She learns to be sympathetic towards her father, a man who inherited a legacy of hate and only perpetuated a cycle that began long before him, but she is also sympathetic towards the victims. She feels partly responsible for the pain experienced by Ruth Kramer, and accepts the idea that her father's passing would bring retribution for the survivors. As a fifty-year-old adult she could list the reasons why her father should die, but like any child she feels a great loss.

Confused and embarrassed by her father's actions, Lee leaves home as early as possible. At eighteen, Lee falls in love and quickly marries Phelps Booth, the son of an aristocratic banking family. They have one child, a son named Walt. Phelps' family was not fond of Lee and even less so once they found out about her heritage. Lee has difficulty in the Booth social circles and finds relief in social drinking. She becomes an alcoholic but navigates daily life well. The passion of her marriage wanes; her son leaves the country and establishes residency with a homosexual partner in Amsterdam, and life is not as grand as it had once been. Then Sam's execution date is set and Adam arrives to defend him. Her memories come racing back, putting her in a precarious emotional space. Lee's character offers background information to fill in Adam's early years. Adam offers her emotional support and eventually moves to Memphis to be near Lee while she struggles to regain her sobriety.

Ruth and Marvin Kramer

Marvin Kramer is a lawyer of Jewish descent living in Greenville, Mississippi with his wife, Ruth, and their two sons. Marvin had attended Brandeis University before continuing on to Columbia for law school. After completing his education, Marvin returns home to find that the civil rights movement has spread through the south. He is eager to help the cause. Marvin opens his own law office and quickly develops a name for himself as a black sympathizer. He helps blacks register to vote and defends them by the law when required. His family keeps to themselves and do not like the attention Marvin attracts. He also attracts death threats from the Ku Klux Klan, who are active in the area. The threats become so prominent that Marvin hires a guard to protect his house and family, thus forcing the Klan to attack his office instead of his home. Ruth wakes up one morning and feels ill, so Marvin brings the boys to work with him. When



the bomb detonate, his sons are instantly killed and Marvin is maimed. His legs are damaged and later require amputation. The stress and sorrow become too great and he and Ruth separate. Although Ruth goes on to live a long life, Marvin is not so fortunate. He is admitted to a mental hospital and commits suicide within a year.

Josh and John Kramer

Josh and John are Marvin Kramer's five-year-old twin sons. They accompany their father to work and are killed in the office bombing—the crime for which Sam Cayhall is found guilty and sentenced to death. There is public outcry over the deaths of the children.

Garner Goodman

Garner Goodman is the head of Kravitz and Bane's pro bono department. The firm's pro bono department is no small affair- it encompasses a whole floor and hundreds of thousands of hours per year are donated to worthy clients. Goodman is a well known lawyer whose work had been published in many textbooks. His description best resembles a nerdy professor—late in age, with graying, bushy hair, and a paisley bow tie. Prior to heading the pro bono department Goodman had been an overworked litigator, but he couldn't keep up with the pace and was crushed under the pressure. He drank too much and his marriage and career suffered. The firm found that as long as they didn't push too hard he still achieved great results. They move him out of litigation and into the quieter pro bono work. Goodman bans clocks from the department and simply works as was necessary for any given situation. Both the firm and Goodman benefit. Goodman and his colleague, Tyner, represent Sam Cayhall until he fires them. When Sam agrees to be represented by Adam and the firm of Kravitz and Bane, Goodman offers his assistance. He works behind the lines by offering practical advice and running from courthouse to office and back again for Adam.

Carmen Hall

Carmen Hall is the daughter of Eddie and Evelyn Hall. She is also Adam's younger sister. Carmen is a twenty-three-year-old graduate student at Berkeley in California. She is enrolled in a psychology program and hopes to eventually be a teacher. Along with Adam, she does not know of her grandfather's existence until after her father's death. Her first, and only, meeting with him is arranged by Adam and occurs on death row in the final days before Sam's execution. Carmen is taken aback by her family's past, but surprisingly tender with Sam when they are finally united.

Daniel Rosen

Daniel Rosen is the managing partner at Kravitz and Bane. His renowned temper has earned him a reputation as a monster. Rosen spends years as a famous litigator and



leaves others flustered in his wake. He is a workaholic and cannot keep a steady marriage. These traits result in an unhealthy life, and Rosen has multiple heart attacks. Following his illnesses, his doctors recommend office work of a low stress level and limited hours. Rosen is frustrated and takes it out on everyone. He searches for a way to make himself useful, and in doing so picks fights with colleagues. When he learns that Adam had not divulged his relationship to Sam on his application, Daniel vows to have Adam's employment terminated.

Emmitt Wycoff

Emmitt Wycoff is Adam Hall's direct boss at Kravitz and Bane. He is nearing fifty years old but appears older after years of stress in his career. Prior to transferring into the pro bono department, Adam had been working under Wycoff as a researcher. Wycoff is impressed with Adam and has even allowed him to argue a motion in court—an honor virtually unheard of for a recent graduate. Adam explains his plan to Emmitt, who then sends Adam to Goodman with a letter of recommendation. Later, he would again vouch for Adam's value by saying that he wants him back when he and Goodman are finished representing Sam. Wycoff is an intense lawyer and a hard worker, but his fondness for Adam shines through.

Phillip Naifeh

At sixty-three years of age, Philip Naifeh is the superintendent of Parchman. He is looking forward to retiring from the position in peace. Before doing so, however, Sam's execution date is set. Naifeh does not believe in the death penalty and is relieved from carrying it out by a heart attack which required hospitalization and bed rest.

Nugent

George Nugent is a retired military commander. He is currently the assistant superintendent of Parchman Prison. When Philip Naifeh has a heart attack, the job of executing Sam becomes Nugent's responsibility. He relishes the job and is disliked by the prisoners.

Ralph Griffin

Ralph Griffin is the minister for Parchman prison. Unlike his predecessor, he does not believe in the death penalty. Griffin obtained the position through family connections. He soon learns that he cannot tolerate the prison and the execution process. He vows to resign or transfer out of the position. Reverend Griffin is very helpful to Sam during his final days.



Governor McAllister

As a lawyer, David McAllister prosecutes Sam in his final trial. He recalls the public outcry over the Kramer bombing and has vowed to see justice served. McAllister then rises to the position of governor of Mississippi. He is highly ambitious and preoccupied with how the public perceives him. He has the power to grant Sam clemency but chooses not to do so. He does, however, decide to render his decision in the form of a press conference, which he hopes will be received favorably by voters. Sam is extremely distrustful of McAllister and sees right through his polished political exterior.

Hez Kerry

Hez Kerry is a graduate of Yale and the founder of an organization officially called the Southern Capital Defense Group. In professional circles it is simply known as Kerry's group, and is dedicated to abolishing the death penalty. Hez makes his agency available to Goodman and Adam when they are defending Sam. Later, Hez offers Adam a staff position and he accepts.

Jeremiah Dogan

Jeremiah Dogan is the imperial wizard, or leader, of the Ku Klux Klan at the time of the Kramer bombing. He plans and sanctions it.

Rollie Wedge

Rollie Wedge is the Ku Klux Klan member who plants the bomb and sets the timing device in the Kramer bombing. After the Kramer bombing he goes underground and later resurfaces in a Nazi bunker and is known as Roland. In an effort to secure his own safety, he kills the majority of the witnesses to the Kramer bombing.

Wyn Lettner

Wyn Lettner is the FBI officer in charge of investigating Ku Klux Klan activity around the time of the Kramer bombing. He spends time investigating the bombing and believes that Sam had an accomplice. He also believes that the proposed accomplice was killing witnesses. When Adam approaches Wyn for information, Wyn advises him of the possible dangers surrounding the Cayhall case.

Clovis Brazelton

Clovis Brazelton is Sam Cayhall's lawyer for his first two trials (they resulted in mistrials). He is secretly a Ku Klux Klan member just like Sam.



Objects/Places

Parchman Prison

Parchman Prison is a Mississippi state penitentiary. Its maximum security unit, or MSU, houses death row inmates. It is where Sam Cayhall lives.

The Chamber

The Chamber is the room where executions take place. This room is the namesake of the book, as the story line follows Sam's journey to his execution.

The Isolation Room

The isolation room is the last room where an inmate spends time before moving on to the chamber. In the isolation room the prisoner is monitored continuously as a suicide precaution. He or she is only allowed two visitors in the isolation room—an attorney and a clergyman.

Kravitz and Bane Chicago Office

Kravitz and Bane's Chicago branch houses the offices of nearly three hundred lawyers. It practices all forms of law and also has a full time pro bono department headed by Garner Goodman. Adam Hall is hired right out of law school and is employed at the Chicago branch.

Kravitz and Bane Memphis Office

Adam is given a short term office at Kravitz and Bane's Memphis branch to be nearer to Sam during the last month of his life. The Memphis branch employs only a dozen lawyers who practice corporate law. It used to be a smaller firm but was purchased by Kravitz and Bane. The Memphis branch is the office from which Adam files all of the petitions for Sam's final defense attempts.

Clanton, Mississippi

Clanton is the hometown of Sam Cayhall's family. Therefore, it is also the birthplace of Eddie and Lee.



California

Eddie Cayhall legally changes his last name to Hall and then relocates his family to escape the Cayhall legacy. They settle in California.

Memphis, Mississippi

Memphis, Mississippi is the city Lee called home. She lives there in a four bedroom condo by herself with the help of a maid. Her husband lives in their house in the country. Adam stays with her while he conducts Kravitz and Bane business on behalf of Sam.

Greenville, Mississippi

Greenville is the hometown of Marvin Kramer and his family.

Law Offices of Marvin B. Kramer and Associates

Kramer's office is also located in Greenville, Mississippi. It is the target of a Ku Klux Klan bombing, which maimed him and killed his two sons.

Sam's Typewriter

Sam takes a serious interest in his own defense. He spends time studying applicable cases and typing communication related to his defense. He becomes so discouraged that at one point he fires his legal counsel and types his own briefs from his jail cell. He types petitions for other inmates as well.

Kite

A kite is the euphemism at Parchman Prison for a message. Because the inmates are not allowed to socialize, communication occurs through kites, or handwritten notes, that are passed down the corridors. The inmates' hands could extend just far enough through the bars to receive and pass objects. Books are also passed in this manner.

Calico Rock

Calico Rock is a small town nestled in the Ozark mountains. It is known for its spectacular trout fishing. Wyn Lettner, the FBI official in charge of the Ku Klux Klan activity in Mississippi in the '60s, retires there. Adam travels to Calico Rock to talk to Mr. Lettner about the investigation surrounding the Kramer bombing.



Nazi Bunker

Although the exact location is never disclosed, the bomber known as "Rollie Wedge" goes underground after the Kramer bombing. He travels first to Ireland, then to Libya, Germany, and Lebanon. He lives in an underground Nazi bunker and follows world events via many newspapers. The bunker is also technologically advanced so he is never lacking in news. He returns to the United States periodically for events related to the Kramer case.

Auburn House

The Auburn House is located in Memphis and is the site of Lee's employment. She is a full time volunteer counselor for this organization. Its purpose is to provide support for young and unwed mothers.

Montclair Cigarettes

Montclair cigarettes are the brand that Sam Cayhall chose to smoke. His brother sends him a few cartons each month. Sam is a chain smoker and smoked three packs each day. He once told Adam that he hoped lung cancer would kill him before his execution date.



Themes

Violence

Sam Cayhall was a violent man. He descended from a family of mean and physical men who were known to fight often, even at highly inappropriate times such as funerals. Sam was raised just as the seeds for the civil rights movement were sown. As a child, he watched blacks being mistreated and was taught that such treatment was acceptable and even condoned. He participated in lynchings and murders. Some of these crimes were for revenge, while others were strictly racial in nature. As an adult raising a young family, Sam perpetuated this cycle of violence that had been taught to him. Then came the civil rights movement, and by the time Sam faced his third trial for the Kramer bombing, American society had progressed. Racial inequality was no longer acceptable. While Sam admitted to being violent toward others, he also insisted that he had not intended to kill anyone during the Kramer bombing. That particular crime was only meant to scare the Kramer family, not harm anyone. One might argue that even if the Kramer deaths were not intended, Sam had certainly murdered in the past and had not been caught, so his death was considered acceptable by many. Very few people would sympathize with a Ku Klux Klansman who seemed to exude the stereotypical ideas of violence and racism. Sam's violent actions caused a sort of ripple effect as well. His daughter, Lee, required years of psychiatric therapy and became an alcoholic. His son, Eddie, was unable to live with their family history and committed suicide. Sam and his grandson, Adam, debate over whether or not Sam is responsible for Eddie's death and Lee's alcoholism, as well as the crimes he personally committed. Sam is sentenced to die via the gas chamber. The idea of execution is also a violent topic. Adam argues in court that it is an inhumane procedure and that other states have discontinued its use because of its inefficiency and violent nature. The prison minister states that just like it was wrong for Sam to kill, it is equally wrong for the state of Mississippi to kill Sam.

Redemption

Sam Cayhall's character is ultimately a redeeming one. At the time of his sentencing, he appears aloof and undeterred by the prospect of life behind bars and eventually death by gas inhalation. The survivors are thankful for what they consider to be justice served. After all, he is known to be a violent man. Additionally, he is disliked because of his affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan. In some respects, the desire to prosecute him was less about Sam and more about making a statement. The general public would no longer tolerate crimes against minorities. The prosecuting lawyer was a disingenuous man who used the tragedy of the Kramer bombing to further his own career. Whatever the reasons behind it, Sam's capture and subsequent imprisonment may have been the best thing to happen to him. While in prison, Sam had lots of time to think. He came to realize that his actions were cruel, and he regretted them deeply. If he had remained a free man, this change of heart may not have occurred. He was motivated by his remorse and confessed his sins to the prison minister. It is important to note that he not



only confessed the crimes for which he had been caught, but also other crimes that were not known. He could have carried those events to his grave, but instead, he wished to seek God's forgiveness. He found solace in personally writing letters of apology to the family members of his victims. He specifically requested that Adam not mail them until after his death. Sam wanted it to be clear that his intentions were sincere and that he was not trying to manipulate the survivors in any way. This consciousness would not have been possible earlier in his life when he was filled with unkind ideologies. Fortunately, he was also able to set things right with his family during his final weeks of life.

Family

The theme of family is one of the driving factors behind many of the decisions made by the characters in *The Chamber*. For Sam, joining the Ku Klux Klan was an inevitable path. All of his ancestors belonged, and the organization was an extended family of sorts. Additionally, both of his brothers, his father, and grandfather were all members as well. As a young adult, Eddie wished to shield his own family from this heritage. He broke tradition and cut ties with his father. To spare his wife and children from the ridicule and pain of the Cayhall legacy, he legally changed their names. Eddie was running from his family. He corresponded sporadically and only with the females in the family.

Eddie's sister, Lee, also struggled with her idea of what a family should be. She was ashamed of her father's criminal activity. She married young and without much fanfare because she did not want the added attention to reveal her past. Lee married for love, but the match was not a healthy one. She was unable to assimilate with her husband's aristocratic family. Her feelings of ill ease in the Booth family and shame of her own family prompted her to drink. The social habit escalated and became alcoholism. Her only child relocated to another country, which further amplified her lack of family. Her closest family member was her nephew, Adam.

Adam came to Lee demanding family history. In his father's desire to protect Adam, he had not answered any of Adam's questions. Adam had grown up feeling ungrounded and jealous of his friends, who seemed to have family roots that Adam admired. Sam's presence in Lee's life was beneficial for him, but in some ways parasitic for Lee. When Adam became aware of this discrepancy, he changed his approach and became much more supportive. Lastly, Sam Cayhall spent years behind bars for a crime that he did not commit. He was guilty of other crimes, and was merely an accessory to the Kramer bombing, but he sacrificed his freedom to keep his family safe. The one piece of information that could have freed him would have endangered his family.



Style

Point of View

The Chamber is written in the third person point of view. The author, John Grisham, writes about the characters with some discussion among them. The novel is purely fictional, so the author has no motives beyond storytelling. Grisham does mention in the acknowledgments section that he was once a lawyer, although he was never required to visit death row or assist a client detained there, and that he struggles with the "moral complexities" of the death penalty.

Setting

The first three chapters of The Chamber are set in the late 1960s. At that time in Mississippi, the fight for civil rights was well under way. The Ku Klux Klan was terrorizing blacks and their sympathizers. Sam Cayhall lived in a small town called Clanton, but traveled to Greenville to assist in a Klan organized bombing of Marvin Kramer's law office. The era is described as tumultuous and emotionally charged. Beginning with chapter four, the story moves forward. A few chapters are designated to the aftermath of the bombing and Sam Cayhall's three trials. The remainder of the book is set in 1990. Sam Cayhall is detained in the maximum security unit of Parchman Prison in Mississippi. The prison was built in 1954 amid fields of soybean and cotton. Although it boasts electronically operated sets of double doors for protection, not much thought was given to comfort. The temperature inside the prison is always too hot and the air circulation is poor. Adam technically lives in Chicago, but his time is divided between his Aunt Lee's home in Memphis and the prison. Occasional forays are made to a handful of courthouses and offices and there are some flashbacks of childhood events, but these are few.

Language and Meaning

The Chamber is written in a straightforward manner. Overall it is a contemporary novel. The only use of specialty language occurs when the inmates refer to an execution as a "thang" and a message as a "kite". A notable example of foreshadowing can be seen in Rosen's threat regarding Adam's employment at Kravitz and Bane. The subject comes up again, many chapters later, and Rosen follows through with his threat, but Adam ultimately prevails.

Structure

The Chamber is 486 pages long. It has a total of fifty-two chapters, each of which are roughly seven pages in length. The chapters are arranged chronologically, with the first

three setting the plot and the rest following to its resolution. There is no prologue or epilogue for this book, although it does have a short section for acknowledgments.



Quotes

"The decision to bomb the office of the radical Jew lawyer was reached with relative ease." p. 1

"He preferred to serve as the watchman and avoid handling the explosives." p. 5

"They called her names and made her cry but she doggedly held on." p. 18

"'He recognizes talent,' Adam said with a smile." p. 27

"He left a note on the floor with instructions for Adam to hurry and clean up the mess before the girls got home." p. 52

"There were gaps in her oral history large enough to fill libraries, but she covered the high spots with a great deal of finesse." p. 53

"If not for the fences and barbed wire, it could almost pass for an elementary school in the suburbs." p. 73

"He would take his time and make it last as long as possible." p. 82

"But the burden of the actual killing was his, and he despised this horrible aspect of his job." p. 85

"As a general rule, death row inmates were quiet and well behaved." p. 110

"The delay in itself was an admission." p. 127

"The state of Mississippi, in its boundless wisdom, had built its prison in the hottest place it could find." p. 167

"It was time to practice law and forget the folklore." p. 265

"But that had been many years ago, when the gas chamber seemed to distant to worry about." p. 289

"The first pungent vapor wafted from the bedsheets and covers, and Adam wanted to cry." p. 300

"'I've been very effective at keeping people quiet.'" p. 322

"They would back him into the chamber, strap him in, close the door, and kill him." p. 344

"How thoughtful of these kind people to grant his request to see one final sunrise." p. 382



"The sensation of being fully dressed in real clothes brought sudden, painful memories of the free world." p. 446

"The end came quickly." p. 476



Topics for Discussion

Recall the Kramer bombing. The civil rights movement was fraught with violence. What was it about the Kramer bombing that the public found so appalling?

Discuss Sam's heritage.

What measures did Eddie take to escape his past?

Describe Lee and what it means to be a "functioning alcoholic".

Discuss the idea of an accomplice at the Kramer bombing. What made the authorities doubt Sam's story?

Adam was accused of misleading Kravitz and Bane at the point of hire. This caused dissension among the members of the personnel committee. Compare and contrast the firm of Kravitz and Bane with Hez Kerry's organization.

Consider Ralph Griffin's job. At first he longs to help, but later decides Sam will be his only death row visit. Discuss the relationship that evolves between minister and inmate.

Adam longs for a family history. Do you feel that his questions are answered before Sam is put to death?

Discuss the character of Rollie Wedge and the significance of Sam's decision to protect him.

Just before Sam's death, he renounces the Ku Klux Klan. Examine Sam's spiritual journey.