The Green Mile

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF STEPHEN KING

Stephen King grew up in Portland, Maine. His father, a merchant seaman, left his family when Stephen was two years old, leaving Stephen's mother, a caregiver at a mental hospital, to take care of two sons. As a child, King grew fascinated with science-fiction and horror stories and soon began to write his own. The publication of his first novel, *Carrie*, in 1974 (King was twenty-six) was a huge success, allowing him to leave his job in order to write full-time. Over the course of an extraordinarily prolific career, King has published over two hundred short stories and fifty-four novels. As in *The Green Mile*, his stories often involve ordinary people forced to confront horrific events, demonstrating the power of human courage, solidarity, and compassion in the face of evil.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Stephen King sets his novel in the American South during the Great Depression, a severe, years-long economic downturn that began in the United States in 1929 and soon affected the rest of the world. In the United States, it led many people to lose their jobs and forced them to live in poverty. In *The Green Mile*, Paul and his colleagues share a fear of losing their jobs, primarily motivated by these extremely difficult economic conditions. King's depiction of small Southern American towns also builds on the United States' history of slavery and racism. While slavery was abolished in 1865—over fifty years before the setting of the novel—the racist attitudes of many characters show that many whites proved resistant to social change, unable to accept the end of slavery and the basic equality of whites and blacks.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many of Stephen King's novels show ordinary citizens dealing with the conflicting forces of good and evil in seemingly everyday circumstances. King's first novel, *Carrie* (1974), tells the story of a young girl who uses her telekinetic powers to exact revenge on her enemies in an ordinary American town—an evil objective that contrasts sharply with John Coffey's use of his supernatural powers to do good in *The Green Mile*. A possible inspiration for *The Green Mile* could be John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937), which is also set during the period of the Great Depression. It tells the story of two migrant field workers, George and Lennie, who are forced to seek temporary jobs. Like John Coffey, Lennie is physically strong but mentally disabled. Unaware of his own strength, he ends up inadvertently killing a young woman. As a result, George finds himself forced to kill his companion in order to spare him a violent death at the hands of a mob. The Green Mile shares a similar premise (in that Coffey is also a strong but gentle and mentally childlike man who stands accused of a violent crime and must ultimately face death at the hands of someone who loves him and wishes to spare him further pain).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Green Mile
- **When Written:** 1995-1996
- **Where Written:** United States
- **When Published:** 1996
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Mystery, Magical Realism
- **Setting:** Depression-Era American South
- **Climax:** Eduard Delacroix's execution
- **Antagonist:** Percy Wetmore
- **Point of View:** First-person (Paul)

EXTRA CREDIT

Six-Volume Publication. *The Green Mile* was first published serially in six volumes, released over the course of six months.

Movie Adaptation. The movie adaptation of *The Green Mile*, released three years after the book's publication, was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

PLOT SUMMARY

From the relative tranquility of his nursing home ("Georgia Pines"), Paul Edgecombe recounts his time as death-row supervisor of Cold Mountain Penitentiary in 1932. As his narrative shifts back and forth between 1932 and the present, Paul explains that his goal in recounting this earlier period of his life is to provide a detailed account of one time during his career when he had serious doubts about his job.

At Cold Mountain, Paul supervises E block—the equivalent of what is commonly known as death row. E block has the nickname **"the Green Mile"** because of the color of the tiles in the long corridor leading up to the electric chair, where condemned inmates await executions in their cells. Paul believes in showing compassion toward the death-row prisoners. He and his colleagues Brutal, Harry, and Dean are constantly frustrated by the behavior of Percy Wetmore, a

young guard who behaves cruelly toward the inmates, making the atmosphere on E block violent and unpredictable.

After the execution of The Chief (a Native American convicted for drunkenly killing a man in a fight) and the transfer of The Pres (who murdered his father by throwing him out of a window) to another section of prison, Eduard Delacroix arrives on E block. His arrival is marked by chaos and brutality, as Percy violently drags him into the corridor, insults him, and hits him with his baton. Paul scolds Percy for his behavior, but the young man, who trusts that his political connections can protect him in any situation, feels no sense of remorse—developing, instead, a growing hatred toward Delacroix.

One evening, when Delacroix is heard laughing in his cell, the guards discover that he is playing with a mouse that appeared on E block a few weeks earlier. At the time of the mouse's first appearance, the rodent had amazed the guards with its quasi-human intelligence, having shown signs that it was looking for someone. Paul later realizes the mouse had been looking for none other than Eduard Delacroix. The mouse, whom Delacroix calls Mr. Jingles, becomes the inmate's faithful pet and entertains the guards with various tricks. In particular, Mr. Jingles enjoys running after a wooden spool that Delacroix hits against his cell's wall.

A few weeks later, John Coffey arrives on E block. Paul describes him as a giant—a towering black man who makes everything around him appear ridiculously small. After giving Coffey the usual speech he reserves for new inmates, Paul realizes that Coffey is soft-spoken and almost completely illiterate. Paul is startled by the peaceful gentleness that emanates from Coffey's eyes, a strange tranquility that makes the man look absent and lost.

Spurred by a curiosity that later turns into an obsession, Paul searches for details about John Coffey's crime. He discovers that Coffey was charged with the rape and murder of two nine-year-old girls, the Detterick twins. One summer morning, the two girls, who had been sleeping out on their porch, are found missing, the family dog strangled to death. A search party is called to look for the two girls, and the searchers ultimately find John Coffey holding the bloodied, dead bodies of the Detterick twins, whose heads have been smashed together. Crying ceaselessly, moved by desperation and grief, Coffey's attitude appears to be a clear indication of guilt. Coffey is soon arrested and swiftly sentenced to death for his crime.

In the meantime, a young new inmate arrives on E block: William Wharton, a cruel murderer who plays violent tricks on the guards with a persistence that Paul finds terrifying. Wharton is often punished for his actions, forced into a straitjacket and confined to the restraint room for a few days, but never modifies his behavior.

The same day as Wharton's arrival, Coffey urgently calls Paul into his cell, saying he needs to talk to him. Paul, who has been suffering from an excruciatingly painful urinary infection, sits down on Coffey's bunk and Coffey suddenly touches Paul's groin, sending a flow of painless energy through Paul's body. After Coffey coughs up a cloud of black insects that turn white and vanish, Paul stands up and realizes that his urinary infection is entirely gone.

Coffey performs a second miraculous healing a few weeks later, on the day of Delacroix's execution. When Delacroix throws Mr. Jingles's spool against the wall a bit too hard, causing Mr. Jingles to exit the cell, Percy takes the opportunity to violently crush the mouse under his shoe. A few seconds later, from within his cell, Coffey tells Paul to give him the mouse. Paul hands it to him and the inmate holds the mouse inside his hands, breathes in, releases a cloud of black insects that turn white and disappear. The next moment, Mr. Jingles emerges from Coffey's hands alive and well. The guards look on, utterly dumbfounded.

That same night, Percy takes his greatest revenge on Delacroix. He intentionally sabotages Delacroix's execution, failing to wet the sponge that is typically used to conduct electricity through the condemned man's head. As a result, Delacroix suffers an agonizing, minutes-long death on the electric chair during which he essentially burns alive. Furious about Percy's loathsome action, the guards make Percy promise to apply to transfer to a job at Briar Ridge psychiatric hospital the next day, so that they might be rid of him.

In order to atone for Delacroix's horrific death, Paul decides to use John Coffey's powers to perform a good deed. He convinces Brutal, Harry, and Dean to take part in an expedition to heal the warden's wife, Melinda Moores, of her recently diagnosed brain cancer. After sedating William Wharton with a strong drug and locking Percy up in the restraint room, the men drive John Coffey to warden Moores's house. There, Coffey heals Melinda in the same way he previously healed Paul and Mr. Jingles. This time, however, Coffey is unable to cough up the black insects, and the guards notice that he begins to suffer from the same symptoms of which he relieved Melinda.

The guards successfully return to prison, bringing a weakened Coffey back to his cell, and let Percy out of the restraint room. However, before Percy has a chance to leave the Green Mile, Coffey suddenly grabs him through the bars of his cell. He forces Percy's lips against his and transfers to him the illness that he had absorbed from Melinda Moores. Percy's eyes go blank and, after taking a few uncertain steps, he suddenly shoots into William Wharton's cell multiple times, killing the sedated inmate in his sleep. Percy never regains his sanity but, instead, is sent as a patient to the psychiatric hospital where he had applied to work.

As the official investigation surrounding Wharton's death comes to an end and the date of Coffey's execution approaches, Paul conducts an investigation of his own that leads him to confirm his long-held suspicion that Coffey is innocent. In the

process, he discovers that William Wharton is the true rapist and murderer of the Detterick girls. John Coffey later confirms this fact, telling Paul that once, when Wharton grabbed John's arm, John was able to see inside Wharton's mind and learn about what Wharton did to the Detterick twins. The discovery of Wharton's guilt is what spurred Coffey to make Percy kill Wharton on E block.

Disturbed by the idea of executing an innocent man, Paul reveals what he has learned to his wife (Janice) and colleagues. However, faced with the fact that it would be impossible to justify Coffey's innocence without referring to his special powers (in addition to the fact that the racist justice system would never agree to re-open the case of a black man convicted of murder), Paul and his friends are forced to recognize that they will not be able to save Coffey's life. The guards must thus prepare for Coffey's execution with heavy hearts, feeling shameful for executing an innocent man with God-given healing powers. Coffey, however, claims that he is happy to die so that he may escape the cruelties of the world. Paul's account of 1932 ends with John Coffey's death on the electric chair—the very last execution of his career.

Once Paul finishes writing down his narrative at the nursing home, he shows his story to his special friend Elaine Connelly. He then brings her to a secret shed in the woods where he shows her Mr. Jingles, who is still alive. He explains that when Coffey touched Mr. Jingles, he made him resistant to the effects of aging. Paul also reveals that he himself is resistant to aging.

After Elaine dies a few months later, Paul is left to reflect on the difficulty of his present life. He recalls his wife Janice's brutal death in a bus accident, during which he believes he saw Coffey's ghost looking at him from a distance. At the nursing home, Paul feels alone in the world, left only with the memories of those he has loved and lost. While he knows that everyone is bound to die, he laments his current state, in which he must wait joylessly for his own death, as though this life were but a longer version of the Green Mile.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Paul Edgecombe – The narrator and protagonist of *The Green Mile*. As the supervisor of E block, Paul takes his job very seriously, believing that all prisoners should be treated with compassion and respect so that their final moments of life might be tolerable. He has an acute sense of responsibility, as his desire to atone for Delacroix's horrific execution leads him to risk his job and freedom in order to heal Melinda Moores's brain tumor. He also demonstrates his commitment to fairness and truth when he unofficially reopens the investigation into John Coffey's crime, dedicating time and energy outside of his work to prove the man's innocence. His feeling of guilt at participating in Coffey's execution leads him to write down his memories, in the hope that he might right the wrong of Coffey's unjust death. Overall, he believes in the value of companionship, trusting that love and friendship are capable of defeating the evil forces of the world.

John Coffey – Despite his intimidating size, John Coffey is sensitive and non-violent. He is mostly illiterate (the only thing he can spell is his own name) and, like a child, is afraid of the dark. In prison, he spends most of his time crying for the suffering of other people. He has extraordinary healing powers, which lead the guards on E block to consider him a conduit for God's will. After revealing these powers to the guards by healing the injured Mr. Jingles as well as Paul's painful urinary infection, Paul decides to break Coffey out of prison so that he can heal Melinda Moores of her fatal brain tumor. Paul then discovers Coffey to be innocent of the crime for which he was sentenced, but sees no way around having to execute the innocent man. Despite the injustice of his sentencing and execution, Coffey proves willing to die, having grown weary of sensing the suffering and cruelty of the world. Nevertheless, Coffey believes in retribution and, when he discovers that Wharton is the true rapist and murderer of the Detterick twins, he uses his gifts to make Percy kill Wharton in his cell. The only black man in the story, Coffey is often the victim of racism, in the legal system as well as among ordinary individuals. In the end, he is executed on the electric chair for a crime he never committed, but not before he has passed some of his gifts onto Paul, enabling Paul to read the thoughts of others and making him impervious to the effects of old age.

Percy Wetmore – A particularly cruel guard who makes the atmosphere on E block violent and unpredictable, Percy is despised by inmates and guards alike. As the nephew of the governor's wife, his characteristic cowardice is offset by the fact that he has friends in high places, causing him to act arrogantly with the assurance that he can have anyone fired for mistreating him. While he takes pleasure in beating and humiliating weaker individuals, he deeply fears humiliation himself. Percy's hatred of Delacroix is in part motivated by homophobia, as he uses the false excuse that Delacroix has touched him inappropriately to violently beat the chained prisoner. Percy's cruelty reaches new heights when he deliberately sabotages Delacroix's execution, causing the inmate to suffer a protracted, agonizing death on the electric chair. He ultimately goes insane after John Coffey transfers onto him the illness he had absorbed from Melinda Moores, which in turn causes Percy to kill Wharton in his cell. As punishment for this crime, Percy spends the rest of his life in an asylum for the mentally unwell.

Brutus "Brutal" Howell – Nicknamed Brutal because of his size, Brutus is a sensitive, thoughtful guard who assists Paul in some of his most challenging tasks and only uses force when it

is absolutely necessary. Brutal believes strongly in the ideas of justice and retribution, for he feels that God will send him to hell for murdering John Coffey, who is a gift of God. He decides to transfer out of E block after Coffey's execution, proving that his moral and spiritual qualms about the electric chair are sufficient to make him leave his job.

Eduard "Del" Delacroix – Convicted for raping and murdering a young girl, and then involuntarily setting fire to the adjacent building (leading to the deaths of six more people), Delacroix shows no sign of cruelty by the time he reaches E block. Instead, he appears to be a fearful old man, terrified of the cruel Percy Wetmore. His forlorn attitude changes dramatically with the arrival of the mysterious, hyper-intelligent mouse, Mr. Jingles, who brings Del endless joy—a feeling of happiness that Paul believes is probably the greatest the man has ever experienced. Del dies a horrific and agonizing death on the electric chair after Percy, who hates Del, sabotages his execution by not wetting the sponge.

Mr. Jingles (also "Steamboat Willy") – This mouse, which appears on E block one evening, shows signs of quasi-human, supernatural intelligence. It peers into the cells along **the Green Mile** as though it were looking for someone, and Paul later concludes that it had been waiting for Eduard Delacroix all along. Delacroix looks after and loves Mr. Jingles, and after Del's execution, Mr. Jingles disappears, never to be seen again in the prison—but Paul later discovers that the mouse had stashed pieces of peppermint candy and splinters from the colored spool, which remind him of Delacroix. After John Coffey touches Mr. Jingles, he is given the supernatural gift of resistance to the effects of age. Years after the main events of the story, Mr. Jingles lives in a shed near Paul's nursing home, where Paul visits him and feeds him pieces of toast. He dies there of a heart attack, perhaps brought about by the appearance of Brad Dolan (whom Paul sees as a reincarnation of Percy).

William Wharton – Wharton, who thinks of himself as "Billy the Kid" but is nicknamed "Wild Bill" by the guards, is a violent inmate who takes pleasure in scaring and hurting other people. Paul is amazed by Wharton's sheer persistence in committing violent actions, even when he has no hope of escaping punishment. Wharton is later discovered to be the true rapist and murderer of the nine-year-old Detterick twins. He is killed in his cell by Percy Wetmore after Percy has seemingly come under the supernatural influence of John Coffey.

Janice Edgecombe – Paul's wife is a kind, thoughtful woman who supports Paul in all his moments of difficulty. She proves brave and compassionate when visiting her friend Melinda Moores, who is clearly suffering from the severe effects of a brain tumor. When Janice discovers Paul's plan to help Melinda Moores, she encourages Paul to do whatever it takes to save her, even if it is a risky endeavor. She demonstrates her commitment to justice and racial equality, giving in to rage and frustration when she discovers that Coffey is innocent, but that nothing can be done to save him. She dies in a bus accident which Paul survives.

Elaine Connelly – Paul's companion at Georgia Pines is a fierce, compassionate woman who encourages Paul to write down his memories even if it proves to be a difficult task. Unafraid of facing danger herself, she takes various risks to help Paul. She sets off the fire alarm so that Paul might go on his walk without being seen by Brad Dolan, and, on another occasion, stands up to Dolan directly when she sees him harassing Paul. Her status as the grandmother of the Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives serves as a useful protection against Dolan—an inversion of the threat of political connections that Percy wielded against Paul as a prison guard. She dies peacefully of a heart attack in her bed at the nursing home.

Hal Moores – Hal Moores is described as the most honest warden that Paul has worked with during his career as a guard at Cold Mountain Penitentiary. Hal's combination of integrity and political savvy allows him to maintain his position at the prison while avoiding unethical political games. Endowed with a strong sense of authority and discipline, he shows himself capable of confronting danger head-on, unafraid to engage in a fight with a violent prisoner or to step out of his house, shotgun in hand, when he hears Harry's car in the driveway in the middle of the night. He is devoted to his wife and shows emotional vulnerability in front of Paul a few times, despite the embarrassment that this causes in him.

Melinda Moores – Hal Moores's wife is a kind woman devoted to the community. Her persistent headaches soon prove to be a brain tumor, which causes her health and sanity to deteriorate rapidly. She is healed by John Coffey, after which she lives another ten years, ultimately outliving her husband by two years and dying peacefully of a heart attack. After Coffey heals Melinda, she gives him a **medal** as a token of appreciation.

Harry Terwilliger – A regular guard on E block, Harry tries to warn Paul about not causing Percy trouble, so that he might not lose his job. He is a responsible guard, and he does not hesitate to take part in dangerous activities, lending his car for Coffey's escape and confronting warden Moores on the steps of his house while Moores points a shot-gun at the guards. He makes a significant mistake when he is put in charge of Wharton's transfer from the hospital to the prison, as he assumes that Wharton is sedated without ever thinking that the man might be pretending—a mistake that leads to Wharton almost strangling Dean to death.

Dean Stanton –Dean is a responsible—if occasionally too serious—guard on E block. He is nearly strangled to death by Wharton on the day Wharton arrives on the block. Dean has two young children. Because of his family situation, his colleagues try to spare him the danger of participating in Coffey's illegal escape, so that he wouldn't lose his job if the

plan failed. However, Dean dies a few months after this event, brutally assassinated in C block, where he applied to transfer after Coffey's execution.

Arlen "The Chief" Bitterbuck – First elder of his tribe on the Washita Reservation and member of the Cherokee Council, Bitterbuck is a relatively calm, reserved man. He is convicted for drunkenly murdering a man over a trivial matter, smashing his head with a cement block. His execution is the first one that is described in the novel, and it goes according to plan.

Robert McGee – Deputy Sheriff Rob McGee is a competent, responsible man who generally fills in for Homer Cribus's responsibilities. Capable of leadership in moments of danger and stress, he leads the search party that ultimately finds the bodies of the Detterick twins. He demonstrates his commitment to his job when he decides to investigate William Wharton's potential involvement in the murder of the Detterick twins after talking with Paul Edgecombe. While he returns visibly distressed, convinced of Coffey's innocence, his commitment to truth and justice nevertheless proves limited, as he reproaches Paul for seeking to uncover the truth. In the end, he proves complicit in supporting the racist legal system when he confirms that a black man's case would never be reopened.

Homer Cribus – The Trapingus County high sheriff is an incompetent alcoholic who depends on others (such as Deputy Rob McGee) to get his job done. His racist attitude constitutes a significant obstacle to reopening Coffey's case. He shows sadistic pleasure in attending Coffey's execution, showing his approval when Marjorie Detterick publicly insults the condemned man.

Burt Hammersmith – The man who reported on the case of the Detterick twins. Hammersmith believes that there is no doubt John Coffey is guilty of raping and killing the two nine-year-old girls, whatever his past history of crime may be. His underlying racism becomes apparent when he compares Coffey to a mongrel dog, explaining that some people are simply beholden animal instincts. He also refers to black people as "your Negroes" as though they are property (as they were during slavery). Paul considers Hammersmith's attitude of white supremacy typical of the American South at that time.

Curtis Anderson – The warden's chief assistant proves a good judge of character. He recognizes William Wharton as a wild, uncaring, animal-like criminal and also proves unafraid to tell Percy what he thinks of him after Delacroix's horribly botched execution, despite the threat of Percy's political connections. His serious attitude toward his job is complemented by a light sense of humor.

Toot-Toot – An old man who sells snacks to prisoners. During execution rehearsals, he plays the role of the condemned prisoners. While most men enjoy Toot's French accent and humor, Paul sees him as a weaker version of Percy Wetmore, inclined to revel in violence and cruelty. During Bitterbuck's execution rehearsal, Toot makes everyone laugh by saying vulgar jokes and exaggerating the condemned man's pain, visibly enjoying making fun of the inmates' suffering.

Kathe and Cora Detterick – The nine-year-old blonde twins whose rape and murder make the headlines for weeks in Trapingus County. They were kidnapped from the porch of their home, where they had been sleeping, by William Wharton. John Coffey reveals that Wharton convinced the twins to keep quiet that night by telling them that he would kill the sister of whichever one of them was first to speak. In this way, Coffey says, the girls died because they loved each other.

Klaus Detterick – The father of Kathe and Cora. He sets off immediately with his son Howie when he learns of his twins' disappearance. Upon discovering John Coffey with the bodies of his two daughters, he attacks him violently but goes limp when he is pulled away from Coffey, suggesting that he was affected by Coffey's special powers. His quiet demeanor at Coffey's execution contrasts sharply with his wife's virulent insults, and he dies of a stroke a few months later.

Marjorie Detterick – The mother of Kathe and Cora. While she fears for her husband and her son's lives when the two men set out in search of the twins, she soon proves capable of handling the situation quite competently, calling up Sheriff Cribus to tell him what has happened. Her attitude at Coffey's execution is hateful, vindictive, and racist. She loudly and repeatedly expresses her desire for him to feel pain for the crime she wrongly believes he has committed.

Beverly "Matuomi" McCall – A woman who kills her abusive husband—a barber—with one of his own razors in retaliation for his cheating. Paul uses her story as a counterpoint to John Coffey, showing that there is a clear difference between people (such as Matuomi) in whom murder is a natural part of their personality and people (like John) who are inherently innocent, incapable of committing a crime.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Brad Dolan – A nursing home employee who reminds Paul of Percy Wetmore, Brad Dolan finds pleasure in cruelty and harasses Paul throughout his time at the nursing home. Like Percy, he demonstrates a combination of aggressiveness and cowardice, using his position of authority to inflict harm on weaker individuals.

Arthur "The President" Flanders – Convicted for throwing his father out of a window, The Pres sees his death sentence commuted to life—according to Harry, because the mere fact that he is white. He is murdered twelve years later in prison, drowned in dry-cleaning fluid.

Bill Dodge – A "floater" (i.e., an irregular guard) on E block in charge of other floaters. He is described as a responsible worker. With Dean Stanton, he attempts to protect the mouse

Mr. Jingles from Percy's wrath, and chastens Percy for upsetting the prisoners with his outbursts of violence.

Howie Detterick – Klaus and Marjorie's son. He is the first to discover that the twins have disappeared. While searching for his sisters, he gives in to fear, almost fainting when he sees a blood-filled patch of grass in the woods that held his sisters' bodies.

Jack Van Hay – The man in charge of the switch room during executions. Percy asks Jack a lot of questions about the role of the sponge in executions, suggesting that his sabotage of Delacroix's execution was premeditated.

Bobo Marchant – The man whose dogs lead the search party in charge of finding the Detterick girls. Paul describes him as an ignorant Southerner.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DEATH AND THE DEATH PENALTY

In *The Green Mile*, death appears first and foremost as a form of punishment. As a consequence of their crimes, all prisoners on E block—known as **the "Green Mile"** because of the color of its tiles—are meant to wait for the moment of their execution on the electric chair. Although execution by electrocution is still legal in many states, the narrator, Paul Edgecombe, does not refrain from expressing his discomfort—and at times, his utter disgust—at this method of execution. Beyond the electric chair, though, death strikes in a variety of ways, and Paul comes to terms with the fact that criminals and ordinary civilians alike must suffer through the brutal certainty of death. Not only can death never be eradicated but there is also never a guarantee of *how* one is going to die. Life, then, can be seen as a period of waiting for a potentially painful end, however long or short the wait may be. Through Paul's story, King shows that ordinary members of society, too, must walk their own version of the "Green Mile," living their life waiting for the inevitable ordeal of death.

All characters on E block have been condemned to the death penalty for their crimes. Even though this punishment is the result of a legal process, the narrator Paul denounces it on various occasions as an unnecessarily brutal way to die. While the electric chair is described as a familiar presence, given playful nicknames such as "Old Sparky" and "the Big Juicy," Paul rejects the idea—defended by proponents of the electric chair—that this method is painless. The black bag that covers the condemned men's faces, he argues, is not meant to protect their dignity but, rather, to keep the audience from seeing the pain and fear that inevitably appear on their face. As such, the bag serves as one of many indications that this form of punishment is far from humane. The potential cruelty of the electric chair becomes all too apparent during Eduard Delacroix's execution. When Percy, a cruel guard on death-row, intentionally botches the execution, Delacroix is forced to suffer an agonizing, minutes-long death on the electric chair. The electricity kills him slowly and painfully, as his flesh catches flame and he burns alive. Excruciating to witness, the moment of his death becomes a traumatic event for all spectators present—guards, officials, and civilians alike. It highlights the extent to which the electric chair can prove barbaric and inhumane.

As an old man, Paul, who generally refrains from making moralizing comments, cannot help but decry the electric chair when he looks back on his time as death-row supervisor of Cold Mountain Penitentiary. He writes, "Old Sparky seems such a thing of perversity when I look back on those days, such a deadly bit of folly. [...] To kill each other with gas and electricity, and in cold blood? The folly. The *horror*." What he once considered a normal part of the legal process he now clearly sees as an unacceptable form of punishment. Paul does not clearly condemn capital punishment as a practice, instead focusing specifically on the electric chair, but his outrage suggests that there is something unnatural about making coolheaded decisions ("in cold blood") about when and how another human is meant to die.

Yet whether or not one dies on the electric chair, death often proves just as painful and unfair on E block as in civilian life. Paul reminds readers that no one—however guilty or innocent—can escape the moment of their death. While there do exist a few ways for prisoners on E block to avoid the electric chair, such opportunities are scarce. In the execution room, there is a telephone that allows the governor to call in to prevent the execution from occurring, but Paul mentions that this does not happen a single time during his entire career. Hoping for the telephone to ring, he suggests, belongs to the realm of delusion more than to reality. In fact, even when execution is postponed, there is no guarantee that one's death will be any less brutal than the electric chair. When a prisoner called The Pres sees his death sentence commuted to a sentence of life in prison, he escapes the electric chair only to be murdered violently twelve years later in a different prison block. Paul reflects that, "on the whole, he might have been better off with Old Sparky . . . but then he never would have had those extra twelve years, would he?" The death-row guard Harry considers The Pres's death "a long stay of execution that finally ran out." Both Harry and Paul imply that it was impossible for this condemned man to escape his fate. Even the chance to live a few extra years, they suggest, might not have been worth it, as a violent death was bound to strike anyway.

Death can prove equally brutal for ordinary civilians. The deaths of both Dean (a guard on death-row) and Paul's wife Janice are reminiscent of the deaths of criminals. When an inmate stabs Dean in the throat in the prison's C block, the circumstances mirror the death of The Pres, who was killed in a prison block by a fellow inmate. Similarly, when Janice dies in a bus accident, Paul describes her death as a form of electrocution, thereby associating it with the electric chair. However, "innocent" Janice might have been, she dies, ironically, of a similar cause as many of the criminals whose executions Paul oversaw. These parallels between the deaths of inmates and civilians are reminders that nothing in one's life or character can determine the more or less painful way in which one is going to die. Death, then, serves as a powerful equalizer between all humans, making criminals and civilians equally subject to the brutal inescapability of death. Paul concludes that life as a whole can be seen as a long "Green Mile," as everyone—whether locked-up or free—is bound to spend their life waiting for the moment of their death.

At the end of his life, Paul finds himself in a similar situation to the prisoners on E block. He calls the nursing home where he spends his last days "as much of a killing bottle as E Block at Cold Mountain ever was." As the residents suffer through the various illnesses of old age, the nursing home, like the electric chair, implicitly "kills" its residents—that is, hosts them until they die of a natural death. As Paul lists the various ways in which his friends have died, he realizes that living, in what it contains of loss and grief, can be as unbearable as dying. Forced to survive with the memories of all the people he has lost, he concludes that "sometimes there is absolutely no difference at all between salvation and damnation." The fact that he is still alive, yet forced to suffer emotionally, proves to be as much of a curse as a gift. Paul's situation, in this way, mirrors the isolated, joyless waiting that Green Mile prisoners experience as they await their executions. His final words confirm that to live life is to live out a protracted death sentence. Just like John Coffey, who was happy to die if it meant liberation from life's cruelties, Paul realizes that he, too, almost wishes to die. He writes, "We each owe a death, there are no exceptions, I know that, but sometimes, oh God, the Green Mile is so long."

While condemned prisoners (such as John) and old men (such as Paul) might be exceptionally aware of the proximity of their death, everyone, without exception, is bound to walk a "Green Mile" of their own—to live their life knowing that death awaits them in the end. The E block's Green Mile, then, serves as a powerful metaphor for the existential condition of humanity as a whole.

MORALITY AND JUSTICE

In *The Green Mile*, the justice system is not always as effective as it should be. While it may succeed in punishing dangerous criminals, it can also mandate the death of innocent people such as John Coffey. The justice system is limited, too, in that many violent and cruel actions go unpunished because they take place beyond its reach. As such, even though the law can separate what is legal from what is illegal, it does not account for all unjust or immoral actions. Faced with the stark limitations of the American justice system, many characters turn to a higher authority when it comes to questions of morality and justice in order to make sense of the world around them, trusting that only God can judge what is right and wrong. Relying blindly on God's judgment, however, is *also* shown to have its pitfalls, as "God's will" is used throughout the book to justify a variety of actions—from the horrific to the deeply courageous. As such, morality and justice, each in their own way, remain elusive and subject to personal interpretation as characters attempt to give meaning to the world's injustice and cruelty.

While the law is meant to punish criminals, King shows that it does not always succeed in differentiating the guilty from the innocent. William Wharton is a perfect model of sadism. His entire existence is focused on hurting others, and he takes joy in even the most insignificant acts of violence. Even after he is condemned for various crimes and knows he will die on the electric chair, he still takes pride in harming the people around him. He attempts to strangle Dean to death, threatens to rape Percy, and shoots liquefied Moon Pie into Brutal's face, even as he knows these actions will lead to him spending a day or two in solitary confinement. Curtis Anderson, the warden's chief assistant, summarizes Wharton's mentality by underlining one sentence in his report: "*This man just doesn't care.*" Wharton's amoral attitude and crimes—and in particular the discovery that he is the actual murderer of the Detterick girls—only confirm that he is deserving of punishment.

John Coffey, by contrast, is an example of the law's failings. While the circumstances surrounding the Detterick twins' rape and murder seem to clearly indicate John Coffey as the culprit, Paul later realizes that Coffey is entirely innocent and that he was, in fact, trying to *heal* the girls, not kill them. However, this realization does not lead to exoneration for John, who dies on the electric chair like any other criminal, executed for a crime he never committed. This combination of impunity (as some terrible crimes evade punishment by the law) and injustice (as innocent men are condemned as criminals) suggests that the law does not provide the right standard through which to judge each person's true guilt and innocence. Neither does the law succeed in creating a more *moral* society. While it might punish crimes that have already been committed, it proves incapable of eradicating the human impulse to harm others. Paul portrays cruelty as something inherent to humanity, as even ordinary civilians—not just locked-up criminals—prove capable of deeply sadistic behavior.

The behaviors of Percy Wetmore and Brad Dolan suggest that, while human cruelty can undergo transformations and

reincarnations, it never fully disappears. Percy is a character who derives joy and excitement from harming other individuals. The only reason he works as a prison guard instead of accepting an easier job elsewhere is because he is fascinated by the idea of taking part in executions. He beats Delacroix upon his arrival, stomps his mouse to death, and, in his last and most cruel action, makes him suffer an agonizing death on the electric chair. In the completely different setting of the nursing home, Brad Dolan is reminiscent of Percy. Brad takes pleasure in harassing Paul, spying on him as he goes out on his walks, and threatening to hurt him if he doesn't reveal his "secret." His hatred for Paul has no clear motive, for Paul has done nothing to antagonize Brad. Rather, it is motivated by a pure desire for control and manipulation. His behavior reminds Paul so much of Percy's that he repeatedly confuses the two names in his head and begins to believe that Brad is a reincarnation of Percy. Yet despite these men's cruelty and immoral behavior, neither of them is ever punished by the law, suggesting once more that the law and the justice system do not necessarily have anything to do with justice or morality. Paul, in fact, begins to believe that cruelty is inherent to the human race and that no form of punishment, not even the electric chair, can suppress the evil inclinations of mankind.

Faced with the limitations of human law, many characters turn to divine law in order to make sense of the world around them. However, even this moral perspective proves limited, for much of what people consider to be "God's will" remains subject to personal interpretation. Wishing to atone for Delacroix's horrific execution, Paul decides to use John Coffey's divine powers to heal Melinda Moores of her brain tumor. Despite having to sneak John out of prison to do so, Paul and the guards feel that the moral value of their deed outweighs the importance of abiding by the law. At the same time, in their everyday tasks, the guards are involved in actions that they know might be morally wrong. Paul admits that it is possible to think of his job as criminal: "yes, in a way we *were* killers. I'd done seventy-seven myself, more than any of the men I'd ever put the chest-strap on." Paul's wife Janice sees the situation in a similar light when she realizes that Coffey, who is innocent, will still face the electric chair. She calls Paul and his fellow guards "cowards" and "murderer[s]," arguing that executing an innocent man on the electric chair is the same as killing him in cold blood, as any murderer might do. During John Coffey's execution, Brutal, too, becomes convinced that he is taking part in an immoral action. Despite the legality of what he is doing, he fears that God will send him to hell for killing an innocent man.

Throughout the book, different characters refer to God's will in order to justify a variety of actions, sometimes even deeply horrific ones. After Delacroix's execution, Brutal realizes that people will not necessarily understand his horrific death as proof of the evils of capital punishment. Rather, he argues, they will see his suffering as the will of God. "As for your witnesses," he says cynically, "most of them will be telling their friends tomorrow night that it was poetic justice—Del there burned a bunch of people alive, so we turned around and burned *him* alive. Except they won't say it was us. They'll say it was the will of God, working *through* us." Paradoxically, a single unspeakable act of cruelty (burning someone alive) is considered moral or immoral depending on mere circumstances. What the guards see as the unwarranted suffering of an innocent man can be interpreted by others as just retribution for a horrific crime.

Neither human law nor divine justice thus proves capable of righting all wrongs or accounting for human suffering. While some people believe that behaving morally means showing everyone compassion and respect, others trust that morality involves retribution, however violent the punishment may be. In both cases, people invoke "God's will" as a justification for their views. Thus, Morality, justice, and God's will are ideas that remain open to subjective interpretation throughout *The Green Mile*, as people use these concepts to justify actions of all kind, compassionate or cruel, according to what fits with their conception of the world.

LOVE, COMPASSION, AND HEALING

In a world where violence and cruelty are rampant, *The Green Mile*'s characters are often in need of physical and spiritual healing. Two characters with supernatural powers, John Coffey and Mr. Jingles, come to the aid of others in the novel, healing their wounds at the expense of their own lives. Their self-sacrifice serves as an elevated example of the healing that takes place every day among humans. Indeed, ordinary humans, too, prove capable of overcoming pain, isolation, and cruelty through love and compassion. In the face of the novel's many horrors, losses, and grave injustices, love and compassion are shown to be sources of healing and salvation.

The mouse ("Mr. Jingles") and the prisoner John Coffey prove to be supernatural beings that provide joy and healing to the world. When a mouse appears on E block, it shows signs of extraordinary intelligence. In addition to engaging in human-like interactions with the guards, Paul notices that it seems to be looking for someone in particular. Later, when Delacroix arrives, Paul realizes that Mr. Jingles had been looking for Delacroix all along. The mouse's sole purpose, it seems, is to provide amusement to this particular prisoner—to be, as Paul defines it, Delacroix's "guardian angel," and what The Chief calls a "spiritual guide." The mouse's dedication to this man demonstrates that everyone is deserving of joy and happiness, no matter what their past crimes or social status may be. John Coffey, too, performs miracles on ordinary humans. While he seems incapable of grasping the full significance of his actions, he successfully heals Paul's urinary infection, keeps Mr. Jingles from dying after being crushed by Percy's boot, and gets rid of Melinda Moores's brain tumor. From John's very first act of

healing, Paul recognizes this man as an agent of God, saying "I'd experienced a healing, an authentic Praise Jesus, The Lord Is Mighty." While Mr. Jingles's presence remains more mysterious, Paul sees Coffey as a direct conduit for God's will.

Both Mr. Jingles and Coffey's actions come at a heavy cost. While Mr. Jingles survives being almost crushed to death, Coffey, by contrast, is not spared a brutal end on the electric chair. This, along with the visible suffering he undergoes after each act of healing, suggests that reducing humanity's suffering is an all-consuming task that can only take place at the cost of great individual suffering. John Coffey—whose initials, incidentally, are the same as those of Jesus Christ—proves to be a Biblical figure of sorts, a martyr whose entire existence is dedicated to saving other people. In their self-sacrificing dedication to the cause, these two characters (Coffey and Jingles) are exemplars of compassion and generosity.

Yet such compassion and generosity are not limited to supernatural beings. On a smaller scale, healing often takes a human form, as love, friendship, and loyalty often work as antidotes to pain and cruelty. Paul believes that healing physical wounds or illnesses can make up for transgressions. Wishing to atone for Delacroix's horrific execution, he decides to heal Melinda Moores of her brain tumor. While this act of generosity bears no direct relation to what happened to Delacroix, it serves as what Brutal calls a "balancing"—an opportunity for a good action to "balance" out a bad one. While Coffey ultimately performs the healing, the decision to help Melinda is entirely Paul's idea, suggesting that his impulse to help others is, perhaps, just as divine as Coffey's supernatural impulse to heal.

Paul also trusts that even the worst human beings are worthy of love and care. As death-row supervisor, he considers his most important task to be talking to the prisoners as a "psychiatrist" instead of a mere guard. His attitude is pragmatic as much as ideological. From a practical perspective, talking to the inmates keeps the E-block prisoners from becoming insane (and, perhaps, violent). More importantly, though, Paul's actions demonstrate that he focuses more on the prisoners' humanity than on the crimes they have committed. His humane approach to inmate supervision suggests that, with enough compassion and care, these men can be seen as full, dignified humans, not as mere criminals. Paul's attitude endows them with the kind of compassion and self-respect they might very well have lost on the way. Such powers of empathy and trust are multiplied when they involve more than one person. Inspired by his companionship with Elaine Connelly at the nursing home, Paul trusts that the positive forces of love and friendship are strong enough to counter and, perhaps, to crush the evil forces of cruelty and violence. "[T]he team of Elaine Connelly and Paul Edgecombe would probably be a match for a dozen Brad Dolans, with half a dozen Percy Wetmores thrown in for good measure." While cruelty isolates people, forcing them to retreat inside themselves, love has the power to unite people, and to bring out unsuspected strength in even the most vulnerable individuals, such as two old residents (Paul and Elaine) in a nursing home. As Paul faces his own "**Green Mile**" (awaiting death at the nursing home), his memories of love are a source of peace, healing, and salvation in the face of the myriad questions and unresolved injustices that linger around him late in his life.

RACISM

In the early-twentieth-century American South (where *The Green Mile* takes places), racism is a prevailing ideology—one that is so overwhelmingly present in the legal system that it plays an important role in condemning John Coffey to death. The novel sheds light on the racism that exists in the county's institutions as well as within individuals. Racism is often used to highlight characters' cruelty and to emphasize the explicit and implicit ways in which black lives are constantly devalued in daily life. *The Green Mile* shows that opposing racism verbally is insufficient to change the status quo. Even though anti-racist characters express their outrage at the injustice of Coffey's death, they prove incapable of taking concrete action to try to save his life—or, at least, beyond Paul's writing, to publicly clear him of blame. Ultimately, King suggests that the great injustice of Coffey's death is inextricably linked to—and symbolic of—the injustice of a racist society like America in the 1930s.

In Trapingus County's legal system, John Coffey is inherently disadvantaged because of his skin color, and racism is ultimately the deciding factor in condemning him to death. The legal process that leads to Coffey's death sentence may seem, initially, to be founded on objective facts. After Coffey is found holding the dead bodies of the two little Detterick girls, crying over what appears to be his crime, his guilt seems obvious to everyone present. As the reporter Hammersmith emphasizes, the scandalous nature of Coffey's crime is not just the result of its brutality (as double rape and murder); rather, Coffey's crime is considered particularly gruesome because of its interracial nature, as it involves a black man against two white girls. Before the trial even begins, therefore, Coffey is already at a disadvantage, as his crime is judged more severely because of the color of his skin.

King shows that white criminals, in general, benefit from greater clemency than black men, even for the same crimes. Paul notes that death-row prisoners are usually black, suggesting that black criminals tend to disproportionately receive a death sentence, and Harry also comments that the only reason The Pres saw his death sentence commuted to life was because he was white. William Wharton's execution is delayed because his lawyer invokes the fact that his client is a young, white man and, in so doing, has a chance of convincing judges to commute his death sentence to life. Coffey, by

contrast, is denied that possibility. Even once Coffey's innocence can be proven, he does not benefit from a fair re-examination. "John Coffey is a Negro, and in Trapingus County we're awful particular about giving new trials to Negroes," Deputy McGee tells Paul. Even though both men know John is innocent—and that it is in fact a white man who is responsible for the murder of the Detterick girls—the men in charge of the legal system prove unwilling to save a black man from an unjust death.

Such racism in legal institutions mirrors people's general racism in this predominantly white, Southern American society. Many characters are loath to recognize the equal dignity of black people and often treat them as savage and inferior beings. Percy notes that Mr. Jingles's way of eating a Ritz cracker is not an extraordinary feat but, rather, looks "like a nigger eating watermelon," and on another occasion William Wharton tells John that "[n]iggers ought to have they own 'lectric chair." These men's racism serves to emphasize their inherent cruelty. Yet racial slurs are not the only visible form of racism. Racist beliefs are often smooshed together with ostensibly progressive views: "I'd not bring slavery back for all the tea in China. I think we have to be humane and generous in our efforts to solve the race problem. But we have to remember that your negro will bite if he gets the chance, just like a mongrel dog will bite if he gets the chance," the reporter Hammersmith tells Paul. Paul reflects: "[H]e kept calling them your Negroes, as if they were still property . . ." Paul aims to show that Hammersmith's attitude is deeply hypocritical, and that it reflects a mentality that was prevalent in the American South at the time, a racism so entrenched and ordinary that it becomes almost difficult to notice.

In contrast to these despicable characters, the main person who stands up for John Coffey, arguing that his life is just as valuable as any other, is Paul's wife Janice. "Do you mean to kill the man who saved Melinda Moores's life, who tried to save those little girls' lives?" she asks. "Well, at least there will be one less black man in the world, won't there? You can console yourselves with that. *One less nigger.*" Janice's use of the racial slur is ironic—she is emulating the speech of a racist. She denounces what she sees as Paul and his companions' unwillingness to fight for John Coffey's freedom, arguing that, in keeping quiet about his innocence, they are implicitly accepting that John Coffey is less deserving than a white man of a right to life. Through Janice's blunt denunciation of Paul's apathy, King shows that the central injustice of the book—that is, Coffey's wrongful execution—is more a product of racism than anything else. And yet, Janice proves unable to do anything to prevent Coffey's execution. Thus, the bitterest injustices portrayed in *The Green Mile* are shown to be not personal, but racial—nor are they incidental, but rather pervasive and systemic.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GREEN MILE

"The Green Mile" is the nickname given to E block, or death row, at Cold Mountain Penitentiary—so called because of the color of the tiles in the long corridor leading up to the electric chair, where condemned inmates await executions in their cells. The Green Mile is symbolic of the inmates' inevitable walk toward death, as they all must face the electric chair. It is a space where violence and compassion co-exist, as Paul's humane efforts to talk to the inmates balance out the danger of the inmates losing their sanity or turning to violence. Over the course of the novel, different places are referred to as "Green Miles" in their own right: Melinda Moores's room (where she is dying of cancer), the Georgia Pines nursing home (where elderly people await death), and, at the end of the novel, life as a whole (as all humans live with the knowledge of death's inevitability). The Green Mile, then, serves as a representation of the fact that all humans—ordinary citizens and criminals alike—are bound to face death. Just as Cold Mountain's Green Mile is characterized by a mix of compassion and violence, ordinary life, too, is made up of moments of joy as well as pain—and, like life on the Green Mile, every person's life is bound to end in death. The various places that are referred to as Green Miles in the novel thus represent the various ways in which different individuals must confront the certainty of their own death.

MEDAL

After John Coffey miraculously cures Melinda Moores of her brain tumor, she gives her savior a medal of Saint Christopher, telling him to wear it around his neck as protection. In addition to symbolizing Melinda's gratefulness, the woman's gesture highlights the parallels between the lives of John Coffey and of the Christian martyr Saint Christopher. According to legend, Saint Christopher—whose original name was Reprobus—was a giant in size and strength who served Christ by helping travelers cross a dangerous river. One day, an unusually heavy child he is carrying across the river reveals himself to be Christ. The child tells Reprobus that he is currently bearing the weight of the world on his shoulders—as well as that of Christ his king—and that he shall be renamed Christopher, which means "Christ-bearer." Christopher is later beheaded by enemies of Christianity who try—and fail—to make him renounce his faith. Like Saint Christopher, Coffey, too, bears the weight of other people's suffering on his shoulders. He, too, is condemned to die because he cannot renounce who he truly is: a man who

serves God by saving humans' lives (and, in this particular case, by trying to save the lives of the Detterick twins). The medal of Saint Christopher thus highlights the suffering that Coffey is forced to endure as a servant of God. It emphasizes Coffey's role as a mediator between the divine and the human realms, as he helps humans survive the dangerous course (or "river") of life.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Pocket Books edition of *The Green Mile* published in 1996.

Part 1: Chapter 1 Quotes

A left turn meant life—if you called what went on in the sunbaked exercise yard life, and many did; many lived it for years, with no apparent ill effects. Thieves and arsonists and sex criminals, all talking their talk and walking their walk and making their little deals.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Arthur "The President" Flanders

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

When Paul first describes the various elements that form the Green Mile, he contrasts the death on the electric chair that awaits E-block prisoners with its alternative: the possibility of seeing their death sentence commuted to a sentence of life in prison, thereby avoiding the electric chair altogether. Paul, however, does not consider this alternative "life" to be a full, wholesome life worth living. Rather, he sees it as a monotonous and repetitive series of petty actions.

This reflects Paul's general vision of prison life as an uneventful affair that amounts to a postponement of death. When The Pres sees his death sentence commuted to life but is killed twelve years later in prison, Paul argues that dying on the electric chair at least has the advantage of avoiding an uncontrolled, overly painful death. Life in prison, he suggests, might not be such an attractive alternative to the electric chair.

This gloomy vision of life affects not only condemned prisoners, but also civilian life—and even Paul himself. In the nursing home, he feels that the life he is leading is as much a dull prelude to his inevitable death as the lives of these locked-up criminals. Life, he feels, can sometimes turn into the monotonous act of waiting for death.

Part 1: Chapter 2 Quotes

In a way, that was the worst; Old Sparky never burned what was inside them, and the drugs they inject them with today don't put it to sleep. It vacates, jumps to someone else, and leaves us to kill husks that aren't really alive anyway.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Eduard "Del" Delacroix

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After describing Delacroix's various crimes, Paul explains that Delacroix abandoned all violent, criminal instincts before he even reached the Green Mile. As a result, any punishment that he will be subjected to—in this case, death by electrocution on "Old Sparky," the electric chair—will not serve to actually repair or destroy his violent instincts, for these violent instincts have already vanished. In other words, the electric chair will only punish a man who has already left his criminal life behind—a man who, in accepting that he is going to die, has already left his entire *life* behind him.

Paul thus rejects the idea that the electric chair serves as adequate punishment for criminals. His rejection relies on the idea that such punishment does not actually make the world a better place, since it does not strike at the root of cruelty and violence but, instead, eliminates people who are no longer dangerous to society. Paul believes that cruelty merely flows from one person to the next, incapable of being stopped by any system of justice known to mankind.

Part 1: Chapter 4 Quotes

I think they would have given a good deal to unsee what was before them, and none of them would ever forget it—it was the sort of nightmare, bald and almost smoking in the sun, that lies beyond the drapes and furnishings of good and ordinary lives—church suppers, walks along country lanes, honest work, love-kisses in bed. There is a skull in every man, and I tell you there is a skull in the lives of all men. They saw it that day, those men—they saw what sometimes grins behind the smile.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Kathe and Cora Detterick, John Coffey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

Paul describes the irruption of quasi-surreal horror into the lives of ordinary citizens. The particular event he refers to is the moment when the search party in charge of finding the Detterick twins discovers the dead bodies of the little blonde girls in John Coffey's arms by the river.

Paul describes the search party's emotional reaction with the objectivity of someone who has already experienced something similar—who, in fact, is used to dealing with death, criminal behavior, cruelty, and sadism in his everyday life, as part of his job. Paul's understanding of the search party's shock serves as a reminder that murder—however much he might be used to the idea of it—is capable of turning life upside down for those it affects, upsetting all the norms and comforts that civilized human beings otherwise take for granted.

The "skull" that Paul describes is both literal and metaphorical: a dark representation of horror. As something sinister that lies beneath seemingly harmless appearances, this "skull" represents the ease with which ordinary life can be destroyed, swallowed by the seemingly unfathomable force of evil. This skull is a reminder of the death and violence that lie beneath the veneer of human civilization, within the darkest impulses of many human beings, capable of surging to the surface at any moment and destroying life as we know it.

Part 2: Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ It was over. We had once again succeeded in destroying what we could not create. Some of the folks in the audience had begun talking in those low voices again; most sat with their heads down, looking at the floor, as if stunned. Or ashamed.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Arlen "The Chief" Bitterbuck

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

After Bitterbuck's execution, Paul observes the reaction of the audience. Even though the execution has gone according to plan (unlike what later happens to Eduard Delacroix), Paul cannot feel satisfied by the knowledge of a job well done. Instead, he feels guilty over what he describes, in a Biblical tone, as the sin of destroying what he cannot create. In other words, he realizes that, in killing another man, he has taken on a role that should belong to God—but that he is incapable of performing God's full range of powers, as he cannot *create* life, but can only take it away. This realization suggests that humans should not attempt to take on a role that belongs to God alone.

The shame that both he and the audience feel is deeply rooted in moral and existential questions. Paul wonders if it is truly right to execute someone, even if such a procedure is authorized by the law. Indeed, the gap between what he and the audience should have felt (satisfaction) and what they actually feel (shame) suggests that there is a gap between human law, which condones executions, and divine law, which prohibits humans from killing each other. This suggests that human law does not truly bring forth justice and morality.

Part 2: Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ I don't want you to forget him, all right? I want you to see him there, looking up at the ceiling of his cell, weeping his silent tears, or putting his arms over his face. I want you to hear him, his sighs that trembled like sobs, his occasional watery groan.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Paul, who realizes that his desire to write about John Coffey has led him to delve deeper into his memories of his time as death-row supervisor than he would have imagined, suddenly addresses the reader. He wants the reader to remember that his goal is not merely to recount personal anecdotes, but rather to paint a picture of John Coffey's weakness—to depict, as best he can, the man's ceaseless suffering. Paul wants the image of John's tears to remain prominent in the reader's mind throughout the narrative, greater than any understanding of the crime John is

accused of committing. In this way, Paul insists on two aspects of John's character. First, he implicitly proclaims John's innocence. He makes the reader feel John's pain so that the idea that such a sensitive man could commit a crime becomes increasingly difficult to believe—and, later, is disproven by concrete facts. Second, Paul depicts John as a martyr, bound to bear the psychic weight of other people's suffering. This emphasizes John Coffey's status as a figure meant to sacrifice himself in the name of humanity because of his status as a divine healer of human wounds.

Part 3: Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ *I helped it, didn't I?*

Except *he* hadn't. God had. John Coffey's use of "I" could be chalked up to ignorance rather than pride, but I knew—believed, at least—that I had learned about healing in those churches of Praise Jesus, The Lord Is Mighty, piney-woods amen corners much beloved by my twenty-two-year-old mother and my aunts: that healing is never about the healed or the healer, but about God's will.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

This episode takes place right after John Coffey heals Paul's urinary infection. Paul reflects on what has just happened, recalling Coffey's question after the fact, which was meant to confirm that he did indeed help Paul. Paul concludes that Coffey has performed a miracle, indeed "helping" the pain and illness that Paul felt from his urinary infection. He also concludes, however, that Coffey should not be considered entirely responsible for this act. Instead, Paul describes Coffey as a vessel for God's will. Paul uses the knowledge he acquired as a child at church to remind himself that God—and not his servants—is all-powerful. This reinforces the image of Coffey as a victim. Not only is Coffey condemned for a crime he has not committed, but he is also bound to heal people with a power that is not of his own making.

Coffey's relative passivity in the process of receiving and delivering God's will explains his faulty memory and his ignorance of how the process actually works. Coffey is merely the intermediary between the divine and the human realm, bound to serve God at the cost of his own life.

Part 3: Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Everyone—black as well as white—thinks it's going to be better over the next jump of land. It's the American damn way. Even a giant like Coffey doesn't get noticed everywhere he goes . . . until, that is, he decides to kill a couple of little girls. Little *white* girls.

Related Characters: Burt Hammersmith (speaker), Paul Edgecombe, John Coffey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

The reporter Burt Hammersmith attempts to explain to Paul Edgecombe why it is possible for Coffey to have committed other crimes before the murder of the Detterick twins without ever being noticed. The reporter invokes the economic circumstances of the Great Depression to explain Coffey's past. He argues that economic precariousness forces everyone to migrate from one job opportunity to the next, in a desperate search for money and employment.

Hammersmith—whose discourse later proves racist and intolerant—here admits what any reader could have guessed: that Coffey was discriminated against because of his race. Specifically, he says that the interracial nature of Coffey's crime is what has made it stand out so prominently among other crimes. The reporter believes that, even if Coffey might have committed other crimes before, it was only when his actions affected white girls that he was punished for them.

Hammersmith's assumptions about Coffey's past criminality later turn out to be entirely unfounded, but the reporter does prove correct in identifying race as an important factor in determining Coffey's fate—ultimately weighing heavily in Coffey's condemnation to death for a crime he never committed, without the hope of being granted a fair re-tria``

Part 3: Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ This is the real circus, I thought, closing my eyes for a second. This is the real circus right here, and we're all just a bunch of trained mice. Then I put the thought out of my mind, and we started to rehearse.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Toot-Toot, Mr. Jingles (also "Steamboat Willy") , Eduard "Del" Delacroix

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

After Delacroix is sent off with Mr. Jingles to perform a circus act for a group of other prison guards, Paul and his companions rehearse the inmate's execution. When old Toot-Toot, as usual, turns the rehearsal into a farce, Paul becomes aware of the spiritual weight of what they are preparing for (the execution of a fellow human being) and the way in which the guards are not living up to the seriousness of the event. This realization is shocking and disturbing, as Paul feels that this entire execution is an unsavory joke. He becomes aware of the absurdity of the guards' actions, as they engage in a series of mechanical, rehearsed acts developed for the sake of efficiency, and not necessarily—as one would hope in the context of an execution—for their moral worth.

Paul questions the moral value of what the guards are preparing for, arguing that the purpose of this execution might be none other than to amuse an audience, just like the mouse Mr. Jingles's tricks. The moral decision to terminate a man's life, Paul implies, should belong to someone else: to God, perhaps, but certainly not to fallible human beings who are liable to see executions as a laughing matter.

Part 4: Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Smiling at me. Disliking me. Maybe even hating me. And why? I don't know. Sometimes there *is* no why. That's the scary part.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Brad Dolan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 239

Explanation and Analysis

In the nursing home, Paul is forced to confront a cruel character who reminds him of Percy Wetmore: Brad Dolan. Dolan harasses and scares Paul for reasons that remain mysterious, since Paul has not offended Dolan in any way he can recall. The perseverance Dolan shows in his pursuit of Paul lays bare the nursing home employee's need for control. Like Percy, Dolan shows a need to violently affirm his authority over weaker beings in order to feel good about himself.

Paul ultimately concludes that human cruelty does not necessarily conform to rational explanations. Instead, cruelty of the kind that Percy and Brad demonstrate has less to do with their external environment than with violent internal impulses, which no one can truly control. These characters derive pleasure from harming others, without necessarily expecting some greater benefit in return for their actions. Cruelty, for them, is not a means to an end but an end in itself.

❝ It's as if, by writing about those old times, I have unlocked some unspeakable door that connects the past to the present—Percy Wetmore to Brad Dolan, Janice Edgecombe to Elaine Connelly, Cold Mountain Penitentiary to the Georgia Pines old folks' home.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

Part of Paul Edgecombe's narrative focuses on the act of writing. From the nursing home, as Paul writes about the past, he realizes that the past does not consist of events that feel remote or unrelated to the present moment. Instead, the past is capable of reverberating all the way into the present, affecting his present state of mind and emotions, bringing him alternate pain and joy. This makes Paul feel that the past and the present have somehow magically merged.

This uniting of past and present highlights the underlying purpose of Paul's task in writing: the need to atone for his involvement in John Coffey's execution, to make his guilt disappear—in other words, to allow the truth about the past to heal his present mind. This can only be achieved if Paul engages in an honest and full reckoning with the past and commits to telling the entire truth about what happened.

The apparent repetition of people and experiences across time and space also brings forth the idea that cruelty, death, and injustice are not limited by physical boundaries and unpleasant experiences are not necessarily a punishment for evil deeds. Rather, all human beings alike, whether guilty

or innocent, are subject to suffering, and civilian life is just as likely to bring people pain as the small, self-contained world of E block.

Part 4: Chapter 3 Quotes

Meanness is like an addicting drug—no one on earth is more qualified to say that than me—and I thought that, after a certain amount of experimentation, Percy had gotten hooked on it. He liked what he had done to Delacroix's mouse. What he liked even more was Delacroix's dismayed screams.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Eduard "Del" Delacroix, Percy Wetmore

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253-254

Explanation and Analysis

After Percy steps on Delacroix's mouse to kill it, Paul understands that he had underestimated the extent of Percy's cruelty. Instead of being stifled by Paul's authority, his fellow guards' disapproval, and a series of violent episodes, Percy's cruelty has only grown over time, as he derives more and more pleasure from the harm he can cause. By this time, Percy's violence has grown in amplitude, shifting from physical harm to the pleasure of inflicting emotional pain on others such as Delacroix.

Like William Wharton and Brad Dolan, Percy never shows any sign of guilt for his evil deeds, even after he makes Delacroix suffer agonizing pain on the electric chair. His first reaction is always out of self-protection (which leads him to constantly refer to his political connections), never self-examination. It thus becomes obvious that any peaceful method to placate Percy is bound to fail. Instead, only complete destruction could possibly put an end to his cruel deeds. His violent descent into madness in the end achieves this, destroying his entire mind in the process.

Part 4: Chapter 4 Quotes

I could hear Del breathing in great dry pulls of air, lungs that would be charred bags less than four minutes from now laboring to keep up with his fear-driven heart. The fact that he had killed half a dozen people seemed at that moment the least important thing about him. I'm not trying to say anything about right and wrong here, but only to tell how it was.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Eduard "Del" Delacroix

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

When Paul closes the clamp around Delacroix's ankle, preparing the inmate for electrocution on the electric chair, he is so close to him that he can hear the condemned man's fear. The horror of this moment, when Paul knows that he is participating in the act of killing a fellow human being, surpasses any consideration about Delacroix's past crimes.

Paul's plea to recognize Delacroix's inherent humanity stems from his emotional discomfort at witnessing Del's fear. However, even though Paul claims not to be speaking about what is "right" or "wrong," he *is* implicitly making a moral judgment about the scene, suggesting that it certainly *feels* wrong to put this man to death in his current state. His moral compass is clearly guided by his personal emotions.

Paul thus separates what Delacroix *is* (a human being worthy of care and love) from what he has *done*, suggesting that the former should bear more weight than the latter in deciding if he should die. Paul's criticism of the electric chair—and, in general, of capital punishment—thus does not stem necessarily from a belief in the innocence of the condemned prisoners (as is the case with John Coffey), but from a deep respect for humanity and human beings' weakness.

Part 4: Chapter 5 Quotes

As for your witnesses, most of them will be telling their friends tomorrow night that it was poetic justice—Del there burned a bunch of people alive, so we turned around and burned *him* alive. Except they won't say it was us. They'll say it was the will of God, working *through* us. Maybe there's even some truth to that. And you want to know the best part? The absolute cat's pajamas? Most of their friends will wish they'd been here to see it.

Related Characters: Brutus "Brutal" Howell (speaker), Curtis Anderson, Eduard "Del" Delacroix

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

When Curtis Anderson meets the guards after Delacroix's terrible execution, he is furious at what has just happened. In order to deflate the assistant warden's anger, Brutal tries to argue that the execution was actually a success. He points to the fact that Delacroix is in fact dead—as any execution is supposed to achieve—and that his agony on the chair can be seen as fair retribution for his crimes. In assessing the audience's reaction, Brutal identifies that there is something sadistic about watching an execution. He cynically concludes that, instead of feeling compassion for the poor prisoner, people will be excited by Delacroix's suffering.

More generally, though, Brutal's speech highlights the fact that morality and justice are deeply subjective. In this case, the same fact (Delacroix's agony on the chair) can be seen either as an absolute abomination (by the guards) or as proof of God's will (by the audience). In other words, people who believe that God does not condone violence will be repulsed by what happened, and people who believe that God delivers violent punishment will feel comforted in their moral views.

Part 4: Chapter 9 Quotes

"[...] But none of those things are the reason I want to help save her, if she can be saved. What's happening to her is an *offense*, goddammit, an *offense*. To the eyes and the ears and the heart."

"Very noble, but I doubt like hell if that's what put this bee in your bonnet," Brutal said. "I think it's what happened to Del. You want to balance it off somehow."

Related Characters: Brutus "Brutal" Howell, Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Melinda Moores

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

After telling his companions that he wants John Coffey to perform magical healing on Melinda Moores, Paul defends himself by saying that he wants to save this woman because she is a good person and does not deserve to die. Brutal, however, realizes that Paul's motives are not entirely selfless. He rightfully notes that Paul is in fact trying to atone for the guilt he feels at having allowed Delacroix to suffer an agonizing death on the electric chair.

Paul's moral decisiveness in this situation contrasts with his attitude in prison. It is hard to reconcile the reasons why, for example, Paul might fight so strongly for Melinda Moores's life when he is willing to let innocent Coffey die on the electric chair—both events seemingly equal in the moral "offense" they represent. The main difference in this case is the degree of agency Paul feels he has in the process. While, in prison, Paul has no control over whom the justice system decides to execute, in this situation he actually has the power to save someone's life. This suggests that Paul only expresses moral outrage at the cases he feels he can repair. In other cases, where there is nothing that can be done to save an innocent person, Paul is forced to put his moral considerations aside and abide by the dictates of his job.

Part 5: Chapter 1 Quotes

Writing is a special and rather terrifying form of remembrance, I've discovered there is a totality to it that seems almost like rape. Perhaps I only feel that way because I've become a very old man (a thing that happened behind my own back, I sometimes feel), but I don't think so. I believe that the combination of pencil and memory creates a kind of practical magic, and magic is dangerous. As a man who knew John Coffey and saw what he could do—to mice and to men—I feel very qualified to say that.

Magic is dangerous.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

Before proceeding to recount the way in which he and his colleagues helped John Coffey escape from prison to heal Melinda Moores, Paul reflects on the act of writing itself. At other moments in the narrative, writing has brought back painful memories, leading Paul to realize that writing about the past can impact the present in this "dangerous" way.

At the same time, Paul's reference to John Coffey's healing powers suggests that writing has positive effects on the

person performing it. In this series of written memories, through which Paul hopes to atone for the injustice of Coffey's death, writing seems capable of healing the writer himself of his guilt. In referencing the danger of such an enterprise, Paul implies that the writing process does not take place painlessly. Rather, writing down one's memories is an all-consuming effort, requiring the writer to confront joy and pain, shame and grief, violence and compassion—all in the effort to convey the entirety of the truth.

❝ As I went on down toward the kitchen, it occurred to me that the team of Elaine Connelly and Paul Edgecombe would probably be a match for a dozen Brad Dolans, with half a dozen Percy Wetmores thrown in for good measure.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Percy Wetmore, Brad Dolan, Elaine Connelly

Related Themes:

Page Number: 320

Explanation and Analysis

After Elaine sets off the fire alarm so that Paul can go on his walk without being seen by Brad Dolan, Paul realizes that his partnership with Elaine has defeated the evil nursing home employee in a way that he could never have achieved on his own. Paul, who so often discusses the seemingly unstoppable flow of cruelty than runs from one human being to the next, thus discovers the extraordinary powers of love and friendship. Therefore, even though human cruelty is often shown to be capable of continually wreaking havoc upon humans in new and unexpected ways, love is capable of the exact opposite: uniting people together to achieve something good. Paul is so inspired by Elaine's action that he concludes that, in the end, love is strong enough to crush the forces of evil.

Part 5: Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Hammersmith who had told me that mongrel dogs and Negroes were about the same, that either might take a chomp out of you suddenly, and for no reason. Except he kept calling them your Negroes, as if they were still property . . . but not his property. No, not his. Never his. And at that time, the South was full of Hammersmiths.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey, Burt Hammersmith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 335

Explanation and Analysis

Paul convinces his colleagues of John Coffey's innocence by referring to a detail about the wrapped lunch that Coffey had in his pocket at the time of his arrest. He explains that no one during the trial ever thought of examining such a simple detail. This serious oversight is partly the result of pure chance (no one ever *thought* of focusing on that detail) but also of racial prejudice (no one ever truly questioned the fact that Coffey might be innocent).

Paul refers to Hammersmith's description of Coffey's crime to explain that most people at the time were just as racist as him. Paul argues that many white people in the South have never overcome such slavery-era beliefs about black people and that, as such, many Southerners are unable to treat black people as true equals, deserving of a fair trial in court. This racist attitude leads to gross discrimination in the justice system and, ultimately, to the legal condemnation of innocent individuals such as John Coffey.

Part 5: Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ I believe there is good in the world, all of it flowing in one way or another from a loving God. But I believe there's another force as well, one every bit as real as the God I have prayed to my whole life, and that it works consciously to bring all our decent impulses to ruin. Not Satan, I don't mean Satan (although I believe he is real, too), but a kind of demon of discord, a prankish and stupid thing that laughs with glee when an old man sets himself on fire trying to light his pipe or when a much-loved baby puts its first Christmas toy in its mouth and chokes to death on it. I've had a lot of years to think on this, all the way from Cold Mountain to Georgia Pines, and I believe that force was actively at work among us on that morning, swirling everywhere like a fog, trying to keep John Coffey away from Melinda Moores.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Melinda Moores, John Coffey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 372

Explanation and Analysis

When Paul, his colleagues, and John Coffey reach warden

Moores's house, Paul and Brutal suddenly find themselves incapable of justifying their presence to Moores. By contrast, Harry, who had been with John Coffey by the truck, courageously walks up to Moores and explains to him why they are there. Paul does not initially understand his own silence and fear, but later explains it in terms of the influence of good and bad forces.

Paul refers to good and bad forces to explain the existence of evil and injustice in the world—for example, the fact that innocent people die of trivial causes. It remains unclear, however, how exactly Paul believes these forces work and whether they are truly powerful enough to save or destroy people. Coffey, for example, is inhabited by a positive force, but is ultimately made to die even though he is innocent—which seems like an unjust destiny for someone protected by God. Paul does not necessarily address these contradictions, but asserts his belief that human beings are not entirely in control of their destinies, as justice and injustice are determined by invisible forces that are more powerful than them.

Part 6: Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ I'll be okay, they ain't *killers*, Percy would think . . . and then, maybe, he'd think of Old Sparky and it would cross his mind that yes, in a way we were killers. I'd done seventy-seven myself, more than any of the men I'd ever put the chest-strap on, more than Sergeant York himself got credit for in World War I.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Percy Wetmore

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 410

Explanation and Analysis

When Paul and his colleagues release Percy from the straightjacket in which they left while they led Coffey out of prison, Percy looks at them with a mixture of fear and reassurance. His fear is understandable because, while Paul and his colleagues are not murderers in the ordinary sense, they do earn their living by (legally) killing people on the electric chair. Indeed, in terms of pure numbers, Paul understands he himself can be seen as a killer—a reproachable murderer or, perhaps, as he mentions in the context of World War I, a public hero.

Paul is highly aware of the fact that he is not free of moral responsibility for the deaths of many criminals—one of whom he devotes this entire narrative to out of a desire to atone for his involvement in John Coffey's unfair execution. However despicable a character Percy may be, Paul treats him as though he has the capacity to reflect on himself and the muddled moral territory in which the guards find themselves, seemingly trapped in a loop of violence and death.

Part 6: Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ "My poor old guy," she repeated, and then: "Talk to him."

"Who? John?"

"Yes. Talk to him. Find out what *he* wants."

I thought about it, then nodded. She was right. She usually was.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe, Janice Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 452

Explanation and Analysis

A little while after Janice has gotten angry at Paul for accepting the fact that innocent John Coffey will be executed, she returns to her husband, apologizing for her anger, as she understands that her husband lacks the power to do anything about Coffey's condemnation. Even though neither of them can publicly defend Coffey's innocence, Janice tells her husband to talk to the inmate.

This injunction mirrors Paul's own strategy of talking to inmates to help them maintain their sanity while on the Green Mile. Here, though, Janice does not believe John is in danger. She merely suggests engaging John in dialogue because she believes John should be given the right to express himself—even if the legal system will not allow him to do this publicly. Paul's admiration for his wife's idea demonstrates the strong bond that exists between the two of them and the way in which his wife challenges him to be a better, more compassionate person, inclined to respect the thoughts and desires of all the people around him.

Part 6: Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ "I mean we're fixing to kill a gift of God," he said. "One that never did any harm to us, or to anyone else. What am I going to say if I end up standing in front of God the Father Almighty and He asks me to explain why I did it? That it was my job? My *job*?"

Related Characters: Brutus "Brutal" Howell (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 454

Explanation and Analysis

As the guards prepare for John Coffey's execution, Brutal tells Paul that he believes he will go to hell for what they are doing. He believes that killing John Coffey is unacceptable, not only because Coffey is innocent but because he is one of God's servants, meant to bring divine good to the human world.

Brutal—a highly thoughtful, sensitive guard—conceives of his work in elevated moral terms, trusting that, even though he never ordered Coffey's execution, he will be held responsible for participating in it and allowing it to happen. Whereas Paul usually sets aside his moral qualms, focusing on doing his job well so as to cause the inmates as little pain as possible, Brutal proves overcome with remorse and doubt. He knows that the legality of what he is doing does not justify its clear immorality.

Despite interrogating his own moral responsibility, Brutal nevertheless ends up feeling incapable of doing anything to assuage his feelings of guilt, just like all the other characters—Paul, Janice, and Paul's coworkers—who are forced to accept the injustice of Coffey's death.

Part 6: Chapter 8 Quotes

"He kill them with they love," John said. "They love for each other. You see how it was?"

Related Characters: John Coffey (speaker), Kathe and Cora Detterick, William Wharton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 459

Explanation and Analysis

John tells Paul that, when Wharton touched his arm as he was being led outside of prison, he was able to read Wharton's mind and discovered that Wharton was the true murderer of the Detterick twins. John tells Paul the two little girls never screamed out for help because Wharton threatened each one with killing her sister if she made any sound. In that way, each sister was afraid to speak out and get the other killed. Therefore, both stayed quiet.

This detail heightens the tragedy of the little girls' death, suggesting that part of what killed them was their own bravery and commitment to each other—that their love, in other words, was powerful enough to get them killed. This serves as a vicious counter-example to Paul's theory that love is capable of vanquishing cruelty, for here love was used *in the service of* cruelty.

The injustice of this episode—and more generally the fact that love does not always triumph over violence—explains why John finds human life so unbearable. Much of the suffering he bears derives from the seeming senselessness of human life, and the way in which good and evil alternate, punishing the guilty and the innocent alike with no clear pattern of justice.

Part 6: Chapter 10 Quotes

Old Sparky seems such a thing of perversity when I look back on those days, such a deadly bit of folly. Fragile as blown glass, we are, even under the best of conditions. To kill each other with gas and electricity, and in cold blood? The folly. The *horror*.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), John Coffey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 475

Explanation and Analysis

After recounting John Coffey's execution, Paul reflects on the execution method of the electric chair in general. He concludes that what he had accepted at the time as a normal part of his job and a normal element of the justice system now seems to him a complete aberration.

His rejection of the electric chair relies on the deceitful veneer of rationality and fairness on which executions depend. He describes it as nothing but an act of cruelty in disguise, hiding behind the excuse of human law. To human law, Paul evokes a higher ideal, describing the fragility of mankind's body and mind as a crucial reason for respecting the sacred nature of human life.

Paul's outrage at the electric chair is all the more powerful considering his experience with the execution of John Coffey, who was innocent. In light of this faulty

condemnation, Paul's criticism of the electric chair is also a criticism of human judgment, suggesting that humans (even within the legal system) should not consider themselves morally superior enough to judge whether or not other people should be allowed to live. Even though Paul focuses primarily on the method of the electric chair, his criticism can be understood as extending to capital punishment in general—an element of human law that Paul considers barbaric and immoral.

Part 6: Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ John saved me, too, and years later, standing in the pouring Alabama rain and looking for a man who wasn't there in the shadows of an underpass, standing amid the spilled luggage and the ruined dead, I learned a terrible thing: sometimes there is absolutely no difference at all between salvation and damnation.

Related Characters: Paul Edgecombe (speaker), Janice Edgecombe, John Coffey

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 497

Explanation and Analysis

When he survives the bus accident that killed all other passengers, including his own wife Janice, Paul realizes—after seeing the figure of John in the distance—that the reason he was lucky enough to live is because John had given him special powers of resistance. However, Paul does not feel grateful for this chance to extend his life. In the context of his wife's death, he realizes that the grief he is going to have to endure is just as powerful as his desire to live might have been before this event. In other words, the pain of having to live without his wife is stronger than his gratitude for still being alive.

Paul's reference to the Biblical terms of "salvation" and "damnation" carries a clear moral connotation. Paul is subtly establishing a link between emotional pain (the "damnation" he endures after his wife's death) and capital punishment ("damnation" in the form of death). Paul considers that his "salvation" (the fact that his life was saved) is just another form of suffering. He implies that he would have been happy to accept a violent death alongside his wife, if only to spare himself the pain of having to live without her.

Paul thus realizes that there justice rarely prevails in human life. Instead, all one can do is engage in the ceaseless struggle to live and handle, as best as one can, the physical and emotional obstacles that come one's way—before succumbing, like everyone else, to an inevitable death.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1: CHAPTER 1

Paul Edgecombe begins his story in 1932, during his time as death-row supervisor at Cold Mountain Penitentiary. He recounts that, through the years, in which he has presided over seventy-eight executions, he has learned to recognize patterns of emotions among inmates. While prisoners often joke about the chair, calling it "Old Sparky" or "the Big Juicy," the chair has the power to subdue their enthusiasm. As soon as it comes time for the men to sit on it, their ankles tied against the chair's structure, they become aware, with an awful sense of doom, that they are truly going to die. Paul explains that a black bag placed over the prisoners' heads keeps the audience from discovering the look of panic and fear that appears on the men's faces.

Paul's narrative begins with a fear-inducing account of the electric chair. While the narrator does not yet go into detail about the proceedings, he hints at the horror and violence that characterize this method of execution. Instead of describing the black bag in purely practical terms, he offers an emotional interpretation that evokes the existential and spiritual impact of his job: to make other human beings face the enormity of their own death. Paul does not (yet) overtly claim that the electric chair is immoral, but he does underline its distressing and potentially horrific effects.

Numbering six cells, E block—where death-row prisoners must await their fate—is occupied by women and men of all races. Paul relates the story of an inmate he remembers clearly. Beverly McCall killed her abusive and unfaithful husband—a barber—with one of his own razors, and saw her death sentence commuted to a sentence of life in prison the day before her execution.

Paul mentions that prisoners are of all races, emphasizing that criminal behavior has nothing to do with the color of one's skin. Beverly McCall is initially described as both a victim and a criminal, yet her own violence ultimately surpasses the abuse she suffered from her husband. Her release from death row might be seen as recognition of her more vulnerable status as a woman and a victim of domestic violence.

Thirty-five years later, when Paul sees McCall's obituary in the newspaper, he realizes that she has spent the last ten years of her life working as a librarian in a peaceful town. Despite her status as a free woman, Paul can tell from her gaze that she still has the eyes of a murderer. He uses this story to explain that his goal, in writing down his memories, is not to go over people's crimes or to glorify his job as prison supervisor, but rather to account for one time when he had serious doubts about his job.

Despite McCall's initial description as both a victim and a criminal, Paul insists that there is something deeply ingrained in her personality that marks her as a criminal. He implies that, even though she finished her life as a free woman, the justice system was right in condemning her. The fact that Paul doubted his job on one occasion serves as a counterpoint to this episode, as it implies that the justice system is not always good at differentiating between innocent citizens and those who are criminals at heart (such as McCall).

Paul explains that E block is called **the "Green Mile"** because of its tiles, which are the color of old limes. When walking the "mile," a turn to the left means life, for it leads to the exercise yard, and a turn to the right means death, leading to a storage shed and to the end of the Green Mile. The door of the storage shed is so low that, when crossing it, most mean have to duck. John Coffey, Paul explains, was so tall he had to sit. To the left of the shed are tools (life once again) and, to the right, the electric chair itself (death). The chair is fitted with a metal cap and, to its side, a bucket that contains a sponge soaked in brine, which is used to conduct electricity into the inmate's brain.

Paul's description of the Green Mile is objective and technical. Physical places and objects convey a sense of efficiency, as though this mode of execution—and justice in general—were a smooth-running system that cannot go wrong. This unemotional recounting emphasizes the routine nature of Paul's job—which contrasts starkly with the emotional life-and-death experiences that his prisoners are forced to face. Paul also introduces John Coffey's extraordinary features, which set the man apart from ordinary humans.

PART 1: CHAPTER 2

The fall of 1932 is a time of unforgettable events. A strong heat makes the fall feel like summer. The warden's wife, Melinda, is briefly in the hospital. Paul himself suffers from illness: a terrible urinary infection. The inmate Delacroix arrives at E block. Finally, and most importantly, John Coffey is sentenced to death for the rape and murder of the Detterick twins.

Paul's extremely brief notes about the various stories he is about to recount build a growing mystery and suspense. The final event mentioned (that is, Coffey's crime) evokes a sense of fear and danger, suggesting that the core of this narrative will revolve around issues of crime, death, and justice.

During this time, there are four or five guards on E block, many of whom are temporary guards known as "floaters." The regulars include Dean Stanton, Harry Terwillinger, Brutus Howell (nicknamed "Brutal" because of his size, despite his utter gentleness), and, finally, the cruel, idiotic Percy Wetmore.

Paul introduces the central characters in the story. His description of Brutal parallels Coffey's description as having an outwardly frightening body and a kind, innocent mind. Percy's meanness, by contrast, suggests that cruelty can exist within the very people who work to defend morality in justice.

One day, Percy and Harry walk in with John Coffey, an extremely muscular, six-foot-eight-inch tall black man whom Paul compares to a captured bear. Despite Coffey's imposing appearance, Paul notices immediately that something in the man's face makes him look harmless and lost, as though he doesn't even know who he is.

Without even knowing Coffey's story, Paul immediately notices that this prisoner is different from other prisoners—different, in fact, from most people. This highlights, in an evocative way, Coffey's vulnerability and suggests that there is something uncomfortable—perhaps, even, morally wrong—about condemning a man like this to death.

Percy walks in yelling: "Dead man walking! Dead man walking!" but Paul, annoyed, cuts him short. Paul is waiting in John's cell to talk with Coffey, as he does with all new inmates, but Harry is nervous Coffey might do something to hurt him. To assuage his colleague's fears, Paul turns to Coffey directly, asking the new inmate if he should be worried about him. Coffey's only answer is to shake his head slowly, dreamily, as though he were sleepwalking.

Paul demonstrates his commitment to treating prisoners with respect by keeping Percy from turning Coffey's arrival into a farce or an unnecessarily cruel event. Paul's trust in Coffey (which is sufficient to make him believe the inmate's answer) along with Coffey's general behavior emphasize that the new prisoner does not at all seem like an ordinary criminal.

When Coffey enters his cell, his incredible size forces him to duck. Amazed at the inmate's sheer height, Paul also discovers, after reading through Coffey's forms, that Coffey's body is covered in numerous scars. In the meantime, while Paul is preparing to welcome Coffey on E block, both Percy Wetmore and Delacroix, the only other prisoner on E block at the time, are watching the scene. Percy, who is busy hitting his baton against his hand as though he were about to use it, soon gets on Paul's nerves.

Coffey's body is marked by the potential for aggression (his impressive stature) as well as victimhood (the mysterious scars on his back). While it still remains unclear whether violence or meekness will prevail in Coffey's character, Paul clearly believes that he will not need to use force against him to subdue him, and his frustration with Percy's behavior highlights the opposing attitudes of the two men: compassion and understanding (on Paul's side) versus cruelty and force (Percy).

Despite the fact that Percy has political connections that could threaten Paul's job, Paul, whose urinary infection has put him on edge, brusquely sends Percy away to help at the infirmary. When Percy refuses, Paul, desperate for him to leave, orders Percy to go wherever he wishes, as long as he gets out of his way. Full of rage, Percy ultimately caves and leaves the block.

The threat of Percy's political connections is particularly dangerous in this period of the Great Depression, when jobs are hard to come by. Paul's dismissal of Percy despite this threat suggests that Paul puts his commitment to his job before selfish considerations about his own economic security.

Paul also tells Del—who is watching the action from his cell with his mouse Mr. Jingles on his shoulder—to go lie down, reminding him with authority that this is none of his business. Paul briefly mentions Delacroix's past crimes. Del's crimes consist of raping and murdering a young girl, of setting her body on fire to conceal his actions and, in so doing, of involuntarily setting fire to a building where six more people died, including two children.

Even though the people he works with are criminals, Paul respects their right to privacy. His intimate, one-on-one approach to interacting wtih inmates highlights his vision of prison relationships as reciprocal exchanges of respect. This does not blind him to criminals' pasts, however, and he does not hesitate to mention Delacroix's crimes, but he never uses this past as an excuse to behave inappropriately toward him or others.

Despite the awfulness of his crimes, Del seems devoid of any malicious intent. Paul explains that this is the worst aspect of Old Sparky's punishment. While the death penalty is meant to eradicate cruelty, it never actually succeeds in eliminating the human impulse to harm others. Most of the time, people's inclination to do harm disappears by the time they reach the electric chair. The human inclination to be cruel, then, is never truly punished. Instead, it merely jumps from one individual to the next, never to be extinguished by any form of punishment—not even by the electric chair itself. As a result, all the electric chair does, according to Paul, is to kill prisoners who have already accepted their deaths and who, as such, are not even fully alive.

Paul's decision to avoid focusing on inmates' past crimes is the result of his ideological belief that people should be treated with respect regardless of what they have done, as well as his practical consideration that inmates' crimes rarely influence their present behavior. Paul denounces the justice system's inefficacy in this regard. He believes that punishment never heals or repairs the wrong that has been committed. Rather, in the way the electric chair kills prisoners who often are no longer inclined to do harm, it proves cruel and unfair. Punishment, it seems, is not the answer to violence in the world.

When Harry comes to unlock John's chains, Paul realizes that Harry is no longer afraid of John. What truly scared him, Paul concludes, was the guard Percy himself, whose unpredictable behavior can lead him to behave in dangerous, potentially violent ways. Paul launches a conversation with the new prisoner. He asks John to confirm his name, John Coffey, to which John replies in the affirmative, noting that his last name is "like the drink, only not spelled the same way." He tells Paul that all he can spell is his own name. Throughout the dialogue, Paul is troubled by the man's eyes, which seem peaceful and absent, as though Coffey were not truly present in the room.

Harry's fear is highly ironic: he is more afraid of a fellow guard than of a criminal behind bars. This suggests that what makes a person dangerous has nothing to do with their criminal record. Rather, cruelty and violence are attitudes that belong to everyday life, as likely to be found in ordinary citizens as in locked-up criminals. John Coffey will repeat this explanation of his name many times throughout the story, suggesting that, in addition to being illiterate, he has a simple mind.

Paul decides that, despite Coffey's imposing size, the new inmate will not be any trouble on the block—a prediction he later judges to be both true and untrue. He gives him an introductory speech about life in the prison, laying out prisoners' rules and rights. Coffey nods uncertainly throughout Paul's speech. When Paul reaches the topic of visitors, Coffey admits that he has no one to visit him.

It becomes clear that Coffey is not a violent man but, rather, a confused spectator in a world he does not seem to understand. Along with his previously mentioned scars, his lack of social ties emphasizes his vulnerability and isolation. Once again, Coffey seems to exist outside the world of ordinary human experience.

Paul concludes his speech by asking if Coffey has any questions and the prisoner asks if the guards leave a light on during the night, for he is scared of the dark. Paul is taken aback by this question but feels strangely touched. He tells Coffey the corridor does indeed remain lit all night. Then, Paul impulsively decides to offer Coffey his hand, a gesture that surprises both him and Harry. Coffey shakes it gently and, after Paul has stepped out of the cell, Coffey sits down on his bunk. Inside his cell, he says to himself: "I couldn't help it, boss. I tried to take it back, but it was too late." Paul, who believes this confession has to do with the man's crime, feels a chill run down his back.

Coffey's question makes him seem more like a child than a grown-up capable of committing a crime. Paul's handshake, an unusual demonstration of respect toward a prisoner, suggests that something in him recognizes Coffey's inherent innocence. However, when Paul hears what seems to be Coffey's confession, it seems possible, for a moment, that Coffey could be a typical prisoner. This ambiguity creates mystery around Coffey's potential guilt or innocence.

PART 1: CHAPTER 3

As Paul and Harry walk back toward Paul's office, Harry warns Paul that he is likely to get into trouble with Percy because of the way in which he told him to leave earlier. Dean, who is sorting files in Paul's office, joins the two men's conversation about how difficult Percy is. They share their indignation and disbelief at the fact Percy had been shouting "Dead man walking!" when he brought John Coffey in. Harry warns Paul again that, because of Percy's political connections, Paul might be punished for sending Percy away.

The guards share Paul's commitment to treating prisoners with respect and not humiliating them unnecessarily, as Percy tried to do. However, the threat of Percy's political connections reappears, suggesting that Percy could easily get away with otherwise unacceptable behavior. This underlines the fact that evil behavior (such as Percy's) can easily thrive if economic or political interests are rewarded over fairness and justice.

When Paul asks what his colleagues think about John Coffey, both Harry and Dean concur that he will not bring trouble, agreeing that he is very big but seems entirely harmless. Paul asks if they know anything about John's background, and Dean tells him to look into the prison library for information.

The men's instinctive reaction to John suggests that they are able to sense, on a personal level, what the justice system might have overlooked: John's inherent lack of aggressiveness. Paul's decision to investigate Coffey's crime shows that he is perplexed by the idea that a man like Coffey could have committed a crime—and, perhaps, that he is beginning to doubt Coffey's guilt.

Paul then heads to the library, a remote room he discovers to be extremely hot and uncomfortable. There, Paul easily finds information about the rape and murder of the Detterick twins, for the topic was a prominent story in the news at the time. When reading about the crime, Paul feels uneasy at the thought of John's gigantic body in relation with the two blonde, smiling, nine-year-old girls who were murdered. He imagines John eating them like a giant in a fairytale. Soon, he discovers that the actual details of the crime are even worse, and that John was lucky not to have been lynched when people found out about what he had done.

Paul's discomfort at the thought of John's body interacting with that of the two blonde girls mirrors most of the public reaction to the crime, which usually has less to do with John's size (which is what disturbs Paul) than with the fact that John is black and the little girls were white. Paul brings this racism to light when he mentions lynching. His surprise at the fact that John was not *lynched highlights the violently racist period and place that serve as the backdrop to John's crime, where a lynching was more likely than a fair trial.*

PART 1: CHAPTER 4

Paul recounts the story of the Detterick twins' disappearance, rape, and murder. In the 1930s, a period when cotton plantations no longer exist but cotton farming is experiencing a brief revival, Klaus Detterick is the owner of a relatively prosperous cotton farm. One evening in June, his twin daughters, Cora and Kathe, decide to sleep out on the porch. In the morning, Klaus calls the family dog Browser, who fails to appear—a relatively normal occurrence. A few minutes later, Klaus's wife Marjorie begins to prepare breakfast. She wakes her son Howie so he might go wake up the twins. Howie, however, soon comes back, distressed, with the alarming news that the girls are gone.

Paul's mention of the end of cotton plantations highlights the history of slavery and racism that has shaped the American South—and still influences many characters' minds even after the abolition of slavery. Paul recounts the disappearance of the twins step by step, making the reader follow the seemingly normal occurrences of the Dettericks' day and the increasing sense of danger and doom that marks the narrative. This method builds suspense and fear.

Marjorie initially believes that the girls have merely gone off for a walk, but when she sees the scene on the porch she gives in to panic. She shrieks for her husband to come. Both parents see that the porch door has been violently unhinged, the girls' blankets thrown to one side, and that there are drops of blood on the floor. Despite his wife's pleas not to do so, Klaus and his son Howie set off, firearms in hand, in search of the girls. Marjorie, shrieking and weeping, believes that her twins were probably abducted by a group of vagrants or black men.

The drops of blood on the floor introduce the idea that the girls might be wounded—or worse: dead. Marjorie's hypotheses about who the criminal might be are racist. She puts black men on the same level as vagrants, considering that there is something inherently evil or violent in black men that separates them from white people just as vagrants are detached from the laws and mores of a fixed place.

When Klaus and Howie go around the barn, they discover the dog Bowser's dead body, his head turned around his neck—a feat that must have been performed by a man with extraordinary strength. Next to the dog, the men find sausages, which the attacker probably used to soothe the dog before killing him.

The dog's murder is later used as evidence against Coffey, for it seems clear that only a man of his strength could have killed it. However, the use of sausages to soothe the dog also suggests that the man who killed it is cunning and premeditated his crime.

Klaus and Howie are gatherers, not hunters, and are therefore not adept at following someone's trail. They nevertheless manage to find the aggressor's tracks when they discover scraps of both girls' pajamas in the field. In the meantime, as the two men are running after the aggressors, Marjorie calls the sheriff to inform him of the situation. The Trapingus County high sheriff, Homer Cribus, whom Paul describes as an incompetent alcoholic who depends on other people to get things done, calls up Bobo Marchant, who has dogs.

The search party is marked by inefficiency in its early stages, represented in the figure of the Sheriff. This detail serves as a reminder that even a lofty goal like the pursuit of justice is made up of individuals' actions, and is therefore vulnerable to incompetence and ignorance.

Meanwhile, Klaus and Howie, who have by then found various pieces of the girls' clothing soaked in blood, have slowed down their chase, under the growing feeling that, in the end, they are probably going to find a crime scene instead of two living girls. Behind them, they begin to hear the sounds of the search party that Deputy Robert McGee has put together much faster (Paul says) than the sheriff ever could have. As the group follows Bobo's dogs, Rob McGee makes Klaus and Howie unload their weapons, sensing that, if they found the attacker, they would probably shoot him instead of abiding by the normal course of the law.

Deputy Rob McGee is presented as an honest, competent man intent on doing his job well and according to the law. McGee's behavior suggests that the same act (killing a man) can be fair or unfair, moral or immoral, depending on the circumstances in which the act takes place (i.e. outside of the law or as punishment for a crime).


Two miles later, the party reaches the edge of the Trapingus river. There, they find the rest of Cora's nightgown in an extremely bloody patch of land, and the sight of so much blood makes the many of the men sick to their stomachs. At a crossroads, Bobo's dogs suddenly disagree as to where to go. Most of them want to go upstream, while two coonhounds want to head in the other direction. When Bobo gives them the scent of Cora's nightgown again, the dogs settle on going downstream.

The quantity of blood that the search party finds emphasizes the utter inhumanity of this crime, and the fact that only an exceptionally cruel person could have committed it. The dog's disagreement about which road to take appears as a trivial detail in the story of the Detterick twins' murder, but later proves crucial in signaling that the man who has been condemned for this crime might not be the actual murderer.

After ten minutes, the men hear a strange howling, more terrifying than the sound any animal would make, and everyone realizes it is a man's cry. Paul compares this inhuman cry to the screams some men make on their way to the electric chair, when they realize they are truly going to go to hell. In the heat of the moment, Bobo brings his dogs closer to him, out of fear of losing them to a violent psychopath. Frightened, the men reload their guns and Deputy McGee leads the group of stunned men onward, while still making sure that Klaus Detterick is under control.

Paul's matter-of-fact comparison of this inhuman cry to a sound he has heard condemned inmates make is eerie and suggests that his job is, in a way, comparable to the desperate situation of the Detterick twins' murder. In other words, killing someone—whether legally on the electric chair or illegally in the woods—is always a dreadful experience, marked by horror and despair.

When the group reaches the riverbank, the men all stop in their tracks, chilled by the horror of the scene before them. By the river, they see a gigantic man with a bloodstained jumper—John Coffey—carrying the naked bodies of the Detterick twins. Rocking the girls back and forth and crying at the top of his lungs, Coffey seems to be overcome with grief and remorse.

The situation in which the men find Coffey makes it seem clear, beyond any doubt, that Coffey is the murderer and that his tears are the result of his guilt. Later, though, it becomes apparent that even what appeared to be solid facts—such as Coffey's remorse—are a matter open to interpretation, as Coffey was merely expressing anguish at the girls' death.

Out of rage at seeing the dead bodies of his two little girls, Klaus Detterick throws himself at Coffey and kicks him in the temple, but Coffey is unaffected. He seems not to notice what is happening. When four men finally tear Klaus away from Coffey, Klaus slumps over and goes limp, as though giving in to some kind of electric shock.

Klaus's reaction to touching Coffey represents his emotional shock at what has just happened, but also suggests that, in touching Coffey, he might have become aware of the man's supernatural powers.

Deputy McGee steps forward to talk to Coffey, who still has tears rolling steadily down his face. McGee asks the man's name. "John Coffey. Coffey like the drink, only not spelled the same way," Coffey replies. When McGee points to Coffey's jumper pocket, which he believes might contain a weapon, Coffey explains that it is only his lunch. Despite being overcome by the smell and bloody appearance of the two girls, whose heads have been dashed together, McGee leans in to examine Coffey's pocket. He takes out, as Coffey has said, a small sandwich wrapped in paper and a pickle. The sausages that the Dettericks' dog Browser must have eaten are, of course, missing.

Coffey's repetition of the same phrase he later tells Paul suggests that he has limited mental capability, able only to focus on or remember a few details. While the absence of a weapon suggests that Coffey is not a violent man, the fact that his sandwich does not contain sausages is interpreted as incriminating evidence. Nothing in Coffey's attitude, however, proves aggressive. It thus remains a mystery how a man like him could have committed such a crime.

When McGee asks John Coffey what happened, Coffey, tears still running down his face, replies: "I couldn't help it. I tried to take it back, but it was too late." McGee then tells Coffey he is under arrest for murder and spits in his face. At the trial, Paul recounts, the jury only takes forty-five minutes to settle Coffey's fate.

The same sentences that Paul later hears John say in his cell are considered evidence of guilt, even though Coffey does not directly mention any crime.

PART 1: CHAPTER 5

Paul explains that he didn't find out such details from only one visit to the library, but that what he did learn there was enough to make him feel distressed for the rest of the day and night. At home, when his wife, Janice, asks him what is wrong, he lies to her for one of the few times in his marriage, telling her he is bothered by a problem with Percy Wetmore. Janice invites Paul to come to bed with her, implying that he would feel better if they made love, but Paul tells her that he is experiencing a lot of pain from his urinary infection. Before going to bed, Paul pees outside and feels a deep, burning stab of pain in his groin. During the night, he dreams of blonde girls with bloody hair.

Paul is beginning to feel obsessed with John Coffey and, in particular, with the details of Coffey's crime. His decision to lie to his wife can be understood as a desire to protect her from the horror of the crime against the Detterick twins—or, perhaps, as an early sign that Paul is already doubting John's guilt and that, in the absence of proof, he does not yet wish to share any information of that sort.

PART 1: CHAPTER 6

The next day, Paul receives a note from warden Moores summoning him to his office. He knows that this concerns the interaction he had with Percy the day before. However, instead of heading to the warden's office, Paul first takes the time to go over Brutus Howell's report of the previous night. In the report, Brutal mentions that Delacroix cried a bit before going to bed but that he took his pet mouse, Mr. Jingles, out of his box, and calmed down. Brutal also mentions trying to talk to Coffey, but failing to elicit any reaction from the prisoner.

Brutal is exhibiting the same compassionate behavior toward prisoners that Paul advocates by trying to talk to them and soothe them so that their days on the Mile are not too difficult. Delacroix's crying and Coffey's silence show that all prisoners have unique personalities and different ways of dealing with suffering, which the guards must learn to deal with.

Paul explains that talking to the prisoners is a vital task that regular guards must achieve, for it maintains peace on the block and keeps men on **the Green Mile** from going insane. Percy's inability to engage in such tasks is an important reason why he is such an incompetent and dangerous guard, for his lack of civil interactions makes both inmates and guards hate him.

Paul's compassionate attitude toward prisoners is both ideological and pragmatic: it is a noble goal meant to respect everyone's dignity, and also a practical way to keep inmates from causing trouble on the block. In failing to adopt this attitude of respect, Percy paradoxically proves more dangerous than the inmates themselves.

Paul makes a note about trying to talk to John Coffey. He then reads the account that the warden's chief assistant, Curtis Anderson, has written. In this note, Anderson explains that Delacroix's DOE (date of execution) will come soon, but that before then a new prisoner, William Wharton, is scheduled to arrive. Anderson calls nineteen-year-old Wharton a "problem child," wild and heartless. He underlines twice a crucial sentence: "*This man just doesn't care.*"

While Paul believes in treating all prisoners with respect, it is also important for him to remain clear-headed and detached, identifying inmates' evil and immoral behaviors so as to be prepared for the worst. The combination of Delacroix's scheduled death and Wharton's scheduled arrival serves as a reminder of the ease with which one life can replace another on E block, and the ease with which death comes and goes.

After discovering this bad news, Paul heads to warden Moores's office. Paul describes Hal Moores as the most honest of the three wardens he has known during his career at Cold Mountain Penitentiary. When he reaches the warden's office, he immediately asks about Moores's wife Melinda. Moores explains that his wife's headaches have gotten worse, that she's developed a weakness in her right hand, and that her doctor has ordered X-rays. When the two men's eyes suddenly meet, it becomes clear that both of them know, beyond the reassuring tones they are adopting, that Melinda's condition could be explained by a stroke or, perhaps, by something worse, such as brain cancer.

The fact that Paul and the warden talk about the warden's wife before getting into professional matters serves as a reminder that Moores is a full human being—potentially vulnerable, weak, and loving—in addition to being a figure of authority. The threat of illness and death hangs above Melinda's head, similar to the way in which E-block inmates face the inevitability of their own impending executions. Death proves omnipresent in both life at prison and life outside of prison.

Moores then reaches the heart of the matter, telling Paul that he received an angry call from the state capital earlier that morning, for Percy, the governor's wife's nephew, has political connections that can defend him if anything happens to him at work. Paul defends himself by explaining that Percy is mean and stupid, and that Paul doesn't know if he can stand him much longer. Hal, who has worked with Paul for five years, understands him, but reminds him that, in this historical period (the Great Depression), no one can afford to lose their jobs, and that Paul should simply put up with Percy.

Outside of the justice system, which punishes illegal actions, the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior is more difficult to trace. Even though both the guards and warden Moores agree with Paul's assessment of Percy's incompetence, the economic and political conditions of the time make it impossible to punish Percy without fear of retribution. Percy's unfair advantage in the professional world thus shows that justice does not always come for those who deserve it most.

Moores also tells Paul that Percy has apparently submitted an application to transfer to Briar Ridge hospital, which will be a quieter, better paid job. He concludes his speech by commenting that Paul could have gotten rid of Percy earlier if he had not put him in the switch-room during The Chief's execution. Paul, shocked and confused, does not understand what the warden is saying—why, for example, he should have put such an undeserving, incompetent guard in charge of an execution.

Moores's attitude toward Percy is purely pragmatic, not concerned with questions of justice or morality. Moores believes that the end justifies the means—in other words, that engaging in the morally dubious action of putting Percy in charge of an execution is justified if it helps them get rid of him. By contrast, Paul believes that the means (choosing who handles an execution) is of crucial importance. He clearly believes (or hopes) that he can get rid of Percy without causing more harm than Percy is already causing.

Despite Paul's incomprehension, Moores tells Paul that a speedy way to get rid of Percy would be to put him in charge of Delacroix's execution. Certain that Percy is going to make a mistake, Paul nevertheless finds himself forced to accept. He concludes that Percy's main attraction to this job is the thrill of making a man die on the electric chair.

Paul finally understands the full extent of Percy's character, which warden Moores had grasped before him: Percy is a purely sadistic being who only cares about seeing someone die at his own hands. Despite being on the other side of the bars, Percy's attitude is strikingly criminal in its intent.

Before Paul leaves, Moores asks him if he thinks Coffey is going to be any trouble. Paul replies that he does not think so, adding that the new inmate has been extremely quiet and that he has strange, unusual eyes. Moores asks Paul if he knows what Coffey has done and Paul replies that he does. Leaving the office, Paul tells Moores to send Melinda his love. He prepares for another day in prison, and the endless waiting of which each day consists—waiting for Delacroix to die, for Wharton to arrive, and for Percy to leave.

Moores's question about Coffey's crime signals that he is skeptical of Paul's awed attitude toward the new inmate. Moores seems to believe that what matters most—more than apparent *docility—is the crime that Coffey has committed. Paul, by contrast, seems intuitively taken with Coffey's personality and unable to see him as a mere murderer. Paul's fatigue with the repetitions of prison life is existential in its scope, revealing his deep tiredness in constantly dealing with death and evil.*

PART 1: CHAPTER 7

Paul calls Delacroix's mouse one of God's mysteries. He recounts the first time the mouse appeared on E block. From the hall, Brutal had called Dean and Paul, who were in Paul's office, with an urgent voice. As the two men come running in, thinking some disaster has happened, they see a furry green mouse walking along **the Green Mile**, looking into each cell like a guard. The three guards laugh—an unusual occurrence on the severe, gloomy E block—and Paul notices that the mouse's eyes look unusually intelligent. When the mouse stops at the guards' desk, Paul feels a cold chill run through his body, for he suddenly feels the roles have been reversed—that this mouse is a guard, and he a prisoner.

The exceptional arrival of the mouse on E block interrupts the ordinary routine of prison life. Paul immediately senses that this mouse has supernatural powers of some kind, as he feels suddenly trapped by the mouse's presence. His feeling that roles have been reversed suggests that the mouse is invisibly greater than it appears. The mouse strikes Paul as an external, unusually wise observer reminding mankind that his life is controlled by His will.

Dean wants to get rid of the mouse with a broom but Paul, wanting to save the mouse, stops him. Curious to discover what will happen, Brutal gives the mouse a piece of his corned-beef sandwich. For the next few seconds, the men watch, fascinated, as the mouse eats it like a human being—sniffing it, sitting up, and deliberately pulling the bread away to eat the meat. After turning toward the men's faces again, as though trying to remember them, the mouse finally leaves, slipping underneath the door of the restraint room (which doubles as a storage room when no violent prisoners are being punished there).

Paul instinctively feels that the mouse is not an ordinary rodent, but that it should be saved and protected. The men's surprise at realizing that the mouse has a secret intelligence prefigures the surprise they will feel at discovering John Coffey's secret. The guards prove capable of faith and trust in the existence of forms of intelligence beyond human understanding—in other words, of the presence of the divine amidst the everyday.

Brutal opens the "Visitors" book and records the mouse's appearance, calling it "Steamboat Willy," a reference to Mickey Mouse. Paul laughs, but Dean says Brutal is going to get into trouble for that, since Percy could get Brutal fired for putting jokes in the Visitors book. Though he is annoyed by Dean's comments, Paul nevertheless concludes that he is right and that, if Brutal doesn't erase the entry, he himself will do so in order to save his colleague's job.

Brutal's action is both a joke and a serious recognition that this mouse's appearance is an important event, worthy of being recorded. Faced with the threat of Percy's retaliation, the men become bound by a shared secret about the mouse's appearance—joined by their shared fascination and awe at what they have witnessed.

The next night, Brutal and Paul search for Steamboat Willy in the restraint room but are unable to find him. They see no cracks or holes big enough for the mouse to fit in and do not understand how it could possibly have gotten into the prison. Three nights later, however, the mouse appears again, this time during Harry and Percy's shift. Moved by rage and violence, Percy chases the mouse down the **Green Mile** and swears he is going to kill him. However, after emptying the restraint room again—like Brutal and Paul had done a few days earlier—he, too, fails to find the mouse.

Brutal and Paul's inability to find any trace of the mouse seems to confirm the mouse's supernatural nature. Percy's attitude toward the mouse marks him as a faithless person, incapable of recognizing the value of this supernatural being. He is moved by purely mundane motives, unable to grasp that there exists a realm beyond human understanding that is deserving of awe and respect.

PART 1: CHAPTER 8

Months later, long after these events have passed and Percy has already left the prison for Briar Ridge, Brutal calls Paul saying he has found the spot where Mr. Jingles was staying when they first saw him. In the restraint room, Brutal makes Paul climb up on a ladder and, at the intersection of two roof beams, Paul notices a quarter-sized hole he thinks the mouse must have crawled through. Brutal tells Paul not only to look at it but to smell it. When he does so, Paul recognizes the distinct smell of peppermint.

Brutal's continued search for Mr. Jingles demonstrates his persistent sense of awe for this mysterious being, and his desire to make sense of what has happened for himself. The fact that he does end up finding Mr. Jingles's abode does not diminish the mouse's divine aura, but only confirms the improbability of the mouse's entrance into the prison, through such a small hole. It heightens the mystery of why *the mouse chose to come there in the first place.*

Paul recalls how, a few moments before Delacroix's execution, he promised Delacroix to protect his mouse. He notes that, in fact, he always promised to honor the inmates' final wishes, however improbable they might be, so that they might retain their sanity as they prepare for their death. Paul makes a few eerie, mysterious comments about Delacroix's horrible death, concluding that no one should have had to endure such a violent execution.

Paul prizes showing compassion to prisoners above any sense of moral obligation not to lie. His promises to condemned prisoners are meant to protect both the inmates and himself, as they ensure that the execution will go smoothly and no one will be harmed. Paul's recollection of Delacroix's death mysteriously signals his guilt at not being able to control what happened to the prisoner.

Inside the mouse's hole, Paul also finds little colored splinters of wood, which have been colored with wax Crayola crayons. Brutal and Paul realize that the mouse saved pieces of Delacroix's colored spool in order to remember him after his death. While both guards think about this situation and Delacroix's death, Brutal confesses that he cannot work as a guard anymore, for he cannot stand the idea of killing yet another man on the electric chair. Paul admits that he, too, like Brutal, might apply to transfer. As Paul notes retrospectively, the men's decision ultimately came true. Neither of them took part in another execution after John Coffey's.

It becomes clear that Mr. Jingles is capable of the human-like qualities of love and remembrance, as his affectionate commitment to Delacroix extends beyond the inmate's death. Proof of this affection only highlights the deep injustice of Delacroix's death—and the injustice of executing people in general, for everyone is worthy of love and caring, however horrible one's past crimes may be. Both Paul and Brutal agree that they can no longer bear this moral burden by participating in executions.

PART 2: CHAPTER 1

Paul describes Georgia Pines, the nursing home where he is spending his old age. While he considers it a relatively pleasant, cruelty-free place, Paul explains that, like **the Green Mile**, the nursing home implicitly kills its residents. In addition, one of the workers, Brad Dolan, reminds Paul of Percy. Brad is stupid, enjoys being mean, and calls Paul "Paulie" despite Paul's pleas for him to stop. Paul explains that, in the nursing home, he is busy writing down his memories of the year 1932, using John Coffey's arrival as his central landmark.

Paul compares Georgia Pines to the Green Mile, suggesting that everyone is bound to suffer through the ordeal of death and that one's guilt or innocence does not impact how painful or painless one's last days will be. Ordinary life can be strikingly similar to life in prison. Cruelty proves to arise in all places, as Brad shows capable of the same cruelty as Percy was.

PART 2: CHAPTER 2

Three days after Percy chases the mouse down **the Green Mile**, the mouse reappears during the shift of Percy, Dean, and Bill Dodge. The Pres (an inmate condemned to death for pushing his father out a window but who later saw his sentence commuted to life) complains about the mouse's presence, but Percy tells him to keep quiet. Percy stares at the mouse menacingly, meanwhile steadily hitting his baton in his hand.

Percy's violent attitude proves never-ending, as he remains obsessed with the idea of killing the mouse. His perseverance in this regard does not seem to have reasonable motives, and demonstrates Percy's violent rejection of any form of compassion, toward all beings, human and animal alike.

Eager to show Bill what the mouse can do, Dean breaks off a bit of Ritz Cracker and feeds it to the rodent. Bill is impressed by the way in which the mouse eats the cracker with elegance, like a human. Percy makes a denigrating comment about how the sight reminds him "of a nigger eating watermelon," but no one pays attention to him. When Bill tries to feed the mouse himself, it refuses to take his food. Dean concludes that the mouse is able to differentiate between regulars (such as Dean) and floaters (such as Bill).

Percy proves not only unwilling or unable to recognize the mouse's extraordinary abilities, but uses a racial slur to express hostility toward the mouse, simultaneously demonstrating his evident racism, which only highlights his inability to respect others.

When Dean gives the mouse another piece of cracker, Percy, who had been taking aim, suddenly throws his baton at it. However, with incredible agility, the mouse ducks, drops the cracker, and runs away. Angry, Percy chases after him, but the mouse manages to escape once again. Percy's behavior makes Dean furious, for the guards' job on the block is to maintain a calm, peaceful atmosphere, and not to give in to violent impulses. By interrupting the tranquility, Percy visibly upset the two inmates present, The Chief and The Pres. Dean's anger also comes from the fact that he is beginning to consider the mouse as a kind of friend. Percy's inability to understand this—indeed, his inability to show compassion to any living being—is all the more infuriating.

Percy's relentless pursuit of the mouse is ridiculous, demonstrating that his embrace of violence knows no bounds. It also demonstrates his tendency to harass beings who are physically weaker and more vulnerable than him, thereby showing that his violent behavior is inseparable from his cowardice. Once again, Percy proves just as dangerous as the criminals that he is supposed to guard, as he has upset the delicate balance of life on E block.

Dean and Bill, who know that Percy cannot bear to feel humiliated, try to defuse the tension by gently laughing at him while, at the same time, flattering him by complimenting him on his shot. In a more serious tone, Dean and Bill also tell Percy that what he did was unacceptable. They explain that such moments of violence can upset inmates, who might then easily turn violent themselves. Dean repeats what Paul always says: that guards need to talk to the inmates, not make them more nervous than they already are—and yelling is a sign of lack of control. At the end of this speech, Percy storms off, furious at having been reprimanded.

Percy's ignorance and inability to behave in a mature, reasonable way proves just as dangerous as purely criminal behavior, though both are capable of wreaking havoc on E block. Percy's fury at Dean and Bill's speech foreshadows his later desire to seek revenge on the guards, which he is able to effect during Delacroix's execution. It remains unclear whether the guards' compassionate approach or Percy's senseless violence will ultimately prevail.

The following night, Dean tells Paul that what Percy doesn't understand is that he has no real power over the inmates, since the worst that can happen to them is dying on the electric chair—and that that can only happen once. In retrospect, Paul sees Dean's analysis as a kind of eerie prophecy.

Dean's comment ironically emphasizes the fact that, if Percy wants to harm the inmates, he can only do so during the moment of their execution. This serves as an eerie foreshadowing of what Percy will make Delacroix suffer on the electric chair.

PART 2: CHAPTER 3

Despite the mouse's moment of fright, it returns to E block the next evening, on Percy's night off. Paul has taken an extra hour to talk to The Chief, whom he can see is becoming increasingly scared and nervous as his date of execution approaches. Paul explains that six to eight in the evening is the best time to talk to inmates, since it is a relaxed time in between the activity of the day and the more indrawn, gloomy atmosphere of the night. When the Chief asks Paul if heaven consists of eternally reliving one's happiest moment, Paul agrees with him even though he actually believes in the reality of hell.

Paul's commitment to adopting a serious, respectful attitude with inmates has turned into a science of sorts, organized around a defined timetable. He even puts The Chief's needs before his own beliefs, unafraid to lie as he tries to reassure the prisoner, who is becoming scared of death. Paul's belief in hell suggests that he trusts in a divine justice greater than human law, capable of differentiating sinners from innocent people.

In the corridor, as Dean is telling Paul about what happened with Percy the night before, Toot-Toot, who sells snacks in the prison, comes in and sees the mouse. The Pres notes that it seems as though the mouse knows that Percy is not there. While Paul agrees internally with the inmate, he doesn't dare to express his opinion out loud.

Paul begins to realize that his opinion of the mouse extends well beyond the boundaries of ordinary life, as he believes that the mouse is moved by preternatural intelligence but remains afraid to express this belief out loud, feeling that such faith is a sign of weakness or insanity.

Harry gives the mouse a bit of cinnamon apple and everyone laughs at the sight of the mouse eating it. Once again, though, when Toot-Toot offers the mouse a bit of bologna, the mouse refuses it. When Paul gives him a piece from the same sandwich, the mouse eats it, thereby seemingly confirming that it can tell the difference between floaters and regulars. When the mouse is done eating, it returns to the restraint room, stopping by each cell on its way as though it were looking for someone.

The mouse's capacity to differentiate between floaters and regulars is never fully explained, but serves to define a group of people who are trustworthy. The fact that the mouse later includes Delacroix in this circle is striking, suggesting that Delacroix, a criminal, is just as worthy of trust as the guards—and certainly more deserving of it than Percy Wetmore.

As the days go by and the mouse keeps on appearing on days when Percy is absent, it becomes more and more difficult to call the mouse's timing a coincidence. Despite the extraordinary nature of the animal's behavior and timely appearances, the men implicitly decide not to talk about the mouse, as doing so would spoil its uniqueness and beauty.

The men are struck by awe at the mouse's behavior. Their decision not to talk about it only reinforces the unity of the group of guards, which revolves around a shared secret that none of them can quite comprehend. The mouse proves that, just like horror and crime, beauty, too, can come unbidden into humans' lives.

PART 2: CHAPTER 4

The date of Bitterbuck's execution arrives. Paul explains that while everyone calls him The Chief, he is not, in fact, a chief, but first elder of his tribe and a member of the Cherokee Council. He was convicted for drunkenly killing a man over a pair of boots by crushing his head with a cement block.

The triviality of the circumstances under which Bitterbuck killed a man highlights the ease with which death can strike in human life, as well as the fact that, despite being seemingly free of sadistic motives, Bitterbuck is subject to the same punishment as evil criminals who harm others for pleasure—which can arguably be seen as a relatively rigid application of justice.

While The Chief receives the visit of his second wife and a few of his children, Paul and the guards rehearse his execution. Paul puts Percy in the switch room with Van Hay and Percy doesn't complain, eager to witness someone's execution, even if it is from an angle behind the chair. In the execution room, Paul explains that there is a telephone from which the governor can call to cancel the execution, but that this has never happened once in his career. He believes the phone ringing is more the stuff of fiction than of reality, where innocence and salvation are infinitely more difficult to achieve.

Percy's eagerness to join the execution contrasts starkly with Paul's professional approach, in which he tries to treat the inmates with respect. Paul's lack of trust in the possibility that the phone might ring suggests that the justice system rarely pardons the people it has condemned. His vision of the inevitability of the prisoners' death mirrors his belief in hell, both views seemingly confirming that there is no salvation—from the wrath of God or from human society—for people who have committed evil deeds.

In all execution rehearsals, Toot-Toot plays the part of the condemned. While most men find Old Toot funny, Paul sees him as a weaker version of Percy Wetmore, inclined to take pleasure in violence and meanness. Brutal is in charge of placing the cap and ordering the "roll on two" when the time comes. If anything goes wrong, Brutus and Paul will be blamed, which they accept as part of their job.

Paul dismisses the idea that violence and cruelty are only found in criminals' actions. Rather, he suggests that one's general attitude—even one's words and one's jokes—can differentiate a cruel person from a compassionate one, whether they find themselves locked up behind bars or, like Toot-Toot and Percy, free men on the other side.

In Bitterbuck's room, where they are rehearsing the execution, Paul gives a short legal speech, Dean examines Toot-Toot's head in order to make sure that he is well shaved and that the electric current will easily pass, and the men walk Toot toward the chair. Toot-Toot, meanwhile, loudly states and repeats the actions he is performing, saying: "I'm steppin forward, I'm steppin forward, I'm steppin forward" or "I'm walkin down the corridor, I'm walkin down the corridor, I'm walkin down the corridor."

While the guards make sure to follow the procedure so that Bitterbuck's execution might be as painless as possible, Toot-Toot revels in the idea of a man's death. He enjoys turning the serious procedure into a farce, making jokes about what is happening in a way that implicitly humiliates the inmates, mocking their fear and their inevitable walk toward death. This lack of respect toward death is shown to be particularly cruel.

Escorted closely by Paul, Dean, and Harry, Toot enters Paul's office, where he immediately kneels down to pray. He is still loudly stating what he is doing and Dean tells him to shut up. When Harry asks if The Chief has asked for "some Cherokee medicine man," Paul explains that Bitterbuck is a Christian and has accepted the Baptist man who came for the previous execution.

Toot-Toot mocks even the moment of prayer, which is meant to connect the inmates with a greater spiritual power and bring them comfort, highlighting once again Toot's utter lack of compassion. Harry's question demonstrates his ignorance about Bitterbuck's culture and identity, revealing the prevalence of such cultural prejudices at the time.

The guards walk Toot to the chair after ducking through the little door that leads to it. Percy asks what he is supposed to do and Paul curtly replies that he should simply observe and learn. When Toot sits on the chair, Dean and Paul kneel to attach the man's ankles to the chair, crouching in a position to minimize the damage that the condemned man could make if he attacked them with his legs, which has happened a few times. After Brutal has secured Toot's wrists, he calls out: "Roll on one!" On the night of the execution, this would lead Van Hay to charge the prison generator.

The series of mechanical actions that Paul and the guards perform turn the execution into a kind of reassuring ceremony, meant to guarantee the inmate's and the guards' security. The routineness of these acts, honed over the years to achieve a high level of efficiency, contrasts heavily with the existential enormity of what these men are preparing for: ending a man's life.

Brutal gives Toot a short legal speech and asks him if he has anything to say. Toot makes vulgar jokes about what he wants to eat and to do and, however serious the idea of an execution might be, the men cannot keep from bursting out laughing. Even Paul finds the joke funny, but he cannot afford to risk seeing the men laugh during the actual execution, and he angrily tells them to stop.

The irruption of humor into such a serious scene is unsettling. From the outside, it suggests indifference—the fact that the guards have become immune to the grave importance of what they are performing. At the same time, it also demonstrates the human power to turn frightening situations into comical ones and, therefore, to cope with evil or horror as best they can.

Once the laughing fit has passed, Brutal places the mask on Toot's face and the wet sponge and steel cap on his head. He calls out: "Roll on two!" and Toot pretends to be shaken side to side, energetically crying out that he is frying like a turkey. Harry and Dean, though, have their backs to the chair and are not watching. They are looking at the mouse, which has just appeared in the doorway and seems to be watching the rehearsal.

Toot-Toot's joke about the inmate frying like turkey serves as a reminder that, in addition to being endowed with intelligence and emotion, human beings are, at their core, a body that can easily be destroyed—just like a turkey.

PART 2: CHAPTER 5

Bitterbuck's execution goes according to plan. Before the execution, The Chief's eldest daughter, a very dignified woman, helps him braid his hair. Under his daughter's calm influence, Bitterbuck leaves his cell without protest, walks up to Paul's office where he kneels to pray, and cries calmly. However, most of the witness chairs are filled and, when he sees them, Bitterbuck begins to falter. Paul has to tighten his grip on him and encourage him to continue, telling him to behave in a way that will honor his tribe. Walking toward the electric chair, Bitterbuck nods and kisses the hair his daughter has braided.

Both Paul and The Chief's daughter attempt to make Bitterbuck feel dignified and fully human, worthy of care and encouragement. Bitterbuck's tears and fear make the idea of execution seem like an unnecessary punishment for a man who seems so vulnerable and harmless. The presence of an audience brings shame and humiliation to the punishment, only adding psychic pain to the physical pain that Bitterbuck is about to endure.

The guards follow the ordinary procedure and, when Van Hay rolls on two, Bitterbuck's body brutally leaps forward in the chair under the effect of electricity. During the thirty seconds of electrocution, an unpleasant smell begins to emerge. After this, the doctor listens to The Chief's heart, hears a few random heartbeats, and Van Hay thus rolls on three to make sure that The Chief is dead. After the execution, most people in the audience hold their head down, either stunned or, as Paul suggests, ashamed.

While the execution goes well, it is far from a pleasant experience. The movements of Bitterbuck's body and the smell that emerges evokes bodily phenomena that are highly disagreeable to witness. Paul's interpretation of the audience's reaction as shame only reinforces his sense that the electric chair is an undignified and inexcusably cruel form of punishment.

Harry and Dean load Bitterbuck onto the stretcher. The horrible smell is so strong that the men have to take off the man's mask to determine its source. The men see that The Chief's braid is on fire and, refusing Brutal's fire extinguisher, Paul slaps The Chief's braid to put out the fire.

Paul's violent action is merely practical, aimed not at humiliating The Chief but at preserving his body as best he can, so as not to destroy it with the fire extinguisher. Even after Bitterbuck is dead, Paul is committed to treating the inmate with respect.

A few seconds later, Percy imitates Paul's gesture and slaps the dead man's cheek. Indignant, Brutal tells him severely not to do that, for Bitterbuck has paid his due. Percy cuts Brutal off but steps back fearfully when Brutal approaches him (which he does not to attack Percy, but to grab the gurney). After Harry and Dean cover Bitterbuck's body with a sheet, the guards lead the body toward the end of the tunnel, where it will be put in a car by the highway.

While Percy's gesture is exactly the same as Paul's, it carries an entirely different meaning: a desire to create shame and harm, not to protect the inmate's dignity. Percy's utter lack of respect for another person's death only emphasizes his callousness and his inability to see the seriousness of his job or think beyond his base, violent impulses.

PART 2: CHAPTER 6

Paul recounts that, at the age of nineteen, he wrote a passionate, four-page love letter to the woman who would become his wife. At the time, he thought he would never write anything longer, but he has now found that he can write this long story. Writing, he explains, unlocks his memory, allowing him to understand certain events with greater clarity—such as the fact that, from its very first appearance on **the Green Mile,** Mr. Jingles had been looking for Delacroix.

The distance that writing grants Paul does not spare him emotional trauma but does allow him to better understand the chronology of what has happened. In particular, it reinforces his belief in a kind of destiny, as he trusts that Mr. Jingles knew all along that Delacroix was going to come—suggesting that certain events are perhaps mysteriously scripted before they even happened.

Paul realizes that his decision to write about John Coffey has led him much farther back in his memory than he would have thought, but he nevertheless asks the reader to focus on John. He describes Coffey's sobs for the reader, explaining that they felt like an unceasing, profound sorrow, as though Coffey were crying for all the suffering in the world. Even though Paul often tried to comfort him, part of him also felt that Coffey deserved to suffer for what he did. Nevertheless, he asks the reader to keep John Coffey's ceaseless stream of tears in mind throughout this narrative.

Paul insists on a single one of John Coffey's characteristics: his ceaseless suffering. As such, Paul presents Coffey as a martyr, a person bound to suffer a cruel fate in the name of something infinitely greater than him. Paul wants this characteristic to come through more than any consideration of Coffey's crime—suggesting that Coffey may be more innocent than he seems.

PART 2: CHAPTER 7

While The Chief is executed according to plan, The Pres sees his death sentence commuted to life and is transferred to another section of the prison. He is murdered twelve years later in the prison's laundry room. Paul reflects that, ironically, The Pres's death would probably have been less painful on the electric chair. He wonders, knowing this, if the man's twelve extra years were truly worth it. Harry, who believes that The Pres was only saved from the electric chair because he was white, describes the man's murder in prison as a mere postponement of the execution that should have taken place.

The Pres's murder in prison reinforces Paul and Harry's belief in violent destiny—the idea that a condemned criminal cannot escape his violent fate, even if he manages to avoid the electric chair. It also reinforces Paul's view of prison life as a mere postponement of death, suggesting that it might be better to accept execution instead of attempting to avoid it.

After a period of calm on E block, with The Chief and The Pres gone, one day Eduard Delacroix is sent to **the Green Mile**. In E block, Paul, who is waiting on the new inmate's cell's bed for him to arrive, suddenly hears a loud bang and Percy shouting insults, calling Delacroix a "faggot." Paul jumps up and sees Percy violently drag Delacroix inside. When Percy begins to hit the prisoner with his baton, Paul tries to step in between the two men and, after a few seconds of struggle, ultimately manages to shove Delacroix into his cell, but it is only once Brutal grabs Percy by the shoulders that the beating stops. Percy looks a bit scared at Brutal's appearance, but his face reveals that he still believes his connections will protect him.

Once again, Percy brings violent trouble to E block. His insults toward Delacroix show that, in addition to being racist, he is also homophobic. Percy's failure to react to Paul's intervention suggests that he believes himself powerful enough to bypass any authority. His trust in his political connections' protection reveals that, until now, the system has worked in his favor, enabling him to get away with otherwise unacceptable behavior. In this way, King shows the power structure that underpins the society he depicts to be corrupt and immoral.

When Paul angrily asks Percy for an explanation, saying that this type of behavior is unacceptable on E block, Percy says that Delacroix tried to touch his penis and that he was punishing him for it. Paul looks at Percy in disbelief and sends him away, saying he will not write a report about what happened.

Paul does not believe Percy's explanation, sensing that the guard's violence was a mere fit of anger. Even if what Percy has said were true, Paul would never agree with this mode of punishment, which only breeds further anger and instability among inmates. His decision not to write a report does, however, demonstrate that Percy can indeed get away with unacceptable behavior, thanks to his political connections.

Paul goes to Delacroix's cell to give him his usual speech about life in prison, but the new prisoner spends the whole time crying. After this, Paul goes to talk to Brutal and Brutal expresses his anger and disbelief at what has just happened with Percy. Paul asks for an explanation, and Brutal says that Delacroix never meant to touch Percy, but that Percy was dragging him so fast out of the car that Delacroix, chained, accidentally brushed Percy's pants when he tried to keep himself from falling. Paul and Brutal conclude that Percy's outburst of violence was probably meant to demonstrate his authority and scare the new prisoner into submission.

Brutal and Paul's lucidity about Percy's lack of reasonable motives to beat Delacroix reveals their understanding of Percy as an inherently cruel being, incapable of ordinary logic, respect, and compassion—and of listening to anything but his own base impulses.

Paul and Brutal both admit that they hate Percy. After reflecting on it, Brutal tells Paul that he doesn't understand why Percy, who can use his political connections to find much better jobs, never looked for a more comfortable job than this. Paul says he doesn't know—but, in retrospect, he considers himself naïve.

Brutal's question and Paul's confession of ignorance signals that neither of them yet understands the true extent of Percy's cruelty—the fact that Percy enjoys the atmosphere of violence that he is exposed to on the Green Mile and, in particular, the opportunity to participate in an execution.

PART 2: CHAPTER 8

For a while, tranquility returns to E block, except for a few instances when Percy harasses Delacroix. Paul, who has already had many conversations with Percy about his behavior, decides, as a last resort, to tell Percy that Brutal doesn't like him and could potentially handle the matter in a more violent way. The implicit threat seems to work on Percy, who shows some fear and begins to behave.

Paul realizes that traditional dialogue does not affect Percy at all. With such a violent individual, only the threat of violence is sufficient to placate him. Paul's deviation from his usual strategy of kindness and compassion highlights the desperate situation Percy has generated on E block. Paul's decision recalls the restraining measures he usually uses only with violent inmates.

One night, the guards hear Delacroix laughing in his cell and, when Paul hears that Harry is laughing, too, he goes to Delacroix's cell to see what is happening. Delacroix tells him that he has found a mouse—the same one that the guards used to call Steamboat Willy. Delacroix, who until then has spent his time on E block completely terrified, is suddenly filled with joy. He makes the mouse run over his body, claiming that he has taught it that trick, and announces that the mouse's name—which he says the mouse has whispered in his ear—is Mr. Jingles. He asks Paul if he could find a box for the mouse.

The mouse appears at a moment when Delacroix—and the rest of E block—needs it the most. In this way, as Paul later realizes, the mouse's arrival is not just a matter of chance timeliness, but a sign of the mouse's underlying intentions—his knowledge that he would one day become Delacroix's pet, to protect the inmate and make his life in prison easier.

When Percy approaches, he surprises the guards by not behaving in an aggressive way. Percy merely asks if this is the same mouse that he chased to the restraint room, which the men confirm, and Paul notices unusual serenity in the man's face. When Paul tells him that Delacroix wants a box for the mouse, Percy says he has seen a cigar box on Toot-Toot's cart that could work. He offers to help Delacroix purchase it and fill it with cotton. When he leaves, Harry and Paul wonder what could explain Percy's sudden lack of aggressiveness.

Percy's sudden change in behavior is not just surprising—but, also, eerie and disconcerting. In light of all the cruel actions he has undertaken in the past, it is difficult to believe that Percy has experienced a real change of heart. Rather, it is likely that he is concealing his real emotions, hiding his violence and hatred behind a compassionate veil.

Paul explains that he later discovered the reasons behind Percy's behavior. Years later, at a dinner, when neither warden Moores nor Paul were working at the prison anymore, Hal told Paul that, around the same time as Mr. Jingles's reappearance, Percy had been complaining to him about Paul and life on E block in general. To calm the young man and keep him from doing anything that could make Paul lose his job, he told Percy he would be put in charge of Delacroix's execution, which succeeded in calming the young man.

Paul later understands that Percy's behavior was indeed nothing other than the tranquility that comes from knowing that he will be able to seek revenge on his enemy. Percy secretly revels in the knowledge that he will be able to kill a fellow human being and watch him die on the electric chair. At the time, warden Moores was the only one who grasped the true extent of Percy's cruelty, and the fact that the man draws pleasure from watching the harm he causes others.

PART 2: CHAPTER 9

Delacroix gives four cents for the cigar box but, when Toot-Toot proves reluctant to sell it, Paul and Dean contribute some more money. Toot-Toot only agrees to sell the box after Brutal reminds him that, in light of Delacroix's execution, this would merely be a loan, not a permanent purchase. Old Toot gives in and Delacroix receives his box, which Percy previously lines with cotton pads as promised. While Percy's attitude seems generous and disinterested, Paul notices a look of ironic amusement in Percy's eyes.

The comparison that Paul has already drawn between the characters of Toot-Toot and Percy becomes evident in this episode. Like Toot-Toot, Percy is incapable of performing a good deed in the name of kindness alone. Rather, both men expect to derive personal benefits from their acts—which is revealed through Percy's ironic smile.

A week later, Delacroix calls the guards to show them Mr. Jingles's latest trick. Paul arrives to see Mr. Jingles eating one of Delacroix's peppermint candies, munching at it like an old lady. Paul finds the sight truly amusing, although the guards make sure to tell Delacroix that he should keep Mr. Jingles from eating too much candy and dying from indigestion. From that moment, it becomes common to see Mr. Jingles eating peppermint candies, munching on them like his owner.

Mr. Jingles's presence gives Delacroix the opportunity to laugh, amuse himself, and form bonds with the guards. The mouse, in other words, gives Delacroix a reason to live. The affection that exists between the two is powerful. It demonstrates Delacroix's capacity to care for another being, highlighting the fact that he is capable of love and compassion and should not be reduced to the status of a mere criminal.

A week later, Delacroix excitedly shows Paul a trick that Mr. Jingles can do with a wooden spool, which Delacroix has bought from Toot-Toot. Delacroix throws the spool on the floor and, looking at the spool with disconcerting intelligence, the mouse runs after it like a dog. After the spool rebounds against the wall, Mr. Jingles proceeds to push it back toward Delacroix. Amazed by this feat, Paul asks Delacroix how he taught the mouse this trick. Delacroix tells Paul that the mouse whispered it in his ear.

The mouse's extraordinary intelligence is compounded by what Delacroix describes as his human-like powers of communication. While it remains unclear whether the mouse actually whispers words into Delacroix's ear, the inmate suggests that he would not have thought of this trick on his own, and that the mouse played an important part in devising it.

A few days later, Harry brings Delacroix some Crayola crayons he has found in the restraint room, so that Delacroix might decorate his spool, to make the trick more like a circus act. Delacroix is delighted to think of his mouse as a circus mouse. Paul sees him so excited that he believes the man has never been so happy in his entire life. Over the next few days, Delacroix keeps on announcing his mouse's tricks with the voice of a performer, and Paul notes that the mouse's trick with the spool—which he admits could have indeed been part of a circus—is the guards' main attraction for a while, until William Wharton's arrival.

Harry's gesture is remarkably kind and thoughtful, suggesting that the guards' goal truly is to make the inmates content during their last days on Earth—and, perhaps, too, that everyone, guards included, are enjoying Mr. Jingles's tricks. Paul's comment about Delacroix's happiness is unexpectedly sad, as it evokes what must have been deep unhappiness in the man's earlier life. This further depicts the inmate as a vulnerable person, a man who has probably suffered as much as he has harmed.

PART 2: CHAPTER 10

In the meantime, Delacroix's DOE (date of execution) is moved forward two days, and William Wharton's trial lasts longer than expected. During Wharton's trial, the man tries to claim that he suffers from fits of epilepsy and committed his crime while under such spells, but the jury determines these claims to be fake. After the trial, the judge nevertheless sends Wharton to be tested at a hospital, where the doctors find nothing wrong with him.

Once again, death proves omnipresent on E block, as it becomes impossible to ignore that Delacroix, however happy he may currently be, is bound to die soon. The lack of clinical explanation for Wharton's behavior proves that the man is truly and unusually cruel, even when he is in full control of his mind.

The day Wharton is scheduled to enter E block, Paul wakes up with terrible pain from his urinary infection, which has returned stronger after having seemingly abated. He barely reaches the woodpile outside his house when he is forced to kneel on the ground from pain, letting go of a flow of urine that gives him the worst pain he has ever felt. He tries not to scream, so as not to worry his wife, and is barely able to get back up after finishing. He goes back inside, takes an aspirin, and plans on calling in sick to go see a doctor, but suddenly remembers that this is the day Wharton is supposed to arrive.

Paul's urinary infection reminds readers that he is just as potentially weak as anyone else and that he, too, could benefit from some physical and psychological relief. The combination of this pain and the scheduled arrival of William Wharton presages a difficult day, marked by tension and difficulties. This creates suspense and a sense of narrative urgency.

Paul decides to go to the prison early and tell warden Moores to put Brutus Howell in charge of Wharton's reception. When he arrives at the prison around six o'clock, he enters the warden's office to see Moores in a desperate state, his eyes swollen, his hands pulling at his hair. Paul says he can come back later but Moores asks him to stay. He tells Paul that his wife, Melinda, has been diagnosed with a brain tumor and that she has been given, as most, a couple of months to live. Moores, an extremely reserved man, then begins to cry and sobs against Paul's stomach.

Death enters Paul's life once again—this time, not as part of ordinary prison protocol, but via the lives of his friends, the Moores family. Melinda's tumor, warden Moores's psychic pain, and Paul's physical weakness all reveal that, beneath a veneer of strength and professionalism, everyone is vulnerable to emotional and physical harm. Death and violence are just as likely to take place within the prison setting as in the outside world, affecting the guilty and the innocent alike.

A few moments later, after Hal Moores has composed himself. He apologizes, embarrassed at having shown himself so vulnerable. In the emotional chaos of the situation, Paul forgets to tell Moores about his urinary infection and heads to E block, concluding that he could probably make it through the day somehow—not realizing, however, that trouble had only just begun.

Such emotional outbursts are highly unusual in the prison setting, but they reveal the potential for greater understanding and companionship between Paul and warden Moores.

PART 2: CHAPTER 11

That afternoon, after Wharton's violent entrance into E block, Dean explains that they all thought Wharton was sedated from hospital drugs. Harry agrees, and even Percy grudgingly nods to confirm. Brutal glances at Paul and the two men agree, without words, that the guards will have to use this mistake as a learning experience.

Paul jumps to the moments immediately after Wharton's arrival, creating suspense by making the reader try to guess what catastrophe has befallen E block. The guards' mistake was unintentional, but serves as an introduction to the kind of violence that can erupt from mismanagement—a prelude to the later horrors of Delacroix's death.

Paul jumps back in time to explain what happened. Seven guards are in charge of picking Wharton up from the hospital. Harry, in charge of the operation, tries to get Wharton to put on his prison uniform, but the prisoner—his eyes vacant, his body limp—proves unable to comply, and Dean is forced to help him put on his pants. Throughout the morning, none of the guards ever thought Wharton was merely pretending, waiting for the moment he could cause trouble.

Wharton's feigned sedation is devious and cunning, demonstrating his intelligence and, more frighteningly, his devotion to the cause of surprising others in horrific ways. The guards, by contrast, innocently believe this is a day like any other—demonstrating once again the way in which cruelty and horror often irrupt into people's lives by surprise.

The men bring Wharton to the stagecoach. Inside, Wharton continues his act, judging that he wouldn't be able to cause much trouble in such a small space. During the hour-long drive, Wharton remains quiet, drooling and humming every once in a while. When they arrive at the prison, the extra guards stay in the vehicle and, as they exit the car, only Harry, Dean, and Percy are in charge of the prisoner. In a formation of three—Dean and Harry to the sides, Percy in the back—they march him toward the prison door.

Wharton clearly premeditates his evil deeds, making sure to achieve as horrific an effect as he can. His cruelty is not justified by anything the guards have done to him, but purely motivated by the pleasure of harming and scaring others.

When Dean steps forward to unlock the door, Wharton suddenly comes alive, uttering a shrieking, animal-like cry that Paul, hearing the sound from within the prison, believes to come from a dog. Wharton begins to choke Dean with the chain that hangs between his wrists. While Wharton is screaming and yelling, choking Dean, Harry tries to hit Wharton but does not think of drawing his baton or his pistol. With ferocious strength, Wharton is able to throw Harry away. Harry yells to Percy to do something, but Percy remains dumbstruck, unable to move.

Even though Wharton planned his attack rationally, the moment of the attack takes place as though he were releasing a primitive energy, something that exists deep down in human beings below the veneer of civility. Wharton does not merely mean to scare the guards, but actually intends to kill Dean with his bare hands if he can. His cruelty proves of a particularly dangerous kind, combining strength, intelligence, and animal ferocity.

Drawn by the commotion, Paul runs out of Wharton's cell, where he was waiting for him, and recognizes in Wharton's face the look of a mean, stupid animal, intent on doing as much harm as he can. Meanwhile, Dean, his face red, is choking to death. Just as Paul draws his gun, Wharton spins Dean toward it, so that Paul will not be able to shoot at Wharton without hurting Dean as well. With his eyes, Wharton dares Paul to shoot.

Paul is not struck by Wharton's intelligence but, instead, by his animal-like instincts. Once again, Wharton proves fatally cunning in his desire to harm as many people as he can, wanting Paul to kill his own colleague.

PART 3: CHAPTER 1

Paul explains that he is writing this story from his nursing home where, despite the place's comfortable atmosphere, he feels almost like an inmate. He says that his fellow residents consider him aloof, for he rarely joins them in the TV room, but Paul justifies himself by saying he cannot stand television. His special friend—whom, if he were younger, Paul would call his girlfriend—is a refined, intelligent woman called Elaine Connelly who agrees with him about television. Paul spends a lot of time with Elaine. Otherwise, over the past month, his main activity has been writing down his memories in the solarium.

Paul compares Georgia Pines to Cold Mountain Penitentiary, arguing that he does not feel that he is living a free life but, rather, is meant to stay on the premises and abide by the institution's rules. Paul's special relationship with Elaine nevertheless brings to light the human capacity to cope with new circumstances and establish bonds of affection, however difficult one's circumstances—whether in prison or in a nursing home.


One morning, Elaine joins Paul in the TV room at 4 A.M., unable to sleep because of her arthritis. She sees Paul shaking all over on the couch. When Paul regains composure, Elaine says it looks as though Paul has seen a ghost, and Paul feels as though he has. He explains that he was unable to sleep and that, to change his mind from his memories of William Wharton, he came down to watch TV. A gangster movie came on and, when he saw the actor throw an old woman down the stairs, calling her a "squealer," Paul felt that he has seen Wharton in the flesh.

Paul is tortured by his memories of the past. He realizes that his past is not comfortably remote but, rather, that the wounds of the past are capable of reappearing unbidden, bringing with them emotions of pain and fear. Paul proves deeply affected by Wharton's cruelty—a cruelty he cannot wrap his head around, as it is motivated purely by the desire to harm and humiliate others and is therefore deeply at odds with Paul's ideals of respect and compassion.

Elaine reflects for a moment and Paul is convinced that she is going to tell him to stop writing but, instead, she tells him to keep on writing as though none of this has happened. Elaine takes his hands in hers, kisses him on the forehead, and tells him that he shouldn't let a few ghosts discourage him. Both of them decide to return to bed, but Paul is unable to sleep. He keeps on seeing the face of the actor who made him think so strongly of William Wharton. Instead of trying to sleep, he goes to the solarium to write.

Elaine's encouragement reflects her trust in the goodness of the project that Paul has undertaken and her belief that the presence of obstacles and discouraging moments should not obscure the final goal. Elaine's words of motivation mirror Paul's wife Janice's constant encouragement for Paul to behave as morally and compassionately as he possibly can.

PART 3: CHAPTER 2

Paul goes back to recounting the circumstances surrounding Wharton's entrance on E block. While Wharton is daring Paul with his eyes to shoot, Brutal suddenly enters—by some miracle—and hits Wharton on the head with his baton. Dean crawls away and Paul tries to lock Wharton, now unconscious, in his cell. He calls for Percy to help but it is only after Paul yells at him again that Percy stands up to help him drag the body toward his cell.

Brutal's intervention contrasts strikingly with Percy's apathy, proving that the two characters are not only opposite in terms of compassion for others, but also in terms of pure courage. Percy's incompetence reaches previously unseen levels, demonstrating that his physical strength only comes through when he is busy harassing weaker individuals—not when it is actually needed for the good of the community.

Three hours later, Wharton wakes up and stands silently at his cell's bars, scaring Paul, who is writing a report about what happened. While Paul tries not to show his surprise, Wharton threatens to do to him what he did to Dean. Paul calmly replies, remarking that, given the circumstances, he will spare Wharton his usual welcome speech. Wharton is surprised at Paul's calmness. Paul explains to the reader that the only reason he was so calm was because of something that happened during the three hours in which Wharton was unconscious.

Wharton's dedication to scaring other people shows no bounds, as he seems to have learned nothing from his violent confrontation with the guards. Paul's strategy of remaining calm instead of turning violent bears its fruits, as Wharton is taken aback by Paul's reaction and is cut short in his aggressive speech. This proves that Paul's respectful attitude toward inmates is indeed practical as much as ideological, capable of diffusing tense situations.

PART 3: CHAPTER 3

In the immediate aftermath of Wharton's attack, Percy remains silent except to yell at Delacroix, who desperately wants to know what happened. Paul realizes that Percy deeply hates Delacroix, for no reason that Paul can identify. Paul sends Percy off to give warden Moores a brief report of what happened.

Once again, Paul realizes that Percy's hatred and cruelty have no real motive, but are motivated by a mere desire to demonstrate his authority over weaker, more vulnerable beings.

As soon as Percy leaves, Paul heads to the bathroom and stifles a scream as he pees, urinating pus. When he is done, Paul suddenly realizes that John Coffey has made no noise during the entire commotion. He looks into Coffey's cell to make sure he hasn't committed suicide and Coffey, who is calmly sitting on his bunk, tells Paul he needs to talk to him. Paul initially tells him to wait but when Coffey's voice becomes more urgent, he decides to listen to him.

Instead of finding a sick, scared, or dead inmate, Paul finds a particularly calm John Coffey. Coffey displays an eerie sense of control in this difficult, tense situation, surprising for a man like him, who is so easily scared. This serves as a foreshadowing of the extraordinary powers that Coffey is able to summon in times of need.

For once, Paul notices, Coffey looks fully present, his eyes awake and without tears. Coffey tells Paul that he cannot talk through the bars, but that Paul must come into his cell. Paul initially refuses but when he sees that Coffey is truly upset, he decides to give in, knowing that it is an unreasonable, dangerous decision, since Coffey could easily kill or hurt him.

It remains unclear whether Paul's decision to enter Coffey's cell is the mere result of fatigue or, perhaps, the early effects of Coffey's magic powers on him.

From his cell, Delacroix warns Paul not to go in, but Paul tells him to keep quiet. Coffey tells Paul to sit down beside him on his bunk. When Paul sits next to Coffey and asks him what he wants, Coffey says all he wants to do is help. Suddenly, Coffey sighs and puts his hand on Paul's groin. Paul cries out, but soon feels an electric-like, painless current go through his body and does not move. When it ends, his urinary infection is gone.

The violence that Paul had expected in Coffey's cell turns into the exact opposite: a mysterious episode of healing. The seeming ordinariness of the action that Coffey performs—placing his hand on Paul's body—contrasts with the action's unexpected effects. This goes to show that healing, just like violence, can occur at the most unexpected times, disrupting ordinary life by surprise.

While Delacroix is yelling that he wants to know what is going on in Coffey's cell, Paul notices that Coffey looks unwell. Out of nowhere, Coffey's mouth opens as though he is going to vomit, and a cloud of black insects leaves his mouth, turns white, and vanishes. Paul feels his mid-section muscles grow weak. He reclines against Coffey's bunk and is brought back to reality by Delacroix's cries, who believes that Coffey is killing him.

The series of strange events that take place emphasize the supernatural quality of this scene, making Coffey appear like a mysterious healer from a different world. Paul's weakness and subsequent awakening make this entire episode seem like a dream. Delacroix's cries serve as a reminder that, in prison and in ordinary life, death and murder are sadly more common than healing.


Paul stands up, notices that all his pain is gone, and asks Coffey what he has done to him. Coffey replies that he has helped, and Paul cannot help but confirm. Coffey shows no interest in trying to understand precisely how he helped. He merely shakes his head, lays down on his bunk, and Paul notices the large scars on the man's back.

Coffey's ignorance and passivity are difficult to understand, given the extraordinary feat he has just accomplished. This attitude aligns with Paul's later belief that Coffey is a mere conduit for God's will, not the true instigator of his acts of healing.

When Paul exits Coffey's cell, Delacroix, who finds Paul completely different, becomes convinced that Coffey has worked a magic charm on him. He tells Paul that Mr. Jingles has whispered to him that John is a gris-gris man. Feeling that he is floating, Paul goes to sit down at the desk. He jokingly thinks of writing a report about the miracle that has just happened to him, but finds that he almost wants to cry. Instead, he begins to write the report about Wharton.

Once again, it is difficult to determine whether Mr. Jingles has truly whispered in Delacroix's ear or if the inmate is merely drawing conclusions from what he can see. Nevertheless, the truth of what Delacroix says—that Coffey is capable of magic—establishes a parallel between Mr. Jingles and Coffey, as though the two characters share a secret knowledge and similar powers.

When he goes to the bathroom after a few minutes, his pain entirely gone, Paul knows that he has experienced a true miracle. He believes that Coffey is not the one who actually helped him, but that God did, as God has put healing power inside Coffey's body. Paul decides to tell no one about what has just happened. At the same time, he begins to feel extremely curious about John Coffey.

Paul is so powerfully affected by what Coffey has done to him that he immediately understands that only God—not a mere human being such as Coffey—could achieve such a feat. He instinctively understands that Coffey is bent on doing good, not evil.

PART 3: CHAPTER 4

The next day, Paul heads to Tefton, in Trapingus County, to look for Burt Hammersmith, the reporter who covered Coffey's trial. He heads to the newspaper where the man works but is told Hammersmith is at home. After being welcomed in by Hammersmith's wife, he meets the reporter in his backyard, where two of his children are playing on a swing at a distance. Paul can tell from the way Mr. and Mrs. Hammersmith look that they have experienced some traumatic event together.

Paul's curiosity about Coffey leads him to investigate more about the prisoner's crime—suggesting that he has doubts about Coffey's guilt. Burt Hammersmith later explains the traumatic event he has experienced to Paul, using it as an example of how violence can irrupt into ordinary lives out of nowhere, following no apparent logic.


When Paul tells Hammersmith he has come to talk about Coffey, who spends most of his time calmly crying in prison, Hammersmith remarks that this is to be expected considering what he did. After making sure that Paul isn't merely interested in the gory details of the crime, Hammersmith recounts the details of the Coffey investigation.

Like warden Moores earlier, Hammersmith contrasts Paul's sympathetic description of Coffey with the crime of which Coffey has been convicted. Paul, however, proves incapable of seeing Coffey's tears as mere remorse.


When Hammersmith finishes his story, he tries to figure out what exactly motivates Paul's curiosity. Paul decides not to tell him about John's healing, but merely asks if Hammersmith believes Coffey has committed other crimes before. While Hammersmith says it is probable he has, he also admits that it was extremely difficult for him to find any past trace of Coffey, despite the specific nature of the man's characteristics. He supposes that what happened is that one day, out of the blue, Coffey decided to commit his crime. He mentions that the only reason the crime was noticed is because it was committed against white girls.

The lack of evidence for John's past crimes does not keep Hammersmith from holding prejudices against the prisoner—even though his hypotheses ultimately turn out to be wrong. He is correct, though, in identifying racism as a crucial factor in the case of the murder of the Detterick twins. Racism not only plays an important role in bringing the murder to the front cover of newspapers, but also, later, in keeping Coffey from benefiting from a second trial.



Hammersmith asks if Paul has seen Coffey's scars, a detail which was used during the trial in Coffey's defense. The jury, however, did not believe that mistreatment would in any way justify such a crime—a position Paul agrees with. As the conversation evolves, Hammersmith begins to understand that Paul is not actually trying to figure out if Coffey has committed other crimes in the past but, rather, that he is seeking to know if the seemingly tranquil Coffey has truly committed this one.

Coffey's scars might not excuse *any crime he could have committed, but they do hint at past physical and psychological trauma and, as such, could at least help* explain *why Coffey could have committed a crime, perpetuating cycles of abuse. While the nature of these scars remains mysterious, it is possible that King meant for the reader to associate them with the specter of slavery—a history of abuse materialized onto the man's back, as though Coffey were metaphorically bearing the weight of this historical suffering.*


To address Paul's doubts about Coffey's guilt, Hammersmith tells him the story of his own dog. He compares black people to mongrel dogs and says that, despite the utter uselessness of dogs, people are used to having them around, and have grown to believe these animals are capable of love. One day, however, after his dog was involved in an accident, the reporter was forced to shoot him dead.

Hammersmith's speech is cynical and cruel, comparing black people to savage animals that, unlike ordinary humans, have no control over their violent instincts. Hammersmith uses this story as a justification for his harsh attitude toward race and punishment, in which he establishes a link between black people and animals that must be shot dead.

As Hammersmith is telling his story, his children begin to walk toward the house. Hammersmith calls to his four-year-old son, who shies away in embarrassment. However, when his dad forces him to raise his head, Paul sees that the boy's face is completely deformed. A huge scar runs through his face, through one dead eye, all the way to his mouth. While Hammersmith comments that the boy is lucky to still have one eye, Paul imagines all the pain and humiliation that the child will have to endure throughout his life.

However innocent the reporter's son might be, he—like Coffey himself—will be bound to bear the physical and psychological wounds of past abuse throughout the rest of his life. This episode shows that violence and catastrophe follow no rules, affecting everyone alike—bad and good people, children and adults.

Hammersmith explains that even though the dog knew the children since their birth and had never shown any sign of aggression toward them, one day, for no discernible reason, the dog gave in to a fit of rage and attacked his son. Hammersmith returns to the topic of Coffey's crime. He notes that he is against slavery but that Coffey is not innocent and that Coffey, like any mongrel dog, gave in to his animal instincts when he raped and killed the little Detterick girls. It is only after his crime that he began to feel sorry for what he had done. On his way back to the prison, Paul feels gloomy, carrying the image of Hammersmith's disfigured son in his mind.

Once again, following Hammersmith's narrative, it appears that danger and cruelty usually appear out of nowhere, striking ordinary lives when one expects it the least. Hammersmith's speech barely disguises his racism under the veneer of an anti-slavery discourse. He considers Coffey no better than a savage animal obeying lowly instincts and incapable of human rationality.

PART 3: CHAPTER 5

The next day, Wharton pees on Harry's pants from inside his cell and is sent to the restraint room as punishment. When Brutal walks in, making Wharton think he is going to attack him, he suddenly moves to the side. The other guards, who had been hiding behind Brutal, attack Wharton with a powerful firehose. Surprised, Wharton tries to avoid the water, but Brutal hits him in the forehead with his baton and Wharton is left unconscious by the powerful water flow. The men are then able to fit his semi-conscious body into the straitjacket.

While Paul always adopts a respectful approach to his prisoners, he also holds them accountable for their actions. The violent reaction Wharton had expected from Brutal fails to materialize, making Wharton realize that his guards are not as gratuitously violent as him. At the same time, the guards' preparation for Wharton's resistance takes the inmate by surprise, demonstrating that cunning can be found in good and bad people alike—and that cruelty does not always win.

As the men push Wharton toward the restraint room, Paul gives him a brief speech, saying that the guards will treat him well if he treats them well. Otherwise, they will give him the same difficult treatment he is giving them. As Wharton approaches the restraint room, he pleads desperately that he will be good and begins to suffer from a shaking fit. The men nevertheless throw him into the restraint room, giving him twenty-four hours to calm down. While the other guards think Wharton might actually be suffering from a real physical problem, Brutal reassures them, saying he will be fine. When the door opens after twenty-four hours, Brutal is proven right, as Wharton then seems calm and subdued.

Just as the guards had initially underestimated Wharton's cruelty, Wharton proves guilty of having underestimated the guards' rigid principles regarding inmate misbehavior. Paul reminds the inmate that he adopts a pragmatic and respectful attitude toward inmates, treating them as adults fully responsible for their actions. Wharton's attempts to manipulate the guards demonstrate his inability to accept that it is fair for him to be punished for the evil deeds he performs.

Nevertheless, the next day, Wharton buys a Moon Pie from Toot-Toot and, at night, when Brutal walks **the Mile** to check on the prisoners, Wharton spits a long stream of liquid Moon Pie into his face. Wharton laughs heartily on his bunk but is once again sent to the restraint room, this time for two days.

Wharton's desire to harm others proves irrepressible, as even the threat of solitary confinement in the restraint room is unable to make him change his behavior.

Every time such episodes happen, Wharton promises to be good but later ends up playing some new, evil trick on the guards. Paul, who is used to prisoners playing such tricks, is amazed at Wharton's incredible persistence. He worries for the man's potential to create real trouble during a guard's moment of carelessness, and hopes Wharton will not stay long on **the Mile**. However, in the meantime, Wharton's lawyer is busy convincing people that the young man should be kept from capital punishment. Paul believes the lawyer's potential for success lies in the fact that the prisoner is both young and white.

Given Wharton's stubbornly harmful attitude, it remains doubtful whether he actually ever feels remorse for what he has done. The fact that Wharton's lawyer could potentially succeed in making his client escape capital punishment seems unjust in light of Wharton's remorseless attitude. It confirms the fact that the legal system is heavily influenced by discrimination between whites and blacks, unjustly advantaging white criminals.

PART 3: CHAPTER 6

That week, Melinda Moores returns from the hospital and Paul and Janice go to visit her. When they see their friend, the two of them are shocked to note how terribly illness has affected her. Melinda looks fragile and empty, and Paul feels that the room she is sitting in is merely another version of **the Green Mile**. While Janice chats with Melinda, Paul suddenly remembers the way in which John Coffey healed him.

Paul realizes that the threat of death and pain exists outside of the prison setting, capable of striking innocent people at any time. However, Paul's memory of John Coffey gives him a bit of hope—reminding him that goodness and healing, too, can take on unexpected forms.

Hal walks in and takes Paul aside, telling him how hard it is to see his wife like this. When Paul and his wife drive home, both of them agree that Melinda's situation is terrible, and Paul thinks of John Coffey again. At home, Paul and Janice make love. When Paul drives back to the prison, he remembers it is time to prepare for Delacroix's execution and feels a deep sense of dread at the idea that Percy will be in charge of it.

Paul's recurrent thoughts about John Coffey suggest that he is nursing an idea that connects Melinda Moores's illness to John Coffey's healing powers.

PART 3: CHAPTER 7

To make Delacroix leave his cell for the guards to rehearse his execution, Brutal takes Delacroix and Mr. Jingles to perform their tricks in front of a group of prison staff. Delighted at the idea of showing off his mouse's feats, Delacroix believes himself to be in charge of a circus. After he leaves, excited at the prospect of the show, Paul gets the guards ready for rehearsal. When Toot-Toot, as usual, begins to narrate everything he is doing, saying "I'm sittin down, I'm sittin down, I'm sittin down," Paul feels for a second that what they do in this prison is, more than Mr. Jingles's tricks, a real circus.

Delacroix's excitement at being in charge of a circus contrasts ironically with the true reason he is made to do this: to distract from the fact that the guards are preparing for his execution. Paul's feeling that he himself is involved in a circus act signals his frustration with having to kill yet another prisoner—a sobering act that Toot-Toot does not take seriously. Paul's discomfort suggests that he has deep reservations about the very action he is getting ready to perform.

PART 3: CHAPTER 8

After the rehearsals of Delacroix's execution go well, Paul is impressed with Percy's behavior and realizes that the reason the young man is behaving so well might be because he is finally doing something he enjoys. Impressed by Percy's good behavior, the guards give Percy a few pieces of advice about the execution and Paul feels that Percy is truly listening—which he later discovers was not the case at all.

Percy's good behavior is ironic, since Percy only pays attention when he is allowed to perform a cruel act on another human—this time, one that is allowed by the law itself. Moved by good will, the guards commit the same error they made when first seeing Wharton: believing that this cruel individual has somehow been subdued.

When Delacroix returns from his show, Percy jokingly lurches forward to scare him. In his fright, Delacroix steps back, trips, and hits his head. Surprisingly, Percy tries to follow Del to apologize—an extraordinary change in attitude that Paul attributes to the young guard's excitement and pride at being in charge of an execution—but along the way Percy inadvertently steps too close to Wharton's cell. Seizing his opportunity, Wharton jumps off his bunk and grabs Percy by the throat, dragging against his cell door and whispering threats of rape in his ear, before kissing it. The guards approach to defend Percy, but Wharton immediately releases him, saying that he didn't hurt him and was merely fooling around. Percy runs away to the other side of **the Green Mile** with a look of pure terror on his face, panting so hard that it sounds as though he is crying.

Percy is saving his cruel energies for the moment of Delacroix's death, in which he will be allowed to watch a man suffer and die before his eyes. In the meantime, Percy does not see any benefit in harassing the prisoner as he previously has, which explains his uncharacteristic desire to apologize. Wharton's seizing of the situation to do harm is ironic given Percy's tendency to do exactly the same. However, this confrontation between the two sadistic characters highlights the fact that Percy's cruelty stems primarily from cowardice and is protected by his political connections, whereas Wharton's is more entrenched, as he is inclined to harm even people who are capable of punishing him.

Suddenly, the sound of laughter interrupts the corridor's silence. Paul initially believes it is coming from Wharton but soon realizes that Delacroix is laughing and pointing at Percy, saying he has wet his pants. Paul looks down, notices it is true, and tries to talk to Percy to soothe him. Percy, who until then has stood against the wall, mortified, suddenly gets his wits about him and realizes that he has indeed wet his pants. He threatens the guards to get them fired if they tell anyone what has happened. Dean reassures him and Percy, furious and shameful, begins to threaten Delacroix, but then he decides to go look for dry pants instead.

Delacroix's outburst of laughter at Percy's fear serves as a reminder that he, too, despite his seeming meekness, has cruel instincts that can come to light under the right circumstances. The guards attempt to reassure Percy but Percy's violent reaction toward Delacroix shows that he will not forget this humiliation and will seek revenge on the inmate. Once again, Percy's violent behavior is directed against someone weaker than him—instead of his true aggressor, Wharton.

PART 3: CHAPTER 9

The night before Delacroix's execution, the weather turns unbearably hot and humid. When Paul arrives at the prison, he chats with Bill Dodge about the inmates and Bill says Delacroix seems unable to fully grasp that his execution is tomorrow, while Wharton has been making jokes. He also remarks that the weather is ominous, making him feel that something bad is going to happen. Paul says that something bad did indeed happen, for Percy killed Mr. Jingles at ten that night.

The mysterious change in weather before Delacroix's execution brings a sense of doom and angst, creating suspense in the narrative. Delacroix's inability to realize that he is going to die the next day shows that he cannot give up on life so easily, however fraught with violence and crime his life may have been.

PART 3: CHAPTER 10

Delacroix, who *does* in fact know what is about to happen to him, has ordered his favorite chili as his last meal. Mostly, though, Delacroix is concerned with what is going to happen to Mr. Jingles. While constantly throwing the spool against the wall—a trick that the mouse never seems to tire of but which soon gets on Paul's nerves—Delacroix shares his thoughts with Paul. Paul suggests that they could give the mouse to Delacroix's maiden aunt or to one of the guards. However, Delacroix rejects all of Paul's suggestions, and Brutal enters the conversation, suggesting that Mr. Jingles could go to Mouseville, a famous tourist attraction in Florida. Paul plays along with Brutal's idea and Delacroix becomes very excited about the idea of Mr. Jingles joining a fancy circus.

While Delacroix does not necessarily express his emotions in a way that would clearly communicate his existential anguish and fear, his decisions demonstrate that he is in full control of his senses and knows that death awaits him soon. Delacroix's concern for his mouse shows his capacity to love beings beyond himself—shows, in other words, that he, too, despite being a criminal, is capable of love and friendship. Brutal's invention of Mouseville mirrors Paul's commitment to reassuring inmates in moments of difficulty to help them avoid unnecessary psychic angst as best they can.

While Paul is wrapped up in Brutal's fantasy, Percy slowly approaches Delacroix's cell. Suddenly, when Delacroix throws the spool a bit too hard against the wall and the object slips through the cell door with the mouse following it, Percy violently steps on Mr. Jingles with his boot. Mr. Jingles is crushed, Delacroix screams out in horror and grief, and Paul notices that the mouse's eyes express eerily human-like agony. Percy smiles, comments that he always knew he would get the opportunity to kill the mouse, and turns away.

Despite this warm moment of connection between Delacroix and the guards, Percy refuses to respect the inmate's last day and obeys only his base instincts of revenge. Percy's pleasure at seeing what he has done reveals his utter callousness, his inability to feel any emotion for others. The contrast between his behavior and that of Delacroix, who cares so much about his mouse, suggests that ordinary civilians are not necessarily morally superior to condemned criminals.

PART 4: CHAPTER 1

While Paul has been living at Georgia Pines for two years now, he feels that his sense of time is dissolving in the monotonous routine of his days. He calls the nursing home dangerous, noting that he has seen many people become senile since his arrival, losing their memory—sometimes to terrifying extents. He believes that he must fight against such a possibility, and that his writing helps him sharpen his memory.

Paul, too—like all the prisoners he has supervised during his career on the Green Mile—has become aware of the looming presence of death. His writing exercise thus serves a double purpose: to tell the truth about John Coffey and to keep himself alive and well.

For exercise, Paul goes out for walks. He usually grabs toast from the kitchen and sets off toward a path in the woods, where he stops to spend twenty minutes inside the second shed he passes. One rainy day, as Paul is walking back from the woods, remembering how Percy crushed Mr. Jingles with his boot, Brad Dolan surprises him by grabbing his wrist. Paul steps back, terrified by the similarity between Brad and Percy, whom he has just been thinking about. He feels that Brad dislikes him in the same, unfathomable way that Percy hated Delacroix.

Paul's mysterious walks are left unexplained, creating the sense that he is hiding a secret. The parallel that Paul draws between Percy Wetmore and Brad Dolan suggests that cruelty often extends beyond the prison setting, marring ordinary life with its gratuitous harm. Once again, Paul is struck by the fact that cruelty seems to migrate meaninglessly from one human being to the next, without relying on reasonable motives for its perpetuation.

Brad tells Paul he should not be wearing the poncho he has on, as it is meant for employees, not residents. A bit scared, Paul apologizes for breaking the rules. When he tries to walk away from Brad, thinking that he has unlocked some door between the past and the present—connecting Brad to Percy, Elaine to Janice, Georgia Pines to Cold Mountain—Brad grabs him by the wrist again, squeezing it hard so that it hurts.

Brad's mention of the poncho can easily be recognized as a mere excuse to harass Paul, which he seems happy to do. Paul's feeling that the past is repeating itself in the present suggests that changes in circumstances are less powerful than the existence of universal personality types, whether good (like Janice and Elaine's) or bad (like Percy and Brad's).

Brad asks Paul to tell him what he does on that path, but Paul refuses to answer. Instead, Paul becomes seized by fear and, as Brad squeezes his arm so much that it hurts all over his body, he fears that he might cry. When Brad orders him to show him what he has in his other hand, Paul shows him the second piece of toast, whose butter has melted all over his hand. Brad finally lets go of Paul's hand, telling him he should go wash it. He warns Paul that if he ever tells anyone what has just happened, he will claim Paul is suffering from senile dementia.

Brad's harassment of Paul is focused entirely on control, as Brad desperately wants to know what Paul is hiding—not necessarily in the hope that he might benefit from Paul's secret, but from a mere desire for power. Brad's threat mirrors Percy's threats of political connections. Once again, Paul finds himself unable to do anything about the man's behavior, merely because of the particular circumstances in which he finds himself.

When Paul gets back to Georgia Pines, shaking, he tries to calm down and goes to sit at the solarium to write. Elaine walks in, confessing she has just seen his hostile exchange with Brad. She tells Paul that Brad has been asking her about him, trying to figure out his secret, and she says that she, too, believes Paul has a secret—but that she would never pressure him to tell her about it.

Elaine proves a faithful friend, desirous to protect Paul and keep him from harm. Her desire to know about Paul's secret comes from her affection for him and her interest in his life, as opposed to Brad's curiosity, which stems from a desire to exercise power over Paul.


Paul asks Elaine if she would read what he has written when he is done. Elaine says she will and leaves, but Paul remains unable to write, nervous about what has just happened. After thinking about Brad Dolan's cruelty and utter lack of respect, Paul gets back to recounting what happened between Percy and Mr. Jingles.

Paul's desire to show Elaine what he has written demonstrates his desire to tell Elaine the entire truth about himself—and perhaps, in so doing, also achieve a sense of personal healing, making him feel that he has atoned for his involvement in Coffey's unjust death.


PART 4: CHAPTER 2

After Percy crushes Mr. Jingles, Dean angrily shouts at him, asking him what he has done, and Percy walks away. In his cell, Wharton laughs heartily, saying that Percy has taught Delacroix a lesson for making fun of him earlier. While Delacroix is crying and the guards, distraught, do not know what to do, Coffey's voice rises from behind them, compelling them to give him the mouse.

Instead of bringing peace and justice, Percy's harsh punishment of Delacroix only breeds greater chaos, anger, and humiliation to E block. On a greater scale, this suggests that violent punishment for misbehavior—such as the use of the electric chair itself—never actually heals the harm derived from the original misdeed.

Paul remembers what Coffey did to his urinary infection and decides to pick up Mr. Jingles's broken body. Brutal objects, but Paul tells him to keep quiet. He places Mr. Jingles in Coffey's hands, where Coffey holds the mouse's quivering body and soon closes both hands over it so that only the tail is sticking out. Suddenly, he breathes in sharply inside his hands and a look of deep suffering appears on his face. After a few seconds, Brutal notices that Mr. Jingles's tail has begun to move around again. Coffey then opens his mouth and lets out a cloud of black insects that turns white and disappears.

Once again, after the sudden surfacing of cruelty, it appears that hope and healing, too, are capable of appearing suddenly into human lives, bringing joy and comfort. The fact that Coffey performs the same series of actions that he did when healing Paul's urinary infection suggests that his healing abilities are an integral part of his character, as though his entire purpose in life were to heal broken things.

As the guards watch, dumbfounded, Coffey lets Mr. Jingles back down. The mouse looks normal again, if not for a little bit of blood on his whiskers, and Delacroix laughs and cries when he holds him in his hands again. Brutal brings Delacroix the spool and asks him to throw it, to see how the mouse runs. Delacroix reluctantly obeys, and Mr. Jingles runs with a slight limp—which, in Paul's mind, only makes what has just happened (Mr. Jingles's near-death and healing) all the more real. Coffey, whose look of suffering has gone, is happy to have helped someone again. After repeating that Percy is mean, he goes to lie down on his bunk.

Coffey's decision to heal Mr. Jingles proves that no living being, however small (in Mr. Jingles's case) or seemingly undeserving (such as Delacroix), should be deprived of the love and joy that are integral to life. However useless it might seem to revive a mouse for a man who is going to die the next day, it is precisely the lack of selfish motives behind Coffey's act of healing that makes it so awe-inspiring and beautiful.

PART 4: CHAPTER 3

When Paul and Brutal enter the storage room about twenty minutes later, Percy is busy polishing the wooden parts of the electric chair. When Percy turns around, Paul realizes that he does indeed look mean—and that he enjoyed not only what he did to Mr. Jingles but also, and to an even greater extent, hearing Delacroix's horrified screams.

Paul realizes that Percy is even more callous than he originally thought. The guard relishes watching other people suffer.

Paul announces that Mr. Jingles is fine and, when Percy doesn't believe him, he tells him to shut up. Paul is furious and tells Percy he should be glad the mouse is alive. Brutal joins in with a threatening attitude, and Percy fearfully says he has contacts that can protect him. Paul and Brutal tell Percy, who still does not believe the mouse is alive, that he can go check for himself.

Despite becoming gradually aware of the extent of Percy's cruelty, Paul and Brutal still seem to believe that Percy can be affected by moralizing speeches and reproach. As usual, though, Percy invokes his political contacts, trusting that he can always escape justice—and, on a more personal level, that he can escape the need to feel remorse for what he has done.

When Percy returns, in a state of shock, he believes the men are playing a trick on him, having exchanged the dead mouse for a living one. To intimidate Percy, Paul and Brutal force him into the electric chair and force him to promise that, the day after Delacroix's execution, he will put in his application to transfer to Briar Ridge. Percy says that he can appeal to his contacts and tell them the guards threatened him, but Brutal in turn threatens to tell everyone about Percy's apathy when Wharton almost strangled Dean.

Paul and Brutal attempt to create a justice of their own, punishing Percy for his behavior without appealing to official channels. The guards persuade Percy not by appealing to emotions or morality, but by threatening him in the same way he has threatened them. This demonstrates that even a morally dubious method such as blackmail (typical of Percy's behavior) can be used for good purposes, depending on who is using it.

After some more convincing, Percy finally agrees to apply for transfer to Briar Ridge the day after Delacroix's execution. Even though Paul feels that Percy has a funny look in his eyes, as though he'd just had a good idea, Paul and Brutal shake hands with him, sealing their agreement.

Percy's acceptance of Paul and Brutal's conditions does not signal full submission to the guards' authority, as it might initially seem to. Rather, his ironic look reveals that—just like Wharton's ceaseless evil doings—he plans to cause as much harm as he can before he leaves the prison.

PART 4: CHAPTER 4

The next day is marked by a huge thunderstorm. Preparations for the upcoming execution initially seem to go smoothly, as Delacroix waits in his cell and the witnesses arrive. However much the witnesses might have joked about the electric chair, Paul notes that as time passes they become serious and nervous. When Paul comes to pick Delacroix up, Delacroix, in tears, hands him Mr. Jingles and makes him promise that nothing bad will happen to him.

The audience's quiet reaction to the electric chair mirrors the inmates' attitude that Paul had described at the very beginning of his story. However much people might joke about capital punishment, people suddenly grasp the existential weight of what they are about to witness at the very moment the threat of death becomes real.

After Delacroix gives his mouse one last kiss, which puts the guards on the verge of tears, Dean, Brutal, and Paul escort him to Paul's office where he says a Catholic prayer in Cajun French. A stroke of lightning scares the guards but Del, lost in prayer, fails to notice. When the men walk through the small door and are forced to duck, Del stops short at the sight of Percy presiding over the execution. Paul, however, looks at the chair and feels that everything is in order—or hopes so, at least.

The guards' compassion for Delacroix conveys a sense of injustice, as they are forced to put an end to the beauty of love and friendship. The presence of lightning highlights the sense of doom that surrounds Delacroix's execution, which is only heightened by the presence of the cruel Percy, presiding over the execution with intentions that are impossible to identify.


Del walks up to the chair, the men tie him to it, and Paul feels a moment of compassion for this man, explaining that his status as a rapist and a murderer seem to matter little in that moment. Del is trembling and sweating uncontrollably with fear.

In recognizing Del's inherent humanity and his weakness at the moment of his death, Paul realizes that the act of executing a fellow human being—however criminal the man may be—feels deeply disturbing.


After the roll on one, Percy steps forward, gives his official speech, and asks Delacroix if he has anything to say. Delacroix apologizes for his crimes and, in a whisper, asks Paul to take care of his mouse. As Paul is reassuring him, Percy reveals to Delacroix that Mouseville is an invented place, and Del reacts with shock—but his reaction also suggests that part of him already knew. Furious, Paul glares at Percy but realizes that he is powerless to do anything about it, for they are in the middle of a public execution.

Insufficiently satisfied with the fact that he is making his enemy die before his own eyes, Percy seizes any opportunity he can to cause Delacroix harm before he dies. Paul's lack of a reaction to Percy's affront suggests that he is forced to relinquish all his authority to Percy. This distressing fact only presages future danger, conveying a sense of uncontrollable doom and disaster.

Percy places the mask on Del's face. Then, instead of wetting the sponge in brine, which allows electricity to flow through the man's head, he places it dry on Delacroix's head. Neither Brutal nor Paul—who is still upset about Mouseville—notices that anything is wrong. Nevertheless, Dean and Brutal are showing visible signs of distress and Paul realizes that while they all realize that *something* must be wrong, they simply cannot yet identify what it is.

The guards' ability to sense that something is wrong likely derives from their knowledge of Percy's sadistic character. They understand that the decision to put Percy in charge of the execution was a mistake, motivated not by the guard's competence or merit but, paradoxically, by his violently unmanageable nature.

Suddenly, when Percy is done fitting the cap on Delacroix's head, Paul notices that he sees no water running down the condemned man's cheeks. He tries to communicate what he has seen with Brutal, but his colleague doesn't understand. Paul violently grabs Percy's arm and Percy's face reveals the truth that he knew exactly what he was doing when he failed to wet the sponge. Percy calls roll on two and Delacroix's body surges forward.

Paul's panic at what is going to happen to Del contrasts with Percy's calm, as the guard goes on with the execution as though nothing is wrong. The climactic confrontation between the two characters demonstrates that, while Paul cares about his fellow human beings, Percy truly is irredeemable, incapable of compassion and ready to commit even the worst criminal acts.

After a few seconds, it becomes clear that something is wrong when a crinkling sound is heard and a horrible smell emerges, which Paul later understands to be a mix of burning hair and sponge. Paul looks at Dean, who is panicking, and a popping sound is heard underneath Del's mask. Paul runs to stop the electricity, but Brutal, extremely pale yet perfectly in control of his thoughts, grabs his arm, telling him *not* to stop the juice, for it is too late for this and they should go on with the execution.

The horror of the events that begin to take place, as the electric current does not flow correctly into Delacroix's body, is compounded by the ironic fact that stopping the execution would only increase the inmate's physical suffering, since he would then have to endure the pain of the wounds that the chair has already inflicted on his body.

Del begins to scream as his body slams back and forth in the chair, his bones cracking from spasmodic movements and the crotch of his pants turning dark. Soon, his cries can be heard over the din of the rain and the audience begins to wonder if something is wrong. Percy's horrified face shows that he had not expected something so horrible as this. Suddenly, Del's mask bursts into flames and Van Hay, completely shaken, asks if he should stop the current. Paul yells back that he shouldn't. He tells Brutal, who is going to throw water on Del to stop the flames, to go get the fire extinguisher. As Del's mask peels off, his horribly blackened face is visible for all to see. The maddening sound of electricity fills Paul's ears.

The agony that Del is suffering on the electric chair is intolerable for everyone to witness—including its instigator, Percy himself. While Percy realizes with disgust that he had not correctly anticipated the consequences of his evil intention, he still fails to show remorse. The audience's horrified reaction also highlights people's hypocrisy, as spectators are willing to watch a man suffer for his crimes but, at the same time, do not want to feel personally affected by the criminal's agony.

While the audience gives in to panic and Paul explains to Curtis Anderson that they have gone too far to stop the process now, the remainder of the execution lasts two full minutes, excruciatingly long for everyone. Paul believes that Del is conscious through most of it, even as smoke came out of his face, the buttons on his shirt melted, and his body burned alive. The audience huddles by the door, which is locked, and when Paul looks for the doctor he sees that he has fainted.

Paul's realization that Delacroix has remained conscious during his execution only emphasizes the cruel injustice of what the prisoner is undergoing. The audience's fear and panic confirms that their view of punishment was idealistic, as it involved remaining blind to the excruciating pain that the electric chair is capable of inflicting on its victims.

When Del's body slumps back and it becomes clear he is dead, Paul orders Van Hay to cut the electricity and Brutal to put out the fire. Brutal shoves the fire extinguisher into Percy's arms, telling him it is his job and Percy looks back at him, furious and sick. Meanwhile, Curtis Anderson is trying to reassure the audience, telling them what happened was the result of a power surge from the lightning. Paul tells Dean to grab the doctor's stethoscope and places it on Del's burned body, where his skin slides off. Among the audience's cries and protests, he confirms that Del is dead and tells the guards to get his body out of there.

Once again, Percy is unable to behave maturely and accept responsibility for what he has done. While he may feel disgusted by the sight of Del's body, he does not show a true desire to atone for his evil deed, but merely scowls at Brutal. By contrast, Paul acts bravely and confirms Delacroix's death, a remarkably gruesome task in light of the state of Del's body. Paul thus proves capable of effective leadership in moments of stress—an attitude at odds with Percy's irremediable incompetence.

PART 4: CHAPTER 5

After the guards successfully get Delacroix's body out of the execution room, Brutal, moved by uncontrollable rage, goes to hit Percy with a blow that would probably have killed him, but Paul stops him. Brutal doesn't understand why Paul is protecting him, and Paul says that hurting or killing Percy would only succeed in getting them all fired. When Percy tries to defend himself by claiming he didn't know the sponge was supposed to be wet, Brutal moves toward him aggressively but Paul stops him again.

Moved by moral outrage, Brutal is stopped by Paul, who is more focused on practical considerations than moral principles and argues that there is no point in sacrificing one's entire life for revenge. The two men's attitudes contrast visibly: Paul's feeling of comradeship for his fellow guards takes over any moral resentment at Percy's evil deed, whereas Brutal is willing to sacrifice himself in order to defend a moral principle.

Paul says that Del is dead and they cannot do anything about that. He controls his own urge to hit Percy and makes him promise again to apply to transfer to Briar Ridge. Harry threatens that, if Percy doesn't, they would give him over to Wharton—explaining that, since Percy has already proven himself to be incompetent, it would be easy to claim he proved incompetent in allowing himself be taken by Wharton.

Paul's self-control does not mean that he, too, is not moved by moral outrage. However, he believes that the best punishment is to focus on solving the various problems at hand: making sure Del is dead and getting rid of Percy. Paul thus implicitly attributes moral worth to maintaining general sanity and well-being at the prison—not just to reacting violently to injustice.

When Curtis Anderson walks in, screaming, asking what happened, Brutal makes a joke that makes all of them laugh, deflating the atmosphere. Brutal tries to argue that the execution was successful—and that Del's horrible death is poetic justice for the people Del himself burned. Paul tells Curtis that Percy committed a mistake, and Anderson finally agrees the execution could have gone worse—had Del still been alive, for example.

Brutal adopts a practical stance that seems at odds with the strength of his moral principles. His ability to convince Anderson—and, perhaps, himself—of the relative success of the execution demonstrates the power that individuals have in determining what is morally right and wrong, shaping the facts so that they fit their philosophy of punishment.

After making sure that the men will let him talk first to warden Moores and that no newspapers will publish what has happened, Anderson turns toward Percy and tells him he is an asshole. Using the other men as witnesses, Paul reassures Anderson by telling him that Percy is going to ask to transfer to Briar Ridge.

Anderson proves brave in confronting Percy directly, telling him what he thinks of him without fearing the consequences. In doing so, he implicitly takes Delacroix's side over that of a member of the very staff that is supposed to serve justice.

PART 4: CHAPTER 6

When Paul goes back to the block to write his report, feeling exhausted, he sees Coffey's steady flow of tears running down his face and hears Wharton sing an inventive, sadistic song about Del's execution. Paul tells Wharton to shut up but grudgingly admits to himself that Wharton is intelligent in his own cruel way. When he goes to talk to Coffey, who seems drained, Coffey laments Del's terrible death. He says, however, that Del is the lucky one.

The stark difference between Coffey and Wharton's attitudes reveals the opposition between a mentally weak but compassionate person and an intelligent but cruel one. Intelligence, in this case, does not appear as a good in its own right, since it can easily be used for terrible deeds. Compassion is shown to be by far the greater quality.


When Paul asks where Mr. Jingles is, Coffey says he went to the restraint room, and Paul believes he will be back. However, the mouse, never returns. Paul means to return to his desk but, instead, suddenly inspired, he calls to Coffey and takes off his shoe.

The mouse's disappearance can be seen as his implicit moral condemnation of what has just happened to Delacroix. Paul's cryptic request to Coffey reveals that he has a mysterious idea in the back of his head—which he has not yet revealed to the reader.

PART 4: CHAPTER 7

When Paul returns home, Janice is waiting for him as she always does on execution nights. Paul, who means not to tell her what happened, suddenly breaks down crying. He feels a little ashamed, but also feels extremely grateful and lucky for his wife's presence, which he sees as a blessing. Paul conceives his first vague thought about his plan, concerning the shoe but not entirely related. He says that Melinda Moores and John Coffey have a similar sadness in their eyes, which are the eyes of people who are going to die.

Paul's breakdown shows that, even though he did not want to take violent revenge on Percy, he is deeply affected by what happened to Delacroix, emotionally and morally. His gratitude for his wife's presence suggests that solidarity and compassion do have the power to assuage certain wounds. Paul once again references a mysterious plan, keeping the details to himself so as to create suspense.


After Paul and Janice make love, she falls asleep, but Paul finds himself thinking that he and everyone else might merely be circus mice under God's superior will and observation. He goes to sleep for a few hours thinking about God and believes that, while God might be the only one to forgive sins, humans have a responsibility to atone for their sins, as that is the only way to keep the past from haunting you. Paul has a dream about John Coffey holding the dead bodies of the Detterick twins and saying: "I couldn't help it. I tried to take it back, but it was too late," and Paul finally feels that he understands what this means.

Paul invokes the image of humans as circus actors a second time—an image he had previously referenced when rehearsing for Delacroix's execution. This time, he insists more clearly on the fact that the circus is controlled by a divine power—a superior being in charge of determining what truly constitutes justice. Humans too, though, can express their moral power; they must do so not by judging *others, but by* helping *each other, using their faculties of honesty and respect to repair their wrongs.*

PART 4: CHAPTER 8

In the morning, while Paul is drinking his third cup of coffee in the kitchen, Hal Moores calls him on the phone. His voice sounds aged and exhausted. He tells Paul someone warned him there was trouble last night involving Percy Wetmore, and he also tells him that he has made sure Percy's application for Briar Ridge will be processed rapidly, probably in less than a month. While Moores expects Paul to be delighted, Paul feels distressed at the idea of having to deal with Percy for another month. This news also leads Paul to decide to expedite his secret plan tonight.

While the news of Percy's application to Briar Ridge might appear as the victory of justice over evil (since Percy is punished for what he has done), Paul realizes that justice, when expressed in the form of punishment, does not necessarily repair the evil that has been done. Instead, Paul knows that, to feel better about what happened to Delacroix, he needs to achieve a greater goal.

When Paul asks Hal how Melinda is, he says her state is rapidly deteriorating and that she has started swearing horribly, shifting from normalcy to utter vulgarity and insults from one moment to the next. When Paul asks Hal if he is going to be home tonight, he replies with an ironic, vulgar answer—imitating his wife's swearing—that almost makes Paul laugh, but confirms that he will indeed be home.

After the horrors of Delacroix's execution, death invades Paul's life even in the private realm, proving that it is impossible to ever escape the universal reach of death. Moores's ironic answer to Paul's question also demonstrates the human capacity to mock even the most dreadful events in an effort to cope with them.

Paul tells Janice, who has been listening to the conversation, that Melinda Moores is getting worse. Janice tells Paul that she can tell he is planning something. She asks him if it could get him in trouble and if it is a good thing, and Paul replies "maybe" to both questions. She offers Paul to give him some privacy if he wants to use the phone and asks him if they are going to have people over for lunch, to which Paul replies that he hopes so.

Janice seems capable of sensing, without Paul having to tell her, that he has a secret idea in the back of his head. Like Elaine who knows Paul at the nursing home, Janice does not press her husband for details, trusting him to do what is good. In her restraint, she demonstrates her commitment to him, which does not require any explanations.

PART 4: CHAPTER 9

Paul calls Brutal, Dean, and Harry to invite them for lunch, noting that neither of them seem sleepy, which means that they were probably all troubled by what happened the night before. When the men arrive and Paul offers Janice to eat with them, she says she would rather eat on her own and not know what Paul is up to, so as not to have to worry.

Paul realizes that all the guards are troubled by Delacroix's execution. This goes to show that, even though each person might have different ways of showing their emotions, they all feel the same compassion toward Del and his suffering.

When the men are all sitting around the table, Paul explains that what is on his mind has to do with John Coffey and Mr. Jingles. Paul refers to Coffey's healing of Mr. Jingles, which they all witnessed, to reveal the fact that Coffey healed his own urinary infection. The men discuss the issue and conclude that Coffey somehow absorbs people's diseases and releases them in the form of black insects. As the conversation continues, Dean interrupts to say that he accepts these interesting facts as the work of God, but does not see what Paul thinks it has to do with them.

The men's willingness to accept Paul's story about Coffey reveals their capacity for faith and their belief that extraordinarily good events are perhaps just as likely to take place as extraordinarily cruel ones. Their willingness to believe demonstrates their capacity to humbly accept that there might exist a divine world beyond their knowledge and control.

When the men hear Paul's answer, they remain silent. Brutal says they could all lose their jobs. He mentions that none of them, except for Paul and his wife, know Moores's wife Melinda. Paul tells him that she is a good woman and he would like her, too, if he knew her, and that what is happening to her is unfair. Brutal agrees, but argues that it sounds more like Paul is trying to account for what happened to Delacroix.

Paul's desire to heal Melinda Moores becomes evident. While he justifies his plan by referring to the woman's qualities, Brutal understands that this decision has less to do with the general injustice of Melinda's illness than with Paul's own guilt about what happened to Delacroix, for which he wants to atone.

Paul agrees with Brutal, explaining that he feels he has to atone for his involvement in what happened to Delacroix. This justifies participating in the illegal act of helping a man escape and, in doing so, risking his job and his freedom to help Melinda Moores. Dean asks if Paul truly believes that Coffey could heal her brain tumor and Paul says he thinks so.

Paul builds an opposition between legality and morality, arguing that human law is inferior to divine law—which, through Coffey, allows for the healing *and* repair *of wrongs, not just for punishment.*

When Brutal brings up the fact that Percy would never let them do this, Paul reveals the second part of his plan and the men smile at his idea. Harry nevertheless raises the objection that Percy could talk about what happened. Paul says Percy would probably be too afraid, and that if he threatens to say something they could threaten to talk as well, revealing the truth about Percy's complicity in Delacroix's botched execution and in Wharton's attempt to strangle Dean.

Brutal and Harry's practical objections to Paul's idea do not constitute rejections of his desire to atone for what has happened. Instead, these objections show that the men are taking Paul's project seriously, and desire just as much as their supervisor to feel better about what happened to Delacroix, however much they might be putting their jobs at risk.

The men then discuss practical details. Paul confirms that it makes more sense to bring Coffey to Melinda than the other way around, for Hal would never allow it. When he mentions that he had thought of using his car, Dean notes that it would be impossible to get a man of Coffey's size inside it. Harry then offers the use of his pick-up truck.

The men's discussion of practical details demonstrates their acceptance of Paul's project—and, once again, the fact that all men feel equally responsible for what has happened to Delacroix, even if they were not directly involved in causing him harm.

When Dean raises a final objection about the fact that Coffey is a murderer and could become violent, Paul assures him that this would not happen. As the men press him to explain himself, he confesses that he is absolutely certain that Coffey is innocent—first of all, because of his shoe. Then he begins to explain.

Paul's conviction about Coffey's innocence comes as a surprise, as it appears that he possesses strong evidence—in addition to his personal intuition—which leads him to conclude that Coffey is not a murderer.

PART 5: CHAPTER 1

Paul describes the act of writing as a time machine that allows him to re-enter the past. He compares writing memories to rape, something terrifying that consumes him whole. He says that writing creates a kind of magic—and that magic, as he knows from John Coffey, can be dangerous. When he wrote down his memories of Delacroix's execution the day before, he wrote in a steady flow that brought him back to the past and made him feel that he could smell the man's burned body in the solarium.

Paul's mixed description of writing as a project that is both good and bad, soothing and dangerous, implies that the act itself is bound up with suffering—in particular, with the evocation of painful memories and lost people or things. The process also involves self-examination, thereby allowing the full truth to come forth.

When Paul is done with this episode, around four o'clock, he goes on his usual walk in the woods, making sure that Brad Dolan's car is nowhere to be seen, even though he knows that Brad's shift has long ended. He stays in the shed he knows for a little while. The next morning, he wakes up and gets dressed rapidly, in the hope that Brad Dolan might not have arrived yet, but his hopes are disappointed when he sees Brad's car in the parking lot. Elaine startles Paul while he is looking out the window, and she tells him she knows he is looking for Dolan's car.

Paul desperately tries to flee Brad Dolan in the same way that he persistently tried to get rid of Percy Wetmore. The men's similar attitudes signal that, even in the seeming comfort of the nursing home, cruelty can strike innocent people. Instead of being confined to the extraordinary setting of death row, sadism affects people of all walks of life, proving seemingly ineradicable in human life.

Elaine asks if Paul can postpone his walk, and when he says he probably shouldn't, she devises a plan. She decides to set off the smoke detector by smoking a cigarette. Full of admiration and thinking that Elaine reminds him of his late wife Janice, Paul tells her he loves her. She teases him but seems pleased. After Paul tells her to be careful, she kisses him, and Paul praises what he ironically calls "love among the ruins."

Elaine bravely defies the nursing home's rules to help her friend achieve what he describes as a moral obligation. Once again, the characters prove more willing to respect morality than legality, demonstrating that human beings can respect higher principles even if they put their own safety or well-being at risk.

A few minutes after Elaine leaves, Paul hears the fire alarm and, as he thinks about what Elaine has done, he trusts that his alliance with Elaine could defeat even numerous Percy Wetmores and Brad Dolans. Paul grabs a few cold slices of toast, despite the cooks' offer to make some fresh ones, and heads outside. On his way to the woods, Paul reflects on his conversation with the other prison guards in his house, when he told them how he knew that Coffey was innocent.

Paul realizes that it is not punishment, but the healing powers of love and solidarity that are capable of defeating the eternal cruel impulses of human beings. True justice, then, does not come in the form of judgment and proclaimed superiority over others, but in the bettering of relationships among human beings. Justice is felt in its capacity to heal *harm, not to* punish *the aggressor.*

PART 5: CHAPTER 2

At his home, Paul tells the guards that, after Delacroix's execution, he gave Coffey his shoe and told him to tie it. Coffey soon found himself at a loss, saying he had forgotten how to do this. Paul then explains what this has to do with the Detterick twins. He explains that the Dettericks' dog had been fed with sausages and that Deputy McGee found a wrapped lunch in Coffey's pocket, from which it was later supposed Coffey had extracted the sausages to feed them to the dog. However, when McGee found Coffey's lunch, it was still tied together. Yet, if Coffey doesn't know how to tie a simple knot, it follows that he could not possibly have taken the sausages out of his sandwich and tied it back again.

Paradoxically, Coffey's mental weakness proves crucial in proving his innocence. The lack of aggressiveness that Paul had so strongly sensed in the inmate combines with a more objectively identifiable lack of intelligence, proving that Coffey could not carry out an evil deed even if he were so inclined. Paul's explanation is so simple and clear that it seems impossible to refute. It confirms that Paul was right in trusting his intuition, instead of listening to the seemingly objective voices describing the crime in the press and at Coffey's trial.

Paul explains that no one thought of this at the trial. Paul remembers Hammersmith, who compared Negroes to mongrel dogs and referred to them as property. Paul notes that, at the time, the South was full of people like Hammersmith.

The fact that no one thought of this simple detail at the trial can be seen as a mere defect in the investigation or, as Paul suggests by referring to Hammersmith, as racist prejudice that kept the jury from truly giving Coffey the benefit of the doubt.

To his friends, Paul explains that the only reason he thought about it himself was because of what Coffey said after his episodes of healing. After healing Paul's urinary infection as well as Mr. Jingles, Coffey asked if he had helped it. Similarly, after the twins' murder, Coffey said: "I couldn't help it. I tried to take it back, but it was too late." While the search party saw this as a clear confession of Coffey's crime, Paul now understands it as Coffey's effort to say that he tried to heal the girls but failed in his effort.

Paul was able to understand Coffey only after already getting to know and admire the inmate. This suggests that, had Paul never come to see the man in a loving light, he might never have discovered the truth about his innocence. Uncovering the complex truth of reality therefore cannot take place without emotional involvement—in whose absence people's judgments are often too harsh or, as in this case, erroneous.

Harry asks what Paul's second clue was. Paul refers to the moment when the search party's dogs became confused. While most wanted to go upstream, two coonhounds wanted to go downstream. It was only after those two dogs smelled Cora's nightgown that they agreed to go downstream. In other words, the coonhounds were tracking the killer—who had gone upstream—while the rest of the dogs were tracking the victims, who were indeed downstream, with John Coffey.

Paul's investigative conclusions demonstrate that he has spent a lot of time reflecting over each detail of the Detterick case, emotionally convinced of Coffey's innocence before he could prove it with facts. It becomes apparent that intelligence is a crucial tool capable of impacting the world morally, serving good causes (in Paul's case) or bad ones (in cases such as Wharton's).

Paul assumes that Coffey was probably not far from the crime scene and, when he heard the commotion, went in search of its source. That is how he found the two girls' bodies. When he failed to revive them, he broke down crying. The reasons for his decision to walk downstream remain mysterious. He could have panicked or feared that the killer still wasn't very far and could attack him as well.

Despite the danger that Coffey faced, he did not flee and abandon the girls in the woods but, instead, gave into his desire to heal. This depicts Coffey as a selfless savior, willing to put his own life at risk to help other human beings, and proves that compassionate instincts can be just as powerful as cruel ones in influencing people's actions.

The men ask Paul who he thinks the killer might be. Paul says that it is probably someone white. Any man, Brutal realizes, could have been strong enough to break the dog's neck by taking it by surprise. While Brutal feels terrible at the idea of killing an innocent man, he cannot think of a way to convince people of Coffey's innocence, as that would involve talking about Coffey's healing powers. Paul says that the more pressing issue is healing Melinda Moores.

Paul's feeling that the murderer is probably white remains unexplained, but seems to imply that a black man would be more fearful of attacking white girls, since he would know that the resulting consequences would be disproportionately harsh for a black person, in light of the interracial nature of the crime.

The three men confirm that they will all participate in Paul's plan. Paul then announces that Dean is the one who will stay on the block. Brutal supports this decision, reminding Dean that he, unlike the rest of them, has two young children to take care of and cannot afford to lose his job. Moved by the thought of his children, Dean agrees and asks if he can be the one to go pick up what they need at the infirmary. The men agree and decide that they will indeed do it tonight. When Janice walks back in, offering the men more iced tea, Brutal says he would rather have some whiskey. Janice then asks Paul what he has done but suddenly cuts him short before he can answer, saying she would actually prefer not to know.

While the men are willing to sacrifice their own lives to save Melinda Moores, they remain committed to minimizing the potential harm they can cause, sparing Dean from as much danger as they can in the name of his children. Their commitment to justice thus does not involve sacrificing their compassion, as most forms of punishment do (such as the electric chair). Janice's desire to ignore what is going on reveals her fear as much as her limitless faith in her husband.

PART 5: CHAPTER 3

After the men are gone and Paul is getting ready for work, Janice looks into his eyes and asks him if he truly thinks he can do something for Melinda. Paul says he thinks they might be her only chance. Moved by this idea, Janice fiercely tells him to take that chance.

Once again, Janice does not need Paul to say anything to know what is going on in his mind. While she knows his plan is full of dangers, she remains committed to his moral principles and encourages him to carry out his difficult task.

PART 5: CHAPTER 4

When Paul walks into prison that evening, he is convinced that he can still smell Delacroix's burned body but he knows that must be an illusion, since people have been cleaning the room all day. When Brutal arrives, followed by Dean, Paul asks Dean if he can go get him a heating pad at the infirmary for his back, and Dean almost winks at him. Harry arrives and confirms that his truck is ready.

Paul's senses reveal his continuing obsession with the injustice of Delacroix's death, demonstrating that the body is just as capable as the rational mind to reveal deep truths about morality. The men show solidarity in the midst of danger, demonstrating their commitment to justice over the ordinary duties of their job.

The men hope that Percy will not show up, but Percy ultimately arrives a few minutes late. Throughout the evening, the men adopt an attitude towards him that is neither too friendly nor too hostile, so as not to make him suspicious. Paul wants to make sure that no one gets hurt, not even Percy.

Just as Paul adopts a respectful attitude toward even the most cruel inmates, he shows compassion toward Percy despite the horrible crime he has committed, wanting to spare him physical harm.

Paul tells Percy to go wash the floor in the storage room and to write his report about last night. He then goes to talk with William Wharton. When he calls him "Billy the Kid" instead of "Wild Bill," Wharton puffs up, proud at seeing his status as an outlaw finally recognized. Brutal and Paul make sure the restraint room is locked once instead of twice, so that they can open it quickly when the time comes.

Wharton's pride at being recognized as a famous criminal demonstrates that his goal in life is to be cruel and to make his violent behavior as widely known as he can. He celebrates violence for its own sake, and wants to be known for it.

Throughout the evening, Coffey seems unusually alert. When Brutal glances at Coffey's cell on his way back from the restraint room, Coffey says he'd enjoy a ride, as though answering Brutal's internal thoughts. Brutal and Paul look at each other, certain that, somehow, Coffey knows what they are planning to do.

Coffey proves capable of reading other people's minds. While Coffey might not possess ordinary human rationality, his supernatural powers nevertheless give him a clear advantage over traditional intelligence.

PART 5: CHAPTER 5

The men buy snacks from Toot-Toot during his last trip of the night and, in the next hours, time seems to advance at an impossibly slow pace for the nervous guards while Coffey sits on his bunk as though he were waiting for a bus. When Percy returns with his report, Paul reads it and thinks it is an outrageous accumulation of lies but tells him it is fine, and Percy walks away. Dean and Brutal pretend to be absorbed in a game, but they are all aware that the suspense is unbearable.

Despite the evident horror of what Percy has done, he proves incapable of showing either remorse or honesty. Paul, though, has given up on him completely, accepting that he is a lost cause and can probably never be redeemed. The guards' nervousness reveals the high personal stakes that are involved in their decision to break the law and heal Melinda Moores.

When it is almost midnight, Paul gives Dean a sign. Dean goes into Paul's office to get a Cola drink and gives it to Paul, who serves it in an unbreakable tin cup and brings it to Wharton's cell as a reward for behaving that evening. Wharton drinks it up eagerly. Afterwards, when Percy sees that Paul has given Wharton soda, he asks him why he did it and Paul replies internally that it is because it is filled with drugs that will leave Wharton unconscious for forty-eight hours. Brutal gives Percy a Biblical reply about Paul being overly compassionate. Percy, who doesn't understand Brutal's literary speech, goes to sulk in Paul's office.

This time, even cruel Wharton and Percy are subject to Paul's intelligent planning, meant to manipulate and subdue them so as to facilitate Coffey's escape. Paul does not hesitate to cause mild harm to the inmates to achieve his goal but avoids hurting them too severely. Percy's attitude proves ridiculous and childish, demonstrating the ease with which he can feel humiliated, as well as the clear limits of his intelligence.

After about forty minutes, the men check Wharton's cell and see that he is lying on his bunk, unmoving, his eyes open but seemingly unconscious. Paul says it is time. While Coffey is watching, standing up against his cell's door, Brutal grabs the straitjacket and Paul, Harry, and Brutal walk up **the Green Mile** toward Paul's office.

Everything seems to be going according to plan and the reader follows the characters' actions with anticipation, only discovering the next step in Paul's plan by the time it has already happened.

When Percy sees the three men enter, he notices something dangerous in their faces and, despite their assertion that they only want to talk to him, he tries to run away. Harry blocks him and Brutal reveals the straitjacket. Percy tries to run again but Harry stops him by grabbing his arm. As Percy panics, lunging forward and desperately trying to escape Harry's grasp, he hits the book he was reading and a smaller book falls out of it—a pornographic cartoon. While Paul feels sad and Harry disgusted at this sight, Brutal laughs loudly and makes fun of Percy.

The pornographic cartoon that Percy was reading suggests a mixture of childishness and vulgarity, confirming that Percy is incapable of obeying anything but his body's most basic instincts, this time in a way that is both pathetic and ridiculous. Percy's fear of the men's reaction demonstrates the extent to which cruelty and isolation only breed enemies—turning fair, compassionate guards into potential aggressors.


Brutal then tells Percy to enter the straightjacket, as Percy's lips are trembling and he is almost crying. Percy begins to scream for help and Brutal immediately steps behind him, holding his ears in his hands, threatening to tear them off. Percy calms down, but when he still refuses to enter the straightjacket Brutal twists his ears and Percy lets out a scream that is a mix of pain, surprise, and understanding that his connections cannot help him right now.

While Paul does not want Percy to get hurt, he also accepts that physical coercion, however immoral it might seem out of context, justifies their greater goal of healing Melinda Moores. Unlike Percy, Brutal does not use gratuitous violence but generally makes use of force only when it proves absolutely necessary to the group's safety and well-being.

The men succeed in putting Percy in the straightjacket and Percy begs Paul not to put him in Wharton's cell. Paul feels disgusted at the thought that Percy could have thought them capable of such an action and tells Percy he is only going to spend a few hours in the restraint room, so that he might think about what he did to Delacroix. When the men re-enter **the Green Mile**, Dean fakes surprise and indignation at what is happening and Brutal tells him to shut up—a dialogue they scripted ahead of time so that Dean might not lose his job.

Paul realizes that Percy is incapable of understanding compassion, as the guard believes that Paul lacks any sense of pity or respect toward him. Percy's fear thus merely emphasizes the fact that his vision of the world is devoid of positive emotions, only marked by cruelty and violence.


While Percy threatens to get them all fired, the men throw Percy into the restraint room, remove his hickory stick and gun, and put tape over his mouth. After the guards close the door, knowing that there is no turning back now, they go open Coffey's door. The men make sure Dean knows what to say if anyone comes by **the Green Mile**. Suddenly, as they get ready to walk Coffey down the Mile, Wharton's arm shoots out of his cell.

The men do not stop to question the validity of what they have begun, but walk through the various steps of the plan. This creates a sense of urgency—and possibly doom—as it becomes clear that the men could be punished for their actions. It demonstrates their commitment to morality over their own self-interests.

Wharton grabs Coffey's arm and Coffey's eyes suddenly become alive, in the same way that Paul saw them liven up when he healed his urinary infection and Mr. Jingles. This time, however, Coffey's glance is colder and Paul feels a moment of fear at the thought that Coffey could potentially get out of control. With slurred speech, Wharton tries to stop them and Coffey tells him he is a bad man. Brutal separates Wharton's hand from Coffey's arm and the tension suddenly dies down. Brutal tells Wharton to go lie down and Wharton comments, using a racial slur, that black people should have their own electric chair. Soon, he returns to his bunk and falls asleep again.

Despite Coffey's relative lack of memory and rational intelligence, he has a strong capacity for judgment, judging Wharton just as he had previously described Percy: as a bad man. The simplicity of this description suggests that Coffey is able to see into the hearts of men, beyond their status as criminal or innocent people, and judge their souls. This defines morality as something inherent to the personality of certain human beings, which then becomes apparent in their actions.

The men wonder how Wharton could have gotten up with such a strong drug in his body and Coffey repeats that he is a bad man. When Brutal asks Coffey if he knows where they are going, Coffey says they are going to help a lady. Brutal asks how he knows that and Coffey, after thinking about it carefully, admits he doesn't know.

Coffey is unable to notice practical dangers, focusing instead on the more elevated issues of morality and kindness.

PART 5: CHAPTER 6

To pass through the little door separating Paul's office from the storage room, Coffey is forced to sit down, scoot, and get up again. In the storage room, when Coffey sees the electric chair, he remains motionless in front of it, his arms full of goosebumps. Coffey says that he can hear pieces of Delacroix still screaming, and the men are terrified by this thought. Paul takes control of the situation, forcing Coffey to regain control of his senses and walk through the door toward the tunnel.

The outsized proportions of Coffey's body in relation to the small door leading to the electric chair symbolizes the ways in which Coffey is general ill-suited to the human world and, in particular, to the human justice system, which does not recognize the exceptional nature of his character. Coffey's mention of Del's cries evokes the fact that even though Del is dead, the injustice of his death lives on.

Paul makes Coffey lie down on the gurney—which they used the night before to transport Delacroix's body—and the men push him down the tunnel. Coffey smiles and says he is having fun. When Paul thinks to himself that the next time Coffey will ride in this gurney he will be dead, he shivers at the thought of "pieces of him" still screaming even after his death.

The irony of putting a live body in Del's gurney serves as a reminder that Coffey—like, Del, and like everybody else on Earth—will one day have to surrender to death. In Coffey's case, the knowledge of death is indelibly tied with injustice, since he is condemned for a crime he did not commit.

At the end of the tunnel, Paul opens the steel gate with a special key and, farther down, Coffey helps Harry open the bulkhead. The men enter a cold, April night and Coffey catches a dead leaf that is flying around so that he can smell it. Avoiding electric wire and the light from guard towers, fearful that any sound they make might lead to their discovery, the men succeed in reaching the side of the highway. They walk toward Harry's car, while Coffey is busy enjoying the outside world, reveling in its sights and sounds.

Coffey's excitement at being reintroduced to nature and the fresh night air marks a poetic pause in the otherwise chaotic and dangerous effort to get him out of prison. His attitude is almost child-like in its enthusiasm but, at the same, reveals his deep connection with the beauty of life, demonstrating his capacity to see straight through to the essence of things, both good and bad.

When they finally find the car, Harry and Brutal sit in the front while Paul sits in the back with Coffey, and they all set off. Smiling, Coffey spends a long time looking at the stars. He shows Paul a constellation, while Paul observes Coffey's look of utter happiness.

Unlike the guards, Coffey is undisturbed by the practical dangers they are facing. Instead, he revels only in the deep beauty of the universe, demonstrating his connection to a more profound realm of existence.

PART 5: CHAPTER 7

During the hour-long ride to Moores's house, Paul begins to feel nervous and to doubt the very idea that Coffey could heal Melinda Moores. He also worries that Hal might never let a convicted murderer inside his house. When Harry finally reaches the Moores's driveway, Paul, whose doubts have grown considerably during the trip, wants to tell Harry to drive back and abandon the whole enterprise. However, Coffey points out a light that has been turned on in the house and Paul realizes that the Moores are already awake.

Paul's sudden nervousness reveals his momentary crisis of faith—which lies in the confrontation between ordinary thoughts about the human world (the fact that miracles do not exist) and his acceptance of God's power (according to which he believes Coffey should be able to help Melinda Moores). His hesitation proves that he is human just like everyone else, prone to moments of weakness and doubt as well as strength.

Harry and Brutal step out the car as more lights in the house turn on, and Paul realizes that they are all terrified. Suddenly, Hal Moores opens the door of his house and steps out in his pajamas, holding a gun in his hand, challenging the intruders to identify themselves. Brutal steps in to reassure Hal and, when Moores realizes that the guards are there, he thinks something disastrous has happened at the prison. Paul, who had planned to do the talking, finds that he is unable to utter a single word.

This confrontation between Moores and the guards symbolizes the gap in faith that separates the two groups. While the guards have accepted that what they are doing serves a moral, divine purpose, Moores is still unaware of this fact and is focused exclusively on the ordinary, practical concerns of human life.

Paul explains that he believes there are good and bad forces in the world—positive ones flowing from God and negative ones flowing from an evil force. Paul says the evil force was probably what was affecting him at the time, making him full of doubts, trying to keep him and his colleagues from completing the good deed of healing Melinda Moores.

Paul explains his own fear in terms of supernatural forces. This emphasizes his trust in the separation between right and wrong, morality and immorality, as well as his understanding of the frailty of human beings, who are susceptible to suffer the influence of either force.

When Harry walks over with John Coffey, Hal raises his gun and threatens to shoot. Suddenly, Melinda Moores's voice can be heard behind Hal. She calls him a "fucking cocksucker," which unsettles Hal for a moment. When he turns around again, he says that he intends to shoot Coffey because he believes the guards are all prisoners of someone who is still hiding in the darkness. Harry then moves up between Moores and Coffey, shielding Coffey with his body. He shouts that everything is all right and that they are here to help. Melinda's voice rises behind Hal, suggesting in a vulgar manner that he and his friends should have sex with her.

Melinda's vulgar language serves as a vivid reminder of the valid reason for the guards' presence on Moores's property and the need—as Paul had originally insisted to his companions—to help her. Ironically, Moores's suspicion of the men relies on an interpretation of events that is just as potentially far-fetched and ridiculous as the truth that John Coffey is an innocent man endowed with divine healing powers.

Unsettled by the situation, Moores begins to waver and Coffey walks up, moving Harry aside. Paul feels that the evil spirit is gone and understands that Harry was brave enough to stand up to Moores because the good spirit that lives in John gave him the strength to do so. Coffey tells Moores he wants to help and takes the gun from his hands, while Moores remains speechless, unable to move.

However much Coffey might fear certain dangers such as darkness, he proves unmoved by the danger of death, and is focused on the need to heal another human being. The strength of his resolve hints at the fact that he is benefitting from the positive force granted him by a superior, divine power.

While Melinda is still swearing profusely, Coffey says he wants to help her. When Hal objects, saying she cannot be helped, Brutal says they want to try. In that moment, Coffey takes control of the situation and the men follow him into the house.

Coffey's irruption into the house signals the tipping of the balance between human fear and divine control. The characters are literally and symbolically giving in to a higher power.

PART 5: CHAPTER 8

Lying on her bed, Melinda Moores looks unrecognizable. Her skin is livid and drooping, her hair a mess, and her chamber pot full of a horrible yellow substance. When she sees Coffey enter the room, she looks at him with horror, and Paul wonders if she might be possessed by an evil demon. Suddenly, she regains curiosity and interest and tells Coffey to lower his pants, in a vulgar way that makes Hal groan out of despair. As John approaches, she seems to regain a bit of her sanity.

The contrast between Melinda Moores's vulgar language and the elevated, spiritual and moral reason behind John's presence in her room is surprisingly comical, demonstrating the gap between these two realities. In response to Melinda's insults, John offers nothing but silence and warmth, proving that compassion is infinitely greater than violence of any kind.

Melinda asks Coffey why his body is covered in scars and Coffey says he doesn't remember. Hal watches the scene, gripping Paul's shoulder so hard that he leaves a bruise. Melinda asks Coffey his name and he tells her, adding as usual that his last name is spelled differently from the drink. Coffey searches Melinda's face and says he can see "it." Suddenly, he presses his lips against hers and inhales deeply, making the entire house vibrate and causing furniture to fall and glass to break. Paul puts out a fire that is rising from the bed's counterpane.

Melinda's concern with Coffey's scars establishes a common ground of suffering between the two characters, suggesting that Coffey, too, has experienced the kind of pain she is currently enduring. The contrast between Coffey's monotonously repetitive comment about his own name and his capacity to physically heal her demonstrates that, in this case, compassion and faith prove superior to mere rational intelligence.

Suddenly, Melinda's body is agitated by a series of spasms and the men hear the sound of a scream. When Coffey moves away from her, she looks absolutely normal, healthy, and many years younger, while Coffey begins to cough. Paul believes Coffey is going to cough out the insects but, despite the men's encouragements, Coffey seems to be choking on something inside of his throat. He tells Paul not to worry about him and to take care of the lady.

The miraculous effect of Coffey's touch is once again apparent. This time, however, it remains ambiguous whether Coffey will ever be able to expunge from himself the suffering he has absorbed from Melinda. Coffey's plight is visibly a tragic one, as he is bound to sacrifice his well-being in the interest of other people's health.

Melinda wakes up as though from a trance and asks what has happened, explaining that she does not remember anything from the past few weeks. When she asks about the X-ray, Hal tells her they didn't find a tumor and he bursts into tears. Melinda asks who Coffey is and, when he presents himself, she says she dreamed about him. In her dream she was wandering in the dark and then they found each other. Despite Hal's protests, Melinda gets up from bed and, with a slight limp on the first step, goes to hug Coffey and thank him.

Melinda's mysterious dream symbolizes a physical as well as a spiritual awakening, suggesting that she is now capable of recognizing Coffey's divinely ordained powers. The presence of a limp reveals, as it did for Mr. Jingles, the fact that the miracle truly did *take place, and that God's powers are capable of entering ordinary humans' lives to change them forever.*

Harry tells Paul that it is getting late and that they should head out. Paul says goodbye to Hal, reminding him to keep the secret about the fact that they came to his house, and Hal thanks Paul before shaking Coffey's hand and thanking him as well. Before the men leave, Melinda gets up again to hug Coffey and gives him her necklace, explaining that it is a **medal of St. Christopher**, which should keep him safe. John places the necklace around his neck and Paul sees that the man's face looks gray and sick.

Hal and Melinda's gratefulness toward Coffey, as well as Melinda's gift to him, serve as a sincere recognition of Coffey's innocence, worth, and inherent nobility. This communal recognition of Coffey's exceptional nature highlights the superiority of kindness and faith over the limited (and often erroneous) legal system.

PART 5: CHAPTER 9

The men drive back toward prison. When they stop by the side of the road to pee, Coffey remains in the car and Brutal tells Paul that, since Coffey swallowed Melinda's sickness, he will probably die soon. On their way back to the car, Paul wonders if John has taken the opportunity to run away, but they soon see him calmly sitting at the back of the truck. Brutal promises John a big cup of coffee when they get back.

Coffey's dual condemnation to death is, in both cases, the result of his divine powers. Legally and *physically, he is condemned for actually trying to save other people's lives. His status as a martyr becomes impossible to ignore, as he is visibly sacrificing himself in order to alleviate the rest of the world's suffering.*

When the guards reach Harry's hidden parking spot, they help Coffey get out of the car and he almost falls over, coughing hard. On the walk back toward the prison along the highway, Paul is convinced they are going to get caught. He is so nervous that he feels as though he is going to faint. When they reach the enclosure, they notice headlights coming toward them and quickly hide behind the bulkhead as a truck passes by. They begin to walk through the tunnel, Coffey with unsteady steps, and the men worry about Percy and the aftermath of Coffey's escape.

Despite the moral and social value of what the men have achieved, they remain obsessed with the idea of their personal safety. This concern for their own well-being contrasts starkly with Coffey's total self-sacrifice and his calm acceptance of the risk of dying in the name of something good. This marks the difference between the guards' human, emotional frailty and Coffey's divinely-given strength.

PART 6: CHAPTER 1

In the Georgia Pines nursing home, Paul spends all night writing about Coffey's escape from prison. When he takes a short break, he falls asleep and wakes up in the morning. He decides that, instead of going out on his daily walk as he should, he will keep on writing so that he can be rid of John Coffey's ghost. After he goes to the bathroom, he sees that Elaine has left a pot of tea for him. He resumes his writing.

Paul's dedication to writing betrays his obsession with John Coffey, revealing the deep emotional trauma that he addresses by telling the story. Paul does not hide the fact that his goal is not to change history (which is impossible), but rather to repair the emotional damage the injustice of Coffey's death has left on his own psyche.

Suddenly, a shadow obscures his writing. Brad Dolan is there, grinning by his side and telling him he missed him on his morning walk. Paul feels scared but tries to hide his emotion. He asks Brad what he has against him and, in doing so, inadvertently calls him Percy. When Brad tries to see what Paul has been writing, Paul gathers his papers together in a hurry and Brad squeezes Paul's wrist, making him groan.

The moral and emotional value of Paul's task is interrupted by Brad's appearance, which suggests that even the pursuit of a worthy goal is vulnerable to setbacks. Brad's harassment is purely self-centered, as he wants to assert his authority and control over Paul, making him feel weak and vulnerable.

While Brad is harassing Paul, an authoritative voice suddenly rises behind him, telling him to stop, and Brad jumps back, startled. When he sees Elaine bearing a breakfast platter, he tells her Paul cannot eat up here, and Elaine answers in a fierce tone that he can and he will. As Brad tries to threaten her, Elaine stands her ground and reveals that she is the grandmother of a Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives. Paul laughs at the situation, realizing that, this time, unlike when he worked with Percy, the political connections are on his side.

The fact that Elaine's political connections are able to protect Paul show that there is nothing inherently wrong with using one's power and status to one's advantage, as long as it is done for a good cause—and not, as in Percy's case, as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for one's actions. This proves that good people can be just as cunning as cruel ones, capable of defending their principles with the same vigor.

Brad finally steps out of the room. Elaine asks Paul if he is all right and Paul asks her to read what he has already written, as he believes he is almost done. He also tells her that, when he is done, he will show her the secret place he goes to in the woods. Elaine smiles, kisses his forehead, and leaves, allowing Paul to finish his story.

While Paul does feel guilty about participating in John Coffey's execution, he does not fear that Elaine will judge him for what happened. Instead, he is willing to tell the truth about his involvement and get rid of the unpleasant emotions that some of his memories have left him with.

PART 6: CHAPTER 2

When the guards bring John back into the prison, the gurney proves absolutely necessary, as Coffey looks as though he is going to die very soon. Harry goes to check that the storage room is empty and Brutal and Paul help carry Coffey through the door, all the way to Paul's office. Paul realizes, horrified, that Coffey's face is now drooping like Melinda Moores's.

Coffey seems to have truly exchanged his health for Melinda Moores's weakness. The necessity of the gurney serves as a reminder of John's impending death.

When Dean sees them, he expresses relief but worries about John's appearance. Dean tells his friends Percy made some noise at the beginning but ultimately quieted down. The men walk toward Coffey's cell and Paul is relieved to note that Wharton is sound asleep on his bunk. Dean confirms that Wharton stayed sound asleep during the entire time and that no one came down to E block. When Dean asks about Melinda, the men confirm that it was indeed a miracle. John finally reaches his bunk, where he sits down, exhausted.

Dean's concern for John's health reveals that he feels actual compassion for the prisoner, not just self-interested relief at the fact that the operation went well and that he will soon find himself out of trouble. The men's agreement that Melinda's healing was a miracle confirms their willingness to accept the presence of God in their lives and the importance of recognize true goodness when it appears.

Paul tells the men to gather Percy's belongings so that they can get him out of the restraint room. When the door to the restraint room opens, the men see that Percy has gotten part of the tape off his face and that he would probably have succeeded in removing it within an hour, which would have allowed him to scream. Brutal lifts Percy up and, when Paul draws near, he can smell Percy's sweat, which he believes to be mostly caused by fear.

Percy's partial removal of his tape suggests that the men succeeded in their operation not just thanks to their strength and bravery, but also thanks to luck—such as the fact that Percy remained unable to cause trouble on E block. This serves as a humble reminder that many of the elements that influence people's fates lie entirely beyond their control.

Paul imagines Percy reassuring himself that Paul and the other guards are not killers—before realizing that, come to think of it, in a way, they actually *are* killers, since they have presided over tens of executions. Paul tells Percy that he will only remove the tape if Percy agrees not to start screaming, and Percy shows relief at the idea that they are only going to talk. When Paul tears the tape off Percy's mouth, the peeling sound makes Brutal wince and Percy's eyes water. Percy begins shouting for Paul to get him out of the straitjacket and Paul slaps him in the face. Dean gasps and Percy looks at Paul with shock.

Paul's understanding of Percy's fear reveals that he himself has qualms about the moral value of his job, in which he is made to kill fellow human beings. At the same time, Paul's violent reaction toward Percy shows that he does not hesitate to use force in desperate situations—here, to save his and his colleagues' jobs. The guards' shock make it clear that only Percy's exceptionally unbearable character could lead Paul to such an extreme response.


Paul tells Percy that he deserved to be punished for what he did to Delacroix, and that he will be sorry if he ever tells anyone what happened, for they can tell the truth about how he sabotaged the execution and, in this way, keep him from ever finding a job. Paul also threatens to use contacts he and the guards have in prison for violent retaliation if necessary. He concludes that, considering the circumstances, what the guards did to Percy was not so bad, and that no one would ever need to know about it. Percy thinks about it and agrees to keep quiet about what happened.

In the same way that Paul benefited from Elaine's contacts at the nursing home, he uses his own resources to threaten Percy, thereby protecting both himself and his colleagues from potential retaliation. Paul knows that threats, not respectful dialogue, are the only way to interact with Percy. Even though violence—verbal and physical—is not typical of his character, he uses it here for the good of the group.

Before removing the straightjacket, Brutal digs his thumb into Percy's cheek gives and Percy a speech of his own, meant to be more concrete and crude than Paul's. Brutal says that if Percy speaks, he and the guards would lose their jobs, but that they would ultimately find him and make him suffer—a process whose violence he describes in graphic detail. Paul judges these threats scary enough but knows that Percy will probably end up speaking sooner or later, for only murder would succeed in making a man like him keep his promise. Paul looks at Brutal and realizes that Brutal knows this too, but that they had been willing to take that risk when they decided to help Melinda Moores.

Brutal plays the role of the more violent and unstable aggressor. Paul and Brutal are not merely unleashing their violence, but attempting to manipulate Percy so that he might keep quiet, since they know that violence is the only language Percy understands. Both men know that their efforts are probably doomed to fail, since Percy listens to no one but himself. The fact that the guards' safety depends on such an unstable person as Percy highlights the tremendous risk they have taken as well as the nobility of their decision.

Harry lets Percy out of the straightjacket and Percy storms out the room. Once again, though, Percy forgets to stick to the central line of **the Green Mile**. When Paul steps out of the restraint room to try to calm Percy down, he sees Coffey's gigantic arm reach out for Percy. John presses his and Percy's faces together against the bars, and as Percy hits him with his baton, which John seems not to notice, John presses his mouth against Percy's, making the guard's body jerk spasmodically.

Coffey suddenly turns from a passive observer to an aggressor. It remains unclear whether Coffey is still obeying his God-given power to heal or if, this time, perhaps, he is inflicting a punishment of his own. It is likely that Coffey's action bears moral implications of some kind, though, given his previous moral condemnation of Percy's character.

Percy screams and tries to step back, and Paul sees the black flow between John and Percy's lips. Percy lets go of his baton—forever, Paul notes—and Paul tries to come to his rescue but only manages to pull out his gun after John has made the entire floor shake, a lightbulb explode, and has released Percy. When Brutal yells at Paul asking for an explanation, Paul says that John has given Percy whatever he got out of Melinda.

John's transfer of Melinda's illness to Percy shows that he is not as willing to die for Melinda's sake as it had originally seemed. The chaotic events that take place represent the moral *chaos that is happening simultaneously, as it suddenly becomes ambiguous whether Coffey truly is as peaceful and innocent as he usually seems.*

Percy's eyes are blank, and he takes a few unsteady steps forward. Paul, who believes that Percy is coming back to consciousness, tells Brutal to leave him alone. When Percy walks by Wharton's cell, though, he suddenly stops, pulls out his gun, and shoots multiple times at the sedated prisoner. The guards all run toward Percy, expecting to have to fight him, but Percy's eyes are empty, and he suddenly empties his bladder. Paul explains that Percy never regained ordinary consciousness and that he ended up at the Briar Ridge psychiatric hospital as a patient instead of as a worker.

It becomes apparent that Coffey used Percy in order to get at Wharton, for reasons that still remain mysterious. Percy's mental breakdown is highly ironic, given that he ends up at the hospital where he had applied to work, thereby granting the guards the peace and tranquility of his absence before his scheduled departure. A sense of justice emerges in a surprisingly violent form, as the two most cruel characters on E block suffer an end that seems proportional to their own cruelty.

Paul sees blood dripping from Wharton's bunk and turns around to see Coffey sitting on his bed, no longer looking sick. Coffey nods at him and Paul, surprising even himself, returns the gesture. Percy suddenly coughs up a cloud of black insects that turn white and vanish, before returning to his empty gaze. Nervous, the men all agree to act as though this last event has never happened.

Paul and Coffey seem to feel that what has happened is—despite the violence of it—somehow morally right. Paul himself, who generally shuns violence, does not understand his own reaction. It suggests that a desire for revenge probably exists in all humans, and that even good people like Paul can feel satisfied at the idea that two cruel people have been eliminated from the surface of the Earth.

PART 6: CHAPTER 3

Paul tells the entire story to Janice in the morning, just a few hours later. Janice half-jokingly says that he should keep certain small details out of his official report—such as Coffey's healing powers and the fact that Paul helped a condemned murderer escape from prison. Paul tells his wife that he doesn't know if Percy will ever be normal again. Retrospectively, from the nursing home, Paul explains that Percy remained in psychiatric institutions for the rest of his life.

Janice's jokes lighten the mood, demonstrating once again that the human capacity for laughter can lighten even the most severe or dangerous situations. Her jokes also highlight the impossibility of convincing the outside world of Coffey's divinity, suggesting that what they know about Coffey's goodness and innocence will have to remain a secret.

Hal Moores privately asks Paul if Coffey's visit to his house has anything to do with what happened to Percy, and Paul denies it. He tells Moores that Percy was calm throughout his time in the restraint room and that he has always held a grudge against Wharton because of how Wharton had scared and humiliated him in the past.

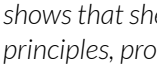
Paul lies to Hal Moores about Coffey's role in Wharton's murder so that Moores will not feel responsible for what has happened. Paul, in fact, does not yet know himself exactly why Coffey wanted Wharton dead.

As Paul and Janice continue to talk about what has happened, Janice becomes lost in thought and Paul suddenly finds himself wondering why the Detterick girls didn't scream when they were taken. Janice asks Paul if he truly thinks Coffey intended to kill Wharton through Percy, and Paul says he does.

Paul and Janice both become aware of various questions they have about the Detterick case and about John's reasons to kill Wharton. They attempt to figure out the reasons behind unjust or violent acts, showing their need to establish clear motives and morality.

Janice then asks Paul to go through the details again of the moment when Wharton grabbed Coffey's arm. As Paul recounts the story, Janice wonders why Coffey, who had never had any interaction with Wharton before, called him a bad man. She asks Paul to describe to her how Coffey's face looked and, while Paul doesn't understand why she is asking him all these questions, he says that Coffey looked surprised, but not merely because of being attacked out of the blue. Paul fails to describe how Coffey's face looked, and Janice concludes that she is surprised at Coffey's burst of violence, since he is not an inherently violent man. She also says that she does not understand how Paul could execute him if he knows Coffey is innocent. Suddenly, Paul is taken aback by an idea and realizes that he needs to find out more about it.

Janice helps Paul realize that Coffey's inexplicable action probably has to do with another inexplicable event: the moment when Wharton grabbed Coffey's arm and Coffey's face mysteriously changed. Janice's surprise at Coffey's attack against Wharton shows that she believes that Coffey, who is a man with strong moral principles, probably has valid motives for wanting to kill Wharton. Neither Paul nor Janice seems bothered by the fact that Coffey is now guilty of murdering a fellow human being. Their trust in Coffey's sense of justice leads them to accept his sudden violence.



PART 6: CHAPTER 4

Paul calls the aftermath of the shooting a circus, as journalists and investigators attempt to make sense of what happened. During these two weeks, Paul keeps a low profile and does not investigate the idea he had while talking to his wife. John Coffey's DOE arrives and, a few days later, Paul drives to the Purdom County courthouse to look at some records. In the process, he is interrogated by the Sheriff, and, after Paul explains what he is after, the man surprises him by saying that it is an interesting idea worth researching.

Once again, Paul uses the image of the circus to show that human beings—in this case, investigators—usually try to make sense of the world in the dark, without realizing that they are never in full control of the situation, since much information and power remains out of their hands. Paul's decision to drive to Purdom County reveals his trust in his own capacity to find out the truth about John Coffey.

The next day, Paul drives to Trapingus County to speak to Deputy McGee. While McGee seems reluctant and almost furious when he listens to what Paul has to say, he nevertheless agrees to go ask the Dettericks a few questions. Later, on his way back from the Dettericks' farm, McGee says that what he has found out does not constitute legal proof and that, anyway, they would not reopen a case for a Negro. Paul says he already knew that.

It becomes apparent that Paul is trying to prove Coffey's innocence to officers of the law. While Deputy McGee realizes, after interrogating the Dettericks again, that Coffey is indeed innocent, he does not pursue justice for Coffey. Instead, he abides by the racist standards of the time, according to which a black person is (unofficially) not allowed the same rights as white people.


Paul returns home and, when he is bed, after having made love with his wife, he begins to cry. When Janice asks him what is wrong, Paul says that he is supposed to execute Coffey in a week but that it is actually William Wharton who killed the Detterick twins.

Learning the truth about the Detterick case only makes Paul feel more powerless. It sets the basis for the persistent guilt that Paul will continue to feel, years later, at the nursing home.


PART 6: CHAPTER 5

The next day, Janice decides to invite Paul's colleagues over for lunch again, arguing that they already know the worst part—that Coffey is innocent. When Paul tells his colleagues what he has found out, the men wonder at what point Coffey realized that Wharton was the true culprit. Together, they realize that Coffey discovered this when Wharton touched him and he could read his thoughts.

Janice takes personal responsibility for bringing about justice—not in the name of Del's execution but to protect Coffey's innocence. She proves more idealistic than Paul in her desire to prevent Coffey's execution, hoping that the legal system will prevent the injustice of Coffey's death from taking place.

Paul himself began to suspect that Wharton could have killed the Detterick twins because Curtis Anderson had written in his report that Wharton had spent a long time wandering around the state. The way that Wharton tried to strangle Dean, too, made it seem likely that he could have killed the dog on his own. When Paul went to Purdom County, he checked Wharton's earlier records and the Sheriff told him that Wharton had been caught sexually assaulting a nine-year-old girl some time earlier. The girl's father did not file an official complaint, deciding instead to go to the Sheriff, who made sure Wharton was violently beaten. Harry, not convinced that this serves as sufficient proof for a pattern of rape, is interrupted by Janice, who says that men like that don't do such things only once.

Wharton's previous records of sexual assault make him a much more likely aggressor than Coffey, who was unknown until the Detterick case. Janice's intervention into the conversation about sexual assault suggests that she, as a woman, feels confident enough about her knowledge of the truth to assert her opinion vigorously, thereby settling the issue. Paul's efforts to prove Wharton's guilt are surprising, given that Wharton is already dead and that Coffey is bound to be executed, but they demonstrate his commitment to his job and, more generally, to the ideals of justice and truth.


Paul then relates his trip to Trapingus County, where he told the entire truth to Rob McGee. When McGee came back from his visit to the Dettericks, he was clearly convinced of Wharton's guilt. Klaus Detterick told him that, some time before his girls' murder, he had hired a young man to paint his barn. The man had dinner with the family a couple of times, during which he would have gotten the chance to hear about the girls occasionally sleeping out on the porch. The day after the man left, a man robbed a business nearby, stealing an ancient silver dollar that was later found on Wharton.

Wharton's propensity to do evil comes to light even more fully than it did in prison, as every single piece of evidence of Wharton's presence in a geographical location is accompanied by reported evidence of a crime. It becomes clear that Wharton was obsessed with causing harm wherever he went, for financial benefit or for his mere enjoyment. The man's cruelty appears completely senseless and desperately impossible to control.

The final incriminating detail, confirming that Wharton murdered the two girls, is the fact that the man told the Dettericks his name was Will Bonney—Billy the Kid's real name. At this piece of news, Janice excitedly concludes that the guards can now get Coffey liberated, since all they have to do is show the Dettericks a picture of Wharton. However, Paul and Brutal tell Janice that what they have found out does not constitute legal proof, only a series of coincidences, whereas Coffey was actually found holding the Detterick girls' dead bodies. In addition, Sheriff Cribus would never want to reopen a case that he believes ended well—that is, with a black man convicted.

Wharton's own pride at his status as a criminal causes him to leave behind a piece of evidence that makes it easy to relate the Detterick case to himself—suggesting, perhaps, that he almost wanted *what he did to become public knowledge. Janice's enthusiasm is cut short by practical considerations about the legal system. The obstacles that she faces reveal that the law's complexity—and its trenchant racism—often impede the very course of justice it is meant to promote.*

Increasingly moved by horror and the realization that it might be impossible to prove Coffey's innocence, Janice suggests a variety of options. She says Deputy McGee could try to convince Sheriff Cribus, or that Paul himself could go, or that the guards could lie about the circumstances in which they found out about Wharton's guilt (without mentioning Coffey's supernatural powers). The men counter all her arguments with practical considerations that make each one infeasible.

Janice's moral outrage is admirable but strikingly impractical. The objections others raise help explain Paul's reaction when he left Deputy McGee: he understood that he could only hope to know *the whole truth about the Detterick case, without hoping that he could actually* change *its outcome.*

Finally, after realizing that the legal route to justice is not an option, Janice tells them they could get Coffey out secretly, to which the men reply that it would be impossible to make it look like a real escape, and that Coffey would easily be arrested again anyway. Silently crying, Janice listens to the men's objections and suddenly sends everything flying off the table. She begins to yell at Paul and Brutal, telling them they are cowards and are going to let an innocent man die, consoling themselves with the fact that it is only the death of one more nigger.

Faced with the impossibility of doing anything for John Coffey, Janice is forced to accept the full injustice of this situation. Her attacks against Paul and Brutal seem harsh, since she knows that Paul and Brutal are not actually racist. At the same time, her comments highlight a fact that both guards already know: that they are in part morally culpable for taking part in an innocent man's execution.

Janice stands up and Paul tries to grab her arm but she pulls away, calling Paul a murderer no better than Wharton. She leaves the room and begins to sob into her apron. After a while, the men stand up and help Paul clean the mess without saying anything, for nothing can be done.

Janice's violence and the men's silent retreat underline the shame and anger that they are all feeling, however differently they might express their emotions, as they realize their inability to change what is clearly an unjust fate for Coffey.

PART 6: CHAPTER 6

That night, which is Paul's night off, Janice comes up to him and takes his hand. She apologizes about calling him a coward and Paul makes a joke about it. She tells Paul not to tell Hal anything about Coffey's innocence. She asks Paul if he and the guards will all be there for the execution, to which he says that they would all want to be there in order to make the execution quick for Coffey. Janice tells him she is sorry for him and that he should talk to Coffey to figure out what he wants.

In light of the pain that Janice still feels given the knowledge of Coffey's innocence, she tells Paul to spare Hal such suffering and lie to him about Coffey's guilt. Her suggestion that Paul talk to Coffey shows that, even though the legal system will ignore Coffey's innocence, she believes Paul should give the prisoner the comfort of feeling understood and loved by a fellow human being.

PART 6: CHAPTER 7

Two days later, the guards rehearse Coffey's execution while he is in the shower. Paul decides to stand in for the condemned instead of Toot-Toot, who always makes inappropriate, obscene jokes. In the middle of the procedure, Paul, unable to cope, suddenly asks to be let out of the chair. On the way back, Brutal tells him that he is afraid to be sent to hell for killing a gift of God.

The guards feel that this execution is unlike any other they have experienced before, and they feel that they should treat it with the seriousness and dignity it deserves. Brutal's fear of divine retribution surpasses his sense of duty to human law, suggesting that true justice lies beyond the grasp of human beings.


PART 6: CHAPTER 8

When John returns from his shower, Paul goes to talk to him. Coffey's calm eyes are, as usual, on the verge of tears. Paul asks him if he wants anything special and Coffey says meatloaf is fine. He says he wants no preacher, but that Paul could say a prayer for him. Paul begins to protest but John presses down on his hands and Paul feels a feeling similar to the one he felt when John cured his urinary infection.

Coffey's desire to share a prayer with Paul confirms the deep respect and affection he feels for him. It also suggests that everyone, even an ordinary human like Paul, has the capacity to elevate his mind to divine ideals and accompany a fellow human through life, even if he cannot actually save his life.


John then shares with him the longest speech Paul has ever heard him say, explaining that he is tired of the pain and loneliness he feels. Meanwhile, Paul feels that he is going to explode from the feeling that Coffey's touch is provoking in him, but Coffey reads his mind and reassures him he will not explode. When Coffey's hands finally leave him, Paul realizes that he has new gifts of visual and auditory perception: he is able to notice a multitude of details he never would have been able to perceive before. Paul asks John what he has done to him and John apologizes, saying the feeling will soon go away.

Despite Coffey's reassurance, his mysterious touching of Paul's hands will have a lasting impact on Paul's body, as Paul will realize, years later, that Coffey has given him special powers of resistance that allow him to live to an exceptionally old age. By contrast, Coffey's fatigue with living suggests that he is almost grateful to die and be rid of the heavy burden of suffering which he is forced to carry.

As Paul leaves the cell, Coffey tells him that he knows Paul wonders why the Detterick girls didn't scream when they were attacked. Paul looks at Coffey, sees the marks of deep suffering on his face and realizes that, however terrible having to kill him might be, they were also alleviating his unbearable suffering. Coffey goes on to explain that he didn't know the details of Wharton's crime until he touched him. He reveals that the girls didn't scream for help because Wharton threatened each one to murder her sister if she made a sound—so both girls kept quiet in order to protect one another. What killed the girls, then, Coffey concludes, is their love for each other. Crying, Coffey tells Paul that this is how the world is, every day.

The idea that Wharton killed the two girls by exploiting their love for each other only heightens the tragedy of the twins' murder, serving as a violent counter-example to Paul's theory that love is capable of vanquishing cruelty. Coffey's despair comes from the fact that, in human life, love and cruelty, justice and injustice, life and death constantly interact, often without offering the comfort of a clear resolution—as is precisely the case with John Coffey's situation.

Paul leaves Coffey's cell and realizes he can hear Brutal's thoughts, who is debating the spelling of a word. Brutal says that Paul looks unwell and that he should lie down—whereas Paul feels incredibly full of energy. On his way out, Paul tells Brutal how to spell the word he was thinking of, leaving Brutal utterly dumbfounded. Paul goes outside to exercise, even stopping his car on the way home to get rid of his excess energy. Back home, he mentions to Janice that he went running but does not mention why.

Paul realizes that Coffey has given him a bit of the power that he himself possesses, and Paul realizes how exhausting experiencing this everyday must be. His decision not to tell Janice about what has happened probably signals his own fear at realizing that he is physically and mentally changed—and that, as in Coffey's case, this could potentially bring dangerous consequences.

PART 6: CHAPTER 9

The time for John Coffey's execution finally comes, on November 20th. The guards feel sick and nervous and Hal Moores is shaking so much he can barely button his shirt, but Coffey seems surprisingly calm. After saying that he would not stay to watch this execution, Hal asks Paul how so much good and so much evil can exist inside the same man, and Paul says that God's ways are mysterious.

The guards' nervousness has less to do with their fear that the execution might not go well than with their moral shame at participating in it. Coffey, by contrast, seems to have accepted his fate and is not morally outraged at what is happening to him.

When Paul, Dean, and Harry go to Coffey's cell, Paul gives him his official speech. Dean and Harry shake Paul's hand, apologizing to him. John says he will be all right, and that this is the hardest part. Paul then asks John to give him his **medallion**, which would be dangerous during the execution. As the men walk toward Paul's office, John tells Paul he dreamed that Mr. Jingles went to Mouseville and that the two blonde girls were there too. Paul feels that he cannot go on and might break down and cry any moment. In Paul's office, John and Paul kneel down to pray, asking God for strength. Paul tells John he is sorry and John tells him not to be.

The irony of the fact that Coffey has to give Paul his medal suggests that the medal will be incapable of protecting him, as Melinda had said. It also implies that John is accepting his identity as a mortal human being, capable of dying just like anybody else, whatever God-given powers Coffey may have transferred to him. John's happy dream only highlights the misery of his current circumstances.

PART 6: CHAPTER 10

There are fourteen witnesses at the execution, including Homer Cribus and Klaus and Marjorie Detterick—although, like Hal Moores, Deputy McGee is absent. As John and the guards walk toward the chair, Marjorie spits on the platform and insults John, wishing him to die and suffer. John tells Brutal, who is waiting on the platform, that he can feel the hatred coming from the crowd, but Brutal reassures him that he and the other guards do not hate him. However, as Marjorie Detterick keeps on screaming at him, Coffey begins to cry again. Harry, too, sheds a few tears.

Deputy McGee's absence at the execution appears particularly cowardly in light of the fact that he is directly responsible for telling Paul that Coffey would never get a second trial. Mrs. Detterick proves unnecessarily cruel, adding humiliation to the pain that the condemned man is about to suffer.

When John sits down in the chair, Paul and Harry attach his ankles, Brutal attaches his wrists, and calls "Roll on one." While Marjorie Detterick is screaming insults, her husband is strikingly calm and quiet, and Paul is not surprised to learn that Klaus died of a stroke one month later. While Brutal gives his official speech, he keeps his hand on John's shoulder, which is not part of ordinary protocol but seems to comfort Coffey. Brutal asks Coffey if he has anything to say and Coffey says he is sorry for what he is, after which Mrs. Detterick screams that he should be.

In contrast to Mrs. Detterick's virulence, the guards aim to reassure Coffey and make his last moments as tolerable as they can. Just as Coffey's words when the search party found him were interpreted as a confession of his guilt, his sadness about the heavy burden of healing and suffering he has to bear is interpreted as an admission of his perversity. The public, it appears, will never be able to discover Coffey's true goodness.

When Coffey turns toward Paul, Paul sees no resignation or peace in his eyes, but rather incomprehension, fear, and misery. Brutal comes forward with the mask but John, who is terrified of the dark, begs him not to put it on and Paul tells Brutal to obey John's wish. Brutal then places the wet sponge on John's head and Dean secures the straps on his chest. Paul recounts that Dean later asked to be transferred out of E block and was stabbed in the throat by an inmate within months—an ironic end, since Paul and the guards had taken such pains to protect him during their illegal expedition with John Coffey. Paul reflects on the folly of executing men in cold blood and, in particular, on the horrific method of the electric chair.

While Coffey had said earlier that he was tired of the suffering and injustice he experienced on Earth, Paul is saddened to see that, despite his God-given powers, Coffey behaves like any other human being and does not accept his death with passive resignation. Instead, Coffey's suffering inspires Paul to denounce the immorality of capital punishment. It is absurd, Paul implies, to believe that humans have the authority to judge each other in such an extreme way.

Brutal then calls "Roll on two" and the electric current is so strong that the light bulbs explode, which makes Marjorie Detterick faint. Paul mentions she died eighteen years later in a trolley-car accident. For a second, John opens his eyes and Paul is the last thing he sees before he dies. Paul doubts that the electric chair is painless, as electric chair proponents claim, but confirms that at least Coffey's execution was quick.

An important reason behind Paul's rejection of the electric chair is the suffering it inflicts. Not only is the moment of electrocution not painless, but the fear and anguish that characterize the time leading up to inmates' death is also difficult to ignore—as Paul knows from being a firsthand spectator. In this light, it would appear that no method of capital punishment can ever be considered painless.

PART 6: CHAPTER 11

When Paul returns home, he sits down on his porch and cries, for John and for all of them. Janice comes out to comfort him and, in the afternoon, Paul returns to work. Paul writes that time takes everything away and concludes his narrative.

Like John Coffey himself, Paul feels burdened by the suffering and injustice in the world. The fact that he concludes his narrative with this scene suggests that he has not yet found a remedy to these profound problems.

PART 6: CHAPTER 12

After finishing his story, Paul sits looking out the window of the solarium. When Elaine walks in, he hands her the rest of the story and Elaine, who has read the first part, realizes that Paul is a hundred and four years old. She says she is a little scared to read the rest but decides to do it anyway. Paul goes to sit outside in the sun and sees Brad Dolan leave the premises in his car.

Paul shares his story with Elaine so that she might understand him more fully and, perhaps, provide the comfort that he seeks, helping him to deal with the injustice of Coffey's death. The presence of Brad only reinforces the feeling that it is impossible to ever escape cruelty and injustice.

At 4 P.M., when Elaine has finished the story, she joins Paul and says she is sorry for Coffey and for Paul. She begins to cry and Paul holds her. She asks Paul what happened to Melinda Moores and Paul says she died about ten years later of a heart attack, outliving Hal by two years. When Elaine asks, Paul says he is not yet ready to talk about Janice's death. He promises her to tell her one day. However, he is never able to fulfill that promise because Elaine dies three months later in her bed of a heart attack. Writing retrospectively, Paul says he loves her and misses her, along with Janice and Brutal and everyone else.

As in prison, death is an omnipresent theme that affects Paul personally, demonstrating that people from all walks of life are bound to suffer the same fate. The variety of ways in which people die show that it is impossible to predict one's death, however good or bad one may be in life. Surrounded by so much death, Paul is bound to suffer the pain of his loved ones' absence—to live, as his narrative demonstrates, with what remains of his memory.

Paul then takes Elaine to go see the shed in the woods. When they arrive, he opens the door and Elaine lets out a surprised scream. Paul calls Mr. Jingles and the mouse appears, slowly limping into John's hand. Then, to Elaine's disbelief, Paul takes out a colored spool and shows her Mr. Jingles's favorite trick. Paul says he feeds him toast because the mouse's digestion can no longer handle peppermint candies. When Mr. Jingles accepts a piece of toast from Elaine, Paul jokes that the mouse knows she is not a floater.

Mr. Jingles's return seems just as miraculous as his first appearance in prison. In the same way that he accompanied Delacroix through his prison ordeal, this time he is providing company and amusement to Paul during the last years of his life. This situation establishes a surprising comparison between Delacroix and Paul, suggesting that Paul, like Delacroix, might not be as free as he may seem.

Paul says the mouse appeared out of nowhere, showing up at the nursing home one day, and that he took care of him. Paul throws the spool again and he and Elaine talk about the fact that Coffey touched the mouse in the same way he touched Paul, making both of them resistant to aging. Suddenly, a voice interrupts the conversation with a sarcastic, threatening tone and Brad Dolan enters the shed. Paul, who feels that Brad is Percy, runs toward him to keep him from killing Mr. Jingles. Brad, however, comments that the mouse is already dead and, when Paul and Janice turn around to look, they realize that Mr. Jingles has indeed died while running after the spool. Elaine bursts into tears.

As Paul had already noticed previously, the past does seem to repeat itself in the present, as Brad's appearance coincides perfectly with Mr. Jingles's death, a situation that is strikingly reminiscent of Percy's boot-crushing of the mouse in prison. While it remains uncertain whether these two situations truly are connected, Brad proves just as free of compassion or remorse as Percy.

Elaine tells Brad Dolan to get out and he finally leaves, fearful of Elaine's connections—and having satisfied his curiosity about where Paul goes when he walks in the woods. He says he will close the shed tomorrow, for it is off-limits to residents. Paul begins to cry when he sees the peppermint candies he had bought for Mr. Jingles and, together, Paul and Elaine bury Mr. Jingles outside the shed. After that, they go watch the sunset and Paul recites a prayer in his head.

Like Percy, Brad's cruelty proves motivated by a desire to harm weaker people for the mere pleasure of affirming his authority. Mr. Jingles's death becomes a sacred moment, and a reminder that Paul, too, will die one day.

PART 6: CHAPTER 13

Paul recounts Janice's death, which took place on a rainy day in Alabama in 1956. Paul and Janice were traveling by bus to see their third grandchild's graduation at the University of Florida. On the way, however, they got a flat tire and, as the bus skidded, it was hit by a truck. Paul regained consciousness among dying bodies. He went to his wife and knelt beside her as she shook as though she were being electrocuted. When he called out for help, he saw John Coffey in the shadows, but the figure soon disappeared. Paul believed it could have been a ghost. When Janice died in Paul's arms, he cried out, wondering why John Coffey saved Melinda Moores but not his wife. Paul then realized that he, too, had been saved.

When faced with the personal burden of suffering, Paul realizes that even performing a good deed such as healing Melinda Moores cannot eliminate injustice from the world. His outcry about Coffey's decision to save Melinda instead of his wife is not truly an expression of regret about what he did for Melinda, but it does convey a sense of the deep emotional pain that he lives with. At the same time, Paul realizes that his pain is inseparable from his luck—for, had he not been saved, he would never have suffered.

In that moment, Paul realized there was no difference between salvation and damnation. He recalls the strange force John poured into him, and explains that since that moment he has never gotten sick. He was spared all the diseases that affected his friends, and he even avoided death during the accident that killed Janice. Since then, and especially since Elaine Connelly's death, Paul now finds himself wishing for death.

Paul concludes—just as John Coffey had on the day of his execution—that emotional pain sometimes makes death seem more appealing than life. He determines that true justice and peace of mind do not necessarily relate to whether or not one is given the chance to live, since, in Paul's case, he would choose death over suffering in the absence of his loved ones.

Looking back on his writing, Paul thinks about God, who chose to sacrifice innocent John Coffey. Paul thinks of the deaths of Mr. Jingles and of his wife Janice. He says he does suffer from one ill: insomnia. He lies awake at night, thinking of the people he knew and has lost. He thinks of Janice and he waits. Finally, he accepts that he will die, but laments that **the Green Mile** can seem unbearably long.

Paul concludes that God's justice is difficult to understand, for it seems to arbitrarily prevent or, at other times, condone injustice.

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