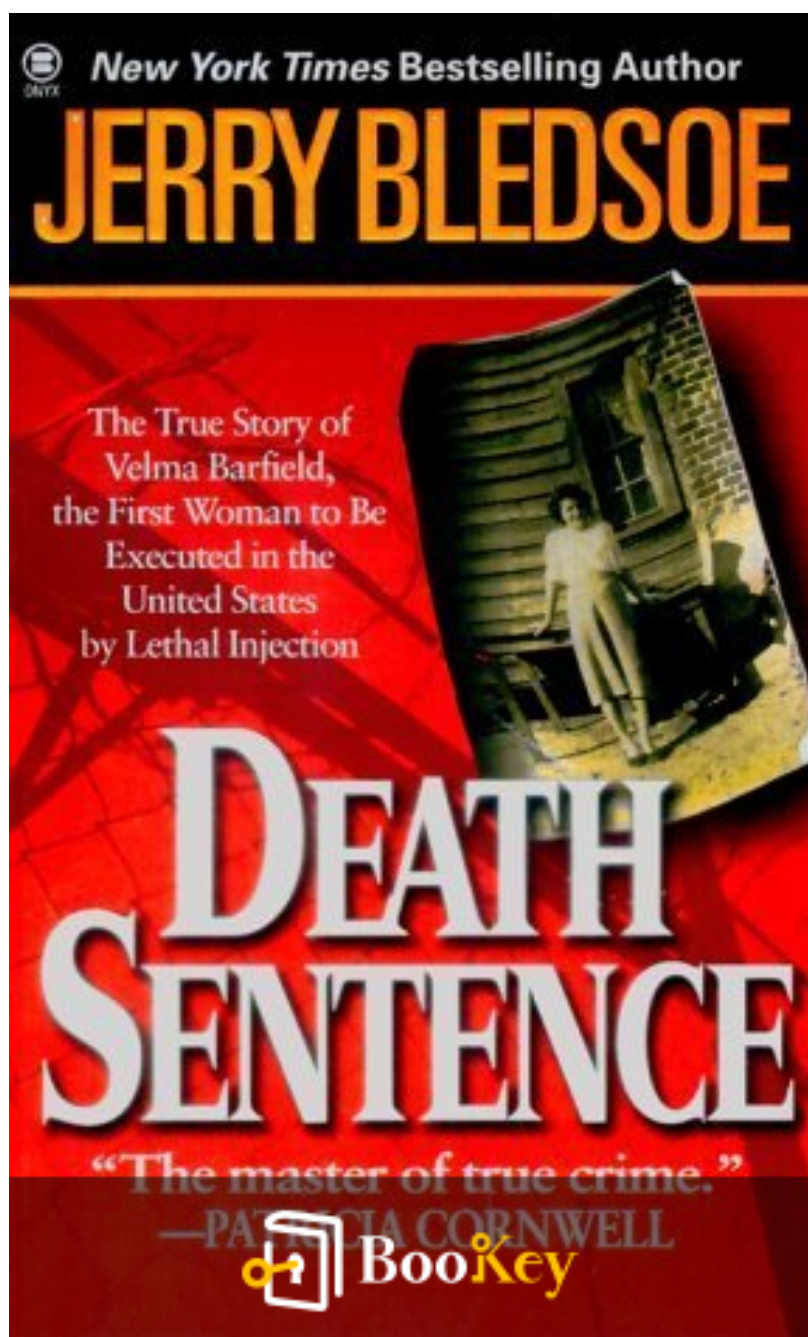


Death Sentence PDF (Limited Copy)

Jerry Bledsoe



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Death Sentence Summary

Unmasking a Deceptive Life Behind a Facade of Love.

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In **Death Sentence**, Jerry Bledsoe explores the chilling transformation of Barbara Stager, a respected mother and church leader in Durham, North Carolina. The narrative begins with the shocking incident of Barbara "accidentally" shooting her husband, Russ Stager, a beloved high school coach. Initially, the authorities accept her version of events, believing the shooting to be a tragic accident. However, this perception quickly shifts as police investigations unveil a disturbing connection to Barbara's first husband, whose death remains shrouded in mystery nearly a decade prior.

As Sgt. Rick Buchanan probes deeper into Barbara's history, he uncovers a series of unsettling truths. These include her compulsive lying, a penchant for reckless spending, and a pattern of infidelity—all signs of a deeply flawed character that contradict her image as a devoted community member. This deterioration of her facade raises questions about her motives and the reality of her relationships, particularly with Russ.

The turning point arrives when Bledsoe reveals a heart-stopping message left by Russ, further unraveling the complex web of betrayal and manipulation surrounding Barbara. Through meticulous investigation, the narrative illuminates the dark side of a woman once perceived as an exemplary citizen, ultimately revealing that the truth behind her actions is far more sinister than it appears. The story serves as a potent reminder that

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appearances can be profoundly deceiving, and what lies beneath can lead to devastating consequences.

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About the author

Jerry Bledsoe is a renowned author celebrated for his gripping narratives, most famously "Bitter Blood," which topped the New York Times bestseller list. His works have also found a place in esteemed publications like Esquire and The New York Times. Currently, Bledsoe splits his time between North Carolina and Virginia, where he continues to create stories that deeply connect with audiences.

In the upcoming chapters, Bledsoe explores complex themes of justice, familial loyalty, and the darker sides of human nature through well-developed characters and interwoven plots. The narrative often shifts perspectives, allowing readers to see events unfold from multiple angles, which enhances the storytelling depth.

As new characters are introduced, such as local law enforcement and family members of central figures, their backgrounds and motivations are revealed, adding layers of intrigue and tension. These elements drive the plot forward, leading to unexpected twists that challenge the characters' relationships and beliefs.

Throughout the chapters, Bledsoe's signature style shines, combining meticulous detail with emotional resonance. The settings, whether a small town or a courtroom, are portrayed vividly, immersing readers in the

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unfolding drama. The tension builds as secrets come to light, forcing characters to confront their pasts and the consequences of their actions.

In summary, Bledsoe's narrative weaves together intricate relationships and moral dilemmas, making for a compelling exploration of the human experience. The evolution of characters and plots ensures a gripping read that keeps audiences engaged and reflective, hallmark traits of Bledsoe's literary prowess.

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Chapter 1 Summary: On the Wings of a Dove

Summary of Chapter 1: "Death Sentence" by Jerry Bledsoe

The narrative begins by immersing the reader in the rural landscape of North Carolina during the 1960s, a decade marked by profound societal changes, including civil rights movements, political assassinations, and protests against the Vietnam War. However, the small town of Parkton feels isolated from these national events until the introduction of Valium—a drug that reveals the undercurrents of personal struggles, particularly for Velma Parnell.

Velma's life is a portrait of personal turmoil as she and her husband, Thomas, confront their diminishing stability. The couple faces the daunting challenge of moving from their rented home, an event that symbolizes not just a change of location but a turning point in their relationship. Following a tragic car accident, Thomas is left unconscious, intensifying Velma's anxieties about his alcohol use. As Thomas occasionally indulges in drinking, conflicts arise, leading to a fracture in their once-harmonious marriage.

The chapter delves into the psychological complexities surrounding mental health and substance abuse. Thomas's descent into alcoholism worsens



following the death of his father, plunging him into deeper depression.

Velma, haunted by her memories of a sober and loving partner, struggles to come to terms with his changing demeanor. Her attempts to address the issue through confrontation only serve to escalate tensions at home, as each harsh word exacerbates the existing fractures in their relationship.

As their situation deteriorates, Velma's own mental health begins to unravel, leading her to grapple with substance abuse too. Their children, Ronnie and Pam, find themselves caught in the crossfire of their parents' conflicts, desperately trying to mediate yet feeling powerless to effect change. Over the years, Velma faces a series of tragedies, including the deaths of both her father and the bond with Thomas, which add layers of grief to her struggles.

The chapter concludes with a bleak reflection on family dynamics, revealing the profound impacts of addiction and mental health issues on all members. Velma's continuous battles with her demons ripple through the entire family, forcing a reevaluation of responsibility, guilt, and the potential for redemption amidst overwhelming despair. Through these struggles, the narrative paints a poignant picture of the bonds that hold families together even in the face of adversity, setting the stage for the challenges yet to unfold.



Chapter 2 Summary: A Death-Qualified Jury

Summary of Chapter 2: A Death-Qualified Jury

This chapter focuses on the transformative journey of Joe Freeman Britt, an attorney who rose to prominence as a prosecutor in North Carolina, and the controversial trial of Velma Barfield, the first woman he prosecuted for murder.

Joe Freeman Britt's Journey to Prosecution

Joe Freeman Britt's path to law was unplanned. Growing up in Robeson County, North Carolina, he initially aspired to a career in aviation but found himself drawn to the legal field after various life experiences. Though he struggled with public speaking, his enrollment in law school marked a significant turning point. Britt matured into a dedicated prosecutor, embracing the responsibility of seeking justice, particularly for serious crimes.

Transformation of Views on Capital Punishment

Once an outspoken opponent of the death penalty while in college, Britt's experiences in the courtroom shifted his perspective. Confronted with

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heinous crimes, he began to believe that society must act decisively to remove irredeemable individuals for the sake of the innocent. His frustration with the leniency of the judicial system led him to pursue an unprecedented number of death penalty cases in North Carolina, leading to his reputation as a staunch advocate for capital punishment.

Britt's Legacy as a Prosecutor

Britt's aggressive prosecution style earned him a record number of death penalty convictions. He was deeply committed to crafting emotional narratives around victims during trials, skillfully engaging juries through impactful storytelling. However, his fervent approach also attracted criticism, with some judges rebuking him for his courtroom conduct.

Velma Barfield's Trial

The trial of Velma Barfield became a pivotal moment in Britt's career. Barfield, a woman accused of poisoning several victims, presented a unique challenge, as societal biases often lead juries to hesitate in imposing the death penalty on female defendants. Her defense focused on her struggles with addiction and mental health, painting her as a victim of circumstance rather than a calculated killer.

Jury Selection and Trial Dynamics

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In preparation for the trial, Britt sought out jurors who would align with his aggressive pursuit of justice. The courtroom was charged with tension as intense testimonies and cross-examinations unfolded, with Britt portraying Barfield as a deliberate murderer. His closing arguments underscored the brutality of her crimes, reinforcing the urgency for the jury to deliver justice for the victims.

Verdict and Sentencing

The jury's recommendation of the death penalty for Barfield highlighted the impact of Britt's prosecutorial methods. As the court proceedings concluded, the emotional fallout rippled through both Barfield's family and the courtroom, eliciting reflections on the profound implications of the trial for everyone involved. This case not only solidified Britt's legacy but also sparked conversations about gender and justice within the criminal justice system.



Chapter 3 Summary: A Mother Again

In Chapter 3 of "Death Sentence" by Jerry Bledsoe, titled "Motherhood in Prison," the narrative delves into the complex world of Velma Barfield, a prisoner at the North Carolina Correctional Institute for Women. This facility is notable for its vibrant surroundings, contrasting sharply with the somber lives of its inhabitants. Velma, initially admitted for drug withdrawal, grapples with severe mental distress, marked by disorientation and emotional turmoil. Recognizing her struggles, Chaplain John Frazier suggests a psychiatric evaluation to address her deteriorating psychological state.

During her incarceration, Velma endures painful withdrawal symptoms, exacerbated by the abrupt cessation of prescribed medications. Despite asserting that she is no longer using drugs, she continues to suffer. In a striking moment of candor, Velma confesses her guilt for the murders she is accused of, expressing a disturbing readiness to accept execution—a revelation that leaves her family and legal representatives reeling.

Amid these challenges, Velma undergoes a significant spiritual transformation. Drawing on her faith, she develops a sense of hope, encouraged by visits from supporters like Sam and Gales Roane. This newfound spirituality prompts her to seek forgiveness, as she writes letters to the families of her victims, although her outreach initially goes



unanswered.

The chapter also explores the impact of Velma's actions on her family, particularly her son, Ronnie, who struggles with depression, marital issues, and substance abuse—echoing his mother's demons. In a moment of vulnerability, Ronnie reaches out to Velma, seeking solace amid his own chaotic life.

As Velma grapples with the ramifications of her death sentence, her legal situation worsens with unyielding court decisions against her appeal. Her attorneys, Richard Burr and Jimmie Little, fight diligently for justice, yet their efforts are met with repeated setbacks, contributing to a growing sense of despair among Velma and her supporters.

Despite her bleak circumstances, Velma embraces her maternal instincts by forming bonds with other inmates, particularly a young woman named Beth. Velma emerges as a guiding figure within the prison, fostering connections that provide her with strength and purpose.

The chapter culminates with the state's decision to resume executions, spotlighted by the impending execution of James Hutchins—an event that reignites public discourse around the death penalty. Throughout this turmoil, Velma remains compassionate, praying for Hutchins while simultaneously navigating her own uncertain fate. This chapter effectively builds emotional



tension and prepares the reader for the escalating protests against capital punishment that are about to unfold in the narrative.

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Chapter 4: On Sinking Sand

Part Five: On Sinking Sand

Overview of Executions in 1984

In 1984, the landscape of capital punishment shifted dramatically as the Supreme Court adopted a tougher approach, leading to a rise in executions. Velma, the central figure in this narrative, found herself at the mercy of public opinion and political pressures that complicated her legal battle for clemency. Jimmie Little, her chief attorney, devised a strategy to leverage media outlets to sway public sentiment in Velma's favor, hoping to influence the governor's decision.

Political Climate and Governor's Campaign

Adding to the complexity, North Carolina's Governor Jim Hunt was in the midst of a Senate campaign. Known for his moderate views, Hunt faced mounting pressure from his supporters on both sides of the capital punishment debate, particularly from his ardent opponent, Jesse Helms. In this charged political environment, the prospect of granting clemency for Velma seemed increasingly precarious, given the high public approval for the death penalty.



Support for Velma

In response to these challenges, Little gathered a coalition of supporters, including influential community members and former inmates, to advocate on Velma's behalf. Among them was Phyllis Tyler, an ACLU member and writer, who penned heartfelt narratives that highlighted Velma's transformation during her time in prison, illustrating her deep remorse and positive influence on other inmates.

Pressures from the Community

As media coverage intensified following the execution of another inmate, Hutchins, Velma's case captured national attention. While many rallied in support of her plea for clemency, the families of victims voiced their anger and resentment, feeling overshadowed by the growing focus on Velma's redemption narrative.

Clemency Efforts and Family Visits

As March 1984 approached, the date of Velma's scheduled execution cast a long shadow over her family. Visits became vital as Velma expressed her remorse and sought forgiveness, all while grappling with the grim reality of her situation. Her family rallied to support her, acutely aware that they might



soon bear witness to her execution.

Tracking Public Sentiment

As the execution date closed in, both supporters and detractors of Velma's clemency intensified their media campaigns, creating an emotionally charged environment surrounding her case. Velma's life story spread widely, engendering profound discussions on justice, mercy, and the ethical dimensions of capital punishment.

Psychological Evaluations and Family Dynamics

During this emotionally fraught time, Velma underwent psychiatric evaluations that unveiled the turbulent roots of her mental health issues, deeply intertwined with her traumatic upbringing. These revelations led to difficult conversations within her family, particularly between Velma and Ronnie, who confronted her regarding the lingering grievances born out of her troubled past.

Confronting the Future

As Velma's execution drew closer, her family found themselves enmeshed in conflicting emotions. Ronnie, burdened by frustration over the drawn-out appeals process, worried about the emotional toll it was taking on all of

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them. Torn between love for his mother and the emotional scars from their shared history, he faced a turbulent confrontation with Velma, laden with unspoken pain and unresolved tension.

Conclusion

In the shadow of Velma's impending execution, her family's struggle amplified the emotional stakes intertwined with legal maneuvers aimed at securing her clemency. The interplay of love, guilt, and the complex nature of justice brought forth a poignant narrative reflecting the deep-seated issues surrounding capital punishment, culminating in a tragic convergence of hope and despair.

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Chapter 5 Summary: Dying Grace

Chapter 5 Summary: Dying Grace

Overview

This chapter offers a poignant examination of the final hours leading up to Velma Barfield's execution, a woman sentenced to death for multiple murders. It intricately weaves the emotional turmoil experienced by her family, attorneys, and those in her circle, as they confront the reality of her impending fate.

The Night Before the Execution

The narrative opens with Phil Carter, a prison official, receiving a call to escort Velma to deathwatch—a secured area where inmates await execution. Despite the gravity of the situation, Velma displays an unexpected composure and even cheerfulness, sharing light-hearted moments with familiar guards. This juxtaposition highlights her resilience and the psychological complexities surrounding capital punishment as she considers how her death will affect her loved ones.

Family Dynamics

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Ronnie, Velma's son, embodies the struggle between love and anger as he copes with his mother's crimes. Their relationship reaches a boiling point following a heated argument, leaving Ronnie feeling both betrayed and guilty. As the execution draws nearer, Velma's decision to pursue last-minute appeals compounds Ronnie's anxiety. In a heartfelt reconciliation, he pledges to be by her side during the execution, exemplifying a profound bond tempered by tumult and loss.

Legal Maneuverings

The efforts of attorneys Jimmie Little and Dick Burr underscore the challenges of the legal system in capital cases. The lawyers focus on Velma's mental state during her trial, particularly how her struggle with Valium addiction may have impaired her cognition. Their relentless pursuit of new legal avenues represents not only their commitment to Velma but also the difficult reality that time is running out.

Holistic Support

As Velma's execution approaches, the chapter introduces a range of visitors—family members, chaplains, and advocates—highlighting Velma's influence on many lives. Her unwavering faith shines through as she finds solace in her beliefs, offering comfort to those around her even as the final



curtain draws near. This aspect emphasizes the dualities of her character: a convicted murderer yet a source of strength for others.

Final Moments

The atmosphere at the prison grows increasingly tense as the execution date arrives. Ronnie and Pam, Velma's daughter-in-law, struggle with grief and confusion, confronting their emotions in the public spotlight that surrounds the execution. Meanwhile, Velma's internal peace stands in stark contrast to the outrage from victim advocates clamoring for justice—a reflection of the painful complexities of her case.

Aftermath of the Execution

The chapter concludes with Ronnie grappling with the profound loss of his mother. Attending her funeral, he reflects on the weight of her choices and the legacy she leaves behind. Emotions of sorrow and self-reproach intermingle as he navigates feelings of forgiveness and reconciliation. Ultimately, the chapter encapsulates themes of justice, redemption, and the enduring ties of familial love, marking the somber end of Velma's story and leaving a lingering contemplation of the personal costs of crime and punishment.



Chapter 6 Summary: Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

In January 1985, Pam grapples with the profound impact of her mother's execution. Initially overwhelmed by anger, she seeks counseling to process her feelings. A pivotal moment comes when she writes a letter to the local newspaper, expressing her pain and reflecting on her mother's final request for forgiveness. This moment of clarity guides Pam to embrace love instead of bitterness, helping her navigate the emotional turmoil she faces after her mother's death.

Despite her attempts at healing, Pam's journey is fraught with challenges. After experiencing a failed marriage and relocating, she strives to create a stable life in a new job and home, carefully concealing her mother's dark past from others. Throughout this period, she contemplates her losses but ultimately finds gratitude in having supported her mother until the end, transforming her grief into a source of strength.

Conversely, Ronnie, Pam's brother, struggles in the aftermath of their mother's execution. His sorrow manifests in a destructive reliance on alcohol, leading to a life filled with violence and estrangement from his son, Michael. Seeking redemption, Ronnie moves to Raleigh, confronting the



fragmented pieces of his life. He faces ongoing difficulties, yet gradually begins to rebuild, ultimately recognizing that he must address the complexities of his past—particularly the implications of his mother’s actions on his own identity and relationships.

Afterword Summary

In the wake of Velma Barfield's execution, public interest in capital punishment wanes, even as the number of executions in the United States continues to rise. Statistical analyses reveal a stark gender disparity: women are executed far less frequently than men. The cases of Velma Barfield and another notable inmate, Karla Faye Tucker, spark crucial conversations around themes of redemption and societal attitudes toward second chances. Despite these moral questions and changing public sentiment, the legal system largely sidesteps considerations of forgiveness or rehabilitation, reinforcing a troubling stance on the death penalty. As executions persist, the implications for justice and humanity remain contentious, pointing to a complex reality where the cycle of capital punishment continues unimpeded.

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