

The Client

by John Grisham · Language: EN

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Overview

The Client is a legal thriller by John Grisham that centers on eleven-year-old Mark Sway, who witnesses the suicide of a New Orleans attorney named Jerome Clifford. Before dying, Clifford reveals the location of the body of a murdered U.S. senator, a secret that puts Mark and his family in grave danger. The FBI, led by the relentless Agent Roy Foltrigg, wants Mark to testify, while the mob, represented by the ruthless Barry Muldanno, wants him silenced. Mark, a street-smart but vulnerable boy, must navigate a world of adult corruption and legal maneuvering to protect himself and his family.

Mark hires a Memphis lawyer, Reggie Love, a recovering alcoholic and former socialite, to represent him. Together, they face intense pressure from federal prosecutors, who threaten to subpoena Mark and force him to reveal the secret, and from the mob, who will stop at nothing to keep the location hidden. The story follows their legal battles, the media circus, and Mark's own desperate attempts to control his fate. The central conflict is whether a child can outsmart the system and the criminals who want to use him, and whether Reggie can overcome her own past to fight for him.

The novel explores themes of childhood innocence, the abuse of power, and the moral compromises inherent in the legal system. It matters because it humanizes the legal thriller genre, focusing on a child's perspective and the ethical dilemmas of witness protection and prosecutorial overreach. The book was a bestseller and was adapted into a 1994 film, cementing Grisham's reputation as a master of the genre. Its enduring appeal lies in its fast-paced plot, sympathetic protagonist, and the tension between justice and survival.

Key Takeaways

- A child can be more perceptive and resilient than adults give them credit for, especially when their life is on the line.
- Legal protections like attorney-client privilege are crucial, but they can be tested by aggressive prosecutors and corrupt officials.
- The media can turn a private tragedy into a public spectacle, complicating legal proceedings and endangering lives.
- Trust is a rare commodity in a world of hidden agendas; Mark learns to rely on only a few people, like Reggie Love.

- The justice system is not always just; it can be manipulated by those with power and resources, as seen with the FBI's tactics.
- Facing a powerful enemy, sometimes the best strategy is to use their own rules against them, as Mark does with the mob.
- Recovery and redemption are possible, as Reggie Love's character shows, but they require courage and a second chance.

Chapter Summaries

Part One: The Suicide

Mark Sway and his younger brother Ricky are smoking cigarettes in the woods near their Memphis home when they witness a man, Jerome Clifford, commit suicide in his car. Before dying, Clifford tells Mark that he killed Senator Boyd Boyette and buried him in a specific spot. Mark and Ricky flee, but Ricky is injured and hospitalized. The FBI, led by Roy Foltrigg, learns that Mark may know the location of the senator's body and begins to pressure him. Mark, terrified, realizes he is in danger from both the FBI and the mob, who want to keep the secret buried.

Part Two: The Lawyer

Mark, fearing for his life, seeks help from Reggie Love, a Memphis lawyer he has seen on TV. Reggie, a recovering alcoholic with a troubled past, initially hesitates but agrees to represent Mark. She faces immediate pressure from the FBI, who want to question Mark about Clifford's confession. Meanwhile, the mob, led by Barry Muldanno, Clifford's stepson, is desperate to find out what Mark knows. Reggie must navigate the legal system while protecting Mark from the threats that are closing in on him and his family.

Part Three: The Subpoena

The FBI obtains a subpoena to force Mark to testify before a grand jury. Reggie fights the subpoena, arguing that Mark is a child and that his testimony would put his life in danger. The case goes to court, and Judge Harry Roosevelt presides. During the hearings, the media descends on Memphis, turning Mark into a celebrity. Reggie and Mark develop a bond, and Mark reveals more about Clifford's confession, but he is still unwilling to reveal the exact location of the body, fearing for his family's safety.

Part Four: The Trial

The grand jury hearing becomes a legal battle between Reggie and the federal prosecutor, Roy Foltrigg. Reggie argues that Mark's testimony is not necessary and that the FBI is overstepping its bounds. The mob, meanwhile, makes threats against Mark and his family, and Reggie's office is broken into. Mark, feeling trapped, considers running away. The tension escalates as the judge must decide whether to compel Mark to testify. Reggie's past as an alcoholic and her estrangement from her children are revealed, adding depth to her character.

Part Five: The Escape

Mark, desperate to protect his family, decides to take matters into his own hands. He escapes from the custody of the U.S. Marshals and, with the help of a sympathetic FBI agent, makes his way to the location where Clifford said he buried the senator's body. He finds the body and calls Reggie, who informs the authorities. The mob, however, is also closing in. Mark's actions force a resolution, as the FBI and police arrive to secure the scene. Mark's bravery is both praised and criticized, and he must face the consequences of his actions.

Part Six: The Resolution

The novel concludes with the discovery of the senator's body, which vindicates Mark's story. The FBI and the mob are both dealt with: Barry Muldanno is arrested, and the FBI's tactics are questioned. Mark and his family are placed in a witness protection program, but they are allowed to stay in Memphis under new identities. Reggie continues to represent Mark and helps him adjust to a new life. The book ends with Mark and his family moving to a new home, with a sense of hope and closure, but also with the knowledge that the trauma will linger.

Themes

- Childhood innocence
- Abuse of power
- Legal ethics
- Media sensationalism
- Trust and betrayal
- Redemption

Notable Quotes

- "I'm not going to tell you where the body is. I'm going to tell the lawyer." — Mark says this to the FBI agents who are pressuring him to reveal the location of the senator's body, showing his determination to control the situation.
- "You're a smart kid, Mark. But you're in over your head." — Reggie Love says this to Mark early in their relationship, acknowledging his intelligence but also his vulnerability.
- "The law is a weapon, and you have to know how to use it." — Reggie explains to Mark the importance of understanding the legal system, reflecting a central theme of the novel.
- "I've been scared all my life. I'm not going to be scared anymore." — Mark says this to Reggie, expressing his resolve to face his fears and take control of his fate.
- "He's just a kid. He's not a pawn in your game." — Reggie says this to Roy Foltrigg, defending Mark against being used by the federal government.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *The Client* about?

The Client is a legal thriller about an 11-year-old boy, Mark Sway, who witnesses a lawyer's suicide and learns the location of a murdered senator's body. The FBI and the mob both want the information, putting Mark and his family in danger. He hires lawyer Reggie Love to protect him and navigate the legal system.

Is *The Client* worth reading?

Yes, if you enjoy fast-paced legal thrillers with a sympathetic young protagonist. The book is well-plotted, with strong tension and moral dilemmas. It's a classic Grisham novel that keeps readers engaged, though some may find the premise of a child in such danger unsettling.

How does *The Client* end?

Spoiler: Mark escapes custody and leads authorities to the senator's body, which is found. Barry Muldanno is arrested, and the FBI's tactics are criticized. Mark and his family enter witness protection but are allowed to stay in Memphis under new identities. Reggie continues to support Mark, and the family begins a new life.

Who should read *The Client*?

Fans of legal thrillers and John Grisham's work will enjoy this book. It also appeals to readers who like stories with child protagonists facing adult challenges. If you appreciate courtroom drama and suspense, this is a good pick.

How long does it take to read *The Client*?

At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, *The Client*, which is about 500 pages and roughly 150,000 words, would take around 10 hours, or about 600 minutes. Most readers finish it in a few days to a week.