

# *The Chain* by Robin Lamont

## Discussion Questions

### ANSWER KEY

#### Chapters 1-2

1. What has Frank done to warrant a meeting with Bloom?

**Answer:** Using a spy camera, Frank recorded damaging footage inside the slaughterhouse where he works. He also secretly recorded a conversation between his boss (Warshauer) and someone named Bannerman that, if leaked, would hurt the company. Bloom has presumably been sent to confiscate the footage.

2. Who do you think sent Bloom? Why?

**Possible answer:** Officials from the company that owns the slaughterhouse likely sent him to collect all incriminating evidence. They don't want the public to see whatever Frank has captured on video, because it could hurt their business.

3. Why do you think Frank drinks to excess?

**Possible answer:** Frank works in a slaughterhouse, where he has to kill animals for a living. He is deeply unhappy about the treatment that the animals and the workers endure there. He has written letters to multiple people trying to get help, but no one has responded. So he secretly recorded videos inside the slaughterhouse, which could get him in trouble and cost him his job. All this is very stressful, and he deals with his stress by abusing alcohol. Additionally, he may be unhappy with his life and the choices that he's made in general.

4. What does Alice's comment about the cost of eggs tell you about her and her family?

**Answer:** She's concerned about not having enough money to feed and care for her family.

5. What do Emmet and Frank have in common?

**Answer:** Both men work at the slaughterhouse and drink to excess.

## Chapter 3

1. Why do you think the meat industry uses the euphemism “processing” to describe the slaughter of animals?

**Possible answer:** It probably uses the euphemism to try to hide the truth about the treatment of animals raised and killed for food. Consumers would be outraged and might stop buying foods made from animals if they knew the truth.

2. What does Emmet reveal to Frank about Caroline?

**Answer:** Caroline is seeing a therapist, who recommends that she take antidepressants.

3. Neither Frank nor Emmet is happy with the situation at the slaughterhouse, and during their argument at the bar, Emmet suggests that by accepting his promotion, he may be able to improve conditions from within the company. How do the two men’s approaches to fixing the problems at the slaughterhouse differ? Whose approach do you think is more viable? Explain your answer.

**Answer:** Frank’s approach to resolving the problems at D&M is more subversive. He has gone behind people’s backs, secretly recording videos of the pigs being abused. If the footage were leaked, he would likely get in trouble and lose his job and his coworkers could lose their jobs, too. He tried writing letters to the USDA and the Occupational Safety and Health Association, and no one responded. So he feels that the only way for him to change the system is to be a whistleblower and break the rules. Emmet, on the other hand, thinks that by following the rules and ascending the corporate ladder, he’ll be able to bring about change from within the company. He hopes to work his way into a position of power so that he can change the rules and hopefully solve the problems at D&M.

**Answers to the second part of the question will vary. Possible answer:** Emmet’s approach would take more time, and given that a promotion will likely earn him more money, he may lose sight of his goal to help the pigs and his coworkers. Frank’s approach seems likely to be more successful, although it’s also riskier.

4. Why did Jude have plans to meet with Frank?

**Answer:** Frank was going to give her the secret footage he’d recorded so that her organization could release it to the public in an attempt to improve conditions for both the animals and the workers at the slaughterhouse.

5. What problem remains even if Jude is able to find Frank's videos?

**Answer:** Frank is dead, so he isn't able to corroborate the evidence. Officials at D&M will say that the footage is fabricated or that it wasn't recorded at their facility or will otherwise deflect the blame for the incidents documented on his camera.

6. What happened to Jude during her last investigation (into the horseracing industry)? How is this affecting her work on her current investigation into D&M?

**Answer:** Her informant backed out at the last minute, claiming that she'd pressured him into providing the information. It was rumored that he'd been paid off and that Jude hadn't properly vetted her sources. She takes a lot of pride in her work and wants to see an improvement in the lives of the animals she works to help, so she's especially nervous that her current investigation into D&M might be heading down a similar path.

7. Jude describes her childhood as "scattered" but recalls a single incident at a truck stop that put her on a path to becoming an investigator. What happened that night?

**Answer:** She encountered a truck full of pigs bound for slaughter and saw how terrified they were.

## Chapters 4–5

1. What details on pages 24 and 25 indicate that D&M is not a safe place to work?

**Answer:** Vernon was bitten by a rat who was in the bottom of his locker. He also has a large scar on his back from when a pig fell off a piece of machinery, causing the machine to break and injure him. The scar on Emmet’s face is also from an accident at D&M involving a pig.

2. The pigs from Heritage Farm are crammed into a truck and beaten and shouted at by the driver. How else are they suffering?

**Answer:** Emmet says that Heritage Farm treats the pigs “like crap.” They are described as “just skin and bones,” their spines “protruding from their backs.” They have wounds that have become infected, their ears are torn, and they’re coughing, which suggests that they’re sick.

3. The pigs from Heritage Farm won’t walk down the passageway from the pens to the chute that leads to the stun area. What are the two reasons for this?

**Answer:** They are extremely distressed and can sense that they’re in danger, and many of them are physically unable to support themselves for the entire length of the passageway—they’ve spent their entire lives confined to metal crates and their legs aren’t strong enough to walk.

4. Why did Verna have to quit her job at D&M?

**Answer:** She developed tendinitis, a repetitive motion injury, in her wrist from her job butchering pig carcasses seven hours a day, six days a week, for five years.

5. According to Verna, what else was causing Frank stress in the year leading up to his death?

**Answer:** He had hurt his back at work and, in spite of taking painkillers, was in a lot of pain. His mother had also passed away. This—combined with the fact that Verna was only receiving workers’ compensation, resulting in further financial strain on the family—was causing him a great deal of stress.

6. Why does Verna suggest that pigs might be more compassionate than humans?

**Answer:** She used to work on a farm and saw escaped pigs going down the whole row and unlatching the other crates, setting their companions free.

7. What did Sheriff Ward find on Frank’s computer? What do his findings suggest?

**Answer:** Frank’s search history includes inquiries about lethal doses of painkillers, possibly indicating that he overdosed intentionally.

## Chapters 6–8

1. How did Finn get his name?

**Answer:** Jude rescued him from a French Canadian–owned puppy mill, where Finn was put in a cage marked *fin*, the French word for “end,” meaning that he was unlikely to be sold and so was being discarded and left to die.

2. Caroline has a hard time articulating why she’s depressed, but the internal monologue on page 52 offers some insight. Based on these details and others from the chapter, what do you think is causing her to obsess over death?

**Possible answer:** Caroline and her family live in a small community supported by a slaughterhouse that’s currently at risk of being exposed for its inhumane practices. Her parents are also deeply unhappy. She seems to have a natural affinity for animals, as evidenced by her interaction with Finn on the trail. She probably feels conflicted by her own ideas of morality and her family’s sole means of income—her father’s work at a slaughterhouse. She often complains about the smell of pig manure in the air in Bragg Falls and on her father when he returns home from work—even noticing it (along with pig blood) on the bottom of his shoes at the doctor’s office.

## Chapters 9–10

1. What information do the men in the diner offer Jude? What does she ask that suddenly causes them to stop talking?

**Answer:** They confirm that the working conditions at D&M are poor. One man even suggests that he understands why Frank killed himself. They also agree that the animals suffer, too—the same man says, “[T]hey don’t wanna die.” But when Jude asks directly if the animals are mishandled, the men stop talking, most likely to avoid implicating themselves or their fellow workers. There seems to be an understanding in Bragg Falls that while it’s unpleasant and even possibly deadly to work at D&M, the company is the town’s largest source of jobs. If it were to go under, many people would be unemployed and their families as well as businesses like the diner would suffer.

2. How has Jude been “branded”? Why does Juan approach her outside the diner? Why does he abruptly stop talking to her?

**Answer:** Jude has been branded an animal activist and therefore a threat to everyone in Bragg Falls. Juan approaches her outside the diner to talk about Frank and the mistreatment of the pigs at D&M, but a man in camouflage is clearly watching the conversation. He threatens Jude and Juan by making a “gun” with his hand and pointing it at them, which causes Juan to run off in fear mid-conversation.

3. Emmet says that the stun station is where accidents happen most often. Why is that?

**Answer:** Pigs are large animals who, like all other animals, don’t want to be killed. They are frightened when forced to go down the line and will fight to live. Given that animals come down the line at the rate of one every few seconds, even the slightest human error can cause a backup in the system and even injury. If the voltage on the stun gun is set too high, it can leave dark patches on the pig’s flesh, making the meat unfit to sell. But if it’s set too low, the pig will regain consciousness later on down the line and begin to struggle. Emmet points out that all the pigs are bred to be the same size, so the same amount of voltage should stun each one effectively. However, every once in a while, a particularly large pig, who can’t be stunned at a low voltage, comes down the line, and this problem arises.

4. Emmet is confronted by Warshauer, the plant manager, just as he’s about to turn up the voltage on the stun gun. Why does Warshauer stop him? What changes the plant manager’s mind?

**Answer:** Warshauer notes that seven out of 5,000 pigs had “blood-splash” after the stun gun was set at a high voltage. He is unable to sell the affected meat (and he wants to waste as little meat as possible in order to turn a higher profit). However, Emmet points out that Lawrence Cimino, the plant’s on-site USDA inspector, is on his way. If Cimino sees conscious pigs on the chain, he’ll shut down production, resulting in even greater loss of revenue.

5. In his last conversation with Frank, Emmet suggests that by accepting his promotion, he'd be able to improve conditions at D&M from within. But what does he reveal his true plan to be on page 68?

**Answer:** Emmet ultimately wants to climb the corporate ladder until he gets out of the plant altogether and into an office job, where he could make better money and wouldn't have to deal with all the stress of working on the kill floor.

## Chapters 11–12

1. What are “downers,” and why does Jude take pictures of them?

**Answer:** “Downers” are pigs who are too weak to walk into the slaughterhouse. Jude takes pictures of a pair of downers who are being dragged into the slaughterhouse by a forklift in order to prove that a USDA veterinarian did not inspect them for disease before they were taken to slaughter—a violation of the Humane Slaughter Act. This evidence could be used against D&M to force it to require better animal care.

2. Why has Marshfield launched a new advertising campaign?

**Answer:** Bannerman reports that fewer people are eating pork as a result of the work of animal rights organizations. As a company that sells pork, Marshfield has launched a new advertising campaign to persuade more people to buy its products.

3. What is depicted in the promotional video that Bannerman shows to the board? Have you seen advertisements like this? What do you think of them?

**Answer:** The video shows happy, healthy, clean pigs living on a picturesque farm. A “Norman Rockwell-type” family is then shown enjoying a holiday ham. **Answers to the second part of the question will vary.**

4. How does the scene in Oma Burney’s barn on pages 84 and 85 compare with Jude’s observations from the ridge overlooking the lairage pens?

**Answer:** Oma’s pig and her piglets live on a spacious, safe, clean property. They sleep on soft bedding and are free to roam around as they please. Oma feeds them apple slices, and the piglets live with their mother. Meanwhile, the pigs who are taken to slaughter at D&M were pulled away from their mothers shortly after being born. Jude points out that their tails, teeth, and testicles are clipped and that they are “then crowded into indoor pens or crates where they would never set foot on grass or feel the sun.” From the ridge overlooking the lairage pens, she saw an immobile pig being dragged into the building—a stark contrast with everything she saw in Oma’s barn.



## Chapters 13–15

1. Why does Emmet ask Jude to leave? Why is Alice upset by this?

**Answer:** Emmet is under strict orders from D&M not to speak to Jude. He says that he could lose his job if he is seen with her. Alice is upset because Jude’s visit has made Caroline, who has been struggling with depression, happy for the first time in a long while.

2. Why does Daniel compare working at D&M to “life inside a prison”?

**Answer:** He says this because of his wife’s comment that other workers harassed her, even shoving roundworms (from the pigs’ intestines) in her face when she first started working there. She said that when she stood up for herself, the other workers left her alone. Daniel says that the only way to get by at D&M is to “be tough and wear your game face,” like in prison.

3. Daniel tells Jude that he’s seen pigs with scrape marks from being dragged and wounds from hooks that are used to pull them. Why doesn’t he report this abuse to management or the USDA inspectors?

**Answer:** Some of his family members, including his wife, are undocumented immigrants to the U.S. Daniel is afraid that they could be deported for causing any kind of disturbance, so this makes him keep quiet.

4. In addition to being harassed by her coworkers, what threat does Abelina face at her station?

**Answer:** She could contract a deadly disease. She tells Jude that a woman at her station died of meningitis and two others contracted the disease from infected pigs who were supposed to have been removed from the line by inspectors.

5. Why do you think Daniel and Abelina talk to Jude, even though by doing so, they risk losing their jobs and being deported?

**Possible answer:** Frank was a good friend to them. He helped Abelina secure a single shift at D&M so that she could be home more to take care of her and Daniel’s baby. Frank looked out for his fellow employees, writing letters to politicians about the abuse that he witnessed and encouraging Daniel and Abelina to stay strong through tough times at the plant. They probably don’t want all of his hard work to go to waste after his passing. Perhaps they realize that he gave his life in an effort to improve conditions at D&M and therefore feel that risking their jobs and their home in the U.S. is the right thing to do.

## Chapters 16–18

1. Why does Emmet feel conflicted about putting Vernon back at the stun station?

**Answer:** Vernon has been known to turn up the voltage on the stun gun and threaten to electrocute other employees. He is unpredictable, and Emmet worries that he might snap and hurt someone. It's Vernon's lack of empathy that allows him to be so effective at his job, stunning thousands of pigs a day.

2. In his argument with Pat LaBrie, Emmet explains the fundamental problem with trying to improve conditions at D&M. What is it?

**Answer:** If Emmet writes up employees for abusing the pigs when trying to get them to move more quickly down the slaughter line (thus making the company more money), he will be reprimanded or even fired by Warshauer, the plant manager. But if he doesn't write up employees, the workers farther down the line are in danger of getting hurt by pigs who haven't been stunned effectively. Either way, someone is at risk of not getting paid or of being injured—and Emmet would be responsible. The USDA inspectors always make it known when they're coming to check on the workers, so they never see the violations.

3. In his conversation with Jude at the bar, what does Howard Bisbee mean when he says that “you develop a shield” from working inside a slaughterhouse? What does he say happens to the workers who “can't switch it on and off like a light”?

**Answer:** The shield that Howard refers to is an emotional distance from the animals he kills. If he were to allow himself to empathize with them, he wouldn't be able to kill them, thus rendering him incapable of performing his job at the slaughterhouse. The workers who can't take off their “shields” at the end of the workday continue to be emotionally distant with their families and eventually stop caring about things that were once important to them.

4. What do you think Emmet's scar symbolizes?

**Possible answer:** It's a symbol of the threat of injury, both physical and mental, that slaughterhouse workers face on the job.

5. What does Jude say is the problem with the Humane Slaughter Act? What's the problem with the USDA workers at the plant, according to her?

**Answer:** She points out that the Humane Slaughter Act is “useless” when companies like D&M that are only concerned with making money are left to “self-monitor.” She then says that the USDA personnel assigned to each plant ignore violations of the act in order to “move up the ranks.”

## Chapters 19–21

1. Marshfield and Hillman start their conversation by talking about a business venture in Bucharest. What does this tell you about their motives?

**Answer:** Hillman says that he has pulled some strings and that “environmental regulations won’t slow our [company’s] expansion,” to which Marshfield responds positively, telling Hillman to “launder [the money] however you think best.” These men are more concerned about expanding their company and making as much money as possible than they are about obeying the law or protecting the environment, and they’re certainly not concerned about animal welfare.

2. What would the Agriculture Terrorism Bill do? How did Marshfield handle opposition to it?

**Answer:** The bill would make it a felony to record video footage inside a slaughterhouse. The senator who is keeping it from passing is up for reelection, so Marshfield gave \$75,000 to his campaign to bribe him into voting in favor of it.

3. According to Jack, what happened to the creek by the plant? Why does he start singing “America the Beautiful”?

**Answer:** He says that the year before, pig blood and feces leaked into the creek, causing all the plants and animals in it to die. He says that someone from the federal government came and issued D&M a fine but that there are still no fish in the creek and people can’t even get close to it because it could make them sick. He begins singing the song in a mocking tone, suggesting that the country isn’t actually beautiful—either in physical appearance or in the way the government treats humans and other animals.

## Chapters 22–26

1. In the incident that Emmet describes to Jude in her hotel room involving Vernon and the pregnant pig, why does Warshauer scream at Emmet?

**Answer:** He screams at Emmet because the chain had stopped moving—not because a couple of his employees were injured or because a pregnant pig’s stomach was cut open while she was still alive.

2. How did Caroline manage to get a copy of Frank’s recording? Why was she particularly horrified by the footage?

**Answer:** Caroline and her best friend, Sophie (Frank’s daughter), had been snooping around on Frank’s computer, worried that they’d be separated after they overheard Sophie’s parents talking about moving to Florida. They found the footage and made a copy, but Frank caught them snooping. Sophie was too scared to tell her dad that she’d made the copy, so she hid it in her music collection. After meeting Jude and learning about her mission in Bragg Falls, Caroline stole the copy to give to her. Caroline was particularly horrified by the footage because her dad was in it, and she also saw a man who had once come to her home for a BBQ repeatedly kicking an injured pig.

3. Why are so many of the trailer park residents aware that Abelina has medical training?

**Answer:** Many of them have come to her after being injured on the job at D&M out of fear that a doctor might instruct them not to go back to work.

4. What do the time stamps on Frank’s footage tell you about the abuse taking place at D&M?

**Answer:** They indicate that animals are abused regularly there—not in isolated incidents, as the company claims.

5. What was the “dynamite” footage that Frank recorded?

**Answer:** Frank recorded a conversation between Bob Warshauer and Ned Bannerman in which Bannerman admitted to knowing about the abuse of the animals and the danger posed to the employees by the pace at which the line moved. He was urging Warshauer to make it move faster to make more money, thus putting more animals and employees at risk.

## Chapters 27–30 and Epilogue

1. What does Caroline reveal to Jude just before Jude drops her off at school?

**Answer:** Caroline says that she’s decided to go vegan after doing some research online about where her food comes from. She no longer wants to be responsible for the killing of animals for food.

2. As Jude drives out of town, why does she feel conflicted about releasing the footage as she passes all the businesses in town? What does she think is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** She can’t help but think about the ways releasing the footage will affect the business owners and their families. She knows that D&M supports the small town—but she also knows that the company doesn’t care about its employees and just uses them to make as much money as it can. This—along with the ongoing animal abuse—helped her decide to release the footage.

3. How does Jude persuade Caroline not to jump off the side of the cliff with the copy of the footage in her hand?

**Answer:** She urges her to dedicate her life to helping animals. In that moment, Caroline feels hopeless and desperate, and Jude encourages her to channel those emotions into effecting positive change in the world instead of giving up.

4. What does Emmet mean when he tells the reporter, “There’s even worse damage to the insides of people”?

**Answer:** He tells them that workers are physically injured every day at D&M but that the psychological effects of having to kill animals have an even greater impact on their lives.