

THE POWERFUL DRAMA OF
THE GREATEST COURTROOM
CLASH OF THE CENTURY

INHERIT THE WIND



Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee

ACT ONE

SCENE I

In and around the Hillsboro Courthouse. The foreground is the actual courtroom, with jury box, judge's bench and a scattering of trial-scarred chairs and counsel tables. The back wall of the courtroom is non-existent. On a raked level above it is the courthouse square, the Main Street and the converging streets of the town. This is not so much a literal view of Hillsboro as it is an impression of a sleepy, obscure country town about to be vigorously awakened.

It is important to the concept of the play that the town is visible always, looming there, as much on trial as the individual defendant. The crowd is equally important throughout, so that the court becomes a cock-pit, an arena, with the active spectators on all sides of it.

It is an hour after dawn on a July day that promises to be a scorcher. HOWARD, a boy of thirteen, wanders onto the courthouse lawn. He is barefoot, wearing a pair of his pa's cut-down overalls. He carries an improvised fishing pole and a tin can. He studies the ground carefully, searching for something. A young girl's voice calls from off-stage.

MELINDA

(Calling sweetly)

How-ard! (HOWARD, annoyed, turns and looks toward the voice. MELINDA, a healthy, pigtailed girl of twelve, skips on) Hello, Howard.

(HOWARD is disinterested, continues to search the ground.)

HOWARD

'Lo, Lindy.

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MELINDA

(Making conversation)

I think it's gonna be hotter'n yesterday. That rain last night didn't do much good.

HOWARD

(Professionally)

It brought up the worms. *(Suddenly he spots one in the lawn. Swiftly he grabs for it, and holds it up proudly)* Lookit this fat one!

MELINDA

(Shivering)

How can you touch 'em? It makes me all goose-bumpy!
(HOWARD dangles it in front of her face. She backs away, shuddering.)

HOWARD

What're yuh skeered of? You was a worm once!

MELINDA

(Shocked)

I wasn't neither!

HOWARD

You was so! When the whole world was covered with water, there was nuthin' but worms and blobs of jelly. And you and your whole family was worms!

MELINDA

We was not!

HOWARD

Blobs of jelly, then.

MELINDA

Howard Blair, that's sinful talk! I'm gonna tell my pa and he'll make you wash your mouth out with soap!

HOWARD

Ahhh, your old man's a monkey! (MELINDA gasps. She turns indignantly and runs off. HOWARD shrugs in the manner of a man-of-the-world) 'Bye, Lindy. (He deposits the worm in his tin can, and continues looking for more. RACHEL enters. She is twenty-two, pretty, but not beautiful. She wears a cotton summer dress. She carries a small composition-paper suitcase. There is a tense, distraught air about her. She may have been crying. She looks about nervously, as if she doesn't want to be seen. When she sees HOWARD, she hesitates; then she crosses quickly downstage into the courthouse area in the hope that the boy will not notice her. But he does see RACHEL, and watches her with puzzled curiosity. Then he spots another worm, tugs it out of the ground, and holds it up, wriggling. HOWARD addresses the worm) What do you wanta be when you grow up?

(RACHEL stands uncertainly in the courthouse area. This is strange ground to her. Unsure, she looks about.)

RACHEL

(Tentatively, calling)

Mr. Meeker . . . ?

(After a pause, a door at stage right opens. MR. MEEKER, the bailiff, enters. There is no collar on his shirt; his hair is tousled, and there is shaving soap on his face, which he is wiping off with a towel as he enters.)

MEEKER

(A little irritably)

Who is it? (Surprised) Why, hello, Rachel. 'Scuse the way I look. (He wipes the soap out of his ear. Then he notices her suitcase) Not goin' away, are you? Excitement's just startin'.

RACHEL

(Earnestly)

Mr. Meeker, don't let my father know I came here.

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DRAMA

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