

Inherit the Wind

By Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee

ACT I

Scene 2

The courtroom. A few days later.

The townspeople are packed into the sweltering courtroom. The shapes of the buildings are dimly visible in the background, as if Hillsboro itself were on trial. Court is in session, fans are pumping. The humorless JUDGE sits at his bench; he has a nervous habit of flashing an automatic smile after every ruling. CATES sits beside DRUMMOND at a counsel table. BRADY sits grandly at another table, fanning himself with benign self-assurance. HORNBECK is seated on her window ledge. RACHEL, tense, is among the spectators. In the jury box, ten of the twelve jurors are already seated. BANNISTER is on the witness stand. DAVENPORT is examining him.

DAVENPORT

Do you attend church regularly, Mr. Bannister?

BANNISTER

Only on Sundays.

DAVENPORT

That's good enough for the prosecution. Your Honor, we will accept this man as a member of the jury.

(BANNISTER starts toward the jury box.)

JUDGE

One moment, Mr. Bannister. You're not excused.

BANNISTER

(A little petulant)

I wanted that there front seat in the jury box.

DRUMMOND

(Rising)

Well, hold your horses, Bannister. You may get it yet!

(BANNISTER returns to the witness chair.)

JUDGE

Mr. Drummond, you may examine the venireman.

DRUMMOND

Or about a fella named Darwin?

BANNISTER

Can't say I have.

DRUMMOND

I'll bet you read your Bible.

BANNISTER

Nope.

DRUMMOND

How come?

BANNISTER

Can't read.

DRUMMOND

Well, you are fortunate. (There are a few titters through the courtroom) He'll do.

(BANNISTER *turns toward the JUDGE, poised.*)

JUDGE

Take your seat, Mr. Bannister.

(*BANNISTER races to the jury box as if shot from a gun, and sits in the remaining front seat, beaming*)

Mr. Meeker, will you call a venireman to fill the twelfth and last seat on the jury?

BRADY

(*Rising*)

Your Honor, before we continue, will the court entertain a motion on a matter of procedure?

MEEKER

(*Calling toward the spectators*)

Jesse H. Dunlap. You're next, Jesse.

JUDGE

Will the learned prosecutor state the motion?

BRADY

It has been called to my attention that the temperature in this courtroom is now 97 degrees Fahrenheit. (He mops his forehead with a large handkerchief) And it may get hotter! (*There is laughter. BRADY basks in the warmth of his popularity*) I do not feel that the dignity of the court will suffer if we remove a few superfluous outer garments.

(BRADY indicates his alpaca coat.)

JUDGE

Does the defense have any objection to Colonel Brady's motion?

DRUMMOND

(*Askance*)

I don't know if the dignity of the court can be upheld with these galluses I've got on.

JUDGE

We'll take that chance, Mr. Drummond. Those who wish to remove their coats may do so.

(*With relief, many of the spectators take off their coats and loosen their collar buttons. DRUMMOND wears wide, bright purple suspenders. The spectators react.*)

BRADY

(*With affable sarcasm*)

Is the counsel for the defense showing us the latest fashion in the great metropolitan city of Chicago?

DRUMMOND

(*Pleased*)

Glad you asked me that. I brought these along special.

(*He cocks his thumbs in the suspenders*) Just so happens I bought these galluses at Peabody's General Store in your home town, Mr. Brady. Weeping Water, Nebraska.

(DRUMMOND snaps the suspenders jauntily. There is amused reaction at this. BRADY is nettled: this is his show and he wants all the laughs. The JUDGE pounds for order.)

JUDGE

Let us proceed with the selection of the final juror.

(MEEKER *brings* JESSE DUNLAP *to the stand. He is a rugged, righteous-looking man.*)

MEEKER

State your name and occupation.

DUNLAP

Jesse H. Dunlap. Farmer and cabinetmaker.

DAVENPORT

Do you believe in the Bible, Mr. Dunlap?

DUNLAP

(Vigorously)

I believe in the Holy Word of God. And I believe in Matthew Harrison Brady!

(There is some applause, and a few scattered "Amens." BRADY waves acceptance.)

DAVENPORT

This man is acceptable to the prosecution.

JUDGE

Very well, Mr. Drummond?

DRUMMOND

(Quietly, without rising)

No questions. Not acceptable.

BRADY

(Annoyed)

Does Mr. Drummond refuse this man a place on the jury simply because he believes in the Bible?

DRUMMOND

If you find an Evolutionist in this town, you can refuse him.

BRADY

(Angrily)

I object to the defense attorney rejecting a worthy citizen without so much as asking him a question!

DRUMMOND

(Agreeably)

All right. I'll ask him a question.

(Saunters over to DUNLAP)

How are you?

DUNLAP

(A little surprised)

Kinda hot.

DRUMMOND

So am I. Excused.

(DUNLAP looks at the JUDGE, confused.)

JUDGE

You are excused from jury duty, Mr. Dunlap. You may step down.

(DUNLAP goes back and joins the spectators, a little miffed.)

BRADY

(Piously)

I object to the note of levity which the counsel for the defense is introducing into these proceedings.

JUDGE

The bench agrees with you in spirit, Colonel Brady.

DRUMMOND

(Rising angrily)

And I object to all this damned "Colonel" talk. I am not familiar with Mr. Brady's military record.

JUDGE

Well – he was made an Honorary Colonel in our State Militia. The day he arrived in Hillsboro.

DRUMMOND

The use of this title prejudices the case of my client it calls up a picture of the prosecution, astride a white horse, ablaze in the uniform of a militia colonel, with all the forces of right and righteousness marshaled behind him.

JUDGE

What can we do?

DRUMMOND

Break him. Make him a private. I have no serious objection to the honorary title of Private Brady.”

(There is a buzz of reaction. The JUDGE gestures for the MAYOR to come over for a hurried, whispered conference.)

MAYOR

(After some whispering)

Well, we can't take it back – !

(There is another whispered exchange. Then the MAYOR steps gingerly toward DRUMMOND)

By – by the authority of – well, I'm sure the governor won't have any objection – I hereby appoint you, Mr. Drummond a temporary Honorary Colonel in the State Militia.

DRUMMOND

(Shaking his head, amused)

Gentlemen, what can I say? It is not often in a man's life that he attains the exalted rank of “temporary Honorary Colonel.”

MAYOR

It will be made permanent, of course, pending the arrival of the proper papers over the Governor's signature.

DRUMMOND

(Looking at the floor)

I thank you.

JUDGE

Colonel Brady. Colonel Drummond. You will examine the next venireman.

(MEEKER brings GEORGE SILLERS to the stand.)

MEEKER

State your name and occupation.

SILLERS

George Sillers. I work at the feed store.

DAVENPORT

Tell me, sir. Would you call yourself a religious man?

SILLERS

I guess I'm as religious as the next man.

(BRADY rises. DAVENPORT immediately steps back, deferring to his superior.)

BRADY

In Hillsboro, sir, that means a great deal. Do you have any children, Mr. Sillers?

SILLERS

Not as I know of.

BRADY

If you had a son, Mr. Sillers, or a daughter, what would you think if that sweet child came home from school and told you that a Godless teacher –

DRUMMOND

Objection! We're supposed to be choosing jury members! The prosecution's denouncing the defendant before the trial has even begun!

JUDGE

Objection sustained.

(The JUDGE and BRADY exchange meaningless smiles.)

BRADY

Mr. Sillers. Do you have any personal opinions with regard to the defendant that might prejudice you on his behalf?

SILLERS

Cates? I don't hardly know him. He bought some peat moss from me once, and paid his bill.

BRADY

Mr. Sillers impresses me as an honest God-fearing man. I accept him.

JUDGE

Thank you, Colonel Brady. Colonel Drummond?

DRUMMOND

(Strolling toward the witness chair)

Mr. Sillers, you just said that you were a religious man. Tell me something. Do you work at it very hard?

SILLERS

Well, I'm pretty busy down at the feed store. My wife tends to the religion for both of us.

DRUMMOND

In other words, you take care of this life, and your wife takes care of the next one?

DAVENPORT

Objection.

JUDGE

Objection sustained.

DRUMMOND

While your wife was tending to the religion, Mr. Sillers, did you ever happen to bump into a fella named Charles Darwin?

SILLERS

Not till recent.

DRUMMOND

From what you've heard about this Darwin, do you think your wife would want to have him over for Sunday dinner?

(BRADY rises magnificently)

BRADY

Your Honor, my worthy opponent from Chicago is cluttering the issue with hypothetical questions -

DRUMMOND

(Wheeling)

I'm doing your job, Colonel.

DAVENPORT

(Leaping up)

The prosecution is perfectly able to handle its own arguments.

DRUMMOND

Look, I've established that Mr. Sillers isn't working very hard at religion. Now, for your sake, I want to make sure he isn't working at Evolution.

SILLERS

(Simply)

I'm just working at the feed store.

(Laughter from the crowd.)

BRADY

Mr. Sillers, do you think you can render an impartial –

DRUMMOND

(To the JUDGE)

Objection, objection. The prosecution has already accepted this man.
(The following becomes a simultaneous Mangle among the attorneys.)

BRADY

I want a fair trial.

DRUMMOND

So do I!

BRADY

Unless the state of mind of the members of the jury conforms to the laws and patters of society –

DRUMMOND

Conform! Conform! What do you want to do – run the jury through a meat-grinder, so they all come out the same? *(Turning)* Take a box seat there, Mr. Sillers.

DAVENPORT

Your Honor, this is ludicrous! *(The JUDGE beats with his gavel)*

JUDGE

Gentlemen, you are both out of order. The bench holds that the jury has been selected. *(BRADY lets his arms fall, with a gesture of sweet charity)* Because of the lateness of the hour and the unusual heat, the court is recessed until ten o'clock tomorrow morning. *(JUDGE raps the gavel, and the court begins to break up. Then the JUDGE notices a slip of paper, and raps for order again)* Oh. The Reverend Brown has asked me to make this announcement. There will be a prayer meeting tonight on the courthouse lawn, to pray for justice and guidance. All are invited.

DRUMMOND

Your Honor. I object to this commercial announcement.

JUDGE

Commercial announcement?

DRUMMOND

For Reverend Brown's product. Why don't you announce that there will be an Evolutionist meeting?

JUDGE

I have no knowledge of such a meeting.

DRUMMOND

That's understandable. It's bad enough that everybody coming into this courtroom has to walk underneath a big banner that says: "Read Your Bible!" Your Honor, I want that sign taken down! Or else I want another one put up – just as big, just as big letters – saying "Read Your Darwin!"

JUDGE

That's preposterous!

DRUMMOND

It certainly is.

JUDGE

You are out of order, Colonel Drummond. This court stands recessed.

(As the formality of the courtroom is relaxed, there is a general feeling of relief. Spectators and jury members adjust their sticky clothes, and start moving off. Many of the townspeople gather around BRADY, to shake his hand, get his autograph, and to stand for a moment in the great man's presence. They cluster about him, and follow BRADY as he goes off, the shepherd leading his flock. In marked contrast, DRUMMOND packs away his brief in a tattered leather case; but no one comes near him. RACHEL moves toward BERT. They stand face-to-face, wordlessly. Both seem to wish the whole painful turmoil were over. Suddenly, RACHEL darts to DRUMMOND'S side. CATES opens his mouth to stop her, but she speaks rapidly, with pent-up tension.)

RACHEL

Mr. Drummond, you've got to call the whole thing off now. It's not too late. Bert knows he did wrong. He didn't mean to. And he's sorry. Why can't he just stand up and say to everybody: "I did wrong. I broke a law. I admit it. I won't do it again." Then they'd stop all this fuss, and – everything would be like it was.

(DRUMMOND looks at RACHEL, not unkindly.)

DRUMMOND

Who are you?

RACHEL

I'm – a friend of Bert's.

(DRUMMOND *turns to* CATES.)

DRUMMOND

How about it, boy? Getting cold feet?

CATES

I never thought it would be like this! Like Barnum and Bailey coming to town.

DRUMMOND

We can call it off. You want to quit?

RACHEL

(*Coming to Bert's side*)

Yes!

CATES

People look at me as if I was a murderer. Worse than a murderer. That fella from Minnesota who killed his wife – remember, Rachel – half the town turned out to see 'em put him on the train. They just looked at him as if he was a curiosity – not like they *hated* him. Not like he'd done anything really wrong! Just different!

DRUMMOND

(*Laughs a little to himself*)

There's nothing very original about killing your wife.

CATES

People I thought were my friends look at me now as if I had horns growing out of my head.

DRUMMOND

You murder your wife, it isn't as bad as murdering an old wives' tale. Kill one of their fairy-tale notions, and they'll call down the wrath of God, Brady, and the state legislature.

RACHEL

You make a joke out of everything. You seem to think it's so funny!

DRUMMOND

Lady, when you lose your ability to laugh, you lose your power to think straight.

CATES

Mr. Drummond, I can't laugh. I'm scared.

DRUMMOND

Good. You'd be a damned fool if you weren't.

RACHEL

You're supposed to help Bert; but every time you swear, you make it worse for him.

DRUMMOND

(Honestly)

I'm sorry if I offend you. (He smiles) But I don't swear just for the hell of it. (He fingers his galluses) You see, I figure language is a poor enough means of communication as it is. So we ought to use all the words we've got. Besides, there are damned few words that everybody understands.

RACHEL

You don't care anything for Bert! You just want a chance to make speeches against the Bible!

DRUMMOND

I care a great deal about Bert. I care a great deal about what Bert thinks.

RACHEL

Well, I care about what the people in this town think of *him*.

DRUMMOND

(Quietly)

Can you buy back his respect by making him a coward? *(He spades his hands in his hip pockets)* I understand what Bert is going through. It's the loneliest feeling in the world – to find yourself standing up when everybody else is sitting down. To have everybody look at you and say, "What's the matter with him?" I know. I know what it feels like. It's like walking down an empty street listening to the sound of your own footsteps. Shutters closed. Blinds drawn, doors locked against you. And you aren't sure if you are walking towards

something, or if you're just walking away. *(He takes a deep breath, then turns abruptly)* Cates, I'll change your plea and we'll call off the whole business – on one condition. If you honestly believe you committed a criminal act against the citizens of this state and the minds of their children. If you honestly believe that you 're wrong and the law's right. Then the hell with it. I'll pack my grip and go back to Chicago, where it's a cool hundred in the shade.

RACHEL

Bert knows he's done wrong. Don't you, Bert?

CATES

What do you think, Mr. Drummond?

DRUMMOND

I'm here. That tells you what I think. *(He looks squarely at CATES)* Well, what's the verdict, Bert? You want to find yourself guilty before the jury does?

CATES

(Quietly, with determination)

No, sir. I'm not gonna quit.

RACHEL

(Protesting)

Bert!

CATES

It wouldn't do any good, anyhow. *(He turns to RACHEL)* If you'll stick by me, Rache – well, we can fight it out.

(He smiles at her wanly. All the others have gone now, except MEEKER and DRUMMOND. RACHEL shakes her head, bewildered, tears forming in her eyes.)

RACHEL

I don't know what to do.

CATES

(Frowning)

What's the matter, Rache?

RACHEL

I don't want to do it, Bert; but Mr. Brady says –

DRUMMOND

What does Brady say?

RACHEL
(Looking down)

They want me to testify against Bert.

CATES
(Stunned)

You can't!

MEEKER

I don't mean to rush you, Bert; but we gotta close up the shop.

(CATES is genuinely panicked)

CATES

Rache, some of the things I've talked to you about are just things you say to your own heart. *(He starts to go with MEEKER, then turns back)* If you get up on the stand and say those things out loud – *(He shakes his head)* Don't you understand? The words I've said to you – softly, in the dark – just trying to figure out what the stars are for, or what might be on the back side of the moon –

RACHEL

Bert –

CATES

They were questions, Rache. I was just asking questions. If you repeat those things on the witness stand, Brady'll make 'em sound like answers. And they'll crucify me!

(CATES and MEEKER go off. The lights are slowly dimming.)

DRUMMOND *puts on his coat, sizing up RACHEL as he does so.*

RACHEL, *torn, is almost unconscious of his presence or of her surroundings.*

DRUMMOND
(Kindly, quietly)

What's your name? Rachel what?

RACHEL

Rachel Brown. Can they make me testify?

DRUMMOND

I'm afraid so. It would be nice if nobody ever had to make anybody do anything. But – (*He takes his brief case*) Don't let Brady scare you. He only seems to be bigger than the law.

RACHEL

It's not Mr. Brady. It's my father.

DRUMMOND

Who's your father?

The Reverend Jeremiah Brown (DRUMMOND whistles softly through his teeth) I remember feeling this way when I was a little girl. I would wake up at night, terrified of the dark. I'd think sometimes that my bed was on the ceiling, and the whole house was upside down; and if I didn't hang onto the mattress, I might fall outward into the stars. (*She shivers a little, remembering*) I wanted to run to my father, and have him tell me I was safe, that everything was all right. But I was always more frightened of him than I was of falling. It's the same way now.

DRUMMOND

(*Softly*)

Is your mother dead?

RACHEL

I never knew my mother. (*Distraught*) Is it true? Is Bert wicked?

DRUMMOND

(*With simple conviction*)

Bert Cates is a good man. Maybe even a great one. And it takes strength for a woman to love such a man. Especially when he's a pariah in the community.

RACHEL

I'm only confusing Bert. And he's confused enough as it is.

DRUMMOND

The man who has everything figured out is probably a fool. College examinations notwithstanding, it takes a very smart fella to say "I don't know the answer!"

(DRUMMOND *puts on his hat, touches the brim of it as a gesture of good-bye and goes slowly off.*)