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Dramatic Publishing



HARPER LEE'S

To Kill a Mockingbird

Dramatized by CHRISTOPHER SERGEL

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

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(TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD)

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TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
A Full-Length Play
For Twelve Men* and Eight Women, Extras

CHARACTERS

JEAN LOUISE FINCH	Scout as a grown-up woman
SCOUT	a young girl
JEM	her brother
ATTICUS	their father
CALPURNIA	the housekeeper
MAUDIE ATKINSON	}
STEPHANIE CRAWFORD	
MRS. DUBOSE	
NATHAN RADLEY	
ARTHUR RADLEY (BOO)	
DILL	a young boy
HECK TATE	the sheriff
JUDGE TAYLOR	the judge
REVEREND SYKES	a minister
MAYELLA EWELL	a young woman
BOB EWELL	her father
WALTER CUNNINGHAM	a farmer
MR. GILMER	public prosecutor
TOM ROBINSON	a young man
HELEN ROBINSON	his wife
TOWNSPEOPLE	
FARMERS	

PLACE: Maycomb, Alabama

TIME: 1935

*Boo Radley and Nathan Radley may be played by the same actor.

SETTING

There may be a curtain, but it isn't necessary. The set which stands throughout the play can be visible to the audience as they take their seats in the theatre.

The intention of the set is to suggest a part of a house and the immediate neighborhood just outside, in a small town in the southern part of Alabama. It is 1935, and while the set need not reflect this in detail, a few props that suggest the period (available, no doubt, from someone's attic) are recommended.

The stage has two levels. At the right on the lower level is the porch of the Finch home. It has several old rockers, chairs, possibly an old-fashioned radio and a porch swing or glider.

On the upper level, suggesting the street, are several narrow porch fronts with doorways behind. The porches have railings, and if desired, there may be flowers or shrubs about them. The Dubose porch, ULC, should have at least a few potted flowers. The actors must have access to these porches from behind, and there should be a passageway in front of the porches, but still on the platform, on which an actor can cross the stage from right to left. This passageway also makes room for an inner curtain that can be drawn across (or lowered) in front of the upper level porches.

At the left side of the stage is a part of another house. It's a slate-gray house with dark green shutters beside a window with heavy curtains behind. There is a closed door and a picket fence. The place is neglected, and to a child, it could seem ominous. It is on the upper level, though the little section of picket fence is in front of it on the lower level. Just outside the fence and at the left is a tree.

ACT ONE

THE HOUSELIGHTS DIM and in the darkness there are the soft sounds of birds, and in the distance, a dog barking.

The stage light comes up, revealing a girl who is now sitting in the porch swing (or glider) thoughtfully swinging back and forth. Her hair is plain and she wears bib overalls.

A woman, dressed in simple modern clothes, comes on the lower level, L. If possible, there should be something about her that suggests the girl-in-the-swing, grown older, for this is who she is. The woman, Jean Louise Finch, was called "Scout" when she was young, and so the young girl in the swing will be called SCOUT, while the same person, grown older, is called JEAN.

JEAN is looking about as though seeing this place in memory. As she comes up to the tree, she reaches up and touches a place on the trunk.

JEAN (smiling as she speaks; softly and to herself). The cement would still be there covering the knothole. (A voice is heard calling from off R. It's the voice of CALPURNIA.)

CALPURNIA (calling). Scout -- where are you? Scout, you come here.

JEAN. My name is Jean Louise, but when I was that young girl there on the swing . . . they called me "Scout. "

CALPURNIA. You hear me, Scout?

SCOUT (still swinging; preoccupied). I'm watching for Atticus.

JEAN. Atticus -- that's my father. Back then he seemed ancient . . . feeble.

He was a lawyer and nearly fifty. When my brother Jem asked him why he was so old, he said he got started late -- which we thought reflected on his manliness. He was much older than the parents of our school contemporaries and there was nothing Jem or I could say about him.

SCOUT (speaking forward). Because he doesn't do anything. Atticus doesn't drive a dump truck for the county, he isn't sheriff, he doesn't farm, or work in a garage, or anything worth mentioning. Other fathers go hunting, play poker, or fish. Atticus works in an office, and he reads. JEAN. With those attributes, however, Atticus did not remain as inconspicuous as Jem and I might have wished. (With feeling.) No, he did not!

BOY'S VOICE (calling from off L). Hey, Scout -- how come your daddy defends niggers? (Singsong.) Scout's daddy defends nig . . . gers! (SCOUT has risen and come to the porch railing, her fists clenched.)

SCOUT. You gonna take that back, boy?

BOY'S VOICE. You gonna make me? My folks say your daddy's a disgrace and that nigger oughta hang from the water tank.

SCOUT. You take that back!

BOY'S VOICE (going away). Make me! Try and make me!

CALPURNIA (voice offstage R). Scout. I've told you to come in.

SCOUT. I'm not ready to come in. (Going back to swing.) I have to talk to Atticus.

JEAN. It was Maycomb, Alabama and it was back in 1935 when I was that girl -- back when ugly words were first shouted at us -- back at the beginning of an experience that brought a man to his death. (Looks toward house L.) And it brought Boo Radley storming out of that shut up house -- the attack on me -- Jem's arm broken -- another man killed! (Turning back front.) But that isn't what I want to remember. That's not why my mind's come back here. (Trying to sort this out.) There's something I have to do -- something my father wanted. Probably enough years have gone by -- enough so I can look back -- perhaps even enough so now I can do the one thing my father asked. (Correcting herself with a smile. Almost an afterthought.) No -- there was one other thing. When he gave us air rifles, he asked us never to kill a mockingbird.

(MISS MAUDIE ATKINSON has come out on her porch.)

MISS MAUDIE (to JEAN LOUISE). Your father's right. Mockingbirds just make music. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs; they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.

SCOUT (crossing to porch rail). Miss Maudie -- this is an old neighborhood, ain't it?

MISS MAUDIE (turning toward SCOUT). Been here longer than the town.

SCOUT. No, I mean the folks on our street are all old. Jem and me's the only children. Mrs. Dubose is close on a hundred and Miss Crawford's old and so are you and Atticus.

MISS MAUDIE (tartly). Not being wheeled around yet. Neither's your father. You're lucky. You and Jem have the benefit of your father's age. If your father was thirty, you'd find life quite different.

SCOUT (emphatically). I sure would. Atticus can't do anything.

MISS MAUDIE. You'd be surprised. There's life in him yet.

SCOUT. What can he do?

MISS MAUDIE. Quite a lot. (Going.) Seems to me you'd be proud of him.

SCOUT (calling after her; concerned). Why? The way some folks are starting to go on, you'd think he was running a still. (Realizing Miss Maudie is gone, she returns to swing.) I have to speak to him.

JEAN (crossing). We lived over there -- Atticus, my brother Jem, and Calpurnia, our cook -- who raised us. Calpurnia was all angles and bones.

(CALPURNIA has come out on the porch.)

CALPURNIA. You come in and wash up before your father gets home.

SCOUT (rising, but under protest). I said I wasn't ready.

CALPURNIA. Your brother's already washed. Why don't you behave as well as Jem?

SCOUT. Because he's older than me and you know it.

CALPURNIA (giving her a swat to encourage her along). Get in there.

(They are both going into the house.)

JEAN. Calpurnia's hand was as hard as a bed slat. My mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. (Smiles wryly.) But I felt Calpurnia's tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.

SCOUT (voice, from inside house). The water's too hot.

CALPURNIA (voice, also inside house; unimpressed). Keep scrubbin'!

JEAN (considering neighborhood). Even in 1935, Maycomb, Alabama was already a tired old town.

(HECK TATE and JUDGE TAYLOR enter on the upper level L, and are crossing R.)

JEAN (continuing). In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. (Noticing.)

That's Heck Tate -- the sheriff, and Judge Taylor.

HECK (calling). Atticus -- you home?

(CALPURNIA comes out onto the porch.)

CALPURNIA. Not yet, Mr. Tate. Afternoon, Judge Taylor.

HECK. Cal -- tell him we were passing by. (They nod and are starting off R.)

CALPURNIA. You want him to call?

JUDGE (as they go; pleasantly). We'll be seeing him anyway.

(CALPURNIA re-enters the house, and MISS STEPHANIE CRAWFORD comes on DL.)

JEAN. People moved slowly then -- and somehow it was hotter. A day was twenty-four hours long, but seemed longer. There was no hurry for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with. (MISS STEPHANIE has paused to consider the house at L with disapproval.)

MISS STEPHANIE. Lack of money is no excuse to let a place go like

that. At the least they could cut the Johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco. (Turns toward JEAN.) But of course, they're Radleys.

JEAN (identifying). Miss Stephanie Crawford -- a neighborhood scold.

According to her, everybody in Maycomb has a streak -- a drinking streak, a gambling streak, a mean streak, a funny streak.

MISS STEPHANIE (emphatically). No Atkinson minds his own business; every third Merriweather is morbid; the truth is not in the Delafields; all the Bufords walk like that; if Mrs. Grace sips gin out of Lydia E. Pinkham bottles, it is nothing unusual -- her mother did the same.

JEAN. She was also your principal source of information about Boo Radley.

MISS STEPHANIE (coming closer; confidentially and with relish). When that boy was in his teens, he took up with some bad ones from Old Sarum. They were arrested on charges of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, assault and battery, and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female. Boo Radley was released to his father, who shut him up in that house, and he wasn't seen again for fifteen years.

JEAN. I'd have to ask -- as she intended. (To her.) Miss Stephanie, what happened fifteen years later?

MISS STEPHANIE (delighted to continue). Boo Radley was sitting in the living room cutting some items from The Maycomb Tribune to paste in his scrapbook. As his father passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants and resumed his activities. Boo was then thirty-three. Mr. Radley said no Radley was going to any insane asylum. So he was kept home, where he is till this day.

JEAN. How do you know? How can you be sure he's still there?

MISS STEPHANIE (as she goes into her house; emphatically). Because I haven't seen him carried out yet. (She exits.)

JEAN (regarding Radley house). Jem and I had never seen him. That didn't come till later, and when it did, we were in no condition to take much notice, being in fear for our lives! (She turns back toward the audience.) People said Boo Radley went out at night when the moon was down. When azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he

breathed on them. The tall Radley pecan trees shook their fruit into the adjoining schoolyard in the back, but the nuts lay untouched. Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked.

(During this, MRS. DUBOSE has come out onto her porch. She's old and bad-tempered. Supporting herself [partially] with a cane, she crosses to her porch chair which is draped in shawls. JEM, an active boy a few years older than Scout, comes out onto the porch R, holding football.)

JEAN. My brother Jem -- before the fight when his arm got broken. (JEM tucks the football under his arm, plunges off the porch, and starts dodging imaginary tacklers. She smiles.) Alabama must be playing in the Rose Bowl with Jem scoring the winning touchdown.

MRS. DUBOSE (sharply). Where are you going this time of day, Jeremy Finch? Playing hooky, I suppose. I'll just call up the principal and tell him.

JEM. Aw, it's Saturday, Mrs. Dubose.

MRS. DUBOSE. I wonder if your father knows where you are?

JEM. 'Course he does.

MRS. DUBOSE. Maudie Atkinson told me you broke down her scuppernong arbor this morning. She's going to tell your father and then you'll wish you'd never seen the light of day!

JEM (indignant). I haven't been near her scuppernong arbor!

MRS. DUBOSE. Don't you contradict me! (JEM clutches the football as though plunging through center and with MRS. DUBOSE calling after him, bulls his way off L.) If you aren't sent to the reform school before next week, my name's not Dubose! (She starts back into house.)

JEAN. Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose. If she was on the porch when Jem or I passed, we'd be raked by her wrathful gaze, subjected to ruthless interrogation regarding our behavior, and given a melancholy prediction on what we'd amount to when we grew up, which was always nothing. Jem and I hated her. We had no idea that she was fighting a hard battle.

(REVEREND SYKES, a Negro minister, dressed conservatively in a black

suit, black tie and white shirt, has come on down R.)

REVEREND SYKES (calling). Miss Cal--

(CALPURNIA is coming out onto the porch, followed by SCOUT.)

JEAN. Reverend Sykes of the First Purchase Church -- called First Purchase because it was paid for from the first earnings of the freed slaves.

CALPURNIA. Afternoon, Reverend.

REVEREND SYKES (speaking quietly). It's about Brother Tom Robinson's trouble. We have to do more for his wife and children.

CALPURNIA (agreeing). Yes, Reverend.

REVEREND SYKES. The collection for the next three Sundays will go to Helen. Please encourage everyone to bring what they can.

SCOUT (curiously). Why are you all taking up a collection for Tom Robinson's wife?

REVEREND SYKES. To tell you the truth, Miss Jean Louise, Helen's finding it hard to get work these days.

SCOUT. I know Tom Robinson's done somethin' awful, but why won't folks hire Helen?

REVEREND SYKES. Folks aren't anxious to (Hesitates as he sees someone entering L. He drops his voice.) -- to have anything to do with his family.

(MAYELLA EWELL, a poor girl accustomed to strenuous labor, has entered L on the platform, followed by her father, BOB EWELL, a little bantam cock of a man, ignorant and sharptempered.)

MAYELLA (as they're crossing R). Yes, Pa.

BOB EWELL. I told ya -- stay outa town right now, hear?

MAYELLA (resigned). I hear. (They are continuing off R.)

JEAN (quietly). Bob Ewell -- his daughter, Mayella. No truant officer could keep any of the Ewells in school. No public health officer could free them from filth and disease. Good times or bad, they lived off the

county -- in a cabin by the garbage dump near a small Negro settlement. (Smiles. Wryly.) And all Bob Ewell could hold onto that made him feel better than his nearest neighbors was that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water -- his skin was white.

SCOUT (puzzled). Why'd you stop talking? Those are just Ewells.

JEAN. Remembering it now, I'm not surprised they stopped talking.

REVEREND SYKES. I have a lot of calls to make. Good-bye, Miss Jean Louise. See you Sunday, Miss Cal.

CALPURNIA (nodding). Reverend.

SCOUT (after him). Bye. (REVEREND SYKES is crossing L, and exits. Curious.) Cal -- what did Tom Robinson do?

CALPURNIA. You mean, what do they say he did? Old Mr. Bob Ewell accused Tom of attackin' his girl and had him put in jail.

SCOUT (scornfully). But everyone in Maycomb knows the Ewells. You'd think folks would be glad to hire Tom's wife.

CALPURNIA (briefly). That's what you think.

SCOUT (not satisfied). What does it mean -- he attacked her?

CALPURNIA. You'll have to ask Mr. Finch about that. You hungry?

SCOUT (lighting up as she sees someone coming). I have to see Atticus. There's Dill! (CALPURNIA re-enters house.)

JEAN. That was the summer Dill came to us -- Dill, who was to give us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.

(DILL is coming on down L. He's a little older than Scout, small, blond and wise. He's neat, well-dressed with an undercurrent of sophistication, but his laugh is sudden and happy.)

DILL (looking up to SCOUT). Hey.

SCOUT. Hey, Dill. (She starts down from the porch and is crossing toward him.)

JEAN. His real name was Charles Baker Harris, and he'd been sent here to spend the summer with an aunt. We came to know Dill as a pocket Merlin whose head teemed with eccentric plans, strange longings and quaint fancies. He was to be my childhood fiancé -- which was nice for a girl, even if he wasn't very big. "I'm little," he said one time, "but I'm

old."

DILL. You watchin' for your father?

SCOUT. That's right. (Struck with sudden curiosity.) What about your daddy?

DILL (cautiously). What do you mean?

(JEM, still carrying the football, is coming back on DL.)

SCOUT. You never say anything about him.

DILL. Because I haven't got one.

SCOUT. Is he dead?

DILL. No.

SCOUT. Then if he isn't dead, you've got one, haven't you? (DILL is embarrassed.)

JEM. Never mind her, Dill.

SCOUT (exasperated). If his father isn't dead, how can he say he hasn't got one?

JEM (has taken her arm). Scout! (She stops at his tone and turns to look with him at the door to the Radley place, which is opening.)

(NATHAN RADLEY, a pale, thin, leathery man is coming out.)

SCOUT (relaxing; softly). Nathan Radley.

JEAN (at R). When old Mr. Radley died some folks thought Boo might come out, but they had another think coming. Boo's older brother, Nathan -- that's him -- moved in and took his father's place. At least Nathan Radley would speak to us. (NATHAN, preoccupied, is passing by.)

JEM (nervously clearing his throat). Hidy do, Mr. Nathan.

NATHAN (walking off). Afternoon.

JEAN (thoughtfully). Looking back for a place to begin -- perhaps it would be what happens next. (She considers this a moment, nods confirmation to herself, and steps off R. Meanwhile SCOUT, JEM and DILL have all turned to look back at the Radley place.)

JEM. Now Boo Radley's in there all by himself.

DILL. Wonder what he does. Looks like he'd stick his head out the door some time.

JEM. He goes out when it's pitch dark. I've seen his tracks in our backyard many a morning, and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen.

DILL. Wonder what he looks like.

JEM (professionally). Judging from his tracks, he's about six and a half feet tall, he eats raw squirrels and any cats he can catch. What teeth he has are yellow and rotten. His eyes pop and most of the time he drools.

DILL (with decision). Let's make him come out.

SCOUT (shocked). Make Boo Radley come out?

JEM. If you want to get yourself killed, all you have to do is go up and knock on that door.

DILL (challenging). You're scared -- too scared to put your big toe in the front yard.

JEM. Ain't scared, just respectful.

DILL. I dare you.

JEM (trapped). You dare me? (He turns to look at the house apprehensively.)

SCOUT. Don't go near it, Jem.

DILL. You gonna run out on a dare?

JEM. Lemme think a minute.

DILL. Just touch the house. I dare you!

JEM. Touch the house, that's all?

DILL. He'll probably come out after you. Then Scout 'n me'll jump on him and hold him down till we can tell him, we just want to look at him. (JEM doesn't respond. Impatiently.) Well?

JEM. Don't hurry me. (He starts slowly toward house.)

DILL. Scout and me's right behind you. (As JEM continues toward the Radley place, they follow, SCOUT pausing beside the tree. As JEM hesitates.) Folks where I come from aren't so scared. I've never seen such scary folks as here. (That does it. JEM speeds to the house, slaps it with his palm, and races back past SCOUT and DILL to R. DILL follows. SCOUT starts to follow, notices something in a knothole in the tree, takes it, and then follows.)

JEM (panting with excitement). So there--- (They all turn and look back at the house.)

DILL (hushed). Someone at the window! Look at the curtains! (The curtains have been pulled slightly to the side, and now they fall back into place.)

JEM (horrified). He was watching! He saw me!

SCOUT (exhausted). Don't ever do that again. (Absently putting a piece of gum in her mouth.) If you get killed -- what with Atticus already so old -- what would become of me?

JEM (considering her). Where'd you get the chewing gum?

SCOUT (as she chews, nodding L). It was sticking in the knothole.

JEM (shocked). That tree? (As she nods.) Spit it out! Right now!

SCOUT (obeying, but indignant). I was just getting the flavor.

JEM (grimly). Suppose Boo Radley put it there? Suppose it's poison? You go gargle!

SCOUT (shaking head). It'd take the taste outa my mouth.

DILL (still concentrating on the Radley house). Let's throw a pebble against the door -- and as soon as he sticks his head out, say we want to buy him an ice cream. (Logically.) That'll seem friendly. Maybe if he came out, and sat a spell with us, he'd feel better.

SCOUT. How do you know he don't feel good now?

DILL (concerned). How'd you feel if you'd been shut up for a hundred years with nothing but cats to eat? (Searching about.) 'Course, if you'd rather I throw the pebble ----

JEM (disgusted). Better leave it to me. (Apparently picking up pebble.) How many times do I have to show you that---

DILL (unimpressed). Maybe you ran up and touched it, but---

SCOUT (worried). You're not going to throw a stone at the Radley house!

JEM (to DILL, as he winds up to throw). I guess I just have to keep on showing you-- (He's stopped by an authoritative voice from off L.)

ATTICUS. Jem! (JEM stops and they all look L.)

DILL. Your father!

SCOUT (at same time). Atticus!

(ATTICUS, carrying an old brief case and wearing his "office" clothes,