

Audition Pieces

The Children's Hour by Lillian Hellman

- Please choose only one audition piece to perform at your audition. If you are interested in several characters, please choose the piece of your first choice or the character which most closely matches your first choice.
- Auditionees are encouraged to memorise their audition pieces. However, reading from a print-out is also fine.

Karen Wright (25-33), school teacher

Karen is talking to her fiancé, Joe, about how their relationship cannot continue. This takes place several weeks after they have lost the libel court case. Joe has just admitted that he believed it might be possible that Karen and Martha were lovers.

No, No, no. That isn't the way things work. Maybe you believe me. I'd never know whether you did or not. You'd never know whether you did, either. We couldn't do it that way. Can't you see what would happen? We'd be hounded by it all our lives. I'd be frightened, always, and in the end my own fright would make me – would make me hate you. Yes, it would; I know it would. I'd hate you for what I thought I'd done to you. And I'd hate myself, too. It would grow and grow until we'd be ruined by it. You're still trying to spare me, still trying to tell yourself that we might be alright again. But we won't be all right. Not ever, ever, ever. I don't know all the reasons why. Look, I'm standing here. I haven't changed. My hands look just the same, my face is the same, even my dress is old. We're in a room we've been in so many times before; you're sitting where you always sit; it's nearly time for dinner. I'm like everybody else. I can have all the things that everybody had. I can have you and a baby, and I can go to market, and we can go to the movies, and people will talk to me and – Oh, I'm sorry. I mustn't talk like that. That couldn't be true, any more.

Martha Dobie (25-33), school teacher

Martha is talking to Karen about the effect the scandal has had upon her and how she sees herself and her relationship with Karen in light of it.

There's always been something wrong. Always – as long as I can remember. But I never knew it until all this happened. You're afraid of hearing it; I'm more afraid than you. Listen to me. You've got to know it. I can't keep it any longer. I've got to tell you how guilty I am. I've been telling myself since the night we heard the child say it. Telling myself that I am guilty of nothing; I've been praying I could convince myself of it. I can't, I can't any longer. It's there. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I did love. I do love you. I resented your marriage; maybe because I wanted you; maybe I wanted you all along; maybe I couldn't call it by a name; maybe it's been there ever since I first knew you – I never felt that way about anybody but you. I've never loved a man – I never knew why before. Maybe it's that. It's funny; it's all mixed up. There's something in you, and you don't know it and you don't do anything about it. Suddenly a child gets bored and lies – and there you are, seeing it for the first time. I don't know. It all seems to come back to *me*. In some way I've ruined your life. I've ruined my own. I didn't even *know*. There's a big difference between us now, Karen.

Doctor Joseph Cardin (30-40), doctor, Karen's fiancé

Joe is trying to convince his fiancé, Karen, that the scandal hasn't changed anything between them. They can move to another place and leave it all behind. This takes place several weeks after Karen and Martha have lost the court case.

Look: I don't want to go to Vienna; I'd rather have stayed here. But then you don't want to go to Vienna; you'd rather have stayed here. Well, to hell with that. We *can't* stay here, and Vienna offers enough to eat and sleep and drink beer on. I'll be going back with a pretty girl who belongs to me. I'll show you off all over the place – to Dr Engelhardt, and the nurse at the desk, and to the fat gal in the cake shop, and to Fischer. (*Laughs*) The last time I saw him was at the railroad station. He took me back of the baggage car. "Joseph", he said, "You'll be a good doctor; I would trust you to cut up my Minna. But you're not a great doctor, and you never will be. Go back where you were born and take care of your sick. Leave the fancy work to the others." So I came home. (*beat*) But Vienna is our chance. It's just one chance, and if we miss it we're done for. It means we've got to start putting the whole business behind us now. *Now*, Karen. What you've done, you've done – and that's that.

Mary Tilford (12-15), school girl

(Even if you are interested in playing one of the other schoolgirls, please prepare this piece.)

Mary is bullying another girl, Rosalie. She knows that Rosalie stole a girl's bracelet and she is threatening to tell on her if Rosalie does not do what she wants.

You can't call me a fibber, Rosalie Wells. That's a kind of a dare and I won't take a dare. I guess I'll go tell Grandma, anyway. Then she can call the police and they'll come for you and you'll spend the rest of your life in one of those solitary prisons and you'll get older and older, and when you're very old and can't see anymore, they'll let you out, maybe with a big sign on your back saying you're a thief, and your mother and father will be dead and you won't have any place to go and you'll beg on the streets. Nobody'll believe you didn't take it, Rosalie Wells, least of all the police. You're just a common ordinary thief.

Mrs Amelia Tilford (55-75), Mary's grandmother

This takes place in Mrs Tilford's house, when Karen, Martha and Joe confront her. Mrs Tilford is defending her actions and expressing her opinion about the possibility of Martha and Karen suing her for libel.

It is you I am thinking of. I am frightened for you. It was wrong of you to brazen it out here tonight; it would be criminally foolish of you to brazen it out in public. That can bring you nothing but pain. I am an old woman, Miss Dobie, and I have seen too many people, out of pride, act on that pride. In the end they punish themselves. You came here demanding explanations. It was I who should have asked them from you. You attack me, you attack Mary. I've told you I didn't mean you any harm. I still don't. You claim that it isn't true; it may be natural that you should say that, but I *know* that it is true. No matter what you say, you know very well I wouldn't have acted until I was absolutely sure. All I wanted was to get those children away. That has been done. There won't be any talk about it or about you – I'll see to that. You have been in my house long enough. Get out.

Mrs Lily Mortar (45-55), an ex-actress, Martha's aunt

Martha and Lily are arguing because Martha wishes Lily to leave the school. Lily blames Martha's mood because of her particular friendship with Karen and infers that there is something wrong with her. When two schoolgirls overhear this conversation and tell Mary, it will be instrumental in the scandal that follows.

So? You're turning me out? At my age! Nice, grateful girl you are. I absolutely refuse to be shipped off three thousand miles away. I'm not going to England. I shall go back to the stage. I'll write to my agents tomorrow. I should have known better. I should have known to stay out of your way when *he's* in the house. You always take your spite out on me. Any day that he's in the house is a bad day. Every time that man comes into this house, you have a fit. It seems like you just can't stand the idea of them being together. God knows what you'll do when they get married. You're jealous of him, that's what it is. And it's unnatural, just as unnatural as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend, you always got mad when she liked anybody else. Well, you'd better get a beau of your own now.

Agatha (35-55), housemaid to Mrs Tilford

Agatha is scolding Mary for appearing at her grandmother's house, in a dirty, dishevelled state and without permission.

What are you doing here? Well, come on in – don't stand there gaping at me. Have they given you a holiday or did you just decide you'd get a better dinner here? Why aren't you in school? Look at your face and clothes. Where have you been? You don't feel well? Who ever heard of a person going for a walk in the woods when they didn't feel well? Don't think you can fool me, young lady. You might pull the wool over some people's eyes, but – I bet you've been up to something again. Well, you wait right here till I tell your grandmother. And if you feel sick, you certainly won't want any dinner. A good dose of rhubarb and soda will fix you up.