

BURIED SECRETS

Genre: Drama

Format: Feature

Nutshell: To Kill a Mockingbird, Lincoln Lawyer

Logline: Attorney-client privilege. The shallow grave of a young girl. A racist attorney shunned by his community risks his morals, ethics and life to find a way to disclose a secret that could save his black client and expose the killer

GENESIS

Many moons ago in law school, an Ethics professor told us a story about the attorney-client privilege and how it is the most sacrosanct of all oaths lawyers take. The attorney represented a murder suspect who shared in confidence the location of the murdered little girl; the classmate of the lawyer's daughter. Every morning his daughter would ask where her friend was and it wrecked him emotionally. That was the last case he took. The story haunted me and even before I knew I wanted to write screenplays I knew there was a bigger story.

CHARACTERS

James Klein – Torn between achieving his Norman Rockwell life and his ethical obligations our hero makes the ultimate sacrifice to find Justice.

Bayard Jones – A Black FBI agent returns to Greenville to investigate rumors of child trafficking out of the orphanage. Without jurisdiction he is stymied until he befriends James and together they uncover the town's dark secret.

Silas "Hush" Hamilton – A simple and honest man whose optimism and good nature makes him the perfect patsy.

Claire Klein – Loving, supporting wife of James has her own dark secret. She empathizes with James' dilemma but is afraid that this case could ruin their lives and maybe even end it.

Senator Quinn – Rich, powerful and connected. He sees in James, his son-in-law, a path to political power even he could never dream of. His deviant sexual predilections could upend his gilded life, but his superior legal mind ensures his secrets are safe.

Dr. Billings – The town's physician whose off the books medical procedures hold the clues to James' personal and professional dilemmas.

Ms. Pritchett – Jaded House Mother who supplements her income by trafficking orphans and occasionally turning a blind eye to the deviant behavior of her benefactors.

Sheriff Frank – Greenville's law. His handling of the town's criminal affairs ensures what happens in Greenville, stays in Greenville.

SUMMARY

Greenville, Mississippi – 1968. Civil Rights is the law, but racism permeates this small town. Angela, a young, white girl goes missing from the orphanage, a mere week before her adoption is final. Silas “Hush” Hamilton the caretaker for the town’s orphanage is a mentally slow, but honest and honorable man. He confesses in writing to killing and burying Angela, but when confronted with his written confession he adamantly insists that although he did bury her, he absolutely did not kill her. He promised not to tell who told him to bury the body and he is dead set on keeping this promise; after all, a promise is a promise and he was also told “Do not fear or be dismayed”, he would be fine.

James Klein, an orphan himself, parlays his baseball skills into a full college scholarship and a law degree. He marries his college sweetheart, Claire, the daughter of Senator Quinn. He epitomizes the Normal Rockwell life; a great career, political potential, and a loving and caring wife. All that’s missing are children. As the rotating public defender, James is assigned to Hush’s case and this may be the opportunity to propel him beyond State politics and into the national spotlight. A white, Southern lawyer representing a black man accused of murdering a white girl.

The case appears simple. A missing girl and a signed confession. However, James believes Hush’s protestation that he did not kill Angela and he strives to uncover the killer, only to be rebuffed by Hush’s refusal to disclose the secret he promised to keep. However, Hush does share his secret under the attorney-client-privilege and tell James where Angela’s body is buried. Burdened by this knowledge and unable to appease the town to offer Angela a “good, Christian burial”, James becomes the town’s pariah. Representing a black man was bad enough, not sharing where Angela is buried is unforgiveable.

Bayard Jones, a suave and ambitious black FBI Special Agent returns to Greenville to look into allegations of missing children. However, without jurisdiction his inquiries are thwarted and his return revolves more around rekindling a childhood romance. He befriends the shunned James as they both share their shunning; James for representing a black man and keeping his secret and Bayard for being an “Uncle Tom”.

Claire dies of medical complications, the result of her secret abortions. James, distraught to learn that Claire sought the abortions to protect her presumptive children from the abuse she received from her father, the Senator, confronts the Senator only to discover he is also responsible for the death of Angela. As a client of James, the Senator confesses to the crime of incest and murder and is protected by the attorney-client-privilege.

With no legal recourse, but with the help of Bayard, James devises a way to disclose Hush’s secret and expose the Senator and the orphanage’s transgressions. For this, James pays the ultimate price.