

## JOHN GRISHAM

# THE RAINMAKER

"A TAUT AND TERRIFIC PAGE-TURNER."

— Entertainment Weekly

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### The Rainmaker

A DELL BOOK

#### THE RAINMAKER A Dell Book

#### PUBLISHING HISTORY

Doubleday hardcover edition published May 1995 Dell mass market edition published February 1996 Dell reissue edition / September 2003

Published by Bantam Dell
A Division of Random House, Inc.
New York, New York

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#### ISBN 0-440-22165-X

Manufactured in the United States of America Published simultaneously in Canada

OPM 60 59 58 57 56 55 54 53

"A MIGHTY NARRATIVE TALENT AND AN UNERR-ING EYE FOR HOT-BUTTON ISSUES . . . in this new novel Grisham also reveals for the first time a surprising knack for comedy."

-Chicago Sun-Times

"Passages in *The Rainmaker* are reminiscent of Pat Conroy. . . . This is Grisham's most barbed book since *The Firm*, and it is by far his most entertaining."

--People

## HIGH PRAISE FOR JOHN GRISHAM'S #1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER THE RAINMAKER

"Grisham's vivid minor characters and near-Dickensian zeal for mocking pomposity and privilege are apt to endear him to his many readers all over again."

-Entertainment Weekly

"MR. GRISHAM'S MOST SYMPATHETIC HERO AND MOST ENGROSSING PREMISE SINCE HIS FIRST RUNAWAY SUCCESS, THE FIRM . . . An event-filled tale that works hard to please and largely succeeds."

—The Wall Street Journal

"Melding the courtroom savvy of A Time to Kill with the psychological nuance of The Chamber, imbued with wry humor and rich characters, this bittersweet tale, the author's quietest and most thoughtful, shows that Grisham's imagination can hold its own in a courtroom as well as on the violent streets outside."

-Publishers Weekly

Please turn the page for more extraordinary acclaim. . . .

"John Grisham has combined many of the best qualities of his previous novels to write an entertaining and credible courtroom thriller."

-Chicago Tribune

"NEVER BEFORE HAS GRISHAM USED THE DAVID-GOLIATH ELEMENT SO CLEVERLY AND POWERFULLY AS IN THE RAINMAKER. And by combining it with nail-biting tension, wrenching suspense and unadulterated excitement, and by adding plenty of humor and a smidgen of romance, he has made this new novel his most sheerly entertaining and enjoyable to date."

-Buffalo News (N.Y.)

"Grisham creates courtroom scenes of high humor and intense drama. . . . A good time will be had by all."

-Daily News (N.Y.)

"ENTERTAINING AND WELL-WRITTEN . . . The Rainmaker marks a return to Grisham's snappy pacing and devilish sense of fun."

-Memphis Flyer (Tenn.)

"Grisham has constructed a case and a courtroom drama strong enough to grab our attention."

-The New York Law Journal

#### "THIS IS GRISHAM IN FULL COMMAND OF TELLING A WICKEDLY FUN TALE."

-Nashville Banner (Tenn.)

"Think of Horatio Alger with a briefcase . . . Supporting the plot are colorful characters and a writing style as slick as greased Teflon. Grisham is smart enough not to let the telling of the story interfere with the tale itself."

-Lexington Herald-Leader (Ky.)

"For Grisham, this novel may signal a vital departure; for the reader it's a delightful surprise."

-New York Newsday

"THIS IS A BOOK WORTH STAYING AWAKE AT NIGHT TO READ . . . Within a few pages, Grisham dots his story with colorful characters just real enough to make you weep when they stumble and laugh with joy when they win . . . the story's smoothness and situations will make the reader fall in love with Grisham's writing again."

—Salisbury Post (N.C.)

"Grisham handles all his themes with admirable dexterity and clarity. . . Beyond its entertainment value, *The Rainmaker* can be read as a portrait of contemporary America."

\_Los Angeles Times

#### Books by John Grisham

A TIME TO KILL
THE FIRM
THE PELICAN BRIEF
THE CLIENT
THE CHAMBER
THE RUNAWAY JURY
THE PARTNER
THE STREET LAWYER
THE TESTAMENT
THE BRETHREN
A PAINTED HOUSE
SKIPPING CHRISTMAS
THE SUMMONS
THE KING OF TORTS

In writing this book, I was assisted at every turn by Will Denton, a prominent trial lawyer in Gulfport, Mississippi. For twenty-five years, Will has fought diligently for the rights of consumers and little people. His courtroom victories are legendary, and when I was a trial lawyer I wanted to be like Will Denton. He gave me his old files, answered my numerous questions, even proofread the manuscript.

Jimmie Harvey is a friend and a fine physician in Birmingham, Alabama. He carefully steered me through the impenetrable maze of medical procedures. Certain sections of this book are accurate and readable because of him.

Thanks.

One

Y DECISION TO BECOME A LAWYER was irrevocably sealed when I realized my father hated the legal profession. I was a young teenager, clumsy, embarrassed by my awkwardness, frustrated with life, horrified of puberty, about to be shipped off to a military school by my father for insubordination. He was an ex-Marine who believed boys should live by the crack of the whip. I'd developed a quick tongue and an aversion to discipline, and his solution was simply to send me away. It was years before I forgave him.

He was also an industrial engineer who worked seventy hours a week for a company that made, among many other items, ladders. Because by their very nature ladders are dangerous devices, his company became a frequent target of lawsuits. And because he handled design, my father was the favorite choice to speak for the company in depositions and trials. I can't say that I blame him for hating lawyers, but I grew to admire them because they made his life so miserable. He'd spend eight hours haggling with them, then hit the martinis as soon as he

walked in the door. No hellos. No hugs. No dinner. Just an hour or so of continuous bitching while he slugged down four martinis then passed out in his battered recliner. One trial lasted three weeks, and when it ended with a large verdict against the company my mother called a doctor and they hid him in a hospital for a month.

The company later went broke, and of course all blame was directed at the lawyers. Not once did I hear any talk that maybe a trace of mismanagement could in any way

have contributed to the bankruptcy.

Liquor became his life, and he became depressed. He went years without a steady job, which really ticked me off because I was forced to wait tables and deliver pizza so I could claw my way through college. I think I spoke to him twice during the four years of my undergraduate studies. The day after I learned I had been accepted to law school, I proudly returned home with this great news. Mother told me later he stayed in bed for a week.

Two weeks after my triumphant visit, he was changing a lightbulb in the utility room when (I swear this is true) a ladder collapsed and he fell on his head. He lasted a year in a coma in a nursing home before someone mercifully pulled the plug.

Several days after the funeral, I suggested the possibility of a lawsuit, but Mother was just not up to it. Also, I've always suspected he was partially inebriated when he fell. And he was earning nothing, so under our tort system his

life had little economic value.

My mother received a grand total of fifty thousand dollars in life insurance, and remarried badly. He's a simple sort, my stepfather, a retired postal clerk from Toledo, and they spend most of their time square dancing and traveling in a Winnebago. I keep my distance. Mother didn't offer me a dime of the money, said it was all she had to face the future with, and since I'd proven rather adept at living on nothing, she felt I didn't need any of it. I had a bright future earning money; she did not, she reasoned. I'm certain Hank, the new husband, was filling her ear full of financial advice. Our paths will cross again one day, mine and Hank's.

I will finish law school in May, a month from now, then I'll sit for the bar exam in July. I will not graduate with honors, though I'm somewhere in the top half of my class. The only smart thing I've done in three years of law school was to schedule the required and difficult courses early, so I could goof off in this, my last semester. My classes this spring are a joke—Sports Law, Art Law, Selected Readings from the Napoleonic Code and, my favorite, Legal Problems of the Elderly.

It is this last selection that has me sitting here in a rickety chair behind a flimsy folding table in a hot, damp metal building filled with an odd assortment of seniors, as they like to be called. A hand-painted sign above the only visible door majestically labels the place as the Cypress Gardens Senior Citizens Building, but other than its name the place has not the slightest hint of flowers or greenery. The walls are drab and bare except for an ancient, fading photograph of Ronald Reagan in one corner between two sad little flags—one, the Stars and Stripes, the other, the state flag of Tennessee. The building is small, somber and cheerless, obviously built at the last minute with a few spare dollars of unexpected federal money. I doodle on a legal pad, afraid to look at the crowd inching forward in their folding chairs.

There must be fifty of them out there, an equal mixture of blacks and whites, average age of at least seventy-five, some blind, a dozen or so in wheelchairs, many wearing hearing aids. We were told they meet here each day at noon for a hot meal, a few songs, an occasional visit by a desperate political candidate. After a couple of hours of

socializing, they will leave for home and count the hours until they can return here. Our professor said this was the highlight of their day.

We made the painful mistake of arriving in time for lunch. They sat the four of us in one corner along with our leader, Professor Smoot, and examined us closely as we picked at neoprene chicken and icy peas. My Jell-O was yellow, and this was noticed by a bearded old goat with the name Bosco scrawled on his Hello-My-Name-Is tag stuck above his dirty shirt pocket. Bosco mumbled something about yellow Jell-O, and I quickly offered it to him, along with my chicken, but Miss Birdie Birdsong corralled him and pushed him roughly back into his seat. Miss Birdsong is about eighty but very spry for her age, and she acts as mother, dictator and bouncer of this organization. She works the crowd like a veteran ward boss. hugging and patting, schmoozing with other little bluehaire'd ladies, laughing in a shrill voice and all the while keeping a wary eye on Bosco, who undoubtedly is the bad boy of the bunch She lectured him for admiring my Jell-O, but seconds later placed a full bowl of the yellow putty before his glowing eyes. He ate it with his stubby fingers.

An hour passed. Lunch proceeded as if these starving souls were feasting on seven courses with no hope of another meal. Their wobbly forks and spoons moved back and forth, up and down, in and out, as if laden with precious metals. Time was of absolutely no consequence. They yelled at each other when words stirred them. They dropped food on the floor until I couldn't bear to watch anymore. I even ate my Jell-O. Bosco, still covetous, watched my every move. Miss Birdie fluttered around the room, chirping about this and that.

Professor Smoot, an oafish egghead complete with crooked bow tie, bushy hair and red suspenders, sat with

the stuffed satisfaction of a man who'd just finished a fine meal, and lovingly admired the scene before us. He's a kindly soul, in his early fifties, but with mannerisms much like Bosco and his friends, and for twenty years he's taught the kindly courses no one else wants to teach and few students want to take. Children's Rights, Law of the Disabled, Seminar on Domestic Violence, Problems of the Mentally Ill and, of course, Geezer Law, as this one is called outside his presence. He once scheduled a course to be called Rights of the Unborn Fetus, but it attracted a storm of controversy so Professor Smoot took a quick sabbatical.

He explained to us on the first day of class that the purpose of the course was to expose us to real people with real legal problems. It's his opinion that all students enter law school with a certain amount of idealism and desire to serve the public, but after three years of brutal competition we care for nothing but the right job with the right firm where we can make partner in seven years and earn big bucks. He's right about this.

The class is not a required one, and we started with eleven students. After a month of Smoot's boring lectures and constant exhortations to forsake money and work for free, we'd been whittled down to four. It's a worthless course, counts for only two hours, requires almost no work, and this is what attracted me to it. But, if there were more than a month left, I seriously doubt I could tough it out. At this point, I hate law school. And I have grave concerns about the practice of law.

This is my first confrontation with actual clients, and I'm terrified. Though the prospects sitting out there are aged and infirm, they are staring at me as if I possess great wisdom. I am, after all, almost a lawyer, and I wear a dark suit, and I have this legal pad in front of me on which I'm drawing squares and circles, and my face is fixed in an

intelligent frown, so I must be capable of helping them. Seated next to me at our folding table is Booker Kane, a black guy who's my best friend in law school. He's as scared as I am. Before us on folded index cards are our written names in black felt—Booker Kane and Rudy Baylor. That's me. Next to Booker is the podium behind which Miss Birdie is screeching, and on the other side is another table with matching index cards proclaiming the presence of F. Franklin Donaldson the Fourth, a pompous ass who for three years now has been sticking initials and numerals before and after his name. Next to him is a real bitch, N. Elizabeth Erickson, quite a gal, who wears pinstripe suits, silk ties and an enormous chip on her shoulder. Many of us suspect she also wears a jockstrap.

Smoot is standing against the wall behind us. Miss Birdie is doing the announcements, hospital reports and obituaries. She's yelling into a microphone with a sound system that's working remarkably well. Four large speakers hang in the corners of the room, and her piercing voice booms around and crashes in from all directions. Hearing aids are slapped and taken out. For the moment, no one is asleep. Today there are three obituaries, and when Miss Birdie finally finishes I see a few tears in the audience. God, please don't let this happen to me. Please give me fifty more years of work and fun, then an instant death while I'm sleeping.

To our left against a wall, the pianist comes to life and smacks sheets of music on the wooden grill in front of her. Miss Birdie fancies herself as some kind of political analyst, and just as she starts railing against a proposed increase in the sales tax, the pianist attacks the keys. "America the Beautiful," I think. With pure relish, she storms through a clanging rendition of the opening refrain, and the geezers grab their hymnals and wait for the first verse. Miss Birdie does not miss a beat. Now she's the choir

director. She raises her hands, then claps them to get attention, then starts flopping them all over the place with the opening note of verse one. Those who are able slowly get to their feet.

The howling fades dramatically with the second verse. The words are not as familiar and most of these poor souls can't see past their noses, so the hymnals are useless. Bosco's mouth is suddenly closed but he's humming loudly at the ceiling.

The piano stops abruptly as the sheets fall from the grill and scatter onto the floor. End of song: They stare at the pianist who, bless her heart, is snatching at the air and fumbling around her feet where the music has gathered.

"Thank you!" Miss Birdie yells into the microphone as they suddenly fall back into their seats. "Thank you. Music is a wonderful thang. Let's give thanks to God for beautiful music."

"Amen!" Bosco roars.

"Amen," another relic repeats with a nod from the back row.

"Thank you," Miss Birdie says. She turns and smiles at Booker and me. We both lean forward on our elbows and once again look at the crowd. "Now," she says dramatically, "for the program today, we are so pleased to have Professor Smoot here again with some of his very bright and handsome students." She flops her baggy hands at us and smiles with her gray and yellow teeth at Smoot, who has quietly made his way to her side. "Aren't they handsome?" she asks, waving at us. "As you know," Miss Birdie proceeds into the microphone, "Professor Smoot teaches law at Memphis State, that's where my youngest son studied, you know, but didn't graduate, and every year Professor Smoot visits us here with some of his students who'll listen to your legal problems and give advice that's always good, and always free, I might add." She turns and lays

another sappy smile upon Smoot. "Professor Smoot, on behalf of our group, we say welcome back to Cypress Gardens. We thank you for your concern about the problems of senior citizens. Thank you. We love you."

She backs away from the podium and starts clapping

She backs away from the podium and starts clapping her hands furiously and nodding eagerly at her comrades to do the same, but not a soul, not even Bosco, lifts a hand.

"He's a hit," Booker mumbles.

"At least he's loved," I mumble back. They've been sitting here now for ten minutes. It's just after lunch, and I notice a few heavy eyelids. They'll be snoring by the time Smoot finishes.

He steps to the podium, adjusts the mike, clears his throat and waits for Miss Birdie to take her seat on the front row. As she sits, she whispers angrily to a pale gentleman next to her, "You should've clapped!" He does not hear this.

"Thank you, Miss Birdie," Smoot squeaks. "Always nice to visit here at Cypress Gardens." His voice is sincere, and there's no doubt in my mind that Professor Howard L. Smoot indeed feels privileged to be here at this moment, in the center of this depressing building, before this sad little group of old folks, with the only four students who happen to remain in his class. Smoot lives for this.

He introduces us. I stand quickly with a short smile, then return to my seat and once again fix my face in an intelligent frown. Smoot talks about health care, and budget cuts, and living wills, and sales tax exemptions, and abused geezers, and co-insurance payments. They're dropping like flies out there. Social Security loopholes, pending legislation, nursing home regulations, estate planning, wonder drugs, he rambles on and on, just as he does in class. I yawn and feel drowsy myself. Bosco starts glancing at his watch every ten seconds.

Finally, Smoot gets to the wrap-up, thanks Miss Birdie and her crowd once again, promises to return year after year and takes a seat at the end of the table. Miss Birdie pats her hands together exactly twice, then gives up. No one else moves. Half of them are snoring.

Miss Birdie waves her arms at us, and says to her flock,

"There they are. They're good and they're free."

Slowly and awkwardly, they advance upon us. Bosco is first in line, and it's obvious he's holding a grudge over the Jell-O, because he glares at me and goes to the other end of the table and sits in a chair before the Honorable N. Elizabeth Erickson. Something tells me he will not be the last prospective client to go elsewhere for legal advice. An elderly black man selects Booker for his lawyer and they huddle across the table. I try not to listen. Something about an ex-wife and a divorce years ago that may or may not have been officially completed. Booker takes notes like a real lawyer and listens intently as if he knows exactly what to do.

At least Booker has a client. For a full five minutes I feel utterly stupid sitting alone as my three classmates whisper and scribble and listen compassionately and shake their heads at the problems unfolding before them.

My solitude does not go unnoticed. Finally, Miss Birdie Birdsong reaches into her purse, extracts an envelope and prances to my end of the table. "You're the one I really wanted," she whispers as she pulls her chair close to the corner of the table. She leans forward, and I lean to my left, and at this precise moment, as our heads come within inches of touching, I enter into my first conference as a legal counselor. Booker glances at me with a wicked smile.

My first conference. Last summer I clerked for a small firm downtown, twelve lawyers, and their work was strictly hourly. No contingency fees. I learned the art of