to the wire fence to see if there was a puppy— Miss Rachel’s rat terrier was expecting— instead we found someone sitting looking at us. Sitting down, he wasn’t much higher than the collards. We stared at him until he spoke:

“Hey.”

“Hey yourself,” said Jem pleasantly.

“I’m Charles Baker Harris,” he said. “I can read.”

“So what?” I said.

“I just thought you’d like to know I can read. You got anything needs readin’ I can do it…”

“How old are you,” asked Jem, “four-and-a-half?”

“Goin’ on seven.”

“Shoot no wonder, then,” said Jem, jerking his thumb at me. “Scout yonder’s been readin’ ever since she was born, and she ain’t even started to school yet. You look right puny for goin’ on seven.”

“I’m little but I’m old,” he said.

Jem brushed his hair back to get a better look. “Why don’t you come over, Charles Baker Harris?” he said. “Lord, what a name.”

“‘s not any funnier’n yours. Aunt Rachel says your name’s Jeremy Atticus Finch.”

Jem scowled. “I’m big enough to fit mine,” he said. “Your name’s longer’n you are. Bet it’s a foot longer.”

“Folks call me Dill,” said Dill, struggling under the fence.

“Do better if you go over it instead of under it,” I said. “Where’d you come from?”

Dill was from Meridian, Mississippi, was spending the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel, and would be spending every summer in Maycomb from now on. His family was from Maycomb County originally, his mother worked for a photographer in Meridian, had entered his picture in a Beautiful Child contest and won five dollars. She gave the money to Dill, who went to the picture show twenty times on it.

“Don’t have any picture shows here, except Jesus ones in the courthouse sometimes,” said Jem. “Ever see anything good?”
shamin’ him, Miss Caroline. Walter hasn’t got a quarter at home to bring you, and you can’t use any stovewood.”

Miss Caroline stood stock still, then grabbed me by the collar and hauled me back to her desk. “Jean Louise, I’ve had about enough of you this morning,” she said. “You’re starting off on the wrong foot in every way, my dear. Hold out your hand.”

I thought she was going to spit in it, which was the only reason anybody in Maycomb held out his hand: it was a time-honored method of sealing oral contracts. Wondering what bargain we had made, I turned to the class for an answer, but the class looked back at me in puzzlement. Miss Caroline picked up her ruler, gave me half a dozen quick little pats, then told me to stand in the corner. A storm of laughter broke loose when it finally occurred to the class that Miss Caroline had whipped me.

When Miss Caroline threatened it with a similar fate the first grade exploded again, becoming cold sober only when the shadow of Miss Blount fell over them. Miss Blount, a native Maycombian as yet uninitiated in the mysteries of the Decimal System, appeared at the door hands on hips and announced: “If I hear another sound from this room I’ll burn up everybody in it. Miss Caroline, the sixth grade cannot concentrate on the pyramids for all this racket!”

My sojourn in the corner was a short one. Saved by the bell, Miss Caroline watched the class file out for lunch. As I was the last to leave, I saw her sink down into her chair and bury her head in her arms. Had her conduct been more friendly toward me, I would have felt sorry for her. She was a pretty little thing.

Chapter 3

Catching Walter Cunningham in the schoolyard gave me some pleasure, but when I was rubbing his nose in the dirt Jem came by and told me to stop. “You’re
a moment. “A good home remedy for—Burris, I want you to go home and wash your hair with lye soap. When you’ve done that, treat your scalp with kerosene.”
“What fer, missus?”
“To get rid of the—er, cooties. You see, Burris, the other children might catch them, and you wouldn’t want that, would you?”
The boy stood up. He was the filthiest human I had ever seen. His neck was dark gray, the backs of his hands were rusty, and his fingernails were black deep into the quick. He peered at Miss Caroline from a fist-sized clean space on his face. No one had noticed him, probably, because Miss Caroline and I had entertained the class most of the morning.
“And Burris,” said Miss Caroline, “please bathe yourself before you come back tomorrow.”
The boy laughed rudely. “You ain’t sendin’ me home, missus. I was on the verge of leavin’—I done done my time for this year.”
Miss Caroline looked puzzled. “What do you mean by that?”
The boy did not answer. He gave a short contemptuous snort.
One of the elderly members of the class answered her: “He’s one of the Ewells, ma’am,” and I wondered if this explanation would be as unsuccessful as my attempt. But Miss Caroline seemed willing to listen. “Whole school’s full of ‘em. They come first day every year and then leave. The truant lady gets ’em here ‘cause she threatens ’em with the sheriff, but she’s give up tryin’ to hold ’em. She reckons she’s carried out the law just gettin’ their names on the roll and runnin’ ’em here the first day. You’re supposed to mark ’em absent the rest of the year…”
“But what about their parents?” asked Miss Caroline, in genuine concern.
“Ain’t got no mother,” was the answer, “and their paw’s right contentious.”
Burris Ewell was flattered by the recital. “Been comin’ to the first day o’ the first grade fer three year now,” he said expansively. “Reckon if I’m smart this year they’ll promote me to the second…”
Miss Caroline said, “Sit back down, please, Burris,” and the moment she said it I knew she had made a serious mistake. The boy’s condescension flashed to anger.
“You try and make me, missus.”
Finders were keepers unless title was proven. Plucking an occasional camellia, getting a squirt of hot milk from Miss Maudie Atkinson’s cow on a summer day, helping ourselves to someone’s scuppernongs was part of our ethical culture, but money was different.

“Tell you what,” said Jem. “We’ll keep ‘em till school starts, then go around and ask everybody if they’re theirs. They’re some bus child’s, maybe—he was too taken up with gettin’ outa school today an’ forgot ’em. These are somebody’s, I know that. See how they’ve been slicked up? They’ve been saved.”

“Yeah, but why should somebody wanta put away chewing gum like that? You know it doesn’t last.”

“I don’t know, Scout. But these are important to somebody…”

“How’s that, Jem…?”

“Well, Indian-heads—well, they come from the Indians. They’re real strong magic, they make you have good luck. Not like fried chicken when you’re not lookin’ for it, but things like long life ‘n’ good health ‘n’ passin’ six-weeks tests… these are real valuable to somebody. I’m gonna put em in my trunk.”

Before Jem went to his room, he looked for a long time at the Radley Place. He seemed to be thinking again.

Two days later Dill arrived in a blaze of glory: he had ridden the train by himself from Meridian to Maycomb Junction (a courtesy title—Maycomb Junction was in Abbott County) where he had been met by Miss Rachel in Maycomb’s one taxi; he had eaten dinner in the diner, he had seen two twins hitched together get off the train in Bay St. Louis and stuck to his story regardless of threats. He had discarded the abominable blue shorts that were buttoned to his shirts and wore real short pants with a belt; he was somewhat heavier, no taller, and said he had seen his father. Dill’s father was taller than ours, he had a black beard (pointed), and was president of the L & N Railroad.

“I helped the engineer for a while,” said Dill, yawning.

“In a pig’s ear you did, Dill. Hush,” said Jem. “What’ll we play today?”

“Tom and Sam and Dick,” said Dill. “Let’s go in the front yard.” Dill wanted the Rover Boys because there were three respectable parts. He was clearly tired of
being our character man.

“I’m tired of those,” I said. I was tired of playing Tom Rover, who suddenly lost his memory in the middle of a picture show and was out of the script until the end, when he was found in Alaska.

“Make us up one, Jem,” I said.

“I’m tired of makin’ ’em up.”

Our first days of freedom, and we were tired. I wondered what the summer would bring.

We had strolled to the front yard, where Dill stood looking down the street at the dreary face of the Radley Place. “I—smell—death,” he said. “I do, I mean it,” he said, when I told him to shut up.

“You mean when somebody’s dyin’ you can smell it?”

“No, I mean I can smell somebody an’ tell if they’re gonna die. An’ old lady taught me how.” Dill leaned over and sniffed me. “Jean—Louise—Finch, you are going to die in three days.”

“Dill if you don’t hush I’ll knock you bowlegged. I mean it, now-”

“Yawl hush,” growled Jem, “you act like you believe in Hot Steams.”

“You act like you don’t,” I said.

“What’s a Hot Steam?” asked Dill.

“Haven’t you ever walked along a lonesome road at night and passed by a hot place?” Jem asked Dill. “A Hot Steam’s somebody who can’t get to heaven, just wallows around on lonesome roads an’ if you walk through him, when you die you’ll be one too, an’ you’ll go around at night suckin’ people’s breath-”

“How can you keep from passing through one?”

“You can’t,” said Jem. “Sometimes they stretch all the way across the road, but if you hafta go through one you say, ‘Angel-bright, life-in-death; get off the road, don’t suck my breath.’ That keeps ‘em from wrapping around you-”

“Don’t you believe a word he says, Dill,” I said. “Calpurnia says that’s nigger-talk.”

Jem scowled darkly at me, but said, “Well, are we gonna play anything or not?”
“Let’s roll in the tire,” I suggested.
Jem sighed. “You know I’m too big.”
“You c’n push.”
I ran to the back yard and pulled an old car tire from under the house. I slapped it up to the front yard. “I’m first,” I said.
Dill said he ought to be first, he just got here.
Jem arbitrated, awarded me first push with an extra time for Dill, and I folded myself inside the tire.
Until it happened I did not realize that Jem was offended by my contradicting him on Hot Steams, and that he was patiently awaiting an opportunity to reward me. He did, by pushing the tire down the sidewalk with all the force in his body. Ground, sky and houses melted into a mad palette, my ears throbbed, I was suffocating. I could not put out my hands to stop, they were wedged between my chest and knees. I could only hope that Jem would outrun the tire and me, or that I would be stopped by a bump in the sidewalk. I hear him behind me, chasing and shouting.
The tire bumped on gravel, skittered across the road, crashed into a barrier and popped like a cork onto a cement. Dizzy and nauseated, I lay on the cement and shook my head still, pounded my ears to silence, and heard Jem’s voice:
“Scout, get away from there, come on!”
I raised my head and stared at the Radley Place steps in front of me. I froze.
“Come on, Scout, don’t just lie there!” Jem was screaming. “Get up, can’tcha?”
I got to my feet, trembling as I thawed.
“Get the tire!” Jem hollered. “Bring it with you! Ain’t you got any sense at all?”
When I was able to navigate, I ran back to them as fast as my shaking knees would carry me.
“Why didn’t you bring it?” Jem yelled.
“Why don’t you get it?” I screamed.
Jem was silent.
“Go on, it ain’t far inside the gate. Why, you even touched the house once,
Jem looked at me furiously, could not decline, ran down the sidewalk, treaded water at the gate, then dashed in and retrieved the tire.

“See there?” Jem was scowling triumphantly. “Nothin' to it. I swear, Scout, sometimes you act so much like a girl it’s mortifyin’.”

There was more to it than he knew, but I decided not to tell him.

Calpurnia appeared in the front door and yelled, “Lemonade time! You all get in outa that hot sun ‘fore you fry alive!” Lemonade in the middle of the morning was a summertime ritual. Calpurnia set a pitcher and three glasses on the porch, then went about her business. Being out of Jem’s good graces did not worry me especially. Lemonade would restore his good humor.

Jem gulped down his second glassful and slapped his chest. “I know what we are going to play,” he announced. “Something new, something different.”

“What?” asked Dill.

“Boo Radley.”

Jem’s head at times was transparent: he had thought that up to make me understand he wasn’t afraid of Radleys in any shape or form, to contrast his own fearlessness with my cowardice.

“Boo Radley? How?” asked Dill.

Jem said, “Scout, you can be Mrs. Radley-”

“I declare if I will. I don’t think-”

“’Smatter?” said Dill. “Still scared?”

“He can get out at night when we’re all asleep…” I said.

Jem hissed. “Scout, how’s he gonna know what we’re doin’? Besides, I don’t think he’s still there. He died years ago and they stuffed him up the chimney.”

Dill said, “Jem, you and me can play and Scout can watch if she’s scared.”

I was fairly sure Boo Radley was inside that house, but I couldn’t prove it, and felt it best to keep my mouth shut or I would be accused of believing in Hot Steams, phenomena I was immune to in the daytime.

Jem parceled out our roles: I was Mrs. Radley, and all I had to do was come out
saw Miss Maudie Atkinson staring across the street at us, her hedge clippers poised in midair.

One day we were so busily playing Chapter XXV, Book II of One Man’s Family, we did not see Atticus standing on the sidewalk looking at us, slapping a rolled magazine against his knee. The sun said twelve noon.

“What are you all playing?” he asked.

“Nothing,” said Jem.

Jem’s evasion told me our game was a secret, so I kept quiet.

“What are you doing with those scissors, then? Why are you tearing up that newspaper? If it’s today’s I’ll tan you.”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing what?” said Atticus.

“Nothing, sir.”

“Give me those scissors,” Atticus said. “They’re not things to play with. Does this by any chance have anything to do with the Radleys?”

“No sir,” said Jem, reddening.

“I hope it doesn’t,” he said shortly, and went inside the house.

“Je-m…”

“Shut up! He’s gone in the livingroom, he can hear us in there.”

Safely in the yard, Dill asked Jem if we could play any more.

“I don’t know. Atticus didn’t say we couldn’t—”

“Jem,” I said, “I think Atticus knows it anyway.”

“No he don’t. If he did he’d say he did.”

I was not so sure, but Jem told me I was being a girl, that girls always imagined things, that’s why other people hated them so, and if I started behaving like one I could just go off and find some to play with.

“All right, you just keep it up then,” I said. “You’ll find out.”

Atticus’s arrival was the second reason I wanted to quit the game. The first reason happened the day I rolled into the Radley front yard. Through all the head-
“All right then. What’d you write him?”

Dill said, “We’re askin’ him real politely to come out sometimes, and tell us what he does in there—we said we wouldn’t hurt him and we’d buy him an ice cream.”

“You all’ve gone crazy, he’ll kill us!”

Dill said, “It’s my idea. I figure if he’d come out and sit a spell with us he might feel better.”

“How do you know he don’t feel good?”

“Well how’d you feel if you’d been shut up for a hundred years with nothin’ but cats to eat? I bet he’s got a beard down to here—” “Like your daddy’s?”

“He ain’t got a beard, he—” Dill stopped, as if trying to remember.

“Oh huh, caughtcha,” I said. “You said ‘fore you were off the train good your daddy had a black beard—”

“If it’s all the same to you he shaved it off last summer! Yeah, an’ I’ve got the letter to prove it—he sent me two dollars, too!”

“Keep on—I reckon he even sent you a mounted police uniform! That’n never showed up, did it? You just keep on tellin’ ’em, son—”

Dill Harris could tell the biggest ones I ever heard. Among other things, he had been up in a mail plane seventeen times, he had been to Nova Scotia, he had seen an elephant, and his granddaddy was Brigadier General Joe Wheeler and left him his sword.

“You all hush,” said Jem. He scuttled beneath the house and came out with a yellow bamboo pole. “Reckon this is long enough to reach from the sidewalk?”

“Anybody who’s brave enough to go up and touch the house hadn’t oughta use a fishin’ pole,” I said. “Why don’t you just knock the front door down?”

“This—is—different,” said Jem, “how many times do I have to tell you that?”

Dill took a piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to Jem. The three of us walked cautiously toward the old house. Dill remained at the light-pole on the front corner of the lot, and Jem and I edged down the sidewalk parallel to the side of the house. I walked beyond Jem and stood where I could see around the curve.
All crooked. It’s almost like—"

“—somebody knew you were comin’ back for ’em.”

Jem shuddered. “Like somebody was readin’ my mind… like somebody could tell what I was gonna do. Can’t anybody tell what I’m gonna do lest they know me, can they, Scout?”

Jem’s question was an appeal. I reassured him: “Can’t anybody tell what you’re gonna do lest they live in the house with you, and even I can’t tell sometimes.”

We were walking past our tree. In its knot-hole rested a ball of gray twine.

“Don’t take it, Jem,” I said. “This is somebody’s hidin’ place.”

“I don’t think so, Scout.”

“Yes it is. Somebody like Walter Cunningham comes down here every recess and hides his things—and we come along and take ‘em away from him. Listen, let’s leave it and wait a couple of days. If it ain’t gone then, we’ll take it, ok?”

“Okay, you might be right,” said Jem. “It must be some one-kid’s place—hides his things from the bigger folks. You know it’s only when school’s in that we’ve found things.”

“Yeah,” I said. “We never go by here in the summertime.”

We went home. Next morning the twine was where we had left it. When it was still there on the third day, Jem pocketed it. From then on, we considered everything we found in the knot-hole our property.

The second grade was grim, but Jem assured me that the older I got the better school would be, that he started off the same way, and it was not until one reached the sixth grade that one learned anything of value. The sixth grade seemed to please him from the beginning: he went through a brief Egyptian Period that baffled me—he tried to walk flat a great deal, sticking one arm in front of him and one in back of him, putting one foot behind the other. He declared Egyptians walked that way; I said if they did I didn’t see how they got anything done, but Jem said they accomplished more than the Americans ever did, they invented toilet paper and perpetual embalming, and asked where would we be today if they hadn’t? Atticus told me to delete the adjectives and I’d have
the facts.

There are no clearly defined seasons in South Alabama; summer drifts into autumn, and autumn is sometimes never followed by winter, but turns to a days-old spring that melts into summer again. That fall was a long one, hardly cool enough for a light jacket. Jem and I were trotting in our orbit one mild October afternoon when our knot-hole stopped us again. Something white was inside this time.

Jem let me do the honors: I pulled out two small images carved in soap. One was the figure of a boy, the other wore a crude dress. Before I remembered that there was no such thing as hoo-dooing, I shrieked and threw them down.

Jem snatched them up. “What’s the matter with you?” he yelled. He rubbed the figures free of red dust. “These are good,” he said. “I’ve never seen any these good.”

He held them down to me. They were almost perfect miniatures of two children. The boy had on shorts, and a shock of soapy hair fell to his eyebrows. I looked up at Jem. A point of straight brown hair kicked downwards from his part. I had never noticed it before. Jem looked from the girl-doll to me. The girl-doll wore bangs.

“These are us,” he said.

“Who did ‘em, you reckon?”

“Who do we know around here who whittles?” he asked.

“Mr. Avery.”

“Mr. Avery just does like this. I mean carves.”

Mr. Avery averaged a stick of stovewood per week; he honed it down to a toothpick and chewed it.

“There’s old Miss Stephanie Crawford’s sweetheart,” I said.

“He carves all right, but he lives down the country. When would he ever pay any attention to us?”

“Maybe he sits on the porch and looks at us instead of Miss Stephanie. If I was him, I would.”
Jem stared at me so long I asked what was the matter, but got Nothing, Scout for an answer. When we went home, Jem put the dolls in his trunk.

Less than two weeks later we found a whole package of chewing gum, which we enjoyed, the fact that everything on the Radley Place was poison having slipped Jem’s memory.

The following week the knot-hole yielded a tarnished medal. Jem showed it to Atticus, who said it was a spelling medal, that before we were born the Maycomb County schools had spelling contests and awarded medals to the winners. Atticus said someone must have lost it, and had we asked around? Jem camel-kicked me when I tried to say where we had found it. Jem asked Atticus if he remembered anybody who ever won one, and Atticus said no.

Our biggest prize appeared four days later. It was a pocket watch that wouldn’t run, on a chain with an aluminum knife.

“You reckon it’s white gold, Jem?”

“Don’t know. I’ll show it to Atticus.”

Atticus said it would probably be worth ten dollars, knife, chain and all, if it were new. “Did you swap with somebody at school?” he asked.

“Oh, no sir.” Jem pulled out his grandfather’s watch that Atticus let him carry once a week if Jem were careful with it. On the days he carried the watch, Jem walked on eggs. “Atticus, if it’s all right with you, I’d rather have this one instead. Maybe I can fix it.”

When the new wore off his grandfather’s watch, and carrying it became a day’s burdensome task, Jem no longer felt the necessity of ascertaining the hour every five minutes.

He did a fair job, only one spring and two tiny pieces left over, but the watch would not run. “Oh-h,” he sighed, “it’ll never go. Scout—?”

“Huh?”

“You reckon we oughta write a letter to whoever’s leaving us these things?”

“That’d be right nice, Jem, we can thank ‘em—what’s wrong?”

Jem was holding his ears, shaking his head from side to side. “I don’t get it, I just don’t get it—I don’t know why, Scout…” He looked toward the livingroom. “I’ve
gotta good mind to tell Atticus—no, I reckon not.”

“I’ll tell him for you.”

“No, don’t do that, Scout. Scout?”

“Wha-t?”

He had been on the verge of telling me something all evening; his face would brighten and he would lean toward me, then he would change his mind. He changed it again. “Oh, nothin’.”

“Here, let’s write a letter.” I pushed a tablet and pencil under his nose.

“Okay. Dear Mister…”

“How do you know it’s a man? I bet it’s Miss Maudie—been bettin’ that for a long time.”

“Ar-r, Miss Maudie can’t chew gum—” Jem broke into a grin. “You know, she can talk real pretty sometimes. One time I asked her to have a chew and she said no thanks, that—chewing gum cleaved to her palate and rendered her speechless,” said Jem carefully. “Doesn’t that sound nice?”

“Yeah, she can say nice things sometimes. She wouldn’t have a watch and chain anyway.”

“Dear sir,” said Jem. “We appreciate the—no, we appreciate everything which you have put into the tree for us. Yours very truly, Jeremy Atticus Finch.”

“He won’t know who you are if you sign it like that, Jem.”

Jem erased his name and wrote, “Jem Finch.” I signed, “Jean Louise Finch (Scout),” beneath it. Jem put the note in an envelope.

Next morning on the way to school he ran ahead of me and stopped at the tree. Jem was facing me when he looked up, and I saw him go stark white.

“Scout!”

I ran to him.

Someone had filled our knot-hole with cement.

“Don’t you cry, now, Scout… don’t cry now, don’t you worry—” he muttered at me all the way to school.
When we went home for dinner Jem bolted his food, ran to the porch and stood on the steps. I followed him. “Hasn’t passed by yet,” he said.

Next day Jem repeated his vigil and was rewarded.

“Hidy do, Mr. Nathan,” he said.

“Morning Jem, Scout,” said Mr. Radley, as he went by.

“Mr. Radley,” said Jem.

Mr. Radley turned around.

“Mr. Radley, ah—did you put cement in that hole in that tree down yonder?”

“Yes,” he said. “I filled it up.”

“Why’d you do it, sir?”

“Tree’s dying. You plug ‘em with cement when they’re sick. You ought to know that, Jem.”

Jem said nothing more about it until late afternoon. When we passed our tree he gave it a meditative pat on its cement, and remained deep in thought. He seemed to be working himself into a bad humor, so I kept my distance.

As usual, we met Atticus coming home from work that evening. When we were at our steps Jem said, “Atticus, look yonder at that tree, please sir.”

“What tree, son?”

“The one on the corner of the Radley lot comin’ from school.”

“Yes?”

“Is that tree dyin’?”

“Why no, son, I don’t think so. Look at the leaves, they’re all green and full, no brown patches anywhere—”

“It ain’t even sick?”

“That tree’s as healthy as you are, Jem. Why?”

“Mr. Nathan Radley said it was dyin’.”

“Well maybe it is. I’m sure Mr. Radley knows more about his trees than we do.”

Atticus left us on the porch. Jem leaned on a pillar, rubbing his shoulders against it.
down by the Radley gate away from everybody, we didn’t move an inch—Jem stopped.

“Mr. Nathan was at the fire,” he babbled, “I saw him, I saw him, he was tuggin’
that mattress—Atticus, I swear…”

“That’s all right, son.” Atticus grinned slowly. “Looks like all of Maycomb was
out tonight, in one way or another. Jem, there’s some wrapping paper in the
pantry, I think. Go get it and we’ll—”

“Atticus, no sir!”

Jem seemed to have lost his mind. He began pouring out our secrets right and left
in total disregard for my safety if not for his own, omitting nothing, knot-hole,
pants and all.

“…Mr. Nathan put cement in that tree, Atticus, an’ he did it to stop us findin’
things—he’s crazy, I reckon, like they say, but Atticus, I swear to God he ain’t
ever harmed us, he ain’t ever hurt us, he coulda cut my throat from ear to ear that
night but he tried to mend my pants instead. He ain’t ever hurt us, Atticus—”

Atticus said, “Whoa, son,” so gently that I was greatly heartened. It was obvious
that he had not followed a word Jem said, for all Atticus said was, “You’re right.
We’d better keep this and the blanket to ourselves. Someday, maybe, Scout can
thank him for covering her up.”

“Thank who?” I asked.

“Boo Radley. You were so busy looking at the fire you didn’t know it when he
put the blanket around you.”

My stomach turned to water and I nearly threw up when Jem held out the blanket
and crept toward me. “He sneaked out of the house—turn ‘round—sneaked up,
an’ went like this!”

Atticus said dryly, “Do not let this inspire you to further glory, Jeremy.”

Jem scowled, “I ain’t gonna do anything to him,” but I watched the spark of fresh
adventure leave his eyes. “Just think, Scout,” he said, “if you’d just turned
around, you’d’a seen him.”

Calpurnia woke us at noon. Atticus had said we need not go to school that day,
we’d learn nothing after no sleep. Calpurnia said for us to try and clean up the
holiday with Francis Hancock. He was a year older than I, and I avoided him on principle: he enjoyed everything I disapproved of, and disliked my ingenuous diversions.

Aunt Alexandra was Atticus’s sister, but when Jem told me about changelings and siblings, I decided that she had been swapped at birth, that my grandparents had perhaps received a Crawford instead of a Finch. Had I ever harbored the mystical notions about mountains that seem to obsess lawyers and judges, Aunt Alexandra would have been analogous to Mount Everest: throughout my early life, she was cold and there.

When Uncle Jack jumped down from the train Christmas Eve day, we had to wait for the porter to hand him two long packages. Jem and I always thought it funny when Uncle Jack pecked Atticus on the cheek; they were the only two men we ever saw kiss each other. Uncle Jack shook hands with Jem and swung me high, but not high enough: Uncle Jack was a head shorter than Atticus; the black of the family, he was younger than Aunt Alexandra. He and Aunt looked alike, but Uncle Jack made better use of his face: we were never wary of his sharp nose and chin.

He was one of the few men of science who never terrified me, probably because he never behaved like a doctor. Whenever he performed a minor service for Jem and me, as removing a splinter from a foot, he would tell us exactly what he was going to do, give us an estimation of how much it would hurt, and explain the use of any tongs he employed. One Christmas I lurked in corners nursing a twisted splinter in my foot, permitting no one to come near me. When Uncle Jack caught me, he kept me laughing about a preacher who hated going to church so much that every day he stood at his gate in his dressing-gown, smoking a hookah and delivering five-minute sermons to any passers-by who desired spiritual comfort. I interrupted to make Uncle Jack let me know when he would pull it out, but he held up a bloody splinter in a pair of tweezers and said he yanked it while I was laughing, that was what was known as relativity.

“What’s in those packages?” I asked him, pointing to the long thin parcels the porter had given him.

“None of your business,” he said.
There went with the house the usual legend about the Yankees: one Finch female, recently engaged, donned her complete trousseau to save it from raiders in the neighborhood; she became stuck in the door to the Daughters’ Staircase but was doused with water and finally pushed through. When we arrived at the Landing, Aunt Alexandra kissed Uncle Jack, Francis kissed Uncle Jack, Uncle Jimmy shook hands silently with Uncle Jack, Jem and I gave our presents to Francis, who gave us a present. Jem felt his age and gravitated to the adults, leaving me to entertain our cousin. Francis was eight and slicked back his hair.

“What’d you get for Christmas?” I asked politely.

“Just what I asked for,” he said. Francis had requested a pair of knee-pants, a red leather booksack, five shirts and an untied bow tie.

“That’s nice,” I lied. “Jem and me got air rifles, and Jem got a chemistry set—”

“A toy one, I reckon.”

“No, a real one. He’s gonna make me some invisible ink, and I’m gonna write to Dill in it.”

Francis asked what was the use of that.

“Well, can’t you just see his face when he gets a letter from me with nothing in it? It’ll drive him nuts.”

Talking to Francis gave me the sensation of settling slowly to the bottom of the ocean. He was the most boring child I ever met. As he lived in Mobile, he could not inform on me to school authorities, but he managed to tell everything he knew to Aunt Alexandra, who in turn unburdened herself to Atticus, who either forgot it or gave me hell, whichever struck his fancy. But the only time I ever heard Atticus speak sharply to anyone was when I once heard him say, “Sister, I do the best I can with them!” It had something to do with my going around in overalls.

Aunt Alexandra was fanatical on the subject of my attire. I could not possibly hope to be a lady if I wore breeches; when I said I could do nothing in a dress, she said I wasn’t supposed to be doing things that required pants. Aunt Alexandra’s vision of my deportment involved playing with small stoves, tea sets, and wearing the Add-A-Pearl necklace she gave me when I was born; furthermore, I should be a ray of sunshine in my father’s lonely life. I suggested that one could be a ray of
entered the room I retreated to a corner and turned my back on him. “Scout,” he said, “do you still hate me?”

“Go on, please sir.”

“Why, I didn’t think you’d hold it against me,” he said. “I’m disappointed in you—you had that coming and you know it.”

“Didn’t either.”

“Honey, you can’t go around calling people—”

“You ain’t fair,” I said, “you ain’t fair.”

Uncle Jack’s eyebrows went up. “Not fair? How not?”

“You’re real nice, Uncle Jack, an’ I reckon I love you even after what you did, but you don’t understand children much.”

Uncle Jack put his hands on his hips and looked down at me. “And why do I not understand children, Miss Jean Louise? Such conduct as yours required little understanding. It was obstreperous, disorderly and ab—”

“You gonna give me a chance to tell you? I don’t mean to sass you, I’m just tryin’ to tell you.”

Uncle Jack sat down on the bed. His eyebrows came together, and he peered up at me from under them. “Proceed,” he said.

I took a deep breath. “Well, in the first place you never stopped to gimme a chance to tell you my side of it—you just lit right into me. When Jem an’ I fuss Atticus doesn’t ever just listen to Jem’s side of it, he hears mine too, an’ in the second place you told me never to use words like that except in ex-extreme provocation, and Francis provoked me enough to knock his block off—”

Uncle Jack scratched his head. “What was your side of it, Scout?”

“Francis called Atticus somethin’, an’ I wasn’t about to take it off him.”

“What did Francis call him?”

“A nigger-lover. I ain’t very sure what it means, but the way Francis said it—tell you one thing right now, Uncle Jack, I’ll be—I swear before God if I’ll sit there and let him say somethin’ about Atticus.”

“He called Atticus that?”
Chapter 10

Atticus was feeble: he was nearly fifty. When Jem and I asked him why he was so old, he said he got started late, which we felt reflected upon his abilities and manliness. He was much older than the parents of our school contemporaries, and there was nothing Jem or I could say about him when our classmates said, “My father—”

Jem was football crazy. Atticus was never too tired to play keep-away, but when Jem wanted to tackle him Atticus would say, “I’m too old for that, son.”

Our father didn’t do anything. He worked in an office, not in a drugstore. Atticus did not drive a dump-truck for the county, he was not the sheriff, he did not farm, work in a garage, or do anything that could possibly arouse the admiration of anyone.

Besides that, he wore glasses. He was nearly blind in his left eye, and said left eyes were the tribal curse of the Finches. Whenever he wanted to see something well, he tilted his head and looked from his right eye.

He did not do the things our schoolmates’ fathers did: he never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the livingroom and read.

With these attributes, however, he would not remain as inconspicuous as we wished him to: that year, the school buzzed with talk about him defending Tom Robinson, none of which was complimentary. After my bout with Cecil Jacobs when I committed myself to a policy of cowardice, word got around that Scout Finch wouldn’t fight any more, her daddy wouldn’t let her. This was not entirely correct: I wouldn’t fight publicly for Atticus, but the family was private ground. I would fight anyone from a third cousin upwards tooth and nail. Francis Hancock, for example, knew that.

When he gave us our air-rifles Atticus wouldn’t teach us to shoot. Uncle Jack instructed us in the rudiments thereof; he said Atticus wasn’t interested in guns. Atticus said to Jem one day, “I’d rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I
“Good Lord, Miss Maudie, Jem and me beat him all the time.”

“It’s about time you found out it’s because he lets you. Did you know he can play a Jew’s Harp?”

This modest accomplishment served to make me even more ashamed of him.

“Well…” she said.

“Well, what, Miss Maudie?”

“Well nothing. Nothing—it seems with all that you’d be proud of him. Can’t everybody play a Jew’s Harp. Now keep out of the way of the carpenters. You’d better go home, I’ll be in my azaleas and can’t watch you. Plank might hit you.”

I went to the back yard and found Jem plugging away at a tin can, which seemed stupid with all the bluejays around. I returned to the front yard and busied myself for two hours erecting a complicated breastworks at the side of the porch, consisting of a tire, an orange crate, the laundry hamper, the porch chairs, and a small U.S. flag Jem gave me from a popcorn box.

When Atticus came home to dinner he found me crouched down aiming across the street. “What are you shooting at?”

“Miss Maudie’s rear end.”

Atticus turned and saw my generous target bending over her bushes. He pushed his hat to the back of his head and crossed the street. “Maudie,” he called, “I thought I’d better warn you. You’re in considerable peril.”

Miss Maudie straightened up and looked toward me. She said, “Atticus, you are a devil from hell.”

When Atticus returned he told me to break camp. “Don’t you ever let me catch you pointing that gun at anybody again,” he said.

I wished my father was a devil from hell. I sounded out Calpurnia on the subject. “Mr. Finch? Why, he can do lots of things.”

“Like what?” I asked.

Calpurnia scratched her head. “Well, I don’t rightly know,” she said.

Jem underlined it when he asked Atticus if he was going out for the Methodists and Atticus said he’d break his neck if he did, he was just too old for that sort of
for more, but Jem said I had to grow up some time.

Mrs. Dubose lived alone except for a Negro girl in constant attendance, two doors up the street from us in a house with steep front steps and a dog-trot hall. She was very old; she spent most of each day in bed and the rest of it in a wheelchair. It was rumored that she kept a CSA pistol concealed among her numerous shawls and wraps.

Jem and I hated her. If she was on the porch when we passed, we would be raked by her wrathful gaze, subjected to ruthless interrogation regarding our behavior, and given a melancholy prediction on what we would amount to when we grew up, which was always nothing. We had long ago given up the idea of walking past her house on the opposite side of the street; that only made her raise her voice and let the whole neighborhood in on it.

We could do nothing to please her. If I said as sunnily as I could, “Hey, Mrs. Dubose,” I would receive for an answer, “Don’t you say hey to me, you ugly girl! You say good afternoon, Mrs. Dubose!”

She was vicious. Once she heard Jem refer to our father as “Atticus” and her reaction was apoplectic. Besides being the sassiest, most disrespectful mutts who ever passed her way, we were told that it was quite a pity our father had not remarried after our mother’s death. A lovelier lady than our mother never lived, she said, and it was heartbreaking the way Atticus Finch let her children run wild.

I did not remember our mother, but Jem did—he would tell me about her sometimes—and he went livid when Mrs. Dubose shot us this message.

Jem, having survived Boo Radley, a mad dog and other terrors, had concluded that it was cowardly to stop at Miss Rachel’s front steps and wait, and had decreed that we must run as far as the post office corner each evening to meet Atticus coming from work. Countless evenings Atticus would find Jem furious at something Mrs. Dubose had said when we went by.

“Easy does it, son,” Atticus would say. “She’s an old lady and she’s ill. You just hold your head high and be a gentleman. Whatever she says to you, it’s your job not to let her make you mad.” Jem would say she must not be very sick, she hollered so. When the three of us came to her house, Atticus would sweep off his hat, wave gallantly to her and say, “Good evening, Mrs. Dubose! You look like a
In addition to Jem’s newly developed characteristics, he had acquired a maddening air of wisdom.

“Oh, Scout, it’s like reorganizing the tax systems of the counties and things. That kind of thing’s pretty dry to most men.”

“How do you know?”

“Oh, go on and leave me alone. I’m readin’ the paper.”

Jem got his wish. I departed for the kitchen.

While she was shelling peas, Calpurnia suddenly said, “What am I gonna do about you all’s church this Sunday?”

“Nothing, I reckon. Atticus left us collection.”

Calpurnia’s eyes narrowed and I could tell what was going through her mind.

“Cal,” I said, “you know we’ll behave. We haven’t done anything in church in years.”

Calpurnia evidently remembered a rainy Sunday when we were both fatherless and teacherless. Left to its own devices, our class tied Eunice Ann Simpson to a chair and placed her in the furnace room. We forgot her, trooped upstairs to church, and we were listening quietly to the sermon when a dreadful banging issued from the radiator pipes, persisting until someone investigated and brought forth Eunice Ann saying she didn’t want to play Shadrach any more—Jem Finch said she wouldn’t get burnt if she had enough faith, but it was hot down there.

“Besides, Cal, this isn’t the first time Atticus has left us,” I protested.

“Yeah, but he makes certain your teacher’s gonna be there. I didn’t hear him say this time—reckon he forgot it.” Calpurnia scratched her head. Suddenly she smiled. “How’d you and Mister Jem like to come to church with me tomorrow?”

“Really?”

“How ‘bout it?” grinned Calpurnia.

If Calpurnia had ever bathed me roughly before, it was nothing compared to her supervision of that Saturday night’s routine. She made me soap all over twice, drew fresh water in the tub for each rinse; she stuck my head in the basin and washed it with Octagon soap and castile. She had trusted Jem for years, but that
When they saw Jem and me with Calpurnia, the men stepped back and took off their hats; the women crossed their arms at their waists, weekday gestures of respectful attention. They parted and made a small pathway to the church door for us. Calpurnia walked between Jem and me, responding to the greetings of her brightly clad neighbors.

“What you up to, Miss Cal?” said a voice behind us.

Calpurnia’s hands went to our shoulders and we stopped and looked around: standing in the path behind us was a tall Negro woman. Her weight was on one leg; she rested her left elbow in the curve of her hip, pointing at us with upturned palm. She was bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, and an Indian-bow mouth. She seemed seven feet high.

I felt Calpurnia’s hand dig into my shoulder. “What you want, Lula?” she asked, in tones I had never heard her use. She spoke quietly, contemptuously.

“I wants to know why you bringin’ white chillun to nigger church.”

“They’s my comp’ny,” said Calpurnia. Again I thought her voice strange: she was talking like the rest of them.

“Yeah, an’ I reckon you’s comp’ny at the Finch house durin’ the week.”

A murmur ran through the crowd. “Don’t you fret,” Calpurnia whispered to me, but the roses on her hat trembled indignantly.

When Lula came up the pathway toward us Calpurnia said, “Stop right there, nigger.”

Lula stopped, but she said, “You ain’t got no business bringin’ white chillun here—they got their church, we got our’n. It is our church, ain’t it, Miss Cal?”

Calpurnia said, “It’s the same God, ain’t it?”

Jem said, “Let’s go home, Cal, they don’t want us here—”

I agreed: they did not want us here. I sensed, rather than saw, that we were being advanced upon. They seemed to be drawing closer to us, but when I looked up at Calpurnia there was amusement in her eyes. When I looked down the pathway again, Lula was gone. In her place was a solid mass of colored people.

One of them stepped from the crowd. It was Zeebo, the garbage collector. “Mister Jem,” he said, “we’re mighty glad to have you all here. Don’t pay no ‘tention to
Lula, she’s contentious because Reverend Sykes threatened to church her. She’s a troublemaker from way back, got fancy ideas an’ haughty ways—we’re mighty glad to have you all.”

With that, Calpurnia led us to the church door where we were greeted by Reverend Sykes, who led us to the front pew.

First Purchase was unceiled and unpainted within. Along its walls unlighted kerosene lamps hung on brass brackets; pine benches served as pews. Behind the rough oak pulpit a faded pink silk banner proclaimed God Is Love, the church’s only decoration except a rotogravure print of Hunt’s *The Light of the World*. There was no sign of piano, organ, hymn-books, church programs—the familiar ecclesiastical impedimenta we saw every Sunday. It was dim inside, with a damp coolness slowly dispelled by the gathering congregation. At each seat was a cheap cardboard fan bearing a garish Garden of Gethsemane, courtesy Tyndal’s Hardware Co. (You-Name-It-We-Sell-It).

Calpurnia motioned Jem and me to the end of the row and placed herself between us. She fished in her purse, drew out her handkerchief, and untied the hard wad of change in its corner. She gave a dime to me and a dime to Jem. “We’ve got ours,” he whispered. “You keep it,” Calpurnia said, “you’re my company.” Jem’s face showed brief indecision on the ethics of withholding his own dime, but his innate courtesy won and he shifted his dime to his pocket. I did likewise with no qualms.

“Cal,” I whispered, “where are the hymn-books?”

“We don’t have any,” she said.

“Well how—?”

“Sh-h,” she said. Reverend Sykes was standing behind the pulpit staring the congregation to silence. He was a short, stocky man in a black suit, black tie, white shirt, and a gold watch-chain that glinted in the light from the frosted windows.

He said, “Brethren and sisters, we are particularly glad to have company with us this morning. Mister and Miss Finch. You all know their father. Before I begin I will read some announcements.”

Reverend Sykes shuffled some papers, chose one and held it at arm’s length. “The
“Can’t read?” I asked. “All those folks?”

“That’s right,” Calpurnia nodded. “Can’t but about four folks in First Purchase read... I’m one of ‘em.”

“Where’d you go to school, Cal?” asked Jem.

“Nowhere. Let’s see now, who taught me my letters? It was Miss Maudie Atkinson’s aunt, old Miss Buford—”

“Are you that old?”

“I’m older than Mr. Finch, even.” Calpurnia grinned. “Not sure how much, though. We started rememberin’ one time, trying to figure out how old I was—I can remember back just a few years more’n he can, so I’m not much older, when you take off the fact that men can’t remember as well as women.”

“What’s your birthday, Cal?”

“I just have it on Christmas, it’s easier to remember that way—I don’t have a real birthday.”

“But Cal,” Jem protested, “you don’t look near as old as Atticus.”

“Colored folks don’t show their ages so fast,” she said.

“Maybe because they can’t read. Cal, did you teach Zeebo?”

“Yeah, Mister Jem. There wasn’t a school even when he was a boy. I made him learn, though.”

Zeebo was Calpurnia’s eldest son. If I had ever thought about it, I would have known that Calpurnia was of mature years—Zeebo had half-grown children—but then I had never thought about it.

“Did you teach him out of a primer, like us?” I asked.

“No, I made him get a page of the Bible every day, and there was a book Miss Buford taught me out of—bet you don’t know where I got it,” she said.

We didn’t know.

Calpurnia said, “Your Granddaddy Finch gave it to me.”

“Were you from the Landing?” Jem asked. “You never told us that.”

“I certainly am, Mister Jem. Grew up down there between the Buford Place and the Landin’. I’ve spent all my days workin’ for the Finches or the Bufords, an’ I
shoot the president. Said Cousin Joshua said he wasn’t anything but a sewer-inspector and tried to shoot him with an old flintlock pistol, only it just blew up in his hand. Atticus said it cost the family five hundred dollars to get him out of that one—"

Aunt Alexandra was standing stiff as a stork. “That’s all,” she said. “We’ll see about this.”

Before bedtime I was in Jem’s room trying to borrow a book, when Atticus knocked and entered. He sat on the side of Jem’s bed, looked at us soberly, then he grinned.

“Er—h’rm,“ he said. He was beginning to preface some things he said with a throaty noise, and I thought he must at last be getting old, but he looked the same. ”I don’t exactly know how to say this,“ he began.

“Well, just say it,” said Jem. “Have we done something?”

Our father was actually fidgeting. “No, I just—I’ve—Explain to you that—your Aunt Alexandra asked me... son, you know you’re a Finch, don’t you?”

“That’s what I’ve been told.” Jem looked out of the corners of his eyes. His voice rose uncontrollably, “Atticus, what’s the matter?”

Atticus crossed his knees and folded his arms. “I’m trying to tell you the facts of life.”

Jem’s disgust deepened. “I know all that stuff,” he said.

Atticus suddenly grew serious. In his lawyer’s voice, without a shade of inflection, he said: “Your aunt has asked me to try and impress upon you and Jean Louise that you are not from run-of-the-mill people, that you are the product of several generations’ gentle breeding—” Atticus paused, watching me locate an elusive redbug on my leg.

“Gentle breeding,” he continued, when I had found and scratched it, “and that you should try to live up to your name—” Atticus persevered in spite of us: “She asked me to tell you you must try to behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are. She wants to talk to you about the family and what it’s meant to Maycomb County through the years, so you’ll have some idea of who you are, so
you might be moved to behave accordingly,” he concluded at a gallop.
Stunned, Jem and I looked at each other, then at Atticus, whose collar seemed to worry him. We did not speak to him.
Presently I picked up a comb from Jem’s dresser and ran its teeth along the edge.
“Stop that noise,” Atticus said.
His curtness stung me. The comb was midway in its journey, and I banged it down. For no reason I felt myself beginning to cry, but I could not stop. This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts. My father never spoke so. Aunt Alexandra had put him up to this, somehow. Through my tears I saw Jem standing in a similar pool of isolation, his head cocked to one side.
There was nowhere to go, but I turned to go and met Atticus’s vest front. I buried my head in it and listened to the small internal noises that went on behind the light blue cloth: his watch ticking, the faint crackle of his starched shirt, the soft sound of his breathing.
“Young stomach’s growling,” I said.
“I know it,” he said.
“You better take some soda.”
“I will,” he said.
“Atticus, is all this behavin’ an’ stuff gonna make things different? I mean are you —?”
I felt his hand on the back of my head. “Don’t you worry about anything,” he said. “It’s not time to worry.” When I heard that, I knew he had come back to us. The blood in my legs began to flow again, and I raised my head. “You really want us to do all that? I can’t remember everything Finches are supposed to do…”
“I don’t want you to remember it. Forget it.”
He went to the door and out of the room, shutting the door behind him. He nearly slammed it, but caught himself at the last minute and closed it softly. As Jem and I stared, the door opened again and Atticus peered around. His eyebrows were raised, his glasses had slipped. “Get more like Cousin Joshua every day, don’t I? Do you think I’ll end up costing the family five hundred dollars?”
Atticus smiled. “Let’s leave it at this: you mind Jem whenever he can make you. Fair enough?”

Aunt Alexandra was present but silent, and when she went down the hall with Atticus we heard her say, “…just one of the things I’ve been telling you about,” a phrase that united us again.

Ours were adjoining rooms; as I shut the door between them Jem said, “Night, Scout.”

“Night,” I murmured, picking my way across the room to turn on the light. As I passed the bed I stepped on something warm, resilient, and rather smooth. It was not quite like hard rubber, and I had the sensation that it was alive. I also heard it move.

I switched on the light and looked at the floor by the bed. Whatever I had stepped on was gone. I tapped on Jem’s door.

“What,” he said.

“How does a snake feel?”


“I think there’s one under my bed. Can’t you come look?”

“Are you bein’ funny?” Jem opened the door. He was in his pajama bottoms. I noticed not without satisfaction that the mark of my knuckles was still on his mouth. When he saw I meant what I said, he said, “If you think I’m gonna put my face down to a snake you’ve got another think comin’. Hold on a minute.”

He went to the kitchen and fetched the broom. “You better get up on the bed,” he said.

“You reckon it’s really one?” I asked. This was an occasion. Our houses had no cellars; they were built on stone blocks a few feet above the ground, and the entry of reptiles was not unknown but was not commonplace. Miss Rachel Haverford’s excuse for a glass of neat whiskey every morning was that she never got over the fright of finding a rattler coiled in her bedroom closet, on her washing, when she went to hang up her negligee.

Jem made a tentative swipe under the bed. I looked over the foot to see if a snake would come out. None did. Jem made a deeper swipe.
The men jumped a little and scattered; they were people we saw every day: merchants, in-town farmers; Dr. Reynolds was there; so was Mr. Avery.

“Well, answer it, son,” called Atticus.

Laughter broke them up. When Atticus switched on the overhead light in the livingroom he found Jem at the window, pale except for the vivid mark of the screen on his nose.

“Why on earth are you all sitting in the dark?” he asked.

Jem watched him go to his chair and pick up the evening paper. I sometimes think Atticus subjected every crisis of his life to tranquil evaluation behind The Mobile Register, The Birmingham News and The Montgomery Advertiser.

“They were after you, weren’t they?” Jem went to him. “They wanted to get you, didn’t they?”

Atticus lowered the paper and gazed at Jem. “What have you been reading?” he asked. Then he said gently, “No son, those were our friends.”

“It wasn’t a—a gang?” Jem was looking from the corners of his eyes.

Atticus tried to stifle a smile but didn’t make it. “No, we don’t have mobs and that nonsense in Maycomb. I’ve never heard of a gang in Maycomb.”

“Ku Klux got after some Catholics one time.”

“Never heard of any Catholics in Maycomb either,” said Atticus, “you’re confusing that with something else. Way back about nineteen-twenty there was a Klan, but it was a political organization more than anything. Besides, they couldn’t find anybody to scare. They paraded by Mr. Sam Levy’s house one night, but Sam just stood on his porch and told ‘em things had come to a pretty pass, he’d sold ’em the very sheets on their backs. Sam made ‘em so ashamed of themselves they went away.”

The Levy family met all criteria for being Fine Folks: they did the best they could with the sense they had, and they had been living on the same plot of ground in Maycomb for five generations.

“The Ku Klux’s gone,” said Atticus. “It’ll never come back.”

I walked home with Dill and returned in time to overhear Atticus saying to Aunty,
“You can’t sometimes, not unless you know who they are. But he’s half Raymond, all right.”

“But how can you tell?” I asked.

“I told you, Scout, you just hafta know who they are.”

“Well how do you know we ain’t Negroes?”

“Uncle Jack Finch says we really don’t know. He says as far as he can trace back the Finches we ain’t, but for all he knows we mighta come straight out of Ethiopia durin’ the Old Testament.”

“Well if we came out durin’ the Old Testament it’s too long ago to matter.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Jem, “but around here once you have a drop of Negro blood, that makes you all black. Hey, look—”

Some invisible signal had made the lunchers on the square rise and scatter bits of newspaper, cellophane, and wrapping paper. Children came to mothers, babies were cradled on hips as men in sweat-stained hats collected their families and herded them through the courthouse doors. In the far corner of the square the Negroes and Mr. Dolphus Raymond stood up and dusted their breeches. There were few women and children among them, which seemed to dispel the holiday mood. They waited patiently at the doors behind the white families.

“Let’s go in,” said Dill.

“Naw, we better wait till they get in, Atticus might not like it if he sees us,” said Jem.

The Maycomb County courthouse was faintly reminiscent of Arlington in one respect: the concrete pillars supporting its south roof were too heavy for their light burden. The pillars were all that remained standing when the original courthouse burned in 1856. Another courthouse was built around them. It is better to say, built in spite of them. But for the south porch, the Maycomb County courthouse was early Victorian, presenting an unoffensive vista when seen from the north. From the other side, however, Greek revival columns clashed with a big nineteenth-century clock tower housing a rusty unreliable instrument, a view indicating a people determined to preserve every physical scrap of the past.

To reach the courtroom, on the second floor, one passed sundry sunless county
writing rapidly below in front of him. Judge Taylor looked like most judges I had ever seen: amiable, white-haired, slightly ruddy-faced, he was a man who ran his court with an alarming informality—he sometimes propped his feet up, he often cleaned his fingernails with his pocket knife. In long equity hearings, especially after dinner, he gave the impression of dozing, an impression dispelled forever when a lawyer once deliberately pushed a pile of books to the floor in a desperate effort to wake him up. Without opening his eyes, Judge Taylor murmured, “Mr. Whitley, do that again and it’ll cost you one hundred dollars.”

He was a man learned in the law, and although he seemed to take his job casually, in reality he kept a firm grip on any proceedings that came before him. Only once was Judge Taylor ever seen at a dead standstill in open court, and the Cunninghams stopped him. Old Sarum, their stamping grounds, was populated by two families separate and apart in the beginning, but unfortunately bearing the same name. The Cunninghams married the Coninghams until the spelling of the names was academic—academic until a Cunningham disputed a Coningham over land titles and took to the law. During a controversy of this character, Jeems Cunningham testified that his mother spelled it Cunningham on deeds and things, but she was really a Coningham, she was an uncertain speller, a seldom reader, and was given to looking far away sometimes when she sat on the front gallery in the evening. After nine hours of listening to the eccentricities of Old Sarum’s inhabitants, Judge Taylor threw the case out of court. When asked upon what grounds, Judge Taylor said, “Champertous connivance,” and declared he hoped to God the litigants were satisfied by each having had their public say. They were. That was all they had wanted in the first place.

Judge Taylor had one interesting habit. He permitted smoking in his courtroom but did not himself indulge: sometimes, if one was lucky, one had the privilege of watching him put a long dry cigar into his mouth and munch it slowly up. Bit by bit the dead cigar would disappear, to reappear some hours later as a flat slick mess, its essence extracted and mingling with Judge Taylor’s digestive juices. I once asked Atticus how Mrs. Taylor stood to kiss him, but Atticus said they didn’t kiss much.

The witness stand was to the right of Judge Taylor, and when we got to our seats
life like? I soon found out.

“You say you’re nineteen,” Atticus resumed. “How many sisters and brothers have you?” He walked from the windows back to the stand.

“Seb’m,” she said, and I wondered if they were all like the specimen I had seen the first day I started to school.

“You the eldest? The oldest?”

“Yes.”

“How long has your mother been dead?”

“Don’t know—long time.”

“Did you ever go to school?”

“Read’n’write good as Papa yonder.”

Mayella sounded like a Mr. Jingle in a book I had been reading.

“How long did you go to school?”

“Two year—three year—dunno.”

Slowly but surely I began to see the pattern of Atticus’s questions: from questions that Mr. Gilmer did not deem sufficiently irrelevant or immaterial to object to, Atticus was quietly building up before the jury a picture of the Ewells’ home life. The jury learned the following things: their relief check was far from enough to feed the family, and there was strong suspicion that Papa drank it up anyway—he sometimes went off in the swamp for days and came home sick; the weather was seldom cold enough to require shoes, but when it was, you could make dandy ones from strips of old tires; the family hauled its water in buckets from a spring that ran out at one end of the dump—they kept the surrounding area clear of trash—and it was everybody for himself as far as keeping clean went: if you wanted to wash you hauled your own water; the younger children had perpetual colds and suffered from chronic ground-itch; there was a lady who came around sometimes and asked Mayella why she didn’t stay in school—she wrote down the answer; with two members of the family reading and writing, there was no need for the rest of them to learn—Papa needed them at home.

“Miss Mayella,” said Atticus, in spite of himself, “a nineteen-year-old girl like
“He blacked your left eye with his right fist?”

“I ducked and it—it glanced, that’s what it did. I ducked and it glanced off.”

Mayella had finally seen the light.

“You’re becoming suddenly clear on this point. A while ago you couldn’t remember too well, could you?”

“I said he hit me.”

“All right. He choked you, he hit you, then he raped you, that right?”

“It most certainly is.”

“You’re a strong girl, what were you doing all the time, just standing there?”

“I told’ja I hollered’n’kicked’n’fought—”

Atticus reached up and took off his glasses, turned his good right eye to the witness, and rained questions on her. Judge Taylor said, “One question at a time, Atticus. Give the witness a chance to answer.”

“All right, why didn’t you run?”

“I tried…”

“Tried to? What kept you from it?”

“I—he slung me down’n’hit me. What he did, he slung me down’n got on top of me.”

“You were screaming all this time?”

“I certainly was.”

“Then why didn’t the other children hear you? Where were they? At the dump?”

“Where were they?”

No answer.

“Why didn’t your screams make them come running? The dump’s closer than the woods, isn’t it?”

No answer.

“Or didn’t you scream until you saw your father in the window? You didn’t think to scream until then, did you?”

No answer.
“I think we can,” said Atticus.

“How many witnesses you got?”

“One.”

“Well, call him.”

---

**Chapter 19**

Thomas Robinson reached around, ran his fingers under his left arm and lifted it. He guided his arm to the Bible and his rubber-like left hand sought contact with the black binding. As he raised his right hand, the useless one slipped off the Bible and hit the clerk’s table. He was trying again when Judge Taylor growled, “That’ll do, Tom.” Tom took the oath and stepped into the witness chair. Atticus very quickly induced him to tell us:

Tom was twenty-five years of age; he was married with three children; he had been in trouble with the law before: he once received thirty days for disorderly conduct.

“It must have been disorderly,” said Atticus. “What did it consist of?”

“Got in a fight with another man, he tried to cut me.”

“Did he succeed?”

“Yes suh, a little, not enough to hurt. You see, I—” Tom moved his left shoulder.

“Yes,” said Atticus. “You were both convicted?”

“Yes suh, I had to serve ‘cause I couldn’t pay the fine. Other fellow paid his’n.”

Dill leaned across me and asked Jem what Atticus was doing. Jem said Atticus was showing the jury that Tom had nothing to hide.

“Were you acquainted with Mayella Violet Ewell?” asked Atticus.
aggravates her.”

Dill sighed patiently. “I told her till I was blue in the face where I was goin‘—she’s just seein’ too many snakes in the closet. Bet that woman drinks a pint for breakfast every morning—know she drinks two glasses full. Seen her.”

“Don’t talk like that, Dill,” said Aunt Alexandra. “It’s not becoming to a child. It’s—cynical.”

“I ain’t cynical, Miss Alexandra. Tellin’ the truth’s not cynical, is it?”

“The way you tell it, it is.”

Jem’s eyes flashed at her, but he said to Dill, “Let’s go. You can take that runner with you.”

When we went to the front porch, Miss Stephanie Crawford was busy telling it to Miss Maudie Atkinson and Mr. Avery. They looked around at us and went on talking. Jem made a feral noise in his throat. I wished for a weapon.

“I hate grown folks lookin‘ at you,” said Dill. “Makes you feel like you’ve done something.”

Miss Maudie yelled for Jem Finch to come there. Jem groaned and heaved himself up from the swing. “We’ll go with you,” Dill said.

Miss Stephanie’s nose quivered with curiosity. She wanted to know who all gave us permission to go to court—she didn’t see us but it was all over town this morning that we were in the Colored balcony. Did Atticus put us up there as a sort of—? Wasn’t it right close up there with all those—? Did Scout understand all the—? Didn’t it make us mad to see our daddy beat?

“Hush, Stephanie.” Miss Maudie’s diction was deadly. “I’ve not got all the morning to pass on the porch—Jem Finch, I called to find out if you and your colleagues can eat some cake. Got up at five to make it, so you better say yes. Excuse us, Stephanie. Good morning, Mr. Avery.”

There was a big cake and two little ones on Miss Maudie’s kitchen table. There should have been three little ones. It was not like Miss Maudie to forget Dill, and we must have shown it. But we understood when she cut from the big cake and gave the slice to Jem.
As we ate, we sensed that this was Miss Maudie’s way of saying that as far as she was concerned, nothing had changed. She sat quietly in a kitchen chair, watching us.

Suddenly she spoke: “Don’t fret, Jem. Things are never as bad as they seem.”

Indoors, when Miss Maudie wanted to say something lengthy she spread her fingers on her knees and settled her bridgework. This she did, and we waited.

“I simply want to tell you that there are some men in this world who were born to do our unpleasant jobs for us. Your father’s one of them.”


“Don’t you oh well me, sir,” Miss Maudie replied, recognizing Jem’s fatalistic noises, “you are not old enough to appreciate what I said.”

Jem was staring at his half-eaten cake. “It’s like bein’ a caterpillar in a cocoon, that’s what it is,” he said. “Like somethin’ asleep wrapped up in a warm place. I always thought Maycomb folks were the best folks in the world, least that’s what they seemed like.”

“We’re the safest folks in the world,” said Miss Maudie. “We’re so rarely called on to be Christian, but when we are, we’ve got men like Atticus to go for us.”

Jem grinned ruefully. “I wish the rest of the county thought that.”

“You’d be surprised how many of us do.”

“Who?” Jem’s voice rose. “Who in this town did one thing to help Tom Robinson, just who?”

“His colored friends for one thing, and people like us. People like Judge Taylor. People like Mr. Heck Tate. Stop eating and start thinking, Jem. Did it ever strike you that Judge Taylor naming Atticus to defend that boy was no accident? That Judge Taylor might have had his reasons for naming him?”

This was a thought. Court-appointed defenses were usually given to Maxwell Green, Maycomb’s latest addition to the bar, who needed the experience. Maxwell Green should have had Tom Robinson’s case.

“You think about that,” Miss Maudie was saying. “It was no accident. I was sittin’ there on the porch last night, waiting. I waited and waited to see you all come
all, we would starve if Mr. Ewell killed him, besides be raised exclusively by
Aunt Alexandra, and we all knew the first thing she’d do before Atticus was
under the ground good would be to fire Calpurnia. Jem said it might work if I
cried and flung a fit, being young and a girl. That didn’t work either. But when he
noticed us dragging around the neighborhood, not eating, taking little interest in
our normal pursuits, Atticus discovered how deeply frightened we were. He
tempted Jem with a new football magazine one night; when he saw Jem flip the
pages and toss it aside, he said, “What’s bothering you, son?”

Jem came to the point: “Mr. Ewell.”

“What has happened?”

“Nothing’s happened. We’re scared for you, and we think you oughta do
something about him.”


“When a man says he’s gonna get you, looks like he means it.”

“He meant it when he said it,” said Atticus. “See, see if you can stand in Bob
Ewell’s shoes a minute. I destroy a his last shred of credibility at that trial, if he
had any to begin with. The man had to have some kind of comeback, his kind
always do. So if spitting in my face and threatening me saved Mayella Ewell
one extra beating, that’s something I’ll gladly take. He had to take it out on
somebody and I’d rather it be me than that houseful of children out there. You
understand?”

Jem nodded.

Aunt Alexandra entered the room as Atticus was saying, “We don’t have anything
to fear from Bob Ewell, he got it all out of his system that morning.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that, Atticus,” she said. “His kind’d do anything to pay
off a grudge. You know how those people are.”

“What on earth could Ewell do to me, sister?”

“Something furtive,” Aunt Alexandra said. “You may count on that.”

“Nobody has much chance to be furtive in Maycomb,” Atticus answered.

After that, we were not afraid. Summer was melting away, and we made the most
of it. Atticus assured us that nothing would happen to Tom Robinson until the
that boy’s not trash, Jem. He ain’t like the Ewells.”

Jem kicked off his shoes and swung his feet to the bed. He propped himself against a pillow and switched on the reading light. “You know something, Scout? I’ve got it all figured out, now. I’ve thought about it a lot lately and I’ve got it figured out. There’s four kinds of folks in the world. There’s the ordinary kind like us and the neighbors, there’s the kind like the Cunninghams out in the woods, the kind like the Ewells down at the dump, and the Negroes.”

“What about the Chinese, and the Cajuns down yonder in Baldwin County?”

“I mean in Maycomb County. The thing about it is, our kind of folks don’t like the Cunninghams, the Cunninghams don’t like the Ewells, and the Ewells hate and despise the colored folks.”

I told Jem if that was so, then why didn’t Tom’s jury, made up of folks like the Cunninghams, acquit Tom to spite the Ewells?“

Jem waved my question away as being infantile.

“You know,” he said, “I’ve seen Atticus pat his foot when there’s fiddlin’ on the radio, and he loves pot liquor better’n any man I ever seen.”

“No, lemme finish—it does, but we’re still different somehow. Atticus said one time the reason Aunty’s so hipped on the family is because all we’ve got’s background and not a dime to our names.”

“Well Jem, I don’t know—Atticus told me one time that most of this Old Family stuff’s foolishness because everybody’s family’s just as old as everybody else’s. I said did that include the colored folks and Englishmen and he said yes.”

“Background doesn’t mean Old Family,” said Jem. “I think it’s how long your family’s been readin’ and writin’. Scout, I’ve studied this real hard and that’s the only reason I can think of. Somewhere along when the Finches were in Egypt one of ‘em must have learned a hieroglyphic or two and he taught his boy.” Jem laughed. “Imagine Aunty being proud her great-grandaddy could read an’ write—ladies pick funny things to be proud of.”

“Well I’m glad he could, or who’da taught Atticus and them, and if Atticus couldn’t read, you and me’d be in a fix. I don’t think that’s what background is,
skill Jem considered necessary as walking. They had spent two afternoons at the creek, they said they were going in naked and I couldn’t come, so I divided the lonely hours between Calpurnia and Miss Maudie.

Today Aunt Alexandra and her missionary circle were fighting the good fight all over the house. From the kitchen, I heard Mrs. Grace Merriweather giving a report in the livingroom on the squalid lives of the Mrunas, it sounded like to me. They put the women out in huts when their time came, whatever that was; they had no sense of family—I knew that’d distress Aunty—they subjected children to terrible ordeals when they were thirteen; they were crawling with yaws and earworms, they chewed up and spat out the bark of a tree into a communal pot and then got drunk on it.

Immediately thereafter, the ladies adjourned for refreshments.

I didn’t know whether to go into the diningroom or stay out. Aunt Alexandra told me to join them for refreshments; it was not necessary that I attend the business part of the meeting, she said it’d bore me. I was wearing my pink Sunday dress, shoes, and a petticoat, and reflected that if I spilled anything Calpurnia would have to wash my dress again for tomorrow. This had been a busy day for her. I decided to stay out.

“Can I help you, Cal?” I asked, wishing to be of some service.

Calpurnia paused in the doorway. “You be still as a mouse in that corner,” she said, “an’ you can help me load up the trays when I come back.”

The gentle hum of ladies’ voices grew louder as she opened the door: “Why, Alexandra, I never saw such charlotte… just lovely… I never can get my crust like this, never can… who’d’ve thought of little dewberry tarts… Calpurnia?… who’d thought it… anybody tell you that the preacher’s wife’s… nooo, well she is, and that other one not walkin’ yet…”

They became quiet, and I knew they had all been served. Calpurnia returned and put my mother’s heavy silver pitcher on a tray. “This coffee pitcher’s a curiosity,” she murmured, “they don’t make ‘em these days.”

“Can I carry it in?”

“If you be careful and don’t drop it. Set it down at the end of the table by Miss
gambled and chewed; no matter how undelicious they were, there was something about them that I instinctively liked... they weren’t—

“Hypocrites, Mrs. Perkins, born hypocrites,” Mrs. Merriweather was saying. “At least we don’t have that sin on our shoulders down here. People up there set ‘em free, but you don’t see ’em settin’ at the table with ’em. At least we don’t have the deceit to say to ‘em yes you’re as good as we are but stay away from us. Down here we just say you live your way and we’ll live ours. I think that woman, that Mrs. Roosevelt’s lost her mind—just plain lost her mind coming down to Birmingham and tryin’ to sit with ‘em. If I was the Mayor of Birmingham I’d—”

Well, neither of us was the Mayor of Birmingham, but I wished I was the Governor of Alabama for one day: I’d let Tom Robinson go so quick the Missionary Society wouldn’t have time to catch its breath. Calpurnia was telling Miss Rachel’s cook the other day how bad Tom was taking things and she didn’t stop talking when I came into the kitchen. She said there wasn’t a thing Atticus could do to make being shut up easier for him, that the last thing he said to Atticus before they took him down to the prison camp was, “Good-bye, Mr. Finch, there ain’t nothin’ you can do now, so there ain’t no use tryin’.” Calpurnia said Atticus told her that the day they took Tom to prison he just gave up hope. She said Atticus tried to explain things to him, and that he must do his best not to lose hope because Atticus was doing his best to get him free. Miss Rachel’s cook asked Calpurnia why didn’t Atticus just say yes, you’ll go free, and leave it at that—seemed like that’d be a big comfort to Tom. Calpurnia said, “Because you ain’t familiar with the law. First thing you learn when you’re in a lawin’ family is that there ain’t any definite answers to anything. Mr. Finch couldn’t say somethin’s so when he doesn’t know for sure it’s so.”

The front door slammed and I heard Atticus’s footsteps in the hall. Automatically I wondered what time it was. Not nearly time for him to be home, and on Missionary Society days he usually stayed downtown until black dark.

He stopped in the doorway. His hat was in his hand, and his face was white.

“Excuse me, ladies,” he said. “Go right ahead with your meeting, don’t let me disturb you. Alexandra, could you come to the kitchen a minute? I want to borrow Calpurnia for a while.”
She took her handkerchief from her belt and wiped her nose. She patted her hair and said, “Do I show it?”

“Not a sign,” said Miss Maudie. “Are you together again, Jean Louise?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Then let’s join the ladies,” she said grimly.

Their voices swelled when Miss Maudie opened the door to the diningroom. Aunt Alexandra was ahead of me, and I saw her head go up as she went through the door.

“Oh, Mrs. Perkins,” she said, “you need some more coffee. Let me get it.”

“Calpurnia’s on an errand for a few minutes, Grace,” said Miss Maudie. “Let me pass you some more of those dewberry tarts. ‘dyou hear what that cousin of mine did the other day, the one who likes to go fishing?…”

And so they went, down the row of laughing women, around the diningroom, refilling coffee cups, dishing out goodies as though their only regret was the temporary domestic disaster of losing Calpurnia. The gentle hum began again.

“Yes sir, Mrs. Perkins, that J. Grimes Everett is a married saint, he… needed to get married so they ran… to the beauty parlor every Saturday afternoon… soon as the sun goes down. He goes to bed with the… chickens, a crate full of sick chickens, Fred says that’s what started it all. Fred says…”

Aunt Alexandra looked across the room at me and smiled. She looked at a tray of cookies on the table and nodded at them. I carefully picked up the tray and watched myself walk to Mrs. Merriweather. With my best company manners, I asked her if she would have some.

After all, if Aunty could be a lady at a time like this, so could I.

Chapter 25
“Don’t do that, Scout. Set him out on the back steps.”

“Jem, are you crazy?…”

“I said set him out on the back steps.”

Sighing, I scooped up the small creature, placed him on the bottom step and went back to my cot. September had come, but not a trace of cool weather with it, and we were still sleeping on the back screen porch. Lightning bugs were still about, the night crawlers and flying insects that beat against the screen the summer long had not gone wherever they go when autumn comes.

A roly-poly had found his way inside the house; I reasoned that the tiny varmint had crawled up the steps and under the door. I was putting my book on the floor beside my cot when I saw him. The creatures are no more than an inch long, and when you touch them they roll themselves into a tight gray ball.

I lay on my stomach, reached down and poked him. He rolled up. Then, feeling safe, I suppose, he slowly unrolled. He traveled a few inches of his hundred legs and I touched him again. He rolled up. Feeling sleepy, I decided to end things. My hand was going down on him when Jem spoke.

Jem was scowling. It was probably a part of the stage he was going through, and I wished he would hurry up and get through it. He was certainly never cruel to animals, but I had never known his charity to embrace the insect world.

“Why couldn’t I mash him?” I asked.

“Because they don’t bother you,” Jem answered in the darkness. He had turned out his reading light.

“Reckon you’re at the stage now where you don’t kill flies and mosquitoes now, I reckon,” I said. “Lemme know when you change your mind. Tell you one thing, though, I ain’t gonna sit around and not scratch a redbug.”

“Aw dry up,” he answered drowsily.

Jem was the one who was getting more like a girl every day, not I. Comfortable, I lay on my back and waited for sleep, and while waiting I thought of Dill. He had left us the first of the month with firm assurances that he would return the minute school was out—he guessed his folks had got the general idea that he liked to spend his summers in Maycomb. Miss Rachel took us with them in the taxi to
Chapter 30

“Mr. Arthur, honey,” said Atticus, gently correcting me. “Jean Louise, this is Mr. Arthur Radley. I believe he already knows you.”

If Atticus could blandly introduce me to Boo Radley at a time like this, well—that was Atticus.

Boo saw me run instinctively to the bed where Jem was sleeping, for the same shy smile crept across his face. Hot with embarrassment, I tried to cover up by covering Jem up.

“Ah-ah, don’t touch him,” Atticus said.

Mr. Heck Tate sat looking intently at Boo through his horn-rimmed glasses. He was about to speak when Dr. Reynolds came down the hall.

“Everybody out,” he said, as he came in the door. “Evenin’, Arthur, didn’t notice you the first time I was here.”

Dr. Reynolds’s voice was as breezy as his step, as though he had said it every evening of his life, an announcement that astounded me even more than being in the same room with Boo Radley. Of course… even Boo Radley got sick sometimes, I thought. But on the other hand I wasn’t sure.

Dr. Reynolds was carrying a big package wrapped in newspaper. He put it down on Jem’s desk and took off his coat. “You’re quite satisfied he’s alive, now? Tell you how I knew. When I tried to examine him he kicked me. Had to put him out good and proper to touch him. So scat,” he said to me.

“Er—” said Atticus, glancing at Boo. “Heck, let’s go out on the front porch. There are plenty of chairs out there, and it’s still warm enough.”

I wondered why Atticus was inviting us to the front porch instead of the livingroom, then I understood. The livingroom lights were awfully strong.

We filed out, first Mr. Tate—Atticus was waiting at the door for him to go ahead of him. Then he changed his mind and followed Mr. Tate.

People have a habit of doing everyday things even under the oddest conditions. I
Mr. Tate’s boot hit the floorboards so hard the lights in Miss Maudie’s bedroom went on. Miss Stephanie Crawford’s lights went on. Atticus and Mr. Tate looked across the street, then at each other. They waited.

When Mr. Tate spoke again his voice was barely audible. “Mr. Finch, I hate to fight you when you’re like this. You’ve been under a strain tonight no man should ever have to go through. Why you ain’t in the bed from it I don’t know, but I do know that for once you haven’t been able to put two and two together, and we’ve got to settle this tonight because tomorrow’ll be too late. Bob Ewell’s got a kitchen knife in his craw.”

Mr. Tate added that Atticus wasn’t going to stand there and maintain that any boy Jem’s size with a busted arm had fight enough left in him to tackle and kill a grown man in the pitch dark.

“Heck,” said Atticus abruptly, “that was a switchblade you were waving. Where’d you get it?”

“ Took it off a drunk man,” Mr. Tate answered coolly.

I was trying to remember. Mr. Ewell was on me… the other went down… Jem must have gotten up. A little, I thought.

“Heck.”

“I said I took it off a drunk man downtown tonight. Ewell probably found that kitchen knife in the dump somewhere. Honed it down and bided his time… just bided his time.”

Atticus made his way to the swing and sat down. His hands dangled limply between his knees. He was looking at the floor. He had moved with the same slowness that night in front of the jail, when I thought it took him forever to fold his newspaper and toss it in his chair.

Mr. Tate clumped softly around the porch. “It ain’t your decision, Mr. Finch, it’s all mine. It’s my decision and my responsibility. For once, if you don’t see it my way, there’s not much you can do about it. If you wanta try, I’ll call you a liar to your face. Your boy never stabbed Bob Ewell,” he said slowly, “didn’t come near a mile of it and now you know it. All he wanted to do was get him and his sister safely home.”
Mr. Tate stopped pacing. He stopped in front of Atticus, and his back was to us. “I’m not a very good man, sir, but I am sheriff of Maycomb County. Lived in this town all my life an’ I’m goin’ on forty-three years old. Know everything that’s happened here since before I was born. There’s a black boy dead for no reason, and the man responsible for it’s dead. Let the dead bury the dead this time, Mr. Finch. Let the dead bury the dead.”

Mr. Tate went to the swing and picked up his hat. It was lying beside Atticus. Mr. Tate pushed back his hair and put his hat on.

“I never heard tell that it’s against the law for a citizen to do his utmost to prevent a crime from being committed, which is exactly what he did, but maybe you’ll say it’s my duty to tell the town all about it and not hush it up. Know what’d happen then? All the ladies in Maycomb includin’ my wife’d be knocking on his door bringing angel food cakes. To my way of thinkin’, Mr. Finch, taking the one man who’s done you and this town a great service an’ draggin’ him with his shy ways into the limelight—to me, that’s a sin. It’s a sin and I’m not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man, it’d be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch.”

Mr. Tate was trying to dig a hole in the floor with the toe of his boot. He pulled his nose, then he massaged his left arm. “I may not be much, Mr. Finch, but I’m still sheriff of Maycomb County and Bob Ewell fell on his knife. Good night, sir.”

Mr. Tate stamped off the porch and strode across the front yard. His car door slammed and he drove away.

Atticus sat looking at the floor for a long time. Finally he raised his head. “Scout,” he said, “Mr. Ewell fell on his knife. Can you possibly understand?”

Atticus looked like he needed cheering up. I ran to him and hugged him and kissed him with all my might. “Yes sir, I understand,” I reassured him. “Mr. Tate was right.”

Atticus disengaged himself and looked at me. “What do you mean?”

“Well, it’d be sort of like shootin’ a mockingbird, wouldn’t it?”

Atticus put his face in my hair and rubbed it. When he got up and walked across the porch into the shadows, his youthful step had returned. Before he went inside
misty beads, but looking cross-eyed made me dizzy so I quit. As I made my way home, I thought what a thing to tell Jem tomorrow. He’d be so mad he missed it he wouldn’t speak to me for days. As I made my way home, I thought Jem and I would get grown but there wasn’t much else left for us to learn, except possibly algebra.

I ran up the steps and into the house. Aunt Alexandra had gone to bed, and Atticus’s room was dark. I would see if Jem might be reviving. Atticus was in Jem’s room, sitting by his bed. He was reading a book.

“Is Jem awake yet?”

“Sleeping peacefully. He won’t be awake until morning.”

“Oh. Are you sittin’ up with him?”

“Just for an hour or so. Go to bed, Scout. You’ve had a long day.”

“Well, I think I’ll stay with you for a while.”

“Suit yourself,” said Atticus. It must have been after midnight, and I was puzzled by his amiable acquiescence. He was shrewd, that I, however: the moment I sat down I began to feel sleepy.

“What you readin’?” I asked.


I was suddenly awake. “Why’d you get that one?”

“Honey, I don’t know. Just picked it up. One of the few things I haven’t read,” he said pointedly.

“Read it out loud, please, Atticus. It’s real scary.”

“No,” he said. “You’ve had enough scaring for a while. This is too—”

“Atticus, I wasn’t scared.”

He raised his eyebrows, and I protested: “Leastways not till I started telling Mr. Tate about it. Jem wasn’t scared. Asked him and he said he wasn’t. Besides, nothin’s real scary except in books.”

Atticus opened his mouth to say something, but shut it again. He took his thumb from the middle of the book and turned back to the first page. I moved over and leaned my head against his knee. “H’rm,” he said. “The Gray Ghost, by Seckatary
I willed myself to stay awake, but the rain was so soft and the room was so warm and his voice was so deep and his knee was so snug that I slept.

Seconds later, it seemed, his shoe was gently nudging my ribs. He lifted me to my feet and walked me to my room. “Heard every word you said,” I muttered. “… wasn’t sleep at all, ‘s about a ship an’ Three-Fingered Fred ‘n’ Stoner’s Boy…”

He unhooked my overalls, leaned me against him, and pulled them off. He held me up with one hand and reached for my pajamas with the other.

“Yeah, an’ they all thought it was Stoner’s Boy messin’ up their clubhouse an’ throwin’ ink all over it an’…”

He guided me to the bed and sat me down. He lifted my legs and put me under the cover.

“An’ they chased him ’n’ never could catch him ’cause they didn’t know what he looked like, an’ Atticus, when they finally saw him, why he hadn’t done any of those things… Atticus, he was real nice…”

His hands were under my chin, pulling up the cover, tucking it around me.

“Most people are, Scout, when you finally see them.”

He turned out the light and went into Jem’s room. He would be there all night, and he would be there when Jem waked up in the morning.