

“Why do you reckon Boo Radley’s never run off?”

Dill sighed a long sigh and turned away from me.

“Maybe he doesn’t have anywhere to run off to...”

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## Chapter 15

After many telephone calls, much pleading on behalf of the defendant, and a long forgiving letter from his mother, it was decided that Dill could stay. We had a week of peace together. After that, little, it seemed. A nightmare was upon us.

It began one evening after supper. Dill was over; Aunt Alexandra was in her chair in the corner, Atticus was in his; Jem and I were on the floor reading. It had been a placid week: I had minded Aunty; Jem had outgrown the treehouse, but helped Dill and me construct a new rope ladder for it; Dill had hit upon a foolproof plan to make Boo Radley come out at no cost to ourselves (place a trail of lemon drops from the back door to the front yard and he’d follow it, like an ant). There was a knock on the front door, Jem answered it and said it was Mr. Heck Tate.

“Well, ask him to come in,” said Atticus.

“I already did. There’s some men outside in the yard, they want you to come out.”

In Maycomb, grown men stood outside in the front yard for only two reasons: death and politics. I wondered who had died. Jem and I went to the front door, but Atticus called, “Go back in the house.”

Jem turned out the livingroom lights and pressed his nose to a window screen. Aunt Alexandra protested. “Just for a second, Aunty, let’s see who it is,” he said. Dill and I took another window. A crowd of men was standing around Atticus. They all seemed to be talking at once.

“...movin’ him to the county jail tomorrow,” Mr. Tate was saying, “I don’t look for any trouble, but I can’t guarantee there won’t be any...”

“Don’t be foolish, Heck,” Atticus said. “This is Maycomb.”

“...said I was just uneasy.”

“Heck, we’ve gotten one postponement of this case just to make sure there’s nothing to be uneasy about. This is Saturday,” Atticus said. “Trial’ll probably be Monday. You can keep him one night, can’t you? I don’t think anybody in Maycomb’ll begrudge me a client, with times this hard.”

There was a murmur of glee that died suddenly when Mr. Link Deas said, “Nobody around here’s up to anything, it’s that Old Sarum bunch I’m worried about... can’t you get a—what is it, Heck?”

“Change of venue,” said Mr. Tate. “Not much point in that, now is it?”

Atticus said something inaudible. I turned to Jem, who waved me to silence.

“—besides,” Atticus was saying, “you’re not scared of that crowd, are you?”

“...know how they do when they get shinnied up.”

“They don’t usually drink on Sunday, they go to church most of the day...”

Atticus said.

“This is a special occasion, though...” someone said.

They murmured and buzzed until Auntie said if Jem didn’t turn on the livingroom lights he would disgrace the family. Jem didn’t hear her.

“—don’t see why you touched it in the first place,” Mr. Link Deas was saying.

“You’ve got everything to lose from this, Atticus. I mean everything.”

“Do you really think so?”

This was Atticus’s dangerous question. “Do you really think you want to move there, Scout?” Bam, bam, bam, and the checkerboard was swept clean of my men.

“Do you really think that, son? Then read this.” Jem would struggle the rest of an evening through the speeches of Henry W. Grady.

“Link, that boy might go to the chair, but he’s not going till the truth’s told.”

Atticus’s voice was even. “And you know what the truth is.”

There was a murmur among the group of men, made more ominous when Atticus moved back to the bottom front step and the men drew nearer to him.

Suddenly Jem screamed, “Atticus, the telephone’s ringing!”

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,

“...in favor of Southern womanhood as much as anybody, but not for preserving polite fiction at the expense of human life,” a pronouncement that made me suspect they had been fussing again.

I sought Jem and found him in his room, on the bed deep in thought. “Have they been at it?” I asked.

“Sort of. She won’t let him alone about Tom Robinson. She almost said Atticus was disgracin’ the family. Scout... I’m scared.”

“Scared’ a what?”

“Scared about Atticus. Somebody might hurt him.” Jem preferred to remain mysterious; all he would say to my questions was go on and leave him alone.

Next day was Sunday. In the interval between Sunday School and Church when the congregation stretched its legs, I saw Atticus standing in the yard with another knot of men. Mr. Heck Tate was present, and I wondered if he had seen the light. He never went to church. Even Mr. Underwood was there. Mr. Underwood had no use for any organization but *The Maycomb Tribune*, of which he was the sole owner, editor, and printer. His days were spent at his linotype, where he refreshed himself occasionally from an ever-present gallon jug of cherry wine. He rarely gathered news; people brought it to him. It was said that he made up every edition of *The Maycomb Tribune* out of his own head and wrote it down on the linotype. This was believable. Something must have been up to haul Mr. Underwood out.

I caught Atticus coming in the door, and he said that they’d moved Tom Robinson to the Maycomb jail. He also said, more to himself than to me, that if they’d kept him there in the first place there wouldn’t have been any fuss. I watched him take his seat on the third row from the front, and I heard him rumble, “Nearer my God to thee,” some notes behind the rest of us. He never sat with Aunty, Jem and me. He liked to be by himself in church.

The fake peace that prevailed on Sundays was made more irritating by Aunt Alexandra’s presence. Atticus would flee to his office directly after dinner, where if we sometimes looked in on him, we would find him sitting back in his swivel chair reading. Aunt Alexandra composed herself for a two-hour nap and dared us to make any noise in the yard, the neighborhood was resting. Jem in his old age had taken to his room with a stack of football magazines. So Dill and I spent our

Sundays creeping around in Deer's Pasture.

Shooting on Sundays was prohibited, so Dill and I kicked Jem's football around the pasture for a while, which was no fun. Dill asked if I'd like to have a poke at Boo Radley. I said I didn't think it'd be nice to bother him, and spent the rest of the afternoon filling Dill in on last winter's events. He was considerably impressed.

We parted at suppertime, and after our meal Jem and I were settling down to a routine evening, when Atticus did something that interested us: he came into the livingroom carrying a long electrical extension cord. There was a light bulb on the end.

"I'm going out for a while," he said. "You folks'll be in bed when I come back, so I'll say good night now."

With that, he put his hat on and went out the back door.

"He's takin' the car," said Jem.

Our father had a few peculiarities: one was, he never ate desserts; another was that he liked to walk. As far back as I could remember, there was always a Chevrolet in excellent condition in the carhouse, and Atticus put many miles on it in business trips, but in Maycomb he walked to and from his office four times a day, covering about two miles. He said his only exercise was walking. In Maycomb, if one went for a walk with no definite purpose in mind, it was correct to believe one's mind incapable of definite purpose.

Later on, I bade my aunt and brother good night and was well into a book when I heard Jem rattling around in his room. His go-to-bed noises were so familiar to me that I knocked on his door: "Why ain't you going to bed?"

"I'm goin' downtown for a while." He was changing his pants.

"Why? It's almost ten o'clock, Jem."

He knew it, but he was going anyway.

"Then I'm goin' with you. If you say no you're not, I'm goin' anyway, hear?"

Jem saw that he would have to fight me to keep me home, and I suppose he thought a fight would antagonize Aunty, so he gave in with little grace.

I dressed quickly. We waited until Aunty's light went out, and we walked quietly

down the back steps. There was no moon tonight.

“Dill’ll wanta come,” I whispered.

“So he will,” said Jem gloomily.

We leaped over the driveway wall, cut through Miss Rachel’s side yard and went to Dill’s window. Jem whistled bob-white. Dill’s face appeared at the screen, disappeared, and five minutes later he unhooked the screen and crawled out. An old campaigner, he did not speak until we were on the sidewalk. “What’s up?”

“Jem’s got the look-arounds,” an affliction Calpurnia said all boys caught at his age.

“I’ve just got this feeling,” Jem said, “just this feeling.”

We went by Mrs. Dubose’s house, standing empty and shuttered, her camellias grown up in weeds and johnson grass. There were eight more houses to the post office corner.

The south side of the square was deserted. Giant monkey-puzzle bushes bristled on each corner, and between them an iron hitching rail glistened under the street lights. A light shone in the county toilet, otherwise that side of the courthouse was dark. A larger square of stores surrounded the courthouse square; dim lights burned from deep within them.

Atticus’s office was in the courthouse when he began his law practice, but after several years of it he moved to quieter quarters in the Maycomb Bank building. When we rounded the corner of the square, we saw the car parked in front of the bank. “He’s in there,” said Jem.

But he wasn’t. His office was reached by a long hallway. Looking down the hall, we should have seen *Atticus Finch, Attorney-at-Law* in small sober letters against the light from behind his door. It was dark.

Jem peered in the bank door to make sure. He turned the knob. The door was locked. “Let’s go up the street. Maybe he’s visitin’ Mr. Underwood.”

Mr. Underwood not only ran *The Maycomb Tribune* office, he lived in it. That is, above it. He covered the courthouse and jailhouse news simply by looking out his upstairs window. The office building was on the northwest corner of the square, and to reach it we had to pass the jail.

The Maycomb jail was the most venerable and hideous of the county's buildings. Atticus said it was like something Cousin Joshua St. Clair might have designed. It was certainly someone's dream. Starkly out of place in a town of square-faced stores and steep-roofed houses, the Maycomb jail was a miniature Gothic joke one cell wide and two cells high, complete with tiny battlements and flying buttresses. Its fantasy was heightened by its red brick facade and the thick steel bars at its ecclesiastical windows. It stood on no lonely hill, but was wedged between Tyndal's Hardware Store and *The Maycomb Tribune* office. The jail was Maycomb's only conversation piece: its detractors said it looked like a Victorian privy; its supporters said it gave the town a good solid respectable look, and no stranger would ever suspect that it was full of niggers.

As we walked up the sidewalk, we saw a solitary light burning in the distance. "That's funny," said Jem, "jail doesn't have an outside light."

"Looks like it's over the door," said Dill.

A long extension cord ran between the bars of a second-floor window and down the side of the building. In the light from its bare bulb, Atticus was sitting propped against the front door. He was sitting in one of his office chairs, and he was reading, oblivious of the nightbugs dancing over his head.

I made to run, but Jem caught me. "Don't go to him," he said, "he might not like it. He's all right, let's go home. I just wanted to see where he was."

We were taking a short cut across the square when four dusty cars came in from the Meridian highway, moving slowly in a line. They went around the square, passed the bank building, and stopped in front of the jail.

Nobody got out. We saw Atticus look up from his newspaper. He closed it, folded it deliberately, dropped it in his lap, and pushed his hat to the back of his head. He seemed to be expecting them.

"Come on," whispered Jem. We streaked across the square, across the street, until we were in the shelter of the Jitney Jungle door. Jem peeked up the sidewalk. "We can get closer," he said. We ran to Tyndal's Hardware door—near enough, at the same time discreet.

In ones and twos, men got out of the cars. Shadows became substance as lights

revealed solid shapes moving toward the jail door. Atticus remained where he was. The men hid him from view.

“He in there, Mr. Finch?” a man said.

“He is,” we heard Atticus answer, “and he’s asleep. Don’t wake him up.”

In obedience to my father, there followed what I later realized was a sickeningly comic aspect of an unfunny situation: the men talked in near-whispers.

“You know what we want,” another man said. “Get aside from the door, Mr. Finch.”

“You can turn around and go home again, Walter,” Atticus said pleasantly. “Heck Tate’s around somewhere.”

“The hell he is,” said another man. “Heck’s bunch’s so deep in the woods they won’t get out till mornin’.”

“Indeed? Why so?”

“Called ‘em off on a snipe hunt,” was the succinct answer. “Didn’t you think a’that, Mr. Finch?”

“Thought about it, but didn’t believe it. Well then,” my father’s voice was still the same, “that changes things, doesn’t it?”

“It do,” another deep voice said. Its owner was a shadow.

“Do you really think so?”

This was the second time I heard Atticus ask that question in two days, and it meant somebody’s man would get jumped. This was too good to miss. I broke away from Jem and ran as fast as I could to Atticus.

Jem shrieked and tried to catch me, but I had a lead on him and Dill. I pushed my way through dark smelly bodies and burst into the circle of light.

“H-ey, Atticus!”

I thought he would have a fine surprise, but his face killed my joy. A flash of plain fear was going out of his eyes, but returned when Dill and Jem wriggled into the light.

There was a smell of stale whiskey and pigpen about, and when I glanced around I discovered that these men were strangers. They were not the people I saw last

night. Hot embarrassment shot through me: I had leaped triumphantly into a ring of people I had never seen before.

Atticus got up from his chair, but he was moving slowly, like an old man. He put the newspaper down very carefully, adjusting its creases with lingering fingers. They were trembling a little.

“Go home, Jem,” he said. “Take Scout and Dill home.”

We were accustomed to prompt, if not always cheerful acquiescence to Atticus’s instructions, but from the way he stood Jem was not thinking of budging.

“Go home, I said.”

Jem shook his head. As Atticus’s fists went to his hips, so did Jem’s, and as they faced each other I could see little resemblance between them: Jem’s soft brown hair and eyes, his oval face and snug-fitting ears were our mother’s, contrasting oddly with Atticus’s graying black hair and square-cut features, but they were somehow alike. Mutual defiance made them alike.

“Son, I said go home.”

Jem shook his head.

“I’ll send him home,” a burly man said, and grabbed Jem roughly by the collar. He yanked Jem nearly off his feet.

“Don’t you touch him!” I kicked the man swiftly. Barefooted, I was surprised to see him fall back in real pain. I intended to kick his shin, but aimed too high.

“That’ll do, Scout.” Atticus put his hand on my shoulder. “Don’t kick folks. No —” he said, as I was pleading justification.

“Ain’t nobody gonna do Jem that way,” I said.

“All right, Mr. Finch, get ‘em outa here,” someone growled. “You got fifteen seconds to get ‘em outa here.”

In the midst of this strange assembly, Atticus stood trying to make Jem mind him.

“I ain’t going,” was his steady answer to Atticus’s threats, requests, and finally, “Please Jem, take them home.”

I was getting a bit tired of that, but felt Jem had his own reasons for doing as he did, in view of his prospects once Atticus did get him home. I looked around the

crowd. It was a summer's night, but the men were dressed, most of them, in overalls and denim shirts buttoned up to the collars. I thought they must be cold-natured, as their sleeves were unrolled and buttoned at the cuffs. Some wore hats pulled firmly down over their ears. They were sullen-looking, sleepy-eyed men who seemed unused to late hours. I sought once more for a familiar face, and at the center of the semi-circle I found one.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham."

The man did not hear me, it seemed.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham. How's your entailment gettin' along?"

Mr. Walter Cunningham's legal affairs were well known to me; Atticus had once described them at length. The big man blinked and hooked his thumbs in his overall straps. He seemed uncomfortable; he cleared his throat and looked away. My friendly overture had fallen flat.

Mr. Cunningham wore no hat, and the top half of his forehead was white in contrast to his sunscorched face, which led me to believe that he wore one most days. He shifted his feet, clad in heavy work shoes.

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Cunningham? I'm Jean Louise Finch. You brought us some hickory nuts one time, remember?" I began to sense the futility one feels when unacknowledged by a chance acquaintance.

"I go to school with Walter," I began again. "He's your boy, ain't he? Ain't he, sir?"

Mr. Cunningham was moved to a faint nod. He did know me, after all.

"He's in my grade," I said, "and he does right well. He's a good boy," I added, "a real nice boy. We brought him home for dinner one time. Maybe he told you about me, I beat him up one time but he was real nice about it. Tell him hey for me, won't you?"

Atticus had said it was the polite thing to talk to people about what they were interested in, not about what you were interested in. Mr. Cunningham displayed no interest in his son, so I tackled his entailment once more in a last-ditch effort to make him feel at home.

"Entailments are bad," I was advising him, when I slowly awoke to the fact that I

was addressing the entire aggregation. The men were all looking at me, some had their mouths half-open. Atticus had stopped poking at Jem: they were standing together beside Dill. Their attention amounted to fascination. Atticus's mouth, even, was half-open, an attitude he had once described as uncouth. Our eyes met and he shut it.

"Well, Atticus, I was just sayin' to Mr. Cunningham that entailments are bad an' all that, but you said not to worry, it takes a long time sometimes... that you all'd ride it out together..." I was slowly drying up, wondering what idiocy I had committed. Entailments seemed all right enough for livingroom talk.

I began to feel sweat gathering at the edges of my hair; I could stand anything but a bunch of people looking at me. They were quite still.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

Atticus said nothing. I looked around and up at Mr. Cunningham, whose face was equally impassive. Then he did a peculiar thing. He squatted down and took me by both shoulders.

"I'll tell him you said hey, little lady," he said.

Then he straightened up and waved a big paw. "Let's clear out," he called. "Let's get going, boys."

As they had come, in ones and twos the men shuffled back to their ramshackle cars. Doors slammed, engines coughed, and they were gone.

I turned to Atticus, but Atticus had gone to the jail and was leaning against it with his face to the wall. I went to him and pulled his sleeve. "Can we go home now?" He nodded, produced his handkerchief, gave his face a going-over and blew his nose violently.

"Mr. Finch?"

A soft husky voice came from the darkness above: "They gone?"

Atticus stepped back and looked up. "They've gone," he said. "Get some sleep, Tom. They won't bother you any more."

From a different direction, another voice cut crisply through the night: "You're damn tootin' they won't. Had you covered all the time, Atticus."

Mr. Underwood and a double-barreled shotgun were leaning out his window

above *The Maycomb Tribune* office.

It was long past my bedtime and I was growing quite tired; it seemed that Atticus and Mr. Underwood would talk for the rest of the night, Mr. Underwood out the window and Atticus up at him. Finally Atticus returned, switched off the light above the jail door, and picked up his chair.

“Can I carry it for you, Mr. Finch?” asked Dill. He had not said a word the whole time.

“Why, thank you, son.”

Walking toward the office, Dill and I fell into step behind Atticus and Jem. Dill was encumbered by the chair, and his pace was slower. Atticus and Jem were well ahead of us, and I assumed that Atticus was giving him hell for not going home, but I was wrong. As they passed under a streetlight, Atticus reached out and massaged Jem’s hair, his one gesture of affection.

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## Chapter 16

Jem heard me. He thrust his head around the connecting door. As he came to my bed Atticus’s light flashed on. We stayed where we were until it went off; we heard him turn over, and we waited until he was still again.

Jem took me to his room and put me in bed beside him. “Try to go to sleep,” he said, “It’ll be all over after tomorrow, maybe.”

We had come in quietly, so as not to wake Aunty. Atticus killed the engine in the driveway and coasted to the carhouse; we went in the back door and to our rooms without a word. I was very tired, and was drifting into sleep when the memory of Atticus calmly folding his newspaper and pushing back his hat became Atticus standing in the middle of an empty waiting street, pushing up his glasses. The full meaning of the night’s events hit me and I began crying. Jem was awfully nice

about it: for once he didn't remind me that people nearly nine years old didn't do things like that.

Everybody's appetite was delicate this morning, except Jem's: he ate his way through three eggs. Atticus watched in frank admiration; Aunt Alexandra sipped coffee and radiated waves of disapproval. Children who slipped out at night were a disgrace to the family. Atticus said he was right glad his disgraces had come along, but Auntie said, "Nonsense, Mr. Underwood was there all the time."

"You know, it's a funny thing about Braxton," said Atticus. "He despises Negroes, won't have one near him."

Local opinion held Mr. Underwood to be an intense, profane little man, whose father in a fey fit of humor christened Braxton Bragg, a name Mr. Underwood had done his best to live down. Atticus said naming people after Confederate generals made slow steady drinkers.

Calpurnia was serving Aunt Alexandra more coffee, and she shook her head at what I thought was a pleading winning look. "You're still too little," she said. "I'll tell you when you ain't." I said it might help my stomach. "All right," she said, and got a cup from the sideboard. She poured one tablespoonful of coffee into it and filled the cup to the brim with milk. I thanked her by sticking out my tongue at it, and looked up to catch Auntie's warning frown. But she was frowning at Atticus.

She waited until Calpurnia was in the kitchen, then she said, "Don't talk like that in front of them."

"Talk like what in front of whom?" he asked.

"Like that in front of Calpurnia. You said Braxton Underwood despises Negroes right in front of her."

"Well, I'm sure Cal knows it. Everybody in Maycomb knows it."

I was beginning to notice a subtle change in my father these days, that came out when he talked with Aunt Alexandra. It was a quiet digging in, never outright irritation. There was a faint starchiness in his voice when he said, "Anything fit to say at the table's fit to say in front of Calpurnia. She knows what she means to this family."

“I don’t think it’s a good habit, Atticus. It encourages them. You know how they talk among themselves. Every thing that happens in this town’s out to the Quarters before sundown.”

My father put down his knife. “I don’t know of any law that says they can’t talk. Maybe if we didn’t give them so much to talk about they’d be quiet. Why don’t you drink your coffee, Scout?”

I was playing in it with the spoon. “I thought Mr. Cunningham was a friend of ours. You told me a long time ago he was.”

“He still is.”

“But last night he wanted to hurt you.”

Atticus placed his fork beside his knife and pushed his plate aside. “Mr. Cunningham’s basically a good man,” he said, “he just has his blind spots along with the rest of us.”

Jem spoke. “Don’t call that a blind spot. He’d killed you last night when he first went there.

“

“He might have hurt me a little,” Atticus conceded, “but son, you’ll understand folks a little better when you’re older. A mob’s always made up of people, no matter what. Mr. Cunningham was part of a mob last night, but he was still a man. Every mob in every little Southern town is always made up of people you know—doesn’t say much for them, does it?”

“I’ll say not,” said Jem.

“So it took an eight-year-old child to bring ‘em to their senses, didn’t it?” said Atticus. “That proves something—that a gang of wild animals can be stopped, simply because they’re still human. Hmp, maybe we need a police force of children... you children last night made Walter Cunningham stand in my shoes for a minute. That was enough.”

Well, I hoped Jem would understand folks a little better when he was older; I wouldn’t. “First day Walter comes back to school’ll be his last,” I affirmed.

“You will not touch him,” Atticus said flatly. “I don’t want either of you bearing a grudge about this thing, no matter what happens.”

“You see, don’t you,” said Aunt Alexandra, “what comes of things like this. Don’t say I haven’t told you.”

Atticus said he’d never say that, pushed out his chair and got up. “There’s a day ahead, so excuse me. Jem, I don’t want you and Scout downtown today, please.”

As Atticus departed, Dill came bounding down the hall into the diningroom. “It’s all over town this morning,” he announced, “all about how we held off a hundred folks with our bare hands...” Aunt Alexandra stared him to silence. “It was not a hundred folks,” she said, “and nobody held anybody off. It was just a nest of those Cunninghams, drunk and disorderly.”

“Aw, Aunt, that’s just Dill’s way,” said Jem. He signaled us to follow him.

“You all stay in the yard today,” she said, as we made our way to the front porch. It was like Saturday. People from the south end of the county passed our house in a leisurely but steady stream.

Mr. Dolphus Raymond lurched by on his thoroughbred. “Don’t see how he stays in the saddle,” murmured Jem. “How c’n you stand to get drunk ‘fore eight in the morning?”

A wagonload of ladies rattled past us. They wore cotton sunbonnets and dresses with long sleeves. A bearded man in a wool hat drove them. “Yonder’s some Mennonites,” Jem said to Dill. “They don’t have buttons.” They lived deep in the woods, did most of their trading across the river, and rarely came to Maycomb. Dill was interested. “They’ve all got blue eyes,” Jem explained, “and the men can’t shave after they marry. Their wives like for ‘em to tickle ‘em with their beards.”

Mr. X Billups rode by on a mule and waved to us. “He’s a funny man,” said Jem. “X’s his name, not his initial. He was in court one time and they asked him his name. He said X Billups. Clerk asked him to spell it and he said X. Asked him again and he said X. They kept at it till he wrote X on a sheet of paper and held it up for everybody to see. They asked him where he got his name and he said that’s the way his folks signed him up when he was born.”

As the county went by us, Jem gave Dill the histories and general attitudes of the more prominent figures: Mr. Tensaw Jones voted the straight Prohibition ticket;

Miss Emily Davis dipped snuff in private; Mr. Byron Waller could play the violin; Mr. Jake Slade was cutting his third set of teeth.

A wagonload of unusually stern-faced citizens appeared. When they pointed to Miss Maudie Atkinson's yard, ablaze with summer flowers, Miss Maudie herself came out on the porch. There was an odd thing about Miss Maudie—on her porch she was too far away for us to see her features clearly, but we could always catch her mood by the way she stood. She was now standing arms akimbo, her shoulders drooping a little, her head cocked to one side, her glasses winking in the sunlight. We knew she wore a grin of the uttermost wickedness.

The driver of the wagon slowed down his mules, and a shrill-voiced woman called out: "He that cometh in vanity departeth in darkness!"

Miss Maudie answered: "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance!"

I guess that the foot-washers thought that the Devil was quoting Scripture for his own purposes, as the driver speeded his mules. Why they objected to Miss Maudie's yard was a mystery, heightened in my mind because for someone who spent all the daylight hours outdoors, Miss Maudie's command of Scripture was formidable.

"You goin' to court this morning?" asked Jem. We had strolled over.

"I am not," she said. "I have no business with the court this morning."

"Aren't you goin' down to watch?" asked Dill.

"I am not. 't's morbid, watching a poor devil on trial for his life. Look at all those folks, it's like a Roman carnival."

"They hafta try him in public, Miss Maudie," I said. "Wouldn't be right if they didn't."

"I'm quite aware of that," she said. "Just because it's public, I don't have to go, do I?"

Miss Stephanie Crawford came by. She wore a hat and gloves. "Um, um, um," she said. "Look at all those folks—you'd think William Jennings Bryan was speakin'."

"And where are you going, Stephanie?" inquired Miss Maudie.

"To the Jitney Jungle."

Miss Maudie said she'd never seen Miss Stephanie go to the Jitney Jungle in a hat in her life.

"Well," said Miss Stephanie, "I thought I might just look in at the courthouse, to see what Atticus's up to."

"Better be careful he doesn't hand you a subpoena."

We asked Miss Maudie to elucidate: she said Miss Stephanie seemed to know so much about the case she might as well be called on to testify.

We held off until noon, when Atticus came home to dinner and said they'd spent the morning picking the jury. After dinner, we stopped by for Dill and went to town.

It was a gala occasion. There was no room at the public hitching rail for another animal, mules and wagons were parked under every available tree. The courthouse square was covered with picnic parties sitting on newspapers, washing down biscuit and syrup with warm milk from fruit jars. Some people were gnawing on cold chicken and cold fried pork chops. The more affluent chased their food with drugstore Coca-Cola in bulb-shaped soda glasses. Greasy-faced children popped-the-whip through the crowd, and babies lunched at their mothers' breasts.

In a far corner of the square, the Negroes sat quietly in the sun, dining on sardines, crackers, and the more vivid flavors of Nehi Cola. Mr. Dolphus Raymond sat with them.

"Jem," said Dill, "he's drinkin' out of a sack."

Mr. Dolphus Raymond seemed to be so doing: two yellow drugstore straws ran from his mouth to the depths of a brown paper bag.

"Ain't ever seen anybody do that," murmured Dill.

"How does he keep what's in it in it?"

Jem giggled. "He's got a Co-Cola bottle full of whiskey in there. That's so's not to upset the ladies. You'll see him sip it all afternoon, he'll step out for a while and fill it back up."

"Why's he sittin' with the colored folks?"

“Always does. He likes ‘em better’n he likes us, I reckon. Lives by himself way down near the county line. He’s got a colored woman and all sorts of mixed chillun. Show you some of ‘em if we see ‘em.”

“He doesn’t look like trash,” said Dill.

“He’s not, he owns all one side of the riverbank down there, and he’s from a real old family to boot.”

“Then why does he do like that?”

“That’s just his way,” said Jem. “They say he never got over his weddin’. He was supposed to marry one of the—the Spencer ladies, I think. They were gonna have a huge weddin’, but they didn’t—after the rehearsal the bride went upstairs and blew her head off. Shotgun. She pulled the trigger with her toes.”

“Did they ever know why?”

“No,” said Jem, “nobody ever knew quite why but Mr. Dolphus. They said it was because she found out about his colored woman, he reckoned he could keep her and get married too. He’s been sorta drunk ever since. You know, though, he’s real good to those chillun—”

“Jem,” I asked, “what’s a mixed child?”

“Half white, half colored. You’ve seen ‘em, Scout. You know that red-kinky-headed one that delivers for the drugstore. He’s half white. They’re real sad.”

“Sad, how come?”

“They don’t belong anywhere. Colored folks won’t have ‘em because they’re half white; white folks won’t have ‘em cause they’re colored, so they’re just in-betweens, don’t belong anywhere. But Mr. Dolphus, now, they say he’s shipped two of his up north. They don’t mind ‘em up north. Yonder’s one of ‘em.”

A small boy clutching a Negro woman’s hand walked toward us. He looked all Negro to me: he was rich chocolate with flaring nostrils and beautiful teeth. Sometimes he would skip happily, and the Negro woman tugged his hand to make him stop.

Jem waited until they passed us. “That’s one of the little ones,” he said.

“How can you tell?” asked Dill. “He looked black to me.”

“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

cubbyholes: the tax assessor, the tax collector, the county clerk, the county solicitor, the circuit clerk, the judge of probate lived in cool dim hutches that smelled of decaying record books mingled with old damp cement and stale urine. It was necessary to turn on the lights in the daytime; there was always a film of dust on the rough floorboards. The inhabitants of these offices were creatures of their environment: little gray-faced men, they seemed untouched by wind or sun. We knew there was a crowd, but we had not bargained for the multitudes in the first-floor hallway. I got separated from Jem and Dill, but made my way toward the wall by the stairwell, knowing Jem would come for me eventually. I found myself in the middle of the Idlers' Club and made myself as unobtrusive as possible. This was a group of white-shirted, khaki-trousered, suspended old men who had spent their lives doing nothing and passed their twilight days doing same on pine benches under the live oaks on the square. Attentive critics of courthouse business, Atticus said they knew as much law as the Chief Justice, from long years of observation. Normally, they were the court's only spectators, and today they seemed resentful of the interruption of their comfortable routine. When they spoke, their voices sounded casually important. The conversation was about my father.

"...thinks he knows what he's doing," one said.

"Oh-h now, I wouldn't say that," said another. "Atticus Finch's a deep reader, a mighty deep reader."

"He reads all right, that's all he does." The club snickered.

"Lemme tell you somethin' now, Billy," a third said, "you know the court appointed him to defend this nigger."

"Yeah, but Atticus aims to defend him. That's what I don't like about it."

This was news, news that put a different light on things: Atticus had to, whether he wanted to or not. I thought it odd that he hadn't said anything to us about it—we could have used it many times in defending him and ourselves. He had to, that's why he was doing it, equaled fewer fights and less fussing. But did that explain the town's attitude? The court appointed Atticus to defend him. Atticus aimed to defend him. That's what they didn't like about it. It was confusing.

The Negroes, having waited for the white people to go upstairs, began to come in.

“Whoa now, just a minute,” said a club member, holding up his walking stick.

“Just don’t start up them there stairs yet awhile.”

The club began its stiff-jointed climb and ran into Dill and Jem on their way down looking for me. They squeezed past and Jem called, “Scout, come on, there ain’t a seat left. We’ll hafta stand up.”

“Looka there, now.” he said irritably, as the black people surged upstairs. The old men ahead of them would take most of the standing room. We were out of luck and it was my fault, Jem informed me. We stood miserably by the wall.

“Can’t you all get in?”

Reverend Sykes was looking down at us, black hat in hand.

“Hey, Reverend,” said Jem. “Naw, Scout here messed us up.”

“Well, let’s see what we can do.”

Reverend Sykes edged his way upstairs. In a few moments he was back. “There’s not a seat downstairs. Do you all reckon it’ll be all right if you all came to the balcony with me?”

“Gosh yes,” said Jem. Happily, we sped ahead of Reverend Sykes to the courtroom floor. There, we went up a covered staircase and waited at the door. Reverend Sykes came puffing behind us, and steered us gently through the black people in the balcony. Four Negroes rose and gave us their front-row seats.

The Colored balcony ran along three walls of the courtroom like a second-story veranda, and from it we could see everything.

The jury sat to the left, under long windows. Sunburned, lanky, they seemed to be all farmers, but this was natural: townfolk rarely sat on juries, they were either struck or excused. One or two of the jury looked vaguely like dressed-up Cunninghams. At this stage they sat straight and alert.

The circuit solicitor and another man, Atticus and Tom Robinson sat at tables with their backs to us. There was a brown book and some yellow tablets on the solicitor’s table; Atticus’s was bare. Just inside the railing that divided the spectators from the court, the witnesses sat on cowhide-bottomed chairs. Their backs were to us.

Judge Taylor was on the bench, looking like a sleepy old shark, his pilot fish

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

Mr. Heck Tate was already on it.

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## Chapter 17

“Jem,” I said, “are those the Ewells sittin’ down yonder?”

“Hush,” said Jem, “Mr. Heck Tate’s testifyin’.”

Mr. Tate had dressed for the occasion. He wore an ordinary business suit, which made him look somehow like every other man: gone were his high boots, lumber jacket, and bullet-studded belt. From that moment he ceased to terrify me. He was sitting forward in the witness chair, his hands clasped between his knees, listening attentively to the circuit solicitor.

The solicitor, a Mr. Gilmer, was not well known to us. He was from Abbottsville; we saw him only when court convened, and that rarely, for court was of no special interest to Jem and me. A balding, smooth-faced man, he could have been anywhere between forty and sixty. Although his back was to us, we knew he had a slight cast in one of his eyes which he used to his advantage: he seemed to be looking at a person when he was actually doing nothing of the kind, thus he was hell on juries and witnesses. The jury, thinking themselves under close scrutiny, paid attention; so did the witnesses, thinking likewise.

“...in your own words, Mr. Tate,” Mr. Gilmer was saying.

“Well,” said Mr. Tate, touching his glasses and speaking to his knees, “I was called—”

“Could you say it to the jury, Mr. Tate? Thank you. Who called you?”

Mr. Tate said, “I was fetched by Bob—by Mr. Bob Ewell yonder, one night—”

“What night, sir?”

Mr. Tate said, “It was the night of November twenty-first. I was just leaving my office to go home when B—Mr. Ewell came in, very excited he was, and said get

out to his house quick, some nigger'd raped his girl."

"Did you go?"

"Certainly. Got in the car and went out as fast as I could."

"And what did you find?"

"Found her lying on the floor in the middle of the front room, one on the right as you go in. She was pretty well beat up, but I heaved her to her feet and she washed her face in a bucket in the corner and said she was all right. I asked her who hurt her and she said it was Tom Robinson—"

Judge Taylor, who had been concentrating on his fingernails, looked up as if he were expecting an objection, but Atticus was quiet.

"—asked her if he beat her like that, she said yes he had. Asked her if he took advantage of her and she said yes he did. So I went down to Robinson's house and brought him back. She identified him as the one, so I took him in. That's all there was to it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Gilmer.

Judge Taylor said, "Any questions, Atticus?"

"Yes," said my father. He was sitting behind his table; his chair was skewed to one side, his legs were crossed and one arm was resting on the back of his chair.

"Did you call a doctor, Sheriff? Did anybody call a doctor?" asked Atticus.

"No sir," said Mr. Tate.

"Didn't call a doctor?"

"No sir," repeated Mr. Tate.

"Why not?" There was an edge to Atticus's voice.

"Well I can tell you why I didn't. It wasn't necessary, Mr. Finch. She was mighty banged up. Something sho' happened, it was obvious."

"But you didn't call a doctor? While you were there did anyone send for one, fetch one, carry her to one?"

"No sir—"

Judge Taylor broke in. "He's answered the question three times, Atticus. He

didn't call a doctor."

Atticus said, "I just wanted to make sure, Judge," and the judge smiled.

Jem's hand, which was resting on the balcony rail, tightened around it. He drew in his breath suddenly. Glancing below, I saw no corresponding reaction, and wondered if Jem was trying to be dramatic. Dill was watching peacefully, and so was Reverend Sykes beside him.

"What is it?" I whispered, and got a terse, "Sh-h!"

"Sheriff," Atticus was saying, "you say she was mighty banged up. In what way?"

"Well—"

"Just describe her injuries, Heck."

"Well, she was beaten around the head. There was already bruises comin' on her arms, and it happened about thirty minutes before—"

"How do you know?"

Mr. Tate grinned. "Sorry, that's what they said. Anyway, she was pretty bruised up when I got there, and she had a black eye comin'."

"Which eye?"

Mr. Tate blinked and ran his hands through his hair. "Let's see," he said softly, then he looked at Atticus as if he considered the question childish. "Can't you remember?" Atticus asked.

Mr. Tate pointed to an invisible person five inches in front of him and said, "Her left."

"Wait a minute, Sheriff," said Atticus. "Was it her left facing you or her left looking the same way you were?"

Mr. Tate said, "Oh yes, that'd make it her right. It was her right eye, Mr. Finch. I remember now, she was bunged up on that side of her face..."

Mr. Tate blinked again, as if something had suddenly been made plain to him. Then he turned his head and looked around at Tom Robinson. As if by instinct, Tom Robinson raised his head.

Something had been made plain to Atticus also, and it brought him to his feet.

"Sheriff, please repeat what you said."

“It was her right eye, I said.”

“No...” Atticus walked to the court reporter’s desk and bent down to the furiously scribbling hand. It stopped, flipped back the shorthand pad, and the court reporter said, ““Mr. Finch. I remember now she was bunged up on that side of the face.””

Atticus looked up at Mr. Tate. “Which side again, Heck?”

“The right side, Mr. Finch, but she had more bruises—you wanta hear about ‘em?”

Atticus seemed to be bordering on another question, but he thought better of it and said, “Yes, what were her other injuries?” As Mr. Tate answered, Atticus turned and looked at Tom Robinson as if to say this was something they hadn’t bargained for.

“...her arms were bruised, and she showed me her neck. There were definite finger marks on her gullet—”

“All around her throat? At the back of her neck?”

“I’d say they were all around, Mr. Finch.”

“You would?”

“Yes sir, she had a small throat, anybody could’a reached around it with—”

“Just answer the question yes or no, please, Sheriff,” said Atticus dryly, and Mr. Tate fell silent.

Atticus sat down and nodded to the circuit solicitor, who shook his head at the judge, who nodded to Mr. Tate, who rose stiffly and stepped down from the witness stand.

Below us, heads turned, feet scraped the floor, babies were shifted to shoulders, and a few children scampered out of the courtroom. The Negroes behind us whispered softly among themselves; Dill was asking Reverend Sykes what it was all about, but Reverend Sykes said he didn’t know. So far, things were utterly dull: nobody had thundered, there were no arguments between opposing counsel, there was no drama; a grave disappointment to all present, it seemed. Atticus was proceeding amiably, as if he were involved in a title dispute. With his infinite capacity for calming turbulent seas, he could make a rape case as dry as a sermon. Gone was the terror in my mind of stale whiskey and barnyard smells, of sleepy-eyed sullen men, of a husky voice calling in the night, “Mr. Finch? They gone?”

Our nightmare had gone with daylight, everything would come out all right.

All the spectators were as relaxed as Judge Taylor, except Jem. His mouth was twisted into a purposeful half-grin, and his eyes happy about, and he said something about corroborating evidence, which made me sure he was showing off.

“...Robert E. Lee Ewell!”

In answer to the clerk’s booming voice, a little bantam cock of a man rose and strutted to the stand, the back of his neck reddening at the sound of his name. When he turned around to take the oath, we saw that his face was as red as his neck. We also saw no resemblance to his namesake. A shock of wispy new-washed hair stood up from his forehead; his nose was thin, pointed, and shiny; he had no chin to speak of—it seemed to be part of his crepey neck.

“—so help me God,” he crowed.

Every town the size of Maycomb had families like the Ewells. No economic fluctuations changed their status—people like the Ewells lived as guests of the county in prosperity as well as in the depths of a depression. No truant officers could keep their numerous offspring in school; no public health officer could free them from congenital defects, various worms, and the diseases indigenous to filthy surroundings.

Maycomb’s Ewells lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin. The cabin’s plank walls were supplemented with sheets of corrugated iron, its roof shingled with tin cans hammered flat, so only its general shape suggested its original design: square, with four tiny rooms opening onto a shotgun hall, the cabin rested uneasily upon four irregular lumps of limestone. Its windows were merely open spaces in the walls, which in the summertime were covered with greasy strips of cheesecloth to keep out the varmints that feasted on Maycomb’s refuse.

The varmints had a lean time of it, for the Ewells gave the dump a thorough gleaning every day, and the fruits of their industry (those that were not eaten) made the plot of ground around the cabin look like the playhouse of an insane child: what passed for a fence was bits of tree-limbs, broomsticks and tool shafts, all tipped with rusty hammer-heads, snaggle-toothed rake heads, shovels, axes and grubbing hoes, held on with pieces of barbed wire. Enclosed by this barricade

was a dirty yard containing the remains of a Model-T Ford (on blocks), a discarded dentist's chair, an ancient icebox, plus lesser items: old shoes, worn-out table radios, picture frames, and fruit jars, under which scrawny orange chickens pecked hopefully.

One corner of the yard, though, bewildered Maycomb. Against the fence, in a line, were six chipped-enamel slop jars holding brilliant red geraniums, cared for as tenderly as if they belonged to Miss Maudie Atkinson, had Miss Maudie deigned to permit a geranium on her premises. People said they were Mayella Ewell's.

Nobody was quite sure how many children were on the place. Some people said six, others said nine; there were always several dirty-faced ones at the windows when anyone passed by. Nobody had occasion to pass by except at Christmas, when the churches delivered baskets, and when the mayor of Maycomb asked us to please help the garbage collector by dumping our own trees and trash.

Atticus took us with him last Christmas when he complied with the mayor's request. A dirt road ran from the highway past the dump, down to a small Negro settlement some five hundred yards beyond the Ewells'. It was necessary either to back out to the highway or go the full length of the road and turn around; most people turned around in the Negroes' front yards. In the frosty December dusk, their cabins looked neat and snug with pale blue smoke rising from the chimneys and doorways glowing amber from the fires inside. There were delicious smells about: chicken, bacon frying crisp as the twilight air. Jem and I detected squirrel cooking, but it took an old countryman like Atticus to identify possum and rabbit, aromas that vanished when we rode back past the Ewell residence.

All the little man on the witness stand had that made him any better than his nearest neighbors was, that if scrubbed with lye soap in very hot water, his skin was white.

"Mr. Robert Ewell?" asked Mr. Gilmer.

"That's m' name, cap'n," said the witness.

Mr. Gilmer's back stiffened a little, and I felt sorry for him. Perhaps I'd better explain something now. I've heard that lawyers' children, on seeing their parents in court in the heat of argument, get the wrong idea: they think opposing counsel

to be the personal enemies of their parents, they suffer agonies, and are surprised to see them often go out arm-in-arm with their tormenters during the first recess. This was not true of Jem and me. We acquired no traumas from watching our father win or lose. I'm sorry that I can't provide any drama in this respect; if I did, it would not be true. We could tell, however, when debate became more acrimonious than professional, but this was from watching lawyers other than our father. I never heard Atticus raise his voice in my life, except to a deaf witness. Mr. Gilmer was doing his job, as Atticus was doing his. Besides, Mr. Ewell was Mr. Gilmer's witness, and he had no business being rude to him of all people. "Are you the father of Mayella Ewell?" was the next question.

"Well, if I ain't I can't do nothing about it now, her ma's dead," was the answer. Judge Taylor stirred. He turned slowly in his swivel chair and looked benignly at the witness. "Are you the father of Mayella Ewell?" he asked, in a way that made the laughter below us stop suddenly.

"Yes sir," Mr. Ewell said meekly.

Judge Taylor went on in tones of good will: "This the first time you've ever been in court? I don't recall ever seeing you here." At the witness's affirmative nod he continued, "Well, let's get something straight. There will be no more audibly obscene speculations on any subject from anybody in this courtroom as long as I'm sitting here. Do you understand?"

Mr. Ewell nodded, but I don't think he did. Judge Taylor sighed and said, "All right, Mr. Gilmer?"

"Thank you, sir. Mr. Ewell, would you tell us in your own words what happened on the evening of November twenty-first, please?"

Jem grinned and pushed his hair back. Just-in-your-own words was Mr. Gilmer's trademark. We often wondered who else's words Mr. Gilmer was afraid his witness might employ.

"Well, the night of November twenty-one I was comin' in from the woods with a load o' kindlin' and just as I got to the fence I heard Mayella screamin' like a stuck hog inside the house—"

Here Judge Taylor glanced sharply at the witness and must have decided his

speculations devoid of evil intent, for he subsided sleepily.

“What time was it, Mr. Ewell?”

“Just ‘fore sundown. Well, I was sayin’ Mayella was screamin’ fit to beat Jesus —” another glance from the bench silenced Mr. Ewell.

“Yes? She was screaming?” said Mr. Gilmer.

Mr. Ewell looked confusedly at the judge. “Well, Mayella was raisin’ this holy racket so I dropped m’load and run as fast as I could but I run into th’ fence, but when I got distangled I run up to th’ window and I seen —” Mr. Ewell’s face grew scarlet. He stood up and pointed his finger at Tom Robinson. “—I seen that black nigger yonder ruttin’ on my Mayella!”

So serene was Judge Taylor’s court, that he had few occasions to use his gavel, but he hammered fully five minutes. Atticus was on his feet at the bench saying something to him, Mr. Heck Tate as first officer of the county stood in the middle aisle quelling the packed courtroom. Behind us, there was an angry muffled groan from the colored people.

Reverend Sykes leaned across Dill and me, pulling at Jem’s elbow. “Mr. Jem,” he said, “you better take Miss Jean Louise home. Mr. Jem, you hear me?”

Jem turned his head. “Scout, go home. Dill, you’n Scout go home.”

“You gotta make me first,” I said, remembering Atticus’s blessed dictum.

Jem scowled furiously at me, then said to Reverend Sykes, “I think it’s okay, Reverend, she doesn’t understand it.”

I was mortally offended. “I most certainly do, I c’n understand anything you can.”

“Aw hush. She doesn’t understand it, Reverend, she ain’t nine yet.”

Reverend Sykes’s black eyes were anxious. “Mr. Finch know you all are here? This ain’t fit for Miss Jean Louise or you boys either.”

Jem shook his head. “He can’t see us this far away. It’s all right, Reverend.”

I knew Jem would win, because I knew nothing could make him leave now. Dill and I were safe, for a while: Atticus could see us from where he was, if he looked.

As Judge Taylor banged his gavel, Mr. Ewell was sitting smugly in the witness chair, surveying his handiwork. With one phrase he had turned happy picknickers

into a sulky, tense, murmuring crowd, being slowly hypnotized by gavel taps lessening in intensity until the only sound in the courtroom was a dim pink-pink-pink: the judge might have been rapping the bench with a pencil.

In possession of his court once more, Judge Taylor leaned back in his chair. He looked suddenly weary; his age was showing, and I thought about what Atticus had said—he and Mrs. Taylor didn't kiss much—he must have been nearly seventy.

“There has been a request,” Judge Taylor said, “that this courtroom be cleared of spectators, or at least of women and children, a request that will be denied for the time being. People generally see what they look for, and hear what they listen for, and they have the right to subject their children to it, but I can assure you of one thing: you will receive what you see and hear in silence or you will leave this courtroom, but you won't leave it until the whole boiling of you come before me on contempt charges. Mr. Ewell, you will keep your testimony within the confines of Christian English usage, if that is possible. Proceed, Mr. Gilmer.”

Mr. Ewell reminded me of a deaf-mute. I was sure he had never heard the words Judge Taylor directed at him—his mouth struggled silently with them—but their import registered on his face. Smugness faded from it, replaced by a dogged earnestness that fooled Judge Taylor not at all: as long as Mr. Ewell was on the stand, the judge kept his eyes on him, as if daring him to make a false move.

Mr. Gilmer and Atticus exchanged glances. Atticus was sitting down again, his fist rested on his cheek and we could not see his face. Mr. Gilmer looked rather desperate. A question from Judge Taylor made him relax: “Mr. Ewell, did you see the defendant having sexual intercourse with your daughter?”

“Yes, I did.”

The spectators were quiet, but the defendant said something. Atticus whispered to him, and Tom Robinson was silent.

“You say you were at the window?” asked Mr. Gilmer.

“Yes sir.”

“How far is it from the ground?”

“‘bout three foot.”

“Did you have a clear view of the room?”

“Yes sir.”

“How did the room look?”

“Well, it was all slung about, like there was a fight.”

“What did you do when you saw the defendant?”

“Well, I run around the house to get in, but he run out the front door just ahead of me. I sawed who he was, all right. I was too distracted about Mayella to run after’im. I run in the house and she was lyin’ on the floor squallin’ —”

“Then what did you do?”

“Why, I run for Tate quick as I could. I knowed who it was, all right, lived down yonder in that nigger-nest, passed the house every day. Jedge, I’ve asked this county for fifteen years to clean out that nest down yonder, they’re dangerous to live around ‘sides devaluin’ my property —”

“Thank you, Mr. Ewell,” said Mr. Gilmer hurriedly.

The witness made a hasty descent from the stand and ran smack into Atticus, who had risen to question him. Judge Taylor permitted the court to laugh.

“Just a minute, sir,” said Atticus genially. “Could I ask you a question or two?”

Mr. Ewell backed up into the witness chair, settled himself, and regarded Atticus with haughty suspicion, an expression common to Maycomb County witnesses when confronted by opposing counsel.

“Mr. Ewell,” Atticus began, “folks were doing a lot of running that night. Let’s see, you say you ran to the house, you ran to the window, you ran inside, you ran to Mayella, you ran for Mr. Tate. Did you, during all this running, run for a doctor?”

“Wadn’t no need to. I seen what happened.”

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand,” said Atticus. “Weren’t you concerned with Mayella’s condition?”

“I most positively was,” said Mr. Ewell. “I seen who done it.”

“No, I mean her physical condition. Did you not think the nature of her injuries warranted immediate medical attention?”

“What?”

“Didn’t you think she should have had a doctor, immediately?”

The witness said he never thought of it, he had never called a doctor to any of his’n in his life, and if he had it would have cost him five dollars. “That all?” he asked.

“Not quite,” said Atticus casually. “Mr. Ewell, you heard the sheriff’s testimony, didn’t you?”

“How’s that?”

“You were in the courtroom when Mr. Heck Tate was on the stand, weren’t you? You heard everything he said, didn’t you?”

Mr. Ewell considered the matter carefully, and seemed to decide that the question was safe.

“Yes,” he said.

“Do you agree with his description of Mayella’s injuries?”

“How’s that?”

Atticus looked around at Mr. Gilmer and smiled. Mr. Ewell seemed determined not to give the defense the time of day.

“Mr. Tate testified that her right eye was blackened, that she was beaten around the—”

“Oh yeah,” said the witness. “I hold with everything Tate said.”

“You do?” asked Atticus mildly. “I just want to make sure.” He went to the court reporter, said something, and the reporter entertained us for some minutes by reading Mr. Tate’s testimony as if it were stock-market quotations: “...which eye her left oh yes that’d make it her right it was her right eye Mr. Finch I remember now she was bunged.” He flipped the page. “Up on that side of the face Sheriff please repeat what you said it was her right eye I said—”

“Thank you, Bert,” said Atticus. “You heard it again, Mr. Ewell. Do you have anything to add to it? Do you agree with the sheriff?”

“I holds with Tate. Her eye was blacked and she was mighty beat up.”

The little man seemed to have forgotten his previous humiliation from the bench.

It was becoming evident that he thought Atticus an easy match. He seemed to grow ruddy again; his chest swelled, and once more he was a red little rooster. I thought he'd burst his shirt at Atticus's next question:

"Mr. Ewell, can you read and write?"

Mr. Gilmer interrupted. "Objection," he said. "Can't see what witness's literacy has to do with the case, irrelevant'n'immaterial."

Judge Taylor was about to speak but Atticus said, "Judge, if you'll allow the question plus another one you'll soon see."

"All right, let's see," said Judge Taylor, "but make sure we see, Atticus. Overruled."

Mr. Gilmer seemed as curious as the rest of us as to what bearing the state of Mr. Ewell's education had on the case.

"I'll repeat the question," said Atticus. "Can you read and write?"

"I most positively can."

"Will you write your name and show us?"

"I most positively will. How do you think I sign my relief checks?"

Mr. Ewell was endearing himself to his fellow citizens. The whispers and chuckles below us probably had to do with what a card he was.

I was becoming nervous. Atticus seemed to know what he was doing—but it seemed to me that he'd gone frog-sticking without a light. Never, never, never, on cross-examination ask a witness a question you don't already know the answer to, was a tenet I absorbed with my baby-food. Do it, and you'll often get an answer you don't want, an answer that might wreck your case.

Atticus was reaching into the inside pocket of his coat. He drew out an envelope, then reached into his vest pocket and unclipped his fountain pen. He moved leisurely, and had turned so that he was in full view of the jury. He unscrewed the fountain-pen cap and placed it gently on his table. He shook the pen a little, then handed it with the envelope to the witness. "Would you write your name for us?" he asked. "Clearly now, so the jury can see you do it."

Mr. Ewell wrote on the back of the envelope and looked up complacently to see Judge Taylor staring at him as if he were some fragrant gardenia in full bloom on

the witness stand, to see Mr. Gilmer half-sitting, half-standing at his table. The jury was watching him, one man was leaning forward with his hands over the railing.

“What’s so interestin’?” he asked.

“You’re left-handed, Mr. Ewell,” said Judge Taylor. Mr. Ewell turned angrily to the judge and said he didn’t see what his being left-handed had to do with it, that he was a Christ-fearing man and Atticus Finch was taking advantage of him.

Tricking lawyers like Atticus Finch took advantage of him all the time with their tricking ways. He had told them what happened, he’d say it again and again—which he did. Nothing Atticus asked him after that shook his story, that he’d looked through the window, then ran the nigger off, then ran for the sheriff. Atticus finally dismissed him.

Mr. Gilmer asked him one more question. “About your writing with your left hand, are you ambidextrous, Mr. Ewell?”

“I most positively am not, I can use one hand good as the other. One hand good as the other,” he added, glaring at the defense table.

Jem seemed to be having a quiet fit. He was pounding the balcony rail softly, and once he whispered, “We’ve got him.”

I didn’t think so: Atticus was trying to show, it seemed to me, that Mr. Ewell could have beaten up Mayella. That much I could follow. If her right eye was blacked and she was beaten mostly on the right side of the face, it would tend to show that a left-handed person did it. Sherlock Holmes and Jem Finch would agree. But Tom Robinson could easily be left-handed, too. Like Mr. Heck Tate, I imagined a person facing me, went through a swift mental pantomime, and concluded that he might have held her with his right hand and pounded her with his left. I looked down at him. His back was to us, but I could see his broad shoulders and bull-thick neck. He could easily have done it. I thought Jem was counting his chickens.

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