How could this be so, I wondered, as I read Mr. Underwood’s editorial. Senseless killing—Tom had been given due process of law to the day of his death; he had been tried openly and convicted by twelve good men and true; my father had fought for him all the way. Then Mr. Underwood’s meaning became clear: Atticus had used every tool available to free men to save Tom Robinson, but in the secret courts of men’s hearts Atticus had no case. Tom was a dead man the minute Mayella Ewell opened her mouth and screamed.

The name Ewell gave me a queasy feeling. Maycomb had lost no time in getting Mr. Ewell’s views on Tom’s demise and passing them along through that English Channel of gossip, Miss Stephanie Crawford. Miss Stephanie told Aunt Alexandra in Jem’s presence (“Oh foot, he’s old enough to listen.”) that Mr. Ewell said it made one down and about two more to go. Jem told me not to be afraid, Mr. Ewell was more hot gas than anything. Jem also told me that if I breathed a word to Atticus, if in any way I let Atticus know I knew, Jem would personally never speak to me again.

Chapter 26

School started, and so did our daily trips past the Radley Place. Jem was in the seventh grade and went to high school, beyond the grammar-school building; I was now in the third grade, and our routines were so different I only walked to school with Jem in the mornings and saw him at mealtimes. He went out for football, but was too slender and too young yet to do anything but carry the team water buckets. This he did with enthusiasm; most afternoons he was seldom home before dark.

The Radley Place had ceased to terrify me, but it was no less gloomy, no less chilly under its great oaks, and no less uninviting. Mr. Nathan Radley could still be seen on a clear day, walking to and from town; we knew Boo was there, for the
same old reason—nobody’d seen him carried out yet. I sometimes felt a twinge of
remorse, when passing by the old place, at ever having taken part in what must
have been sheer torment to Arthur Radley—what reasonable recluse wants
children peeping through his shutters, delivering greetings on the end of a fishing-
pole, wandering in his collards at night? And yet I remembered. Two Indian-head
pennies, chewing gum, soap dolls, a rusty medal, a broken watch and chain. Jem
must have put them away somewhere. I stopped and looked at the tree one
afternoon: the trunk was swelling around its cement patch. The patch itself was
turning yellow.

We had almost seen him a couple of times, a good enough score for anybody.
But I still looked for him each time I went by. Maybe someday we would see him.
I imagined how it would be: when it happened, he’d just be sitting in the swing
when I came along. “Hidy do, Mr. Arthur,” I would say, as if I had said it every
afternoon of my life. “Evening, Jean Louise,” he would say, as if he had said it
every afternoon of my life, “right pretty spell we’re having, isn’t it?” “Yes sir,
right pretty,” I would say, and go on.

It was only a fantasy. We would never see him. He probably did go out when the
moon was down and gaze upon Miss Stephanie Crawford. I’d have picked
somebody else to look at, but that was his business. He would never gaze at us.

“You aren’t starting that again, are you?” said Atticus one night, when I expressed
a stray desire just to have one good look at Boo Radley before I died. “If you are,
I’ll tell you right now: stop it. I’m too old to go chasing you off the Radley
property. Besides, it’s dangerous. You might get shot. You know Mr. Nathan
shoots at every shadow he sees, even shadows that leave size-four bare footprints.
You were lucky not to be killed.”

I hushed then and there. At the same time I marveled at Atticus. This was the first
he had let us know he knew a lot more about something than we thought he knew.
And it had happened years ago. No, only last summer—no, summer before last,
when… time was playing tricks on me. I must remember to ask Jem.

So many things had happened to us, Boo Radley was the least of our fears.
Atticus said he didn’t see how anything else could happen, that things had a way
of settling down, and after enough time passed people would forget that Tom
Robinson’s existence was ever brought to their attention.
Perhaps Atticus was right, but the events of the summer hung over us like smoke in a closed room. The adults in Maycomb never discussed the case with Jem and me; it seemed that they discussed it with their children, and their attitude must have been that neither of us could help having Atticus for a parent, so their children must be nice to us in spite of him. The children would never have thought that up for themselves: had our classmates been left to their own devices, Jem and I would have had several swift, satisfying fist-fights apiece and ended the matter for good. As it was, we were compelled to hold our heads high and be, respectively, a gentleman and a lady. In a way, it was like the era of Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose, without all her yelling. There was one odd thing, though, that I never understood: in spite of Atticus’s shortcomings as a parent, people were content to re-elect him to the state legislature that year, as usual, without opposition. I came to the conclusion that people were just peculiar, I withdrew from them, and never thought about them until I was forced to.

I was forced to one day in school. Once a week, we had a Current Events period. Each child was supposed to clip an item from a newspaper, absorb its contents, and reveal them to the class. This practice allegedly overcame a variety of evils: standing in front of his fellows encouraged good posture and gave a child poise; delivering a short talk made him word-conscious; learning his current event strengthened his memory; being singled out made him more than ever anxious to return to the Group.

The idea was profound, but as usual, in Maycomb it didn’t work very well. In the first place, few rural children had access to newspapers, so the burden of Current Events was borne by the town children, convincing the bus children more deeply that the town children got all the attention anyway. The rural children who could, usually brought clippings from what they called The Grit Paper, a publication spurious in the eyes of Miss Gates, our teacher. Why she frowned when a child recited from The Grit Paper I never knew, but in some way it was associated with liking fiddling, eating syrupy biscuits for lunch, being a holy-roller, singing Sweetly Sings the Donkey and pronouncing it dunkey, all of which the state paid teachers to discourage.
Even so, not many of the children knew what a Current Event was. Little Chuck Little, a hundred years old in his knowledge of cows and their habits, was halfway through an Uncle Natchell story when Miss Gates stopped him: “Charles, that is not a current event. That is an advertisement.”

Cecil Jacobs knew what one was, though. When his turn came, he went to the front of the room and began, “Old Hitler—”

“Adolf Hitler, Cecil,” said Miss Gates. “One never begins with Old anybody.”

“Yes ma’am,” he said. “Old Adolf Hitler has been prosecutin’ the—”

“Persecuting Cecil…”

“Nome, Miss Gates, it says here—well anyway, old Adolf Hitler has been after the Jews and he’s puttin’ ‘em in prisons and he’s taking away all their property and he won’t let any of ‘em out of the country and he’s washin’ all the feeble-minded and—”

“Washing the feeble-minded?”

“Yes ma’am, Miss Gates, I reckon they don’t have sense enough to wash themselves, I don’t reckon an idiot could keep hisself clean. Well anyway, Hitler’s started a program to round up all the half-Jews too and he wants to register ‘em in case they might wanta cause him any trouble and I think this is a bad thing and that’s my current event.”

“Very good, Cecil,” said Miss Gates. Puffing, Cecil returned to his seat.

A hand went up in the back of the room. “How can he do that?”

“Who do what?” asked Miss Gates patiently.

“I mean how can Hitler just put a lot of folks in a pen like that, looks like the govamint’d stop him,” said the owner of the hand.

“Hitler is the government,” said Miss Gates, and seizing an opportunity to make education dynamic, she went to the blackboard. She printed DEMOCRACY in large letters. “Democracy,” she said. “Does anybody have a definition?”

“Us,” somebody said.

I raised my hand, remembering an old campaign slogan Atticus had once told me about.
“What do you think it means, Jean Louise?”

“Equal rights for all, special privileges for none,’” I quoted.

“Very good, Jean Louise, very good,’” Miss Gates smiled. In front of DEMOCRACY, she printed WE ARE A. “Now class, say it all together, ‘We are a democracy.’”

We said it. Then Miss Gates said, “That’s the difference between America and Germany. We are a democracy and Germany is a dictatorship. Dictator-ship,” she said. “Over here we don’t believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Prejudice,” she enunciated carefully. “There are no better people in the world than the Jews, and why Hitler doesn’t think so is a mystery to me.”

An inquiring soul in the middle of the room said, “Why don’t they like the Jews, you reckon, Miss Gates?”

“I don’t know, Henry. They contribute to every society they live in, and most of all, they are a deeply religious people. Hitler’s trying to do away with religion, so maybe he doesn’t like them for that reason.”

Cecil spoke up. “Well I don’t know for certain,” he said, “they’re supposed to change money or somethin’, but that ain’t no cause to persecute ’em. They’re white, ain’t they?”

Miss Gates said, “When you get to high school, Cecil, you’ll learn that the Jews have been persecuted since the beginning of history, even driven out of their own country. It’s one of the most terrible stories in history. Time for arithmetic, children.”

As I had never liked arithmetic, I spent the period looking out the window. The only time I ever saw Atticus scowl was when Elmer Davis would give us the latest on Hitler. Atticus would snap off the radio and say, “Hmp!” I asked him once why he was impatient with Hitler and Atticus said, “Because he’s a maniac.”

This would not do, I mused, as the class proceeded with its sums. One maniac and millions of German folks. Looked to me like they’d shut Hitler in a pen instead of letting him shut them up. There was something else wrong—I would ask my father about it.
I did, and he said he could not possibly answer my question because he didn’t know the answer.

“But it’s okay to hate Hitler?”

“It is not,” he said. “It’s not okay to hate anybody.”

“Atticus,” I said, “there’s somethin’ I don’t understand. Miss Gates said it was awful, Hitler doin’ like he does, she got real red in the face about it—”

“I should think she would.”

“But—”

“Yes?”

“Nothing, sir.” I went away, not sure that I could explain to Atticus what was on my mind, not sure that I could clarify what was only a feeling. Perhaps Jem could provide the answer. Jem understood school things better than Atticus.

Jem was worn out from a day’s water-carrying. There were at least twelve banana peels on the floor by his bed, surrounding an empty milk bottle. “Whatcha stuffin’ for?” I asked.

“Coach says if I can gain twenty-five pounds by year after next I can play,” he said. “This is the quickest way.”

“If you don’t throw it all up. Jem,” I said, “I wanta ask you somethin’.”

“Shoot.” He put down his book and stretched his legs.

“Miss Gates is a nice lady, ain’t she?”

“Why sure,” said Jem. “I liked her when I was in her room.”

“She hates Hitler a lot…”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“Well, she went on today about how bad it was him treatin’ the Jews like that. Jem, it’s not right to persecute anybody, is it? I mean have mean thoughts about anybody, even, is it?”

“Gracious no, Scout. What’s eatin’ you?”

“Well, coming out of the courthouse that night Miss Gates was—she was goin’ down the steps in front of us, you musta not seen her—she was talking with Miss Stephanie Crawford. I heard her say it’s time somebody taught ’em a lesson, they
were gettin’ way above themselves, an’ the next thing they think they can do is marry us. Jem, how can you hate Hitler so bad an’ then turn around and be ugly about folks right at home—”

Jem was suddenly furious. He leaped off the bed, grabbed me by the collar and shook me. “I never wanta hear about that courthouse again, ever, ever, you hear me? You hear me? Don’t you ever say one word to me about it again, you hear? Now go on!”

I was too surprised to cry. I crept from Jem’s room and shut the door softly, lest undue noise set him off again. Suddenly tired, I wanted Atticus. He was in the livingroom, and I went to him and tried to get in his lap.

Atticus smiled. “You’re getting so big now, I’ll just have to hold a part of you.” He held me close. “Scout,” he said softly, “don’t let Jem get you down. He’s having a rough time these days. I heard you back there.”

Atticus said that Jem was trying hard to forget something, but what he was really doing was storing it away for a while, until enough time passed. Then he would be able to think about it and sort things out. When he was able to think about it, Jem would be himself again.

Chapter 27

Things did settle down, after a fashion, as Atticus said they would. By the middle of October, only two small things out of the ordinary happened to two Maycomb citizens. No, there were three things, and they did not directly concern us—the Finches—but in a way they did.

The first thing was that Mr. Bob Ewell acquired and lost a job in a matter of days and probably made himself unique in the annals of the nineteen-thirties: he was the only man I ever heard of who was fired from the WPA for laziness. I suppose
his brief burst of fame brought on a briefer burst of industry, but his job lasted only as long as his notoriety: Mr. Ewell found himself as forgotten as Tom Robinson. Thereafter, he resumed his regular weekly appearances at the welfare office for his check, and received it with no grace amid obscure mutterings that the bastards who thought they ran this town wouldn’t permit an honest man to make a living. Ruth Jones, the welfare lady, said Mr. Ewell openly accused Atticus of getting his job. She was upset enough to walk down to Atticus’s office and tell him about it. Atticus told Miss Ruth not to fret, that if Bob Ewell wanted to discuss Atticus’s “getting” his job, he knew the way to the office.

The second thing happened to Judge Taylor. Judge Taylor was not a Sunday-night churchgoer: Mrs. Taylor was. Judge Taylor savored his Sunday night hour alone in his big house, and churchtime found him holed up in his study reading the writings of Bob Taylor (no kin, but the judge would have been proud to claim it). One Sunday night, lost in fruity metaphors and florid diction, Judge Taylor’s attention was wrenched from the page by an irritating scratching noise. “Hush,” he said to Ann Taylor, his fat nondescript dog. Then he realized he was speaking to an empty room; the scratching noise was coming from the rear of the house. Judge Taylor clumped to the back porch to let Ann out and found the screen door swinging open. A shadow on the corner of the house caught his eye, and that was all he saw of his visitor. Mrs. Taylor came home from church to find her husband in his chair, lost in the writings of Bob Taylor, with a shotgun across his lap.

The third thing happened to Helen Robinson, Tom’s widow. If Mr. Ewell was as forgotten as Tom Robinson, Tom Robinson was as forgotten as Boo Radley. But Tom was not forgotten by his employer, Mr. Link Deas. Mr. Link Deas made a job for Helen. He didn’t really need her, but he said he felt right bad about the way things turned out. I never knew who took care of her children while Helen was away. Calpurnia said it was hard on Helen, because she had to walk nearly a mile out of her way to avoid the Ewells, who, according to Helen, “chunked at her” the first time she tried to use the public road. Mr. Link Deas eventually received the impression that Helen was coming to work each morning from the wrong direction, and dragged the reason out of her. “Just let it be, Mr. Link, please suh,” Helen begged. “The hell I will,” said Mr. Link. He told her to come by his store that afternoon before she left. She did, and Mr. Link closed his store,
put his hat firmly on his head, and walked Helen home. He walked her the short way, by the Ewells‘. On his way back, Mr. Link stopped at the crazy gate.

“Ewell?” he called. “I say Ewell!”

The windows, normally packed with children, were empty.

“I know every last one of you’s in there a-layin‘ on the floor! Now hear me, Bob Ewell: if I hear one more peep outa my girl Helen about not bein’ able to walk this road I’ll have you in jail before sundown!” Mr. Link spat in the dust and walked home.

Helen went to work next morning and used the public road. Nobody chunked at her, but when she was a few yards beyond the Ewell house, she looked around and saw Mr. Ewell walking behind her. She turned and walked on, and Mr. Ewell kept the same distance behind her until she reached Mr. Link Deas’s house. All the way to the house, Helen said, she heard a soft voice behind her, crooning foul words. Thoroughly frightened, she telephoned Mr. Link at his store, which was not too far from his house. As Mr. Link came out of his store he saw Mr. Ewell leaning on the fence. Mr. Ewell said, “Don’t you look at me, Link Deas, like I was dirt. I ain’t jumped your—”

“First thing you can do, Ewell, is get your stinkin‘ carcass off my property. You’re leanin’ on it an’ I can’t afford fresh paint for it. Second thing you can do is stay away from my cook or I’ll have you up for assault—”

“I ain’t touched her, Link Deas, and ain’t about to go with no nigger!”

“You don’t have to touch her, all you have to do is make her afraid, an’ if assault ain’t enough to keep you locked up awhile, I’ll get you in on the Ladies’ Law, so get outa my sight! If you don’t think I mean it, just bother that girl again!”

Mr. Ewell evidently thought he meant it, for Helen reported no further trouble.

“I don’t like it, Atticus, I don’t like it at all,” was Aunt Alexandra’s assessment of these events. “That man seems to have a permanent running grudge against everybody connected with that case. I know how that kind are about paying off grudges, but I don’t understand why he should harbor one—he had his way in court, didn’t he?”

“I think I understand,” said Atticus. “It might be because he knows in his heart
that very few people in Maycomb really believed his and Mayella’s yarns. He thought he’d be a hero, but all he got for his pain was... was, okay, we’ll convict this Negro but get back to your dump. He’s had his fling with about everybody now, so he ought to be satisfied. He’ll settle down when the weather changes.”

“But why should he try to burgle John Taylor’s house? He obviously didn’t know John was home or he wouldn’t’ve tried. Only lights John shows on Sunday nights are on the front porch and back in his den...”

“You don’t know if Bob Ewell cut that screen, you don’t know who did it,” said Atticus. “But I can guess. I proved him a liar but John made him look like a fool. All the time Ewell was on the stand I couldn’t dare look at John and keep a straight face. John looked at him as if he were a three-legged chicken or a square egg. Don’t tell me judges don’t try to prejudice juries,” Atticus chuckled.

By the end of October, our lives had become the familiar routine of school, play, study. Jem seemed to have put out of his mind whatever it was he wanted to forget, and our classmates mercifully let us forget our father’s eccentricities. Cecil Jacobs asked me one time if Atticus was a Radical. When I asked Atticus, Atticus was so amused I was rather annoyed, but he said he wasn’t laughing at me. He said, “You tell Cecil I’m about as radical as Cotton Tom Heflin.”

Aunt Alexandra was thriving. Miss Maudie must have silenced the whole missionary society at one blow, for Aunty again ruled that roost. Her refreshments grew even more delicious. I learned more about the poor Mrunas’ social life from listening to Mrs. Merriweather: they had so little sense of family that the whole tribe was one big family. A child had as many fathers as there were men in the community, as many mothers as there were women. J. Grimes Everett was doing his utmost to change this state of affairs, and desperately needed our prayers.

Maycomb was itself again. Precisely the same as last year and the year before that, with only two minor changes. Firstly, people had removed from their store windows and automobiles the stickers that said NRA—WE DO OUR PART. I asked Atticus why, and he said it was because the National Recovery Act was dead. I asked who killed it: he said nine old men.

The second change in Maycomb since last year was not one of national significance. Until then, Halloween in Maycomb was a completely unorganized
affair. Each child did what he wanted to do, with assistance from other children if there was anything to be moved, such as placing a light buggy on top of the livery stable. But parents thought things went too far last year, when the peace of Miss Tutti and Miss Frutti was shattered.

Misses Tutti and Frutti Barber were maiden ladies, sisters, who lived together in the only Maycomb residence boasting a cellar. The Barber ladies were rumored to be Republicans, having migrated from Clanton, Alabama, in 1911. Their ways were strange to us, and why they wanted a cellar nobody knew, but they wanted one and they dug one, and they spent the rest of their lives chasing generations of children out of it.

Misses Tutti and Frutti (their names were Sarah and Frances), aside from their Yankee ways, were both deaf. Miss Tutti denied it and lived in a world of silence, but Miss Frutti, not about to miss anything, employed an ear trumpet so enormous that Jem declared it was a loudspeaker from one of those dog Victrolas.

With these facts in mind and Halloween at hand, some wicked children had waited until the Misses Barber were thoroughly asleep, slipped into their livingroom (nobody but the Radleys locked up at night), stealthily made away with every stick of furniture therein, and hid it in the cellar. I deny having taken part in such a thing.

“I heard ‘em!” was the cry that awoke the Misses Barber’s neighbors at dawn next morning. “Heard ’em drive a truck up to the door! Stomped around like horses. They’re in New Orleans by now!”

Miss Tutti was sure those traveling fur sellers who came through town two days ago had purloined their furniture. “Da-rk they were,” she said. “Syrians.”

Mr. Heck Tate was summoned. He surveyed the area and said he thought it was a local job. Miss Frutti said she’d know a Maycomb voice anywhere, and there were no Maycomb voices in that parlor last night—rolling their r’s all over her premises, they were. Nothing less than the bloodhounds must be used to locate their furniture, Miss Tutti insisted, so Mr. Tate was obliged to go ten miles out the road, round up the county hounds, and put them on the trail.

Mr. Tate started them off at the Misses Barber’s front steps, but all they did was run around to the back of the house and howl at the cellar door. When Mr. Tate
set them in motion three times, he finally guessed the truth. By noontime that day, there was not a barefooted child to be seen in Maycomb and nobody took off his shoes until the hounds were returned.

So the Maycomb ladies said things would be different this year. The high-school auditorium would be open, there would be a pageant for the grown-ups; apple-bobbing, taffy-pulling, pinning the tail on the donkey for the children. There would also be a prize of twenty-five cents for the best Halloween costume, created by the wearer.

Jem and I both groaned. Not that we’d ever done anything, it was the principle of the thing. Jem considered himself too old for Halloween anyway; he said he wouldn’t be caught anywhere near the high school at something like that. Oh well, I thought, Atticus would take me.

I soon learned, however, that my services would be required on stage that evening. Mrs. Grace Merriweather had composed an original pageant entitled *Maycomb County: Ad Astra Per Aspera*, and I was to be a ham. She thought it would be adorable if some of the children were costumed to represent the county’s agricultural products: Cecil Jacobs would be dressed up to look like a cow; Agnes Boone would make a lovely butterbean, another child would be a peanut, and on down the line until Mrs. Merriweather’s imagination and the supply of children were exhausted.

Our only duties, as far as I could gather from our two rehearsals, were to enter from stage left as Mrs. Merriweather (not only the author, but the narrator) identified us. When she called out, “Pork,” that was my cue. Then the assembled company would sing, “Maycomb County, Maycomb County, we will aye be true to thee,” as the grand finale, and Mrs. Merriweather would mount the stage with the state flag.

My costume was not much of a problem. Mrs. Crenshaw, the local seamstress, had as much imagination as Mrs. Merriweather. Mrs. Crenshaw took some chicken wire and bent it into the shape of a cured ham. This she covered with brown cloth, and painted it to resemble the original. I could duck under and someone would pull the contraption down over my head. It came almost to my knees. Mrs. Crenshaw thoughtfully left two peepholes for me. She did a fine job.
Jem said I looked exactly like a ham with legs. There were several discomforts, though: it was hot, it was a close fit; if my nose itched I couldn’t scratch, and once inside I could not get out of it alone.

When Halloween came, I assumed that the whole family would be present to watch me perform, but I was disappointed. Atticus said as tactfully as he could that he just didn’t think he could stand a pageant tonight, he was all in. He had been in Montgomery for a week and had come home late that afternoon. He thought Jem might escort me if I asked him.

Aunt Alexandra said she just had to get to bed early, she’d been decorating the stage all afternoon and was worn out—she stopped short in the middle of her sentence. She closed her mouth, then opened it to say something, but no words came.

“‘s matter, Aunty?” I asked.

“Oh nothing, nothing,” she said, “somebody just walked over my grave.” She put away from her whatever it was that gave her a pinprick of apprehension, and suggested that I give the family a preview in the livingroom. So Jem squeezed me into my costume, stood at the livingroom door, called out “Po-ork,” exactly as Mrs. Merriweather would have done, and I marched in. Atticus and Aunt Alexandra were delighted.

I repeated my part for Calpurnia in the kitchen and she said I was wonderful. I wanted to go across the street to show Miss Maudie, but Jem said she’d probably be at the pageant anyway.

After that, it didn’t matter whether they went or not. Jem said he would take me. Thus began our longest journey together.