

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.

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Chapter 28

The weather was unusually warm for the last day of October. We didn't even need jackets. The wind was growing stronger, and Jem said it might be raining before we got home. There was no moon. The street light on the corner cast sharp shadows on the Radley house. I heard Jem laugh softly. "Bet nobody bothers them tonight," he said. Jem was carrying my ham costume, rather awkwardly, as it was hard to hold. I thought it gallant of him to do so.

"It is a scary place though, ain't it?" I said. "Boo doesn't mean anybody any harm, but I'm right glad you're along." "You know Atticus wouldn't let you go to the schoolhouse by yourself," Jem said.

"Don't see why, it's just around the corner and across the yard."

"That yard's a mighty long place for little girls to cross at night," Jem teased.

"Ain't you scared of haints?"

We laughed. Haints, Hot Steams, incantations, secret signs, had vanished with our years as mist with sunrise. "What was that old thing," Jem said, "Angel bright, life-in-death; get off the road, don't suck my breath."

"Cut it out, now," I said. We were in front of the Radley Place.

Jem said, "Boo must not be at home. Listen."

High above us in the darkness a solitary mocker poured out his repertoire in blissful unawareness of whose tree he sat in, plunging from the shrill kee, kee of the sunflower bird to the irascible qua-ack of a bluejay, to the sad lament of Poor Will, Poor Will, Poor Will.

We turned the corner and I tripped on a root growing in the road. Jem tried to help me, but all he did was drop my costume in the dust. I didn't fall, though, and soon we were on our way again.

We turned off the road and entered the schoolyard. It was pitch black.

"How do you know where we're at, Jem?" I asked, when we had gone a few steps.

"I can tell we're under the big oak because we're passin' through a cool spot.

Careful now, and don't fall again."

We had slowed to a cautious gait, and were feeling our way forward so as not to bump into the tree. The tree was a single and ancient oak; two children could not reach around its trunk and touch hands. It was far away from teachers, their spies,

and curious neighbors: it was near the Radley lot, but the Radleys were not curious. A small patch of earth beneath its branches was packed hard from many fights and furtive crap games.

The lights in the high school auditorium were blazing in the distance, but they blinded us, if anything. “Don’t look ahead, Scout,” Jem said. “Look at the ground and you won’t fall.”

“You should have brought the flashlight, Jem.”

“Didn’t know it was this dark. Didn’t look like it’d be this dark earlier in the evening. So cloudy, that’s why. It’ll hold off a while, though.”

Someone leaped at us.

“God almighty!” Jem yelled.

A circle of light burst in our faces, and Cecil Jacobs jumped in glee behind it. “Ha-a-a, gotcha!” he shrieked. “Thought you’d be comin’ along this way!”

“What are you doin’ way out here by yourself, boy? Ain’t you scared of Boo Radley?”

Cecil had ridden safely to the auditorium with his parents, hadn’t seen us, then had ventured down this far because he knew good and well we’d be coming along. He thought Mr. Finch’d be with us, though.

“Shucks, ain’t much but around the corner,” said Jem. “Who’s scared to go around the corner?” We had to admit that Cecil was pretty good, though. He *had* given us a fright, and he could tell it all over the schoolhouse, that was his privilege.

“Say,” I said, “ain’t you a cow tonight? Where’s your costume?”

“It’s up behind the stage,” he said. “Mrs. Merriweather says the pageant ain’t comin’ on for a while. You can put yours back of the stage by mine, Scout, and we can go with the rest of ’em.”

This was an excellent idea, Jem thought. He also thought it a good thing that Cecil and I would be together. This way, Jem would be left to go with people his own age.

When we reached the auditorium, the whole town was there except Atticus and the ladies worn out from decorating, and the usual outcasts and shut-ins. Most of

the county, it seemed, was there: the hall was teeming with slicked-up country people. The high school building had a wide downstairs hallway; people milled around booths that had been installed along each side.

“Oh Jem. I forgot my money,” I sighed, when I saw them.

“Atticus didn’t,” Jem said. “Here’s thirty cents, you can do six things. See you later on.”

“Okay,” I said, quite content with thirty cents and Cecil. I went with Cecil down to the front of the auditorium, through a door on one side, and backstage. I got rid of my ham costume and departed in a hurry, for Mrs. Merriweather was standing at a lectern in front of the first row of seats making last-minute, frenzied changes in the script.

“How much money you got?” I asked Cecil. Cecil had thirty cents, too, which made us even. We squandered our first nickels on the House of Horrors, which scared us not at all; we entered the black seventh-grade room and were led around by the temporary ghoul in residence and were made to touch several objects alleged to be component parts of a human being. “Here’s his eyes,” we were told when we touched two peeled grapes on a saucer. “Here’s his heart,” which felt like raw liver. “These are his innards,” and our hands were thrust into a plate of cold spaghetti.

Cecil and I visited several booths. We each bought a sack of Mrs. Judge Taylor’s homemade divinity. I wanted to bob for apples, but Cecil said it wasn’t sanitary. His mother said he might catch something from everybody’s heads having been in the same tub. “Ain’t anything around town now to catch,” I protested. But Cecil said his mother said it was unsanitary to eat after folks. I later asked Aunt Alexandra about this, and she said people who held such views were usually climbers.

We were about to purchase a blob of taffy when Mrs. Merriweather’s runners appeared and told us to go backstage, it was time to get ready. The auditorium was filling with people; the Maycomb County High School band had assembled in front below the stage; the stage footlights were on and the red velvet curtain rippled and billowed from the scurrying going on behind it.

Backstage, Cecil and I found the narrow hallway teeming with people: adults in

homemade three-corner hats, Confederate caps, Spanish-American War hats, and World War helmets. Children dressed as various agricultural enterprises crowded around the one small window.

“Somebody’s mashed my costume,” I wailed in dismay. Mrs. Merriweather galloped to me, reshaped the chicken wire, and thrust me inside.

“You all right in there, Scout?” asked Cecil. “You sound so far off, like you was on the other side of a hill.”

“You don’t sound any nearer,” I said.

The band played the national anthem, and we heard the audience rise. Then the bass drum sounded. Mrs. Merriweather, stationed behind her lectern beside the band, said: “Maycomb County Ad Astra Per Aspera.” The bass drum boomed again. “That means,” said Mrs. Merriweather, translating for the rustic elements, “from the mud to the stars.” She added, unnecessarily, it seemed to me, “A pageant.”

“Reckon they wouldn’t know what it was if she didn’t tell ‘em,” whispered Cecil, who was immediately shushed.

“The whole town knows it,” I breathed.

“But the country folks’ve come in,” Cecil said.

“Be quiet back there,” a man’s voice ordered, and we were silent.

The bass drum went boom with every sentence Mrs. Merriweather uttered. She chanted mournfully about Maycomb County being older than the state, that it was a part of the Mississippi and Alabama Territories, that the first white man to set foot in the virgin forests was the Probate Judge’s great-grandfather five times removed, who was never heard of again. Then came the fearless Colonel Maycomb, for whom the county was named.

Andrew Jackson appointed him to a position of authority, and Colonel Maycomb’s misplaced self-confidence and slender sense of direction brought disaster to all who rode with him in the Creek Indian Wars. Colonel Maycomb persevered in his efforts to make the region safe for democracy, but his first campaign was his last. His orders, relayed to him by a friendly Indian runner, were to move south. After consulting a tree to ascertain from its lichen which way

was south, and taking no lip from the subordinates who ventured to correct him, Colonel Maycomb set out on a purposeful journey to rout the enemy and entangled his troops so far northwest in the forest primeval that they were eventually rescued by settlers moving inland.

Mrs. Merriweather gave a thirty-minute description of Colonel Maycomb's exploits. I discovered that if I bent my knees I could tuck them under my costume and more or less sit. I sat down, listened to Mrs. Merriweather's drone and the bass drum's boom and was soon fast asleep.

They said later that Mrs. Merriweather was putting her all into the grand finale, that she had crooned, "Po-ork," with a confidence born of pine trees and butterbeans entering on cue. She waited a few seconds, then called, "Po-ork?" When nothing materialized, she yelled, "Pork!"

I must have heard her in my sleep, or the band playing Dixie woke me, but it was when Mrs. Merriweather triumphantly mounted the stage with the state flag that I chose to make my entrance. Chose is incorrect: I thought I'd better catch up with the rest of them.

They told me later that Judge Taylor went out behind the auditorium and stood there slapping his knees so hard Mrs. Taylor brought him a glass of water and one of his pills.

Mrs. Merriweather seemed to have a hit, everybody was cheering so, but she caught me backstage and told me I had ruined her pageant. She made me feel awful, but when Jem came to fetch me he was sympathetic. He said he couldn't see my costume much from where he was sitting. How he could tell I was feeling bad under my costume I don't know, but he said I did all right, I just came in a little late, that was all. Jem was becoming almost as good as Atticus at making you feel right when things went wrong. Almost—not even Jem could make me go through that crowd, and he consented to wait backstage with me until the audience left.

"You wanta take it off, Scout?" he asked.

"Naw, I'll just keep it on," I said. I could hide my mortification under it.

"You all want a ride home?" someone asked.

“No sir, thank you,” I heard Jem say. “It’s just a little walk.”

“Be careful of haints,” the voice said. “Better still, tell the haints to be careful of Scout.”

“There aren’t many folks left now,” Jem told me. “Let’s go.”

We went through the auditorium to the hallway, then down the steps. It was still black dark. The remaining cars were parked on the other side of the building, and their headlights were little help. “If some of ‘em were goin’ in our direction we could see better,” said Jem. “Here Scout, let me hold onto your—hock. You might lose your balance.”

“I can see all right.”

“Yeah, but you might lose your balance.” I felt a slight pressure on my head, and assumed that Jem had grabbed that end of the ham. “You got me?”

“Uh huh.”

We began crossing the black schoolyard, straining to see our feet. “Jem,” I said, “I forgot my shoes, they’re back behind the stage.”

“Well let’s go get ‘em.” But as we turned around the auditorium lights went off. “You can get ‘em tomorrow,” he said.

“But tomorrow’s Sunday,” I protested, as Jem turned me homeward.

“You can get the Janitor to let you in... Scout?”

“Hm?”

“Nothing.”

Jem hadn’t started that in a long time. I wondered what he was thinking. He’d tell me when he wanted to, probably when we got home. I felt his fingers press the top of my costume, too hard, it seemed. I shook my head. “Jem, you don’t hafta —”

“Hush a minute, Scout,” he said, pinching me.

We walked along silently. “Minute’s up,” I said. “Whatcha thinkin’ about?” I turned to look at him, but his outline was barely visible.

“Thought I heard something,” he said. “Stop a minute.”

We stopped.

“Hear anything?” he asked.

“No.”

We had not gone five paces before he made me stop again.

“Jem, are you tryin’ to scare me? You know I’m too old—”

“Be quiet,” he said, and I knew he was not joking.

The night was still. I could hear his breath coming easily beside me. Occasionally there was a sudden breeze that hit my bare legs, but it was all that remained of a promised windy night. This was the stillness before a thunderstorm. We listened.

“Heard an old dog just then,” I said.

“It’s not that,” Jem answered. “I hear it when we’re walkin’ along, but when we stop I don’t hear it.”

“You hear my costume rustlin’. Aw, it’s just Halloween got you...”

I said it more to convince myself than Jem, for sure enough, as we began walking, I heard what he was talking about. It was not my costume.

“It’s just old Cecil,” said Jem presently. “He won’t get us again. Let’s don’t let him think we’re hurrying.”

We slowed to a crawl. I asked Jem how Cecil could follow us in this dark, looked to me like he’d bump into us from behind.

“I can see you, Scout,” Jem said.

“How? I can’t see you.”

“Your fat streaks are showin’. Mrs. Crenshaw painted ’em with some of that shiny stuff so they’d show up under the footlights. I can see you pretty well, an’ I expect Cecil can see you well enough to keep his distance.”

I would show Cecil that we knew he was behind us and we were ready for him.

“Cecil Jacobs is a big wet he-en!” I yelled suddenly, turning around.

We stopped. There was no acknowledgement save he-en bouncing off the distant schoolhouse wall.

“I’ll get him,” said Jem. “He-y!”

Hay-e-hay-e-hay-ey, answered the schoolhouse wall. It was unlike Cecil to hold

out for so long; once he pulled a joke he'd repeat it time and again. We should have been leapt at already. Jem signaled for me to stop again.

He said softly, "Scout, can you take that thing off?"

"I think so, but I ain't got anything on under it much."

"I've got your dress here."

"I can't get it on in the dark."

"Okay," he said, "never mind."

"Jem, are you afraid?"

"No. Think we're almost to the tree now. Few yards from that, an' we'll be to the road. We can see the street light then." Jem was talking in an unhurried, flat toneless voice. I wondered how long he would try to keep the Cecil myth going.

"You reckon we oughta sing, Jem?"

"No. Be real quiet again, Scout."

We had not increased our pace. Jem knew as well as I that it was difficult to walk fast without stumping a toe, tripping on stones, and other inconveniences, and I was barefooted. Maybe it was the wind rustling the trees. But there wasn't any wind and there weren't any trees except the big oak.

Our company shuffled and dragged his feet, as if wearing heavy shoes. Whoever it was wore thick cotton pants; what I thought were trees rustling was the soft swish of cotton on cotton, wheek, wheek, with every step.

I felt the sand go cold under my feet and I knew we were near the big oak. Jem pressed my head. We stopped and listened.

Shuffle-foot had not stopped with us this time. His trousers swished softly and steadily. Then they stopped. He was running, running toward us with no child's steps.

"Run, Scout! Run! Run!" Jem screamed.

I took one giant step and found myself reeling: my arms useless, in the dark, I could not keep my balance.

"Jem, Jem, help me, Jem!"

Something crushed the chicken wire around me. Metal ripped on metal and I fell

to the ground and rolled as far as I could, floundering to escape my wire prison. From somewhere near by came scuffling, kicking sounds, sounds of shoes and flesh scraping dirt and roots. Someone rolled against me and I felt Jem. He was up like lightning and pulling me with him but, though my head and shoulders were free, I was so entangled we didn't get very far.

We were nearly to the road when I felt Jem's hand leave me, felt him jerk backwards to the ground. More scuffling, and there came a dull crunching sound and Jem screamed.

I ran in the direction of Jem's scream and sank into a flabby male stomach. Its owner said, "Uff!" and tried to catch my arms, but they were tightly pinioned. His stomach was soft but his arms were like steel. He slowly squeezed the breath out of me. I could not move. Suddenly he was jerked backwards and flung on the ground, almost carrying me with him. I thought, Jem's up.

One's mind works very slowly at times. Stunned, I stood there dumbly. The scuffling noises were dying; someone wheezed and the night was still again.

Still but for a man breathing heavily, breathing heavily and staggering. I thought he went to the tree and leaned against it. He coughed violently, a sobbing, bone-shaking cough.

"Jem?"

There was no answer but the man's heavy breathing.

"Jem?"

Jem didn't answer.

The man began moving around, as if searching for something. I heard him groan and pull something heavy along the ground. It was slowly coming to me that there were now four people under the tree.

"Atticus...?"

The man was walking heavily and unsteadily toward the road.

I went to where I thought he had been and felt frantically along the ground, reaching out with my toes. Presently I touched someone.

"Jem?"

My toes touched trousers, a belt buckle, buttons, something I could not identify, a collar, and a face. A prickly stubble on the face told me it was not Jem's. I smelled stale whiskey.

I made my way along in what I thought was the direction of the road. I was not sure, because I had been turned around so many times. But I found it and looked down to the street light. A man was passing under it. The man was walking with the staccato steps of someone carrying a load too heavy for him. He was going around the corner. He was carrying Jem. Jem's arm was dangling crazily in front of him.

By the time I reached the corner the man was crossing our front yard. Light from our front door framed Atticus for an instant; he ran down the steps, and together, he and the man took Jem inside.

I was at the front door when they were going down the hall. Aunt Alexandra was running to meet me. "Call Dr. Reynolds!" Atticus's voice came sharply from Jem's room. "Where's Scout?"

"Here she is," Aunt Alexandra called, pulling me along with her to the telephone. She tugged at me anxiously. "I'm all right, Aunty," I said, "you better call."

She pulled the receiver from the hook and said, "Eula May, get Dr. Reynolds, quick!"

"Agnes, is your father home? Oh God, where is he? Please tell him to come over here as soon as he comes in. Please, it's urgent!"

There was no need for Aunt Alexandra to identify herself, people in Maycomb knew each other's voices.

Atticus came out of Jem's room. The moment Aunt Alexandra broke the connection, Atticus took the receiver from her. He rattled the hook, then said, "Eula May, get me the sheriff, please."

"Heck? Atticus Finch. Someone's been after my children. Jem's hurt. Between here and the schoolhouse. I can't leave my boy. Run out there for me, please, and see if he's still around. Doubt if you'll find him now, but I'd like to see him if you do. Got to go now. Thanks, Heck."

"Atticus, is Jem dead?"

“No, Scout. Look after her, sister,” he called, as he went down the hall.

Aunt Alexandra’s fingers trembled as she unwound the crushed fabric and wire from around me. “Are you all right, darling?” she asked over and over as she worked me free.

It was a relief to be out. My arms were beginning to tingle, and they were red with small hexagonal marks. I rubbed them, and they felt better.

“Aunty, is Jem dead?”

“No—no, darling, he’s unconscious. We won’t know how badly he’s hurt until Dr. Reynolds gets here. Jean Louise, what happened?”

“I don’t know.”

She left it at that. She brought me something to put on, and had I thought about it then, I would have never let her forget it: in her distraction, Aunty brought me my overalls. “Put these on, darling,” she said, handing me the garments she most despised.

She rushed back to Jem’s room, then came to me in the hall. She patted me vaguely, and went back to Jem’s room.

A car stopped in front of the house. I knew Dr. Reynolds’s step almost as well as my father’s. He had brought Jem and me into the world, had led us through every childhood disease known to man including the time Jem fell out of the treehouse, and he had never lost our friendship. Dr. Reynolds said if we had been boil-prone things would have been different, but we doubted it.

He came in the door and said, “Good Lord.” He walked toward me, said, “You’re still standing,” and changed his course. He knew every room in the house. He also knew that if I was in bad shape, so was Jem.

After ten forevers Dr. Reynolds returned. “Is Jem dead?” I asked.

“Far from it,” he said, squatting down to me. “He’s got a bump on the head just like yours, and a broken arm. Scout, look that way—no, don’t turn your head, roll your eyes. Now look over yonder. He’s got a bad break, so far as I can tell now it’s in the elbow. Like somebody tried to wring his arm off... Now look at me.”

“Then he’s not dead?”

“No-o!” Dr. Reynolds got to his feet. “We can’t do much tonight,” he said,

“except try to make him as comfortable as we can. We’ll have to X-ray his arm— looks like he’ll be wearing his arm ‘way out by his side for a while. Don’t worry, though, he’ll be as good as new. Boys his age bounce.”

While he was talking, Dr. Reynolds had been looking keenly at me, lightly fingering the bump that was coming on my forehead. “You don’t feel broke anywhere, do you?”

Dr. Reynolds’s small joke made me smile. “Then you don’t think he’s dead, then?”

He put on his hat. “Now I may be wrong, of course, but I think he’s very alive. Shows all the symptoms of it. Go have a look at him, and when I come back we’ll get together and decide.”

Dr. Reynolds’s step was young and brisk. Mr. Heck Tate’s was not. His heavy boots punished the porch and he opened the door awkwardly, but he said the same thing Dr. Reynolds said when he came in. “You all right, Scout?” he added.

“Yes sir, I’m goin’ in to see Jem. Atticus’n’them’s in there.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Mr. Tate.

Aunt Alexandra had shaded Jem’s reading light with a towel, and his room was dim. Jem was lying on his back. There was an ugly mark along one side of his face. His left arm lay out from his body; his elbow was bent slightly, but in the wrong direction. Jem was frowning.

“Jem...?”

Atticus spoke. “He can’t hear you, Scout, he’s out like a light. He was coming around, but Dr. Reynolds put him out again.”

“Yes sir.” I retreated. Jem’s room was large and square. Aunt Alexandra was sitting in a rocking-chair by the fireplace. The man who brought Jem in was standing in a corner, leaning against the wall. He was some countryman I did not know. He had probably been at the pageant, and was in the vicinity when it happened. He must have heard our screams and come running.

Atticus was standing by Jem’s bed.

Mr. Heck Tate stood in the doorway. His hat was in his hand, and a flashlight bulged from his pants pocket. He was in his working clothes.

“Come in, Heck,” said Atticus. “Did you find anything? I can’t conceive of anyone low-down enough to do a thing like this, but I hope you found him.”

Mr. Tate sniffed. He glanced sharply at the man in the corner, nodded to him, then looked around the room—at Jem, at Aunt Alexandra, then at Atticus.

“Sit down, Mr. Finch,” he said pleasantly.

Atticus said, “Let’s all sit down. Have that chair, Heck. I’ll get another one from the livingroom.”

Mr. Tate sat in Jem’s desk chair. He waited until Atticus returned and settled himself. I wondered why Atticus had not brought a chair for the man in the corner, but Atticus knew the ways of country people far better than I. Some of his rural clients would park their long-eared steeds under the chinaberry trees in the back yard, and Atticus would often keep appointments on the back steps. This one was probably more comfortable where he was.

“Mr. Finch,” said Mr. Tate, “tell you what I found. I found a little girl’s dress—it’s out there in my car. That your dress, Scout?”

“Yes sir, if it’s a pink one with smockin’,” I said. Mr. Tate was behaving as if he were on the witness stand. He liked to tell things his own way, untrammelled by state or defense, and sometimes it took him a while.

“I found some funny-looking pieces of muddy-colored cloth—”

“That’s m’costume, Mr. Tate.”

Mr. Tate ran his hands down his thighs. He rubbed his left arm and investigated Jem’s mantelpiece, then he seemed to be interested in the fireplace. His fingers sought his long nose.

“What is it, Heck?” said Atticus.

Mr. Tate found his neck and rubbed it. “Bob Ewell’s lyin’ on the ground under that tree down yonder with a kitchen knife stuck up under his ribs. He’s dead, Mr. Finch.”

Chapter 29

Aunt Alexandra got up and reached for the mantelpiece. Mr. Tate rose, but she declined assistance. For once in his life, Atticus's instinctive courtesy failed him: he sat where he was.

Somehow, I could think of nothing but Mr. Bob Ewell saying he'd get Atticus if it took him the rest of his life. Mr. Ewell almost got him, and it was the last thing he did.

"Are you sure?" Atticus said bleakly.

"He's dead all right," said Mr. Tate. "He's good and dead. He won't hurt these children again."

"I didn't mean that." Atticus seemed to be talking in his sleep. His age was beginning to show, his one sign of inner turmoil, the strong line of his jaw melted a little, one became aware of telltale creases forming under his ears, one noticed not his jet-black hair but the gray patches growing at his temples.

"Hadn't we better go to the livingroom?" Aunt Alexandra said at last.

"If you don't mind," said Mr. Tate, "I'd rather us stay in here if it won't hurt Jem any. I want to have a look at his injuries while Scout... tells us about it."

"Is it all right if I leave?" she asked. "I'm just one person too many in here. I'll be in my room if you want me, Atticus." Aunt Alexandra went to the door, but she stopped and turned. "Atticus, I had a feeling about this tonight—I—this is my fault," she began. "I should have—"

Mr. Tate held up his hand. "You go ahead, Miss Alexandra, I know it's been a shock to you. And don't you fret yourself about anything—why, if we followed our feelings all the time we'd be like cats chasin' their tails. Miss Scout, see if you can tell us what happened, while it's still fresh in your mind. You think you can? Did you see him following you?"

I went to Atticus and felt his arms go around me. I buried my head in his lap. "We started home. I said Jem, I've forgot m'shoes. Soon's we started back for 'em the

lights went out. Jem said I could get 'em tomorrow..."

"Scout, raise up so Mr. Tate can hear you," Atticus said. I crawled into his lap.

"Then Jem said hush a minute. I thought he was thinkin'—he always wants you to hush so he can think—then he said he heard somethin'. We thought it was Cecil."

"Cecil?"

"Cecil Jacobs. He scared us once tonight, an' we thought it was him again. He had on a sheet. They gave a quarter for the best costume, I don't know who won it —"

"Where were you when you thought it was Cecil?"

"Just a little piece from the schoolhouse. I yelled somethin' at him—"

"You yelled, what?"

"Cecil Jacobs is a big fat hen, I think. We didn't hear nothin'—then Jem yelled hello or somethin' loud enough to wake the dead—"

"Just a minute, Scout," said Mr. Tate. "Mr. Finch, did you hear them?"

Atticus said he didn't. He had the radio on. Aunt Alexandra had hers going in her bedroom. He remembered because she told him to turn his down a bit so she could hear hers. Atticus smiled. "I always play a radio too loud."

"I wonder if the neighbors heard anything..." said Mr. Tate.

"I doubt it, Heck. Most of them listen to their radios or go to bed with the chickens. Maudie Atkinson may have been up, but I doubt it."

"Go ahead, Scout," Mr. Tate said.

"Well, after Jem yelled we walked on. Mr. Tate, I was shut up in my costume but I could hear it myself, then. Footsteps, I mean. They walked when we walked and stopped when we stopped. Jem said he could see me because Mrs. Crenshaw put some kind of shiny paint on my costume. I was a ham."

"How's that?" asked Mr. Tate, startled.

Atticus described my role to Mr. Tate, plus the construction of my garment. "You should have seen her when she came in," he said, "it was crushed to a pulp."

Mr. Tate rubbed his chin. "I wondered why he had those marks on him, His sleeves were perforated with little holes. There were one or two little puncture

marks on his arms to match the holes. Let me see that thing if you will, sir.”

Atticus fetched the remains of my costume. Mr. Tate turned it over and bent it around to get an idea of its former shape. “This thing probably saved her life,” he said. “Look.”

He pointed with a long forefinger. A shiny clean line stood out on the dull wire. “Bob Ewell meant business,” Mr. Tate muttered.

“He was out of his mind,” said Atticus.

“Don’t like to contradict you, Mr. Finch—wasn’t crazy, mean as hell. Low-down skunk with enough liquor in him to make him brave enough to kill children. He’d never have met you face to face.”

Atticus shook his head. “I can’t conceive of a man who’d—”

“Mr. Finch, there’s just some kind of men you have to shoot before you can say hidy to ‘em. Even then, they ain’t worth the bullet it takes to shoot ‘em. Ewell ‘as one of ‘em.”

Atticus said, “I thought he got it all out of him the day he threatened me. Even if he hadn’t, I thought he’d come after me.”

“He had guts enough to pester a poor colored woman, he had guts enough to pester Judge Taylor when he thought the house was empty, so do you think he’da met you to your face in daylight?” Mr. Tate sighed. “We’d better get on. Scout, you heard him behind you—”

“Yes sir. When we got under the tree—”

“How’d you know you were under the tree, you couldn’t see thunder out there.”

“I was barefooted, and Jem says the ground’s always cooler under a tree.”

“We’ll have to make him a deputy, go ahead.”

“Then all of a sudden somethin’ grabbed me an’ mashed my costume... think I ducked on the ground... heard a tusslin’ under the tree sort of... they were bammin’ against the trunk, sounded like. Jem found me and started pullin’ me toward the road. Some—Mr. Ewell yanked him down, I reckon. They tussled some more and then there was this funny noise—Jem hollered...” I stopped. That was Jem’s arm.

“Anyway, Jem hollered and I didn’t hear him any more an’ the next thing—Mr. Ewell was tryin’ to squeeze me to death, I reckon... then somebody yanked Mr. Ewell down. Jem must have got up, I guess. That’s all I know...”

“And then?” Mr. Tate was looking at me sharply.

“Somebody was staggerin’ around and pantin’ and—coughing fit to die. I thought it was Jem at first, but it didn’t sound like him, so I went lookin’ for Jem on the ground. I thought Atticus had come to help us and had got wore out—”

“Who was it?”

“Why there he is, Mr. Tate, he can tell you his name.”

As I said it, I half pointed to the man in the corner, but brought my arm down quickly lest Atticus reprimand me for pointing. It was impolite to point.

He was still leaning against the wall. He had been leaning against the wall when I came into the room, his arms folded across his chest. As I pointed he brought his arms down and pressed the palms of his hands against the wall. They were white hands, sickly white hands that had never seen the sun, so white they stood out garishly against the dull cream wall in the dim light of Jem’s room.

I looked from his hands to his sand-stained khaki pants; my eyes traveled up his thin frame to his torn denim shirt. His face was as white as his hands, but for a shadow on his jutting chin. His cheeks were thin to hollowness; his mouth was wide; there were shallow, almost delicate indentations at his temples, and his gray eyes were so colorless I thought he was blind. His hair was dead and thin, almost feathery on top of his head.

When I pointed to him his palms slipped slightly, leaving greasy sweat streaks on the wall, and he hooked his thumbs in his belt. A strange small spasm shook him, as if he heard fingernails scrape slate, but as I gazed at him in wonder the tension slowly drained from his face. His lips parted into a timid smile, and our neighbor’s image blurred with my sudden tears.

“Hey, Boo,” I said.
