behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are. She wants to talk to you about the family and what it's meant to Maycomb County through the years, so you'll have some idea of who you are, so you might be moved to behave accordingly," he concluded at a gallop.

Stunned, Jem and I looked at each other, then at Atticus, whose collar seemed to worry him. We did not speak to him.

Presently I picked up a comb from Jem's dresser and ran its teeth along the edge.

"Stop that noise," Atticus said.

His curtness stung me. The comb was midway in its journey, and I banged it down. For no reason I felt myself beginning to cry, but I could not stop. This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts. My father never spoke so. Aunt Alexandra had put him up to this, somehow.

Through my tears I saw Jem standing in a similar pool of isolation, his head cocked to one side.

There was nowhere to go, but I turned to go and met Atticus's vest front. I buried my head in it and listened to the small internal noises that went on behind the light blue cloth: his watch ticking, the faint crackle of his starched shirt, the soft sound of his breathing.

"Your stomach's growling," I said.

"I know it," he said.

"You better take some soda."

"I will," he said.

"Atticus, is all this behavin' an' stuff gonna make things different? I mean are you-?"

I felt his hand on the back of my head. "Don't you worry about anything," he said. "It's not time to worry."

When I heard that, I knew he had come back to us. The blood in my legs began to flow again, and I raised my head. "You really want us to do all that? I can't remember everything Finches are supposed to do..."

"I don't want you to remember it. Forget it."

He went to the door and out of the room, shutting the door behind him. He nearly slammed it, but caught himself at the last minute and closed it softly. As Jem and I stared, the door opened again and Atticus peered around. His eyebrows were raised, his glasses had slipped. "Get more like Cousin Joshua every day, don't I? Do you think I'll end up costing the family five hundred dollars?"

I know now what he was trying to do, but Atticus was only a man. It takes a woman to do that kind of work.

Chapter 14

Although we heard no more about the Finch family from Aunt Alexandra, we heard plenty from the town. On Saturdays, armed with our nickels, when Jem permitted me to accompany him (he was now positively allergic to my presence when in public), we would squirm our way through sweating sidewalk crowds and sometimes hear, "There's his chillun," or, "Yonder's some Finches."

Turning to face our accusers, we would see only a couple of farmers studying the cinema bags in the Mayco Drugstore window. Or two dumpy countrywomen in straw hats sitting in a Hoover cart.

"They c'n go loose and rape up the countryside for all of 'em who run this county care," was one obscure observation we met head on from a skinny gentleman when he passed us. Which reminded me that I had a question to ask Atticus.

"What's rape?" I asked him that night.

Atticus looked around from behind his paper. He was in his chair by the window. As we grew older, Jem and I thought it generous to allow Atticus thirty minutes to himself after supper.

He sighed, and said rape was carnal knowledge of a female by force and without consent.
"Well if that's all it is why did Calpurnia dry me up when I asked her what it was?"
Atticus looked pensive. "What's that again?"
"Well, I asked Calpurnia comin' from church that day what it was and she said ask you but I forgot to and now I'm askin' you."
His paper was now in his lap. "Again, please," he said.
I told him in detail about our trip to church with Calpurnia. Atticus seemed to enjoy it, but Aunt Alexandra, who was sitting in a corner quietly sewing, put down her embroidery and stared at us.
"You all were coming back from Calpurnia's church that Sunday?"
Jem said, "Yessum, she took us."
I remembered something. "Yessum, and she promised me I could come out to her house some afternoon. Atticus, I'll go next Sunday if it's all right, can I? Cal said she'd come get me if you were off in the car."
"You may not."
Aunt Alexandra said it. I wheeled around, startled, then turned back to Atticus in time to catch his swift glance at her, but it was too late. I said, "I didn't ask you!"
For a big man, Atticus could get up and down from a chair faster than anyone I ever knew. He was on his feet. "Apologize to your aunt," he said, "I didn't ask her, I asked you."
Atticus turned his head and pinned me to the wall with his good eye. His voice was deadly: "First, apologize to your aunt."
"I'm sorry, Aunty," I muttered.
"Now then," he said. "Let's get this clear: you do as Calpurnia tells you, you do as I tell you, and as long as your aunt's in this house, you will do as she tells you. Understand?"
I understood, pondered a while, and concluded that the only way I could retire with a shred of dignity was to go to the bathroom, where I stayed long enough to make them think I had to go.
Returning, I lingered in the hall to hear a fierce discussion going on in the living room. Through the door I could see Jem on the sofa with a football magazine in front of his face, his head turning as if its pages contained a live tennis match. Simile (Ethan + hail + Mary)
you've got to do something about her," Aunty was saying. "You've let things go on too long, Atticus, too long."
"I don't see any harm in letting her go out there. Cal'd look after her there as well as she does here."
Who was the "her" they were talking about? My heart sank: me. I felt the starched walls of a pink cotton penitentiary closing in on me, and for the second time in my life I thought of running away. Immediately.
"Atticus, it's all right to be soft-hearted, you're an easy man, but you have a daughter to think of.
A daughter who's growing up.
"That's what I am thinking of."
"And don't try to get around it. You've got to face it sooner or later and it might as well be tonight.
We don't need her now."
Atticus's voice was even: "Alexandra, Calpurnia's not leaving this house until she wants to. You may think otherwise, but I couldn't have got along without her all these years. She's a faithful member of this family and you'll simply have to accept things the way they are. Besides, sister, I don't want you working your head off for us-you've no reason to do that. We still need Cal as much as we ever did."
"But Atticus--"
"Besides, I don’t think the children’ve suffered one bit from her having brought them up. If anything, she’s been harder on them in some ways than a mother would have been ... she’s never let them get away with anything, she’s never indulged them the way most colored nurses do. She tried to bring them up according to her lights, and Cal’s lights are pretty good—another thing, the children love her."

I breathed again. It wasn’t me, it was only Calpurnia they were talking about. Revived, I entered the living room. Atticus had retreated behind his newspaper and Aunt Alexandra was worrying her embroidery. Punk, punk, punk, her needle broke the tout circle. She stopped, and pulled the cloth tighter: punk-punk-punk. She was furious.

Jem got up and padded across the rug. He motioned me to follow. He led me to his room and closed the door. His face was grave. "They’ve been fussing, Scout." Jem and I fussed a great deal these days, but I had never heard of or seen anyone quarrel with Atticus. It was not a comfortable sight.

"Scout, try not to antagonize Aunty, hear?" Atticus’s remarks were still rankling, which made me miss the request in Jem’s question. My feathers rose again. "You tryin’ to tell me what to do?" "Naw, it’s—he’s got a lot on his mind now, without us worrying him."

"Like what?" Atticus didn’t appear to have anything especially on his mind. "It’s this Tom Robinson case that’s worryin’ him to death—"

I said Atticus didn’t worry about anything. Besides, the case never bothered us except about once a week and then it didn’t last.

"That’s because you can’t hold something in your mind but a little while," said Jem. "It’s different with grown folks, we—" His maddening superiority was unbearable these days. He didn’t want to do anything but read and go off by himself. Still, everything he read he passed along to me, but with this difference: formerly, because he thought I’d like it; now, for my edification and instruction.

"Jee crawling hova, Jem! Who do you think you are?"

"Now I mean it, Scout, you antagonize Aunty and I’ll—I’ll spank you."

With that, I was gone. "You damn morphine, I’ll kill you!" He was sitting on the bed, and it was easy to grab his front hair and land one on his mouth. He slapped me and I tried another left, but a punch in the stomach sent me sprawling on the floor. It nearly knocked the breath out of me, but it didn’t matter because I knew he was fighting, he was fighting me back. We were still equals.

"Ain’t so high and mighty now, are you?" I screamed, sailing in again. He was still on the bed and I couldn’t get a firm stance, so I threw myself at him as hard as I could, hitting, pulling, pinching, gouging. What had begun as a fist-fight became a brawl. We were still struggling when Atticus separated us.

"That’s all," he said. "Both of you go to bed right now."

"Taah!" I said at Jem. He was being sent to bed at my bedtime.

"Who started it?" asked Atticus, in resignation.

"Jem did. He was tryin’ to tell me what to do. I don’t have to mind him now, do I?"

Atticus smiled. "Let’s leave it at this: you mind Jem whenever he can make you. Fair enough?"

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

Ours were adjoining rooms; as I shut the door between them Jem said,

"Night, Scout."
"Night," I murmured, picking my way across the room to turn on the light. As I passed the bed I stepped on something warm, resilient, and rather smooth. It was not quite like hard rubber, and I had the sensation that it was alive. I also heard it move. I switched on the light and looked at the floor by the bed. Whatever I had stepped on was gone. I tapped on Jem’s door.

"What," he said.

"How does a snake feel?"

"Sort of rough. Cold. Dusty. Why?"

"I think there’s one under my bed. Can you come look?"

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

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

"You reckon it’s really one?" I asked. This was an occasion. Our houses had no cellars; they were built on stone blocks a few feet above the ground, and the entry of reptiles was not unknown but was not commonplace. Miss Rachel Haverford’s excuse for a glass of neat whiskey every morning was that she never got over the fright of finding a rattler coiled in her bedroom closet, on her washing, when she went to hang up her negligee. Jem made a tentative swipe under the bed. I looked over the foot to see if a snake would come out. None did. Jem made a deeper swipe.

"Do snakes grunt?"

"It ain’t a snake," Jem said. "It’s somebody."

Suddenly a filthy brown package shot from under the bed. Jem, raised the broom and missed Dill’s head by an inch when it appeared.

"God Almighty." Jem’s voice was reverent.

We watched Dill emerge by degrees. He was a tight fit. He stood up and eased his shoulders, turned his feet in their ankle sockets, rubbed the back of his neck. His circulation restored, he said, "Hey."

Jem petitioned God again. I was speechless.

"I’m ’bout to perish," said Dill. "Got anything to eat?"

In a dream, I went to the kitchen. I brought him back some milk and half a pan of corn bread left over from supper. Dill devoured it, chewing with his front teeth, as was his custom.

I finally found my voice. "How’d you get here?"

By an involved route. Refreshed by food, Dill recited this narrative: having been bound in chains and left to die in the basement (there were basements in Meridian) by his new father, who disliked him, and secretly kept alive on raw field peas by a passing farmer who heard his cries for help (the good man poked a bushel pod by pod through the ventilator), Dill worked himself free by pulling the chains from the wall. Still in wrist manacles, he wandered two miles out of Meridian where he discovered a small animal show and was immediately engaged to wash the camel. He traveled with the show all over Mississippi until his infallible sense of direction told him he was in Abbott County, Alabama, just across the river from Maycomb. He walked the rest of the way.

"How’d you get here?" asked Jem.

He had taken thirteen dollars from his mother’s purse, caught the nine o’clock from Meridian and got off at Maycomb Junction. lie had walked ten or eleven of the fourteen miles to Maycomb, off the highway in the scrub bushes lest the authorities be seeking him, and had ridden the remainder of the way clinging to the backboard of a cotton wagon. He had been under the bed for two hours,
he thought; he had heard us in the diningroom, and the clink of forks on plates nearly drove him
crazy.
He thought Jem and I would never go to bed; he had considered emerging and helping me beat Jem,
as Jem had grown far taller, but he knew Mr. Finch would break it up soon, so he thought it best to
stay where he was. He was worn out, dirty beyond belief, and home.
"They must not know you’re here," said Jem. "We’d know if they were lookin’ for you . . . .
"Think they’re still searchin’ all the picture shows in Meridian." Dill grinned.
"You oughta let your mother know where you are," said Jem. "You oughta let her know you’re here . . .

Dill’s eyes flickered at Jem, and Jem looked at the floor. Then he rose and broke the remaining
code of our childhood. He went out of the room and down the hall. "Atticus," his voice was distant,"can you come here a minute, sir?"
Beneath its sweat-streaked dirt Dill’s face went white. I felt sick.
Atticus was in the doorway.
He came to the middle of the room and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down at Dill.
I finally found my voice: "It’s okay, Dill. When he wants you to know
somethin’, he tells you."
Dill looked at me. "I mean it’s all right," I said. "You know he wouldn’t bother you, you know you
ain’t scared of Atticus."
"I’m not scared Dill muttered.
"Just hungry, I’ll bet." Atticus’s voice had its usual pleasant dryness. "Scout, we can do better than
a pan of cold corn bread, can’t we? You fill this fellow up and when I get back we’ll see what we can
see."
"Mr. Finch, don’t tell Aunt Rachel, don’t make me go back, please sir! I’ll run off again!"
"Whoa, son," said Atticus. "Nobody’s about to make you go anywhere but to bed pretty soon. I’m
just going over to tell Miss Rachel you’re here and ask her if you could spend the night with us-
you’d like that, wouldn’t you? And for goodness’ sake put some of the county back where it belongs,
the soil erosion’s bad enough as it is."
Dill stared at my father’s retreating figure.
"He’s tryin’ to be funny," I said. "He means take a bath. See there, I told you he wouldn’t bother
you."

Jem was standing in a corner of the room, looking like the traitor he was. "Dill, I had to tell him," he
said. "You can’t run three hundred miles off without your mother knowin’."
We left him without a word.

Dill ate, and ate, and ate. He hadn’t eaten since last night. He used all his money for a ticket,
boarded the train as he had done many times, coolly chatted with the conductor, to whom Dill was a
familiar sight, but he had not the nerve to invoke the rule on small children traveling a distance
alone: if you’ve lost your money the conductor will lend you enough for dinner and your father will
pay him back at the end of the line.

Dill made his way through the leftovers and was reaching for a can of pork and beans in the pantry
when Miss Rachel’s Do-oo Je-sus went off in the hall. He shivered like a rabbit.

He bore with fortitude her Wait Till I Get You Home, Your Folks Are Out Of Their Minds Worryin’,
was quite calm during That’s All the Harris in You Coming Out, smiled at her Reckon You Can Stay
One Night, and returned the hug at long last bestowed upon him.

Atticus pushed up his glasses and rubbed his face.
"Your father’s tired," said Aunt Alexandra, her first words in hours, it seemed. She had been there, but I suppose struck dumb most of the time. "You children get to bed now."
We left them in the dining room, Atticus still mopping his face. "From rape to riot to runaways," we heard him chuckle. "I wonder what the next two hours will bring."
Since things appeared to have worked out pretty well, Dill and I decided to be civil to Jem. Besides, Dill had to sleep with him so we might as well speak to him.
I put on my pajamas, read for a while and found myself suddenly unable to keep my eyes open. Dill and Jem were quiet; when I turned off my reading lamp there was no strip of light under the door to Jem’s room. I must have slept a long time, for when I was punched awake the room was dim with the light of the setting moon.
"Move over, Scout."
"He thought he had to," I mumbled. "Don’t stay mad with him."
Dill got in bed beside me. "I ain’t," he said. "I just wanted to sleep with you. Are you waked up?"
By this time I was, but lazily so. "Why’d you do it?" No answer. "I said why’d you run off? Was he really hateful like you said?"
"Naw."
"Didn’t you all build that boat like you wrote you were gonna?"
"He just said we would. We never did."
I raised up on my elbow, facing Dill’s outline. "It’s no reason to run off. They don’t get around to doin’ what they say they’re gonna do half the time..."
"That wasn’t it, he—they just wasn’t interested in it me."
This was the weirdest reason for flight I had ever heard. "How come?"
"Well, they stayed gone all the time, and when they were home, even, they’d get off in a room by themselves."
"What’d they do in there?"
"Nothin’, just sittin’ and readin’—but they didn’t want me with ’em."
I pushed the pillow to the headboard and sat up. "You know something? I was fixin’ to run off tonight because there they all were. You don’t want ’em around you all the time, Dill."
Dill breathed his patient breath, a half-sigh.
"’—good night, Atticus’s gone all day and sometimes half the night and off in the legislature and I don’t know what—you don’t want ’em around all the time, Dill, you couldn’t do anything if they were."
"That’s not it."
As Dill explained, I found myself wondering what life would be if Jem were different, even from what he was now; what I would do if Atticus did not feel the necessity of my presence, help and advice. Why, he couldn’t get along a day without me. Even Calpurnia couldn’t get along unless I was there. They needed me.
"Dill, you ain’t telling me right—your folks couldn’t do without you. They must be just mean to you. Tell you what to do about that—"
Dill’s voice went on steadily in the darkness: "The thing is, what I’m tryin’ to say is—they do get on a lot better without me, I can’t help them any. They ain’t mean. They buy me everything I want, but it’s now— you’ve-got-it-go-play-with-it. You’ve got a roomful of things. I-got-you-that-book-so-go-read-it." Dill tried to deepen his voice. "You’re not a boy. Boys get out and play baseball with other boys, they don’t hang around the house worryin’ their folks."
Dill’s voice was his own again: "Oh, they ain’t mean. They kiss you and hug you good night and good mornin’ and good-bye and tell you they love you—Scout, let’s get us a baby."
"Where?"
There was a man Dill had heard of who had a boat that he rowed across to a foggy island where all these babies were; you could order one—

"That's a lie. Aunty said God drops 'em down the chimney. At least that's what I think she said," For once, Aunty's diction had not been too clear. "Well that ain't so. You get babies from each other. But there's this man, too-he has all these babies just waitin' to wake up, he breathes life into 'em . . . .

Dill was off again. Beautiful things floated around in his dreamy head. He could read two books to my one, but he preferred the magic of his own inventions. He could add and subtract faster than lightning, but he pre- ferred his own twilight world, a world where babies slept, waiting to be gathered like morning lilies. He was slowly talking himself to sleep and taking me with him, but in the quietness of his foggy island there rose the faded image of a gray house with sad brown doors,

"Dill?"

"Mm?"

"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 . . .

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."

I . . . 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 foot-ball 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.
"Bill’ll want 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, 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 venerated 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 Tyndall'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.

"Hi, 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?"
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 buct 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 living room 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.
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 Aunty 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 pleasing 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 Aunty'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. Everything 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'da 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 he'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, Aunty, 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 tem 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 news- papers, 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 in 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, be 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 Spender 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-between, don't belong anywhere. But Mr. Dolphus, now, they say he's shipped two of his up north. They don't mind '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," be 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 hutch 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. There 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 Jeni 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: town folk 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, seems 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.