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. He 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



"Oh no, he's staying at the Landing. He'll keep the place going."

The moment I said, "Won't you miss him?" I realized that this was not a tactful question. Uncle Jimmy present or Uncle Jimmy absent made not much difference, he never said anything. Aunt Alexandra ignored my question.

I could think of nothing else to say to her. In fact I could never think of anything to say to her, and I sat thinking of past painful conversations between us: How are you, Jean Louise? Fine, thank you ma'am, how are you? Very well, thank you, what have you been doing with yourself? Nothin'. Don't you do anything? Nome. Certainly you have friends? Yessum. Well what do you all do? Nothin'.

It was plain that Aunty thought me dull in the extreme, because I once heard her tell Atticus that I was sluggish.

There was a story behind all this, but I had no desire to extract it from her then. Today was Sunday, and Aunt Alexandra was positively irritable on the Lord's Day. I guess it was her Sunday corset. She was not fat, but solid, and she chose protective garments that drew up her bosom to giddy heights, pinched in her waist, flared out her rear, and managed to suggest that Aunt Alexandra's was once an hour-glass figure. From any angle, it was formidable.

The remainder of the afternoon went by in the gentle gloom that descends when relatives appear, but was dispelled when we heard a car turn in the driveway. It was Atticus, home from Montgomery. Jem, forgetting his dignity, ran with me to meet him. Jem seized his briefcase and bag, I jumped into his arms, felt his vague dry kiss and said, "'d you bring me a book? 'd you know Aunty's here?"

Atticus answered both questions in the affirmative. "How'd you like for her to come live with us?"

I said I would like it very much, which was a lie, but one must lie under certain circumstances and at all times when one can't do anything about them.

"We felt it was time you children needed—well, it's like this, Scout," Atticus said. "Your aunt's doing me a favor as well as you all. I can't stay here all day with you, and the summer's going to be a hot one."

"Yes sir," I said, not understanding a word he said. I had an idea, however, that Aunt Alexandra's appearance on the scene was not so much Atticus's doing as hers. Aunty had a way of declaring What Is Best For The Family, and I suppose her coming to live with us was in that category.

Maycomb welcomed her. Miss Maudie Atkinson baked a Lane cake so loaded with shinny it made me tight; Miss Stephanie Crawford had long visits with Aunt Alexandra, consisting mostly of Miss Stephanie shaking her head and saying, "Uh, uh, uh." Miss Rachel next door had Aunty over for coffee in the afternoons, and Mr. Nathan Radley went so far as to come up in the front yard and say he was glad to see her.

When she settled in with us and life resumed its daily pace, Aunt Alexandra seemed as if she had always lived with us. Her Missionary Society refreshments added to her reputation as a hostess (she did not permit Calpurnia to make the delicacies required to sustain the Society through long reports on Rice Christians); she joined and became Secretary of the Maycomb Amanuensis Club. To all parties present and participating in the life of the county, Aunt Alexandra was one of the last of her kind: she had river-boat, boarding-school manners; let any moral come along and she would uphold it; she was born in the objective case; she was an incurable gossip. When Aunt Alexandra went to school, self-doubt could not be found in any textbook, so she knew not its meaning. She was never bored, and given the slightest chance she would exercise her royal



"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 I meant what I said, he said, "If you think I'm gonna put my face down to a snake you've got another think comin'. Hold on a minute."

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

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

Jem made a tentative swipe under the bed. I looked over the foot to see if a snake would come out. None did. Jem made a deeper swipe.

"Do snakes grunt?"

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

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 morphodite, 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."



prerogative: she would arrange, advise, caution, and warn.

She never let a chance escape her to point out the shortcomings of other tribal groups to the greater glory of our own, a habit that amused Jem rather than annoyed him: "Aunty better watch how she talks—scratch most folks in Maycomb and they're kin to us."

Aunt Alexandra, in underlining the moral of young Sam Merriweather's suicide, said it was caused by a morbid streak in the family. Let a sixteen-year-old girl giggle in the choir and Aunty would say, "It just goes to show you, all the Penfield women are flighty." Everybody in Maycomb, it seemed, had a Streak: a Drinking Streak, a Gambling Streak, a Mean Streak, a Funny Streak.

Once, when Aunty assured us that Miss Stephanie Crawford's tendency to mind other people's business was hereditary, Atticus said, "Sister, when you stop to think about it, our generation's practically the first in the Finch family not to marry its cousins. Would you say the Finches have an Incestuous Streak?"

Aunty said no, that's where we got our small hands and feet.

I never understood her preoccupation with heredity. Somewhere, I had received the impression that Fine Folks were people who did the best they could with the sense they had, but Aunt Alexandra was of the opinion, obliquely expressed, that the longer a family had been squatting on one patch of land the finer it was.

"That makes the Ewells fine folks, then," said Jem. The tribe of which Burris Ewell and his brethren consisted had lived on the same plot of earth behind the Maycomb dump, and had thrived on county welfare money for three generations.

Aunt Alexandra's theory had something behind it, though. Maycomb was an ancient town. It was twenty miles east of Finch's Landing, awkwardly inland for such an old town. But Maycomb would have been closer to the river had it not been for the nimble-

wittedness of one Sinkfield, who in the dawn of history operated an inn where two pig-trails met, the only tavern in the territory.

Sinkfield, no patriot, served and supplied ammunition to Indians and settlers alike, neither knowing or caring whether he was a part of the Alabama Territory or the Creek Nation so long as business was good. Business was excellent when Governor William Wyatt Bibb, with a view to promoting the newly created county's domestic tranquility, dispatched a team of surveyors to locate its exact center and there establish its seat of government. The surveyors, Sinkfield's guests, told their host that he was in the territorial confines of Maycomb County, and showed him the probable spot where the county seat would be built. Had not Sinkfield made a bold stroke to preserve his holdings, Maycomb would have sat in the middle of Winston Swamp, a place totally devoid of interest. Instead, Maycomb grew and sprawled out from its hub, Sinkfield's Tavern, because Sinkfield reduced his guests to myopic drunkenness one evening, induced them to bring forward their maps and charts, lop off a little here, add a bit there, and adjust the center of the county to meet his requirements. He sent them packing next day armed with their charts and five quarts of shinny in their saddlebags— two apiece and one for the Governor.

Because its primary reason for existence was government, Maycomb was spared the grubbiness that distinguished most Alabama towns its size. In the beginning its buildings were solid, its courthouse proud, its streets graciously wide.

Maycomb's proportion of professional people ran high: one went there to have his teeth pulled, his wagon fixed, his heart listened to, his money deposited, his soul saved, his mules vetted. But the ultimate wisdom of Sinkfield's maneuver is open to question. He placed the young town too far away from the only kind of public transportation in those days—river-boat—and it took a man from the north end of the county two days to travel to Maycomb for store-



colored nurses do. She tried to bring them up according to her lights, and Cal's lights are pretty good—and 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 livingroom. Atticus had retreated behind his newspaper and Aunt Alexandra was worrying her embroidery. Punk, punk, punk, her needle broke the taut 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

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 livingroom. 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.

"…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



bought goods. As a result the town remained the same size for a hundred years, an island in a patchwork sea of cottonfields and timberland.

Although Maycomb was ignored during the War Between the States, Reconstruction rule and economic ruin forced the town to grow. It grew inward. New people so rarely settled there, the same families married the same families until the members of the community looked faintly alike. Occasionally someone would return from Montgomery or Mobile with an outsider, but the result caused only a ripple in the quiet stream of family resemblance. Things were more or less the same during my early years.

There was indeed a caste system in Maycomb, but to my mind it worked this way: the older citizens, the present generation of people who had lived side by side for years and years, were utterly predictable to one another: they took for granted attitudes, character shadings, even gestures, as having been repeated in each generation and refined by time. Thus the dicta No Crawford Minds His Own Business, Every Third Merriweather Is Morbid, The Truth Is Not in the Delafields, All the Bufords Walk Like That, were simply guides to daily living: never take a check from a Delafield without a discreet call to the bank; Miss Maudie Atkinson's shoulder stoops because she was a Buford; if Mrs. Grace Merriweather sips gin out of Lydia E. Pinkham bottles it's nothing unusual—her mother did the same.

Aunt Alexandra fitted into the world of Maycomb like a hand into a glove, but never into the world of Jem and me. I so often wondered how she could be Atticus's and Uncle Jack's sister that I revived half-remembered tales of changelings and mandrake roots that Jem had spun long ago.

These were abstract speculations for the first month of her stay, as she had little to say to Jem or me, and we saw her only at mealtimes and at night before we went to bed. It was summer and we were outdoors. Of course some afternoons when I would run inside

for a drink of water, I would find the livingroom overrun with Maycomb ladies, sipping, whispering, fanning, and I would be called: "Jean Louise, come speak to these ladies."

When I appeared in the doorway, Aunty would look as if she regretted her request; I was usually mud-splashed or covered with sand.

"Speak to your Cousin Lily," she said one afternoon, when she had trapped me in the hall.

"Who?" I said.

"Your Cousin Lily Brooke," said Aunt Alexandra.

"She our cousin? I didn't know that."

Aunt Alexandra managed to smile in a way that conveyed a gentle apology to Cousin Lily and firm disapproval to me. When Cousin Lily Brooke left I knew I was in for it.

It was a sad thing that my father had neglected to tell me about the Finch Family, or to install any pride into his children. She summoned Jem, who sat warily on the sofa beside me. She left the room and returned with a purple-covered book on which Meditations of *Joshua S. St. Clair* was stamped in gold.

"Your cousin wrote this," said Aunt Alexandra. "He was a beautiful character."

Jem examined the small volume. "Is this the Cousin Joshua who was locked up for so long?"

Aunt Alexandra said, "How did you know that?"

"Why, Atticus said he went round the bend at the University. Said he tried to shoot the president. Said Cousin Joshua said he wasn't anything but a sewer- inspector and tried to shoot him with an old flintlock pistol, only it just blew up in his hand. Atticus said it cost the family five hundred dollars to get him out of that one—"



"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,

# 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 enema 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?"



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

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

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

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

Our father was actually fidgeting. "No, I just want to explain to you that—your Aunt Alexandra asked me… son, you know you're a Finch, don't you?"

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

Atticus crossed his knees and folded his arms. "I'm trying to tell you the facts of life."

Jem's disgust deepened. "I know all that stuff," he said.

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

"Gentle breeding," he continued, when I had found and scratched it, "and that you should try to live up to your name—" Atticus persevered in spite of us: "She asked me to tell you you must try to behave like the little lady and gentleman that you are. She wants to talk to you about the family and what it's meant to

Maycomb County through the years, so you'll have some idea of who you are, so you might be moved to behave accordingly," he concluded at a gallop.

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

Presently I picked up a comb from Jem's dresser and ran its teeth along the edge. "Stop that noise," Atticus said.

His curtness stung me. The comb was midway in its journey, and I banged it down. For no reason I felt myself beginning to cry, but I could not stop. This was not my father. My father never thought these thoughts. My father never spoke so. Aunt Alexandra had put him up to this, somehow. Through my tears I saw Jem standing in a similar pool of isolation, his head cocked to one side.

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

"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.