down yonder?"

"Yes," he said. "I filled it up."

"Why'd you do it, sir?"

"Tree's dying. You plug 'em with cement when they're sick. You ought to know that, Jem."

Jem said nothing more about it until late afternoon. When we passed our tree he gave it a meditative pat on its cement, and remained deep in thought. He seemed to be working himself into a bad humor, so I kept my distance.

As usual, we met Atticus coming home from work that evening. When we were at our steps Jem said, "Atticus, look down yonder at that tree, please sir."

"What tree, son?"

"The one on the corner of the Radley lot comin' from school." "Yes?"

"Is that tree dyin'?"

"Why no, son, I don't think so. Look at the leaves, they're all green and full, no brown patches anywhere—"

"It ain't even sick?"

"That tree's as healthy as you are, Jem. Why?"

"Mr. Nathan Radley said it was dyin'."

"Well maybe it is. I'm sure Mr. Radley knows more about his trees than we do."

Atticus left us on the porch. Jem leaned on a pillar, rubbing his shoulders against it.

"Do you itch, Jem?" I asked as politely as I could. He did not answer. "Come on in, Jem," I said.

did it again so long as we watched. Jem and I were leaving Miss Rachel's front steps one night when Dill stopped us: "Golly, looka yonder." He pointed across the street. At first we saw nothing but a kudzu-covered front porch, but a closer inspection revealed an arc of water descending from the leaves and splashing in the yellow circle of the street light, some ten feet from source to earth, it seemed to us. Jem said Mr. Avery misfigured, Dill said he must drink a gallon a day, and the ensuing contest to determine relative distances and respective prowess only made me feel left out again, as I was untalented in this area.

Dill stretched, yawned, and said altogether too casually. "I know what, let's go for a walk."

He sounded fishy to me. Nobody in Maycomb just went for a walk. "Where to, Dill?"

Dill jerked his head in a southerly direction.

Jem said, "Okay." When I protested, he said sweetly, "You don't have to come along, Angel May."

"You don't have to go. Remember-"

Jem was not one to dwell on past defeats: it seemed the only message he got from Atticus was insight into the art of cross examination. "Scout, we ain't gonna do anything, we're just goin' to the street light and back."

We strolled silently down the sidewalk, listening to porch swings creaking with the weight of the neighborhood, listening to the soft night-murmurs of the grown people on our street. Occasionally we heard Miss Stephanie Crawford laugh.

"Well?" said Dill.

"Okay," said Jem. "Why don't you go on home, Scout?"

"What are you gonna do?"

Dill and Jem were simply going to peep in the window with the loose shutter to see if they could get a look at Boo Radley, and if I didn't want to go with them I could go straight home and keep my fat flopping mouth shut, that was all.

"But what in the sam holy hill did you wait till tonight?"

Because nobody could see them at night, because Atticus would be so deep in a book he wouldn't hear the Kingdom coming, because if Boo Radley killed them they'd miss school instead of vacation, and because it was easier to see inside a dark house in the dark than in the daytime, did I understand?

"Jem, *please*—"

"Scout, I'm tellin' you for the last time, shut your trap or go home—I declare to the Lord you're gettin' more like a girl every day!"

With that, I had no option but to join them. We thought it was better to go under the high wire fence at the rear of the Radley lot, we stood less chance of being seen. The fence enclosed a large garden and a narrow wooden outhouse.

Jem held up the bottom wire and motioned Dill under it. I followed, and held up the wire for Jem. It was a tight squeeze for him. "Don't make a sound," he whispered. "Don't get in a row of collards whatever you do, they'll wake the dead."

With this thought in mind, I made perhaps one step per minute. I moved faster when I saw Jem far ahead beckoning in the moonlight. We came to the gate that divided the garden from the back yard. Jem touched it. The gate squeaked.

"Spit on it," whispered Dill.

"You've got us in a box, Jem," I muttered. "We can't get out of here so easy."

to have a chew and she said no thanks, that—chewing gum cleaved to her palate and rendered her speechless," said Jem carefully. "Doesn't that sound nice?"

"Yeah, she can say nice things sometimes. She wouldn't have a watch and chain anyway."

"Dear sir," said Jem. "We appreciate the—no, we appreciate everything which you have put into the tree for us. Yours very truly, Jeremy Atticus Finch."

"He won't know who you are if you sign it like that, Jem."

Jem erased his name and wrote, "Jem Finch." I signed, "Jean Louise Finch (Scout)," beneath it. Jem put the note in an envelope.

Next morning on the way to school he ran ahead of me and stopped at the tree. Jem was facing me when he looked up, and I saw him go stark white.

"*Scout!*"

I ran to him.

Someone had filled our knot-hole with cement.

"Don't you cry, now, Scout… don't cry now, don't you worry-" he muttered at me all the way to school.

When we went home for dinner Jem bolted his food, ran to the porch and stood on the steps. I followed him. "Hasn't passed by yet," he said.

Next day Jem repeated his vigil and was rewarded. "Hidy do, Mr. Nathan," he said.

"Morning Jem, Scout," said Mr. Radley, as he went by. "Mr. Radley," said Jem.

Mr. Radley turned around.

"Mr. Radley, ah—did you put cement in that hole in that tree

"Oh, no sir!" Jem pulled out his grandfather's watch that Atticus let him carry once a week if Jem were careful with it. On the days he carried the watch, Jem walked on eggs. "Atticus, if it's all right with you, I'd rather have this one instead. Maybe I can fix it."

When the new wore off his grandfather's watch, and carrying it became a day's burdensome task, Jem no longer felt the necessity of ascertaining the hour every five minutes.

He did a fair job, only one spring and two tiny pieces left over, but the watch would not run. "Oh-h," he sighed, "it'll never go. Scout—?"

"Huh?"

"You reckon we oughta write a letter to whoever's leaving us these things?" "That'd be right nice, Jem, we can thank 'em—what's wrong?"

Jem was holding his ears, shaking his head from side to side. "I don't get it, I just don't get it—I don't know why, Scout…" He looked toward the livingroom. "I've gotta good mind to tell Atticus—no, I reckon not."

"I'll tell him for you."

"No, don't do that, Scout. Scout?" "Wha-t?"

He had been on the verge of telling me something all evening; his face would brighten and he would lean toward me, then he would change his mind. He changed it again. "Oh, nothin'."

"Here, let's write a letter." I pushed a tablet and pencil under his nose. "Okay. Dear Mister…"

"How do you know it's a man? I bet it's Miss Maudie—been bettin' that for a long time."

"Ar-r, Miss Maudie can't chew gum—" Jem broke into a grin. "You know, she can talk real pretty sometimes. One time I asked her

"Sh-h. Spit on it, Scout."

We spat ourselves dry, and Jem opened the gate slowly, lifting it aside and resting it on the fence. We were in the back yard.

The back of the Radley house was less inviting than the front: a ramshackle porch ran the width of the house; there were two doors and two dark windows between the doors. Instead of a column, a rough two-by-four supported one end of the roof. An old Franklin stove sat in a corner of the porch; above it a hat-rack mirror caught the moon and shone eerily.

"Ar-r," said Jem softly, lifting his foot. "'Smatter?"

"Chickens," he breathed.

That we would be obliged to dodge the unseen from all directions was confirmed when Dill ahead of us spelled G-o-d in a whisper. We crept to the side of the house, around to the window with the hanging shutter. The sill was several inches taller than Jem.

"Give you a hand up," he muttered to Dill. "Wait, though." Jem grabbed his left wrist and my right wrist, I grabbed my left wrist and Jem's right wrist, we crouched, and Dill sat on our saddle. We raised him and he caught the window sill. "Hurry," Jem whispered, "we can't last much longer."

Dill punched my shoulder, and we lowered him to the ground. "What'd you see?"

"Nothing. Curtains. There's a little teeny light way off somewhere, though."

"Let's get away from here," breathed Jem. "Let's go 'round in back again. Sh-h," he warned me, as I was about to protest.

"Let's try the back window."

"Dill, *no*," I said.

Dill stopped and let Jem go ahead. When Jem put his foot on the bottom step, the step squeaked. He stood still, then tried his weight by degrees. The step was silent. Jem skipped two steps, put his foot on the porch, heaved himself to it, and teetered a long moment. He regained his balance and dropped to his knees. He crawled to the window, raised his head and looked in.

Then I saw the shadow. It was the shadow of a man with a hat on. At first I thought it was a tree, but there was no wind blowing, and tree-trunks never walked. The back porch was bathed in moonlight, and the shadow, crisp as toast, moved across the porch toward Jem.

Dill saw it next. He put his hands to his face.

When it crossed Jem, Jem saw it. He put his arms over his head and went rigid.

The shadow stopped about a foot beyond Jem. Its arm came out from its side, dropped, and was still. Then it turned and moved back across Jem, walked along the porch and off the side of the house, returning as it had come.

Jem leaped off the porch and galloped toward us. He flung open the gate, danced Dill and me through, and shooed us between two rows of swishing collards.

Halfway through the collards I tripped; as I tripped the roar of a shotgun shattered the neighborhood.

Dill and Jem dived beside me. Jem's breath came in sobs: "Fence by the schoolyard!—hurry, Scout!"

Jem held the bottom wire; Dill and I rolled through and were halfway to the shelter of the schoolyard's solitary oak when we sensed that Jem was not with us. We ran back and found him struggling in the fence, kicking his pants off to get loose. He ran to the oak tree in his shorts.

"Mr. Avery just does like this. I mean carves."

Mr. Avery averaged a stick of stovewood per week; he honed it down to a toothpick and chewed it.

"There's old Miss Stephanie Crawford's sweetheart," I said.

"He carves all right, but he lives down the country. When would he ever pay any attention to us?"

"Maybe he sits on the porch and looks at us instead of Miss Stephanie. If I was him, I would."

Jem stared at me so long I asked what was the matter, but got Nothing, Scout for an answer. When we went home, Jem put the dolls in his trunk.

Less than two weeks later we found a whole package of chewing gum, which we enjoyed, the fact that everything on the Radley Place was poison having slipped Jem's memory.

The following week the knot-hole yielded a tarnished medal. Jem showed it to Atticus, who said it was a spelling medal, that before we were born the Maycomb County schools had spelling contests and awarded medals to the winners. Atticus said someone must have lost it, and had we asked around? Jem camel-kicked me when I tried to say where we had found it. Jem asked Atticus if he remembered anybody who ever won one, and Atticus said no.

Our biggest prize appeared four days later. It was a pocket watch that wouldn't run, on a chain with an aluminum knife.

"You reckon it's white gold, Jem?"

"Don't know. I'll show it to Atticus."

Atticus said it would probably be worth ten dollars, knife, chain and all, if it were new. "Did you swap with somebody at school?" he asked.

he went through a brief Egyptian Period that baffled me—he tried to walk flat a great deal, sticking one arm in front of him and one in back of him, putting one foot behind the other. He declared Egyptians walked that way; I said if they did I didn't see how they got anything done, but Jem said they accomplished more than the Americans ever did, they invented toilet paper and perpetual embalming, and asked where would we be today if they hadn't? Atticus told me to delete the adjectives and I'd have the facts.

There are no clearly defined seasons in South Alabama; summer drifts into autumn, and autumn is sometimes never followed by winter, but turns to a days- old spring that melts into summer again. That fall was a long one, hardly cool enough for a light jacket. Jem and I were trotting in our orbit one mild October afternoon when our knot-hole stopped us again. Something white was inside this time.

Jem let me do the honors: I pulled out two small images carved in soap. One was the figure of a boy, the other wore a crude dress. Before I remembered that there was no such thing as hoo-dooing, I shrieked and threw them down.

Jem snatched them up. "What's the matter with you?" he yelled. He rubbed the figures free of red dust. "These are good," he said. "I've never seen any these good."

He held them down to me. They were almost perfect miniatures of two children. The boy had on shorts, and a shock of soapy hair fell to his eyebrows. I looked up at Jem. A point of straight brown hair kicked downwards from his part. I had never noticed it before. Jem looked from the girl-doll to me. The girl-doll wore bangs. So did I.

"These are us," he said. "Who did 'em, you reckon?"

"Who do we know around here who whittles?" he asked. "Mr. Avery."

Safely behind it, we gave way to numbness, but Jem's mind was racing: "We gotta get home, they'll miss us."

We ran across the schoolyard, crawled under the fence to Deer's Pasture behind our house, climbed our back fence and were at the back steps before Jem would let us pause to rest.

Respiration normal, the three of us strolled as casually as we could to the front yard. We looked down the street and saw a circle of neighbors at the Radley front gate.

"We better go down there," said Jem. "They'll think it's funny if we don't show up."

Mr. Nathan Radley was standing inside his gate, a shotgun broken across his arm. Atticus was standing beside Miss Maudie and Miss Stephanie Crawford. Miss Rachel and Mr. Avery were near by. None of them saw us come up.

We eased in beside Miss Maudie, who looked around. "Where were you all, didn't you hear the commotion?"

"What happened?" asked Jem.

"Mr. Radley shot at a Negro in his collard patch."

"Oh. Did he hit him?"

"No," said Miss Stephanie. "Shot in the air. Scared him pale, though. Says if anybody sees a white nigger around, that's the one. Says he's got the other barrel waitin' for the next sound he hears in that patch, an' next time he won't aim high, be it dog, nigger, or—Jem *Finch!*"

"Ma'am?" asked Jem.

Atticus spoke. "Where're your pants, son?"

"Pants, sir?"

"Pants."

It was no use. In his shorts before God and everybody. I sighed.

"Ah—Mr. Finch?"

In the glare from the streetlight, I could see Dill hatching one: his eyes widened, his fat cherub face grew rounder.

"What is it, Dill?" asked Atticus.

"Ah—I won 'em from him," he said vaguely.

"Won them? How?"

Dill's hand sought the back of his head. He brought it forward and across his forehead. "We were playin' strip poker up yonder by the fishpool," he said.

Jem and I relaxed. The neighbors seemed satisfied: they all stiffened. But what was strip poker?

We had no chance to find out: Miss Rachel went off like the town fire siren: "Do- o-o Jee-sus, Dill Harris! Gamblin' by my fishpool? I'll strip-poker you, sir!"

Atticus saved Dill from immediate dismemberment. "Just a minute, Miss Rachel," he said. "I've never heard of 'em doing that before. Were you all playing cards?"

Jem fielded Dill's fly with his eyes shut: "No sir, just with matches." I admired my brother. Matches were dangerous, but cards were fatal.

"Jem, Scout," said Atticus, "I don't want to hear of poker in any form again. Go by Dill's and get your pants, Jem. Settle it yourselves."

"Don't worry, Dill," said Jem, as we trotted up the sidewalk, "she ain't gonna get you. He'll talk her out of it. That was fast thinkin', son. Listen… you hear?"

when we get home. They'd been sewed up. Not like a lady sewed 'em, like somethin' I'd try to do. All crooked. It's almost like—"

"—somebody knew you were comin' back for 'em."

Jem shuddered. "Like somebody was readin' my mind… like somebody could tell what I was gonna do. Can't anybody tell what I'm gonna do lest they know me, can they, Scout?"

Jem's question was an appeal. I reassured him: "Can't anybody tell what you're gonna do lest they live in the house with you, and even I can't tell sometimes."

We were walking past our tree. In its knot-hole rested a ball of gray twine. "Don't take it, Jem," I said. "This is somebody's hidin' place."

"I don't think so, Scout."

"Yes it is. Somebody like Walter Cunningham comes down here every recess and hides his things—and we come along and take 'em away from him. Listen, let's leave it and wait a couple of days. If it ain't gone then, we'll take it, okay?"

"Okay, you might be right," said Jem. "It must be some little kid's place—hides his things from the bigger folks. You know it's only when school's in that we've found things."

"Yeah," I said, "but we never go by here in the summertime."

We went home. Next morning the twine was where we had left it. When it was still there on the third day, Jem pocketed it. From then on, we considered everything we found in the knot-hole our property. -

The second grade was grim, but Jem assured me that the older I got the better school would be, that he started off the same way, and it was not until one reached the sixth grade that one learned anything of value. The sixth grade seemed to please him from the beginning:

Chapter 7

Jem stayed moody and silent for a week. As Atticus had once advised me to do, I tried to climb into Jem's skin and walk around in it: if I had gone alone to the Radley Place at two in the morning, my funeral would have been held the next afternoon. So I left Jem alone and tried not to bother him.

School started. The second grade was as bad as the first, only worse—they still flashed cards at you and wouldn't let you read or write. Miss Caroline's progress next door could be estimated by the frequency of laughter; however, the usual crew had flunked the first grade again, and were helpful in keeping order. The only thing good about the second grade was that this year I had to stay as late as Jem, and we usually walked home together at three o'clock.

One afternoon when we were crossing the schoolyard toward home, Jem suddenly said: "There's something I didn't tell you."

As this was his first complete sentence in several days, I encouraged him: "About what?"

"About that night."

"You've never told me anything about that night," I said.

Jem waved my words away as if fanning gnats. He was silent for a while, then he said, "When I went back for my breeches—they were all in a tangle when I was gettin' out of 'em, I couldn't get 'em loose. When I went back—" Jem took a deep breath. "When I went back, they were folded across the fence… like they were expectin' me."

"Across—"

"And something else—" Jem's voice was flat. "Show you

We stopped, and heard Atticus's voice:"…not serious… they all go through it, Miss Rachel…"

Dill was comforted, but Jem and I weren't. There was the problem of Jem showing up some pants in the morning.

"'d give you some of mine," said Dill, as we came to Miss Rachel's steps. Jem said he couldn't get in them, but thanks anyway. We said good-bye, and Dill went inside the house. He evidently remembered he was engaged to me, for he ran back out and kissed me swiftly in front of Jem. "Yawl write, hear?" he bawled after us.

Had Jem's pants been safely on him, we would not have slept much anyway.

Every night-sound I heard from my cot on the back porch was magnified three- fold; every scratch of feet on gravel was Boo Radley seeking revenge, every passing Negro laughing in the night was Boo Radley loose and after us; insects splashing against the screen were Boo Radley's insane fingers picking the wire to pieces; the chinaberry trees were malignant, hovering, alive. I lingered between sleep and wakefulness until I heard Jem murmur.

"Sleep, Little Three-Eyes?"

"Are you crazy?"

"Sh-h. Atticus's light's out."

In the waning moonlight I saw Jem swing his feet to the floor. "I'm goin' after 'em," he said.

I sat upright. "You can't. I won't let you."

He was struggling into his shirt. "I've got to." "You do an' I'll wake up Atticus."

"You do and I'll kill you."

I pulled him down beside me on the cot. I tried to reason with

him. “Mr. Nathan’s gonna find ‘em in the morning, Jem. He knows you lost ’em. When he shows ‘em to Atticus it’ll be pretty bad, that’s all there is to it. Go’n back to bed.”

“That’s what I know,” said Jem. “That’s why I’m goin‘ after ’em.”

I began to feel sick. Going back to that place by himself—I remembered Miss Stephanie: Mr. Nathan had the other barrel waiting for the next sound he heard, be it nigger, dog… Jem knew that better than I.

I was desperate: “Look, it ain’t worth it, Jem. A lickin‘ hurts but it doesn’t last. You’ll get your head shot off, Jem. Please…”

He blew out his breath patiently. “I—it’s like this, Scout,” he muttered. “Atticus ain’t ever whipped me since I can remember. I wanta keep it that way.”

This was a thought. It seemed that Atticus threatened us every other day. “You mean he’s never caught you at anything.”

“Maybe so, but—I just wanta keep it that way, Scout. We shouldn’a done that tonight, Scout.”

It was then, I suppose, that Jem and I first began to part company. Sometimes I did not understand him, but my periods of bewilderment were short-lived. This was beyond me. “Please,” I pleaded, “can’tcha just think about it for a minute— by yourself on that place—”

“Shut up!”

“It’s not like he’d never speak to you again or somethin‘… I’m gonna wake him up, Jem, I swear I am—”

Jem grabbed my pajama collar and wrenched it tight. “Then I’m goin‘ with you—” I choked.

“No you ain’t, you’ll just make noise.”

It was no use. I unlatched the back door and held it while he crept down the steps. It must have been two o’clock. The moon was setting and the lattice-work shadows were fading into fuzzy nothingness. Jem’s white shirt-tail dipped and bobbed like a small ghost dancing away to escape the coming morning. A faint breeze stirred and cooled the sweat running down my sides.

He went the back way, through Deer’s Pasture, across the schoolyard and around to the fence, I thought—at least that was the way he was headed. It would take longer, so it was not time to worry yet. I waited until it was time to worry and listened for Mr. Radley’s shotgun. Then I thought I heard the back fence squeak. It was wishful thinking.

Then I heard Atticus cough. I held my breath. Sometimes when we made a midnight pilgrimage to the bathroom we would find him reading. He said he often woke up during the night, checked on us, and read himself back to sleep. I waited for his light to go on, straining my eyes to see it flood the hall. It stayed off, and I breathed again. The night-crawlers had retired, but ripe chinaberries drummed on the roof when the wind stirred, and the darkness was desolate with the barking of distant dogs.

There he was, returning to me. His white shirt bobbed over the back fence and slowly grew larger. He came up the back steps, latched the door behind him, and sat on his cot. Wordlessly, he held up his pants. He lay down, and for a while I heard his cot trembling. Soon he was still. I did not hear him stir again.