

Chapter 20

“Come on round here, son, I got something that’ll settle your stomach.”

As Mr. Dolphus Raymond was an evil man I accepted his invitation reluctantly, but I followed Dill. Somehow, I didn’t think Atticus would like it if we became friendly with Mr. Raymond, and I knew Aunt Alexandra wouldn’t.

“Here,” he said, offering Dill his paper sack with straws in it. “Take a good sip, it’ll quieten you.”

Dill sucked on the straws, smiled, and pulled at length.

“Hee hee,” said Mr. Raymond, evidently taking delight in corrupting a child. “Dill, you watch out, now,” I warned.

Dill released the straws and grinned. “Scout, it’s nothing but Coca-Cola.”

Mr. Raymond sat up against the tree-trunk. He had been lying on the grass. “You little folks won’t tell on me now, will you? It’d ruin my reputation if you did.”

“You mean all you drink in that sack’s Coca-Cola? Just plain Coca-Cola?”

“Yes ma’am,” Mr. Raymond nodded. I liked his smell: it was of leather, horses, cottonseed. He wore the only English riding boots I had ever seen. “That’s all I drink, most of the time.”

his sleep, but he was seldom reversed, and that was the proof of the pudding. Atticus said he was a good judge.

Presently Judge Taylor returned and climbed into his swivel chair. He took a cigar from his vest pocket and examined it thoughtfully. I punched Dill. Having passed the judge’s inspection, the cigar suffered a vicious bite. “We come down sometimes to watch him,” I explained. “It’s gonna take him the rest of the afternoon, now. You watch.” Unaware of public scrutiny from above, Judge Taylor disposed of the severed end by propelling it expertly to his lips and saying, “Fhluck!” He hit a spittoon so squarely we could hear it slosh. “Bet he was hell with a spitball,” murmured Dill.

As a rule, a recess meant a general exodus, but today people weren’t moving. Even the Idlers who had failed to shame younger men from their seats had remained standing along the walls. I guess Mr. Heck Tate had reserved the county toilet for court officials.

Atticus and Mr. Gilmer returned, and Judge Taylor looked at his watch. “It’s gettin’ on to four,” he said, which was intriguing, as the courthouse clock must have struck the hour at least twice. I had not heard it or felt its vibrations.

“Shall we try to wind up this afternoon?” asked Judge Taylor. “How ‘bout it, Atticus?”

“I think we can,” said Atticus. “How many witnesses you got?”

“One.”

“Well, call him.”

Chapter 19

Thomas Robinson reached around, ran his fingers under his left arm and lifted it. He guided his arm to the Bible and his rubber-like left hand sought contact with the black binding. As he raised his right hand, the useless one slipped off the Bible and hit the clerk's table. He was trying again when Judge Taylor growled, "That'll do, Tom." Tom took the oath and stepped into the witness chair. Atticus very quickly induced him to tell us:

Tom was twenty-five years of age; he was married with three children; he had been in trouble with the law before: he once received thirty days for disorderly conduct.

"It must have been disorderly," said Atticus. "What did it consist of?"

"Got in a fight with another man, he tried to cut me."

"Did he succeed?"

"Yes suh, a little, not enough to hurt. You see, I—" Tom moved his left shoulder. "Yes," said Atticus. "You were both convicted?"

"Yes suh, I had to serve 'cause I couldn't pay the fine. Other fellow paid his'n."

Dill leaned across me and asked Jem what Atticus was doing. Jem said Atticus was showing the jury that Tom had nothing to hide.

"Were you acquainted with Mayella Violet Ewell?"

"Well, Mr. Finch didn't act that way to Mayella and old man Ewell when he cross-examined them. The way that man called him 'boy' all the time an' sneered at him, an' looked around at the jury every time he answered—"

"Well, Dill, after all he's just a Negro."

"I don't care one speck. It ain't right, somehow it ain't right to do 'em that way. Hasn't anybody got any business talkin' like that—it just makes me sick."

"That's just Mr. Gilmer's way, Dill, he does 'em all that way. You've never seen him get good'n down on one yet. Why, when—well, today Mr. Gilmer seemed to me like he wasn't half trying. They do 'em all that way, most lawyers, I mean."

"Mr. Finch doesn't."

"He's not an example, Dill, he's—" I was trying to grope in my memory for a sharp phrase of Miss Maudie Atkinson's. I had it: "He's the same in the courtroom as he is on the public streets."

"That's not what I mean," said Dill.

"I know what you mean, boy," said a voice behind us. We thought it came from the tree-trunk, but it belonged to Mr. Dolphus Raymond. He peered around the trunk at us. "You aren't thin-hided, it just makes you sick, doesn't it?"

“No suh, I didn’t go to be.”

This was as much as I heard of Mr. Gilmer’s cross-examination, because Jem made me take Dill out. For some reason Dill had started crying and couldn’t stop; quietly at first, then his sobs were heard by several people in the balcony. Jem said if I didn’t go with him he’d make me, and Reverend Sykes said I’d better go, so I went. Dill had seemed to be all right that day, nothing wrong with him, but I guessed he hadn’t fully recovered from running away.

“Ain’t you feeling good?” I asked, when we reached the bottom of the stairs.

Dill tried to pull himself together as we ran down the south steps. Mr. Link Deas was a lonely figure on the top step. “Anything happenin’, Scout?” he asked as we went by. “No sir,” I answered over my shoulder. “Dill here, he’s sick.”

“Come on out under the trees,” I said. “Heat got you, I expect.” We chose the fattest live oak and we sat under it.

“It was just him I couldn’t stand,” Dill said.

“Who, Tom?”

“That old Mr. Gilmer doin’ him thataway, talking so hateful to him—”

“Dill, that’s his job. Why, if we didn’t have prosecutors—well, we couldn’t have defense attorneys, I reckon.”

Dill exhaled patiently. “I know all that, Scout. It was the way he said it made me sick, plain sick.”

“He’s supposed to act that way, Dill, he was cross—”

“He didn’t act that way when—”

“Dill, those were his own witnesses.”

asked Atticus.

“Yes suh, I had to pass her place goin’ to and from the field every day.”

“Whose field?”

“I picks for Mr. Link Deas.”

“Were you picking cotton in November?”

“No suh, I works in his yard fall an’ wintertime. I works pretty steady for him all year round, he’s got a lot of pecan trees’n things.”

“You say you had to pass the Ewell place to get to and from work. Is there any other way to go?”

“No suh, none’s I know of.”

“Tom, did she ever speak to you?”

“Why, yes suh, I’d tip m’hat when I’d go by, and one day she asked me to come inside the fence and bust up a chiffarobe for her.”

“When did she ask you to chop up the—the chiffarobe?”

“Mr. Finch, it was way last spring. I remember it because it was choppin’ time and I had my hoe with me. I said I didn’t have nothin’ but this hoe, but she said she had a hatchet. She give me the hatchet and I broke up the chiffarobe. She said, ‘I reckon I’ll hafta give you a nickel, won’t I?’ an’ I said, ‘No ma’am, there ain’t no charge.’ Then I went home. Mr. Finch, that was way last spring, way over a year ago.”

“Did you ever go on the place again?”

“Yes suh.”

“When?”

“Well, I went lots of times.”

Judge Taylor instinctively reached for his gavel, but let his hand fall. The murmur below us died without his help.

“Under what circumstances?”

“Please, suh?”

“Why did you go inside the fence lots of times?”

Tom Robinson’s forehead relaxed. “She’d call me in, suh. Seemed like every time I passed by yonder she’d have some little somethin’ for me to do—choppin’ kindlin’, totin’ water for her. She watered them red flowers every day—”

“Were you paid for your services?”

“No suh, not after she offered me a nickel the first time. I was glad to do it, Mr. Ewell didn’t seem to help her none, and neither did the chillun, and I knowed she didn’t have no nickels to spare.”

“Where were the other children?”

“They was always around, all over the place. They’d watch me work, some of ‘em, some of ‘em’d set in the window.”

“Would Miss Mayella talk to you?”

“Yes sir, she talked to me.”

As Tom Robinson gave his testimony, it came to me that Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world. She was even lonelier than Boo Radley, who had not been out of the house in twenty-five years. When Atticus asked had she any friends, she seemed not to know what he meant, then she thought he was making fun of her. She was sad, I thought, as what Jem called a mixed child: white people

inside the house—” “She says she asked you to bust up a chiffarobe, is that right?”

“No suh, it ain’t.”

“Then you say she’s lying, boy?”

Atticus was on his feet, but Tom Robinson didn’t need him. “I don’t say she’s lyin’, Mr. Gilmer, I say she’s mistaken in her mind.”

To the next ten questions, as Mr. Gilmer reviewed Mayella’s version of events, the witness’s steady answer was that she was mistaken in her mind.

“Didn’t Mr. Ewell run you off the place, boy?”

“No suh, I don’t think he did.”

“Don’t think, what do you mean?”

“I mean I didn’t stay long enough for him to run me off.” “You’re very candid about this, why did you run so fast?”

“I says I was scared, suh.”

“If you had a clear conscience, why were you scared?”

“Like I says before, it weren’t safe for any nigger to be in a—fix like that.”

“But you weren’t in a fix—you testified that you were resisting Miss Ewell. Were you so scared that she’d hurt you, you ran, a big buck like you?”

“No suh, I’s scared I’d be in court, just like I am now.”

“Scared of arrest, scared you’d have to face up to what you did?”

“No suh, scared I’d hafta face up to what I didn’t do.”

“Are you being impudent to me, boy?”

"I done 'em both, suh."

"You must have been pretty busy. Why?"

"Why what, suh?"

"Why were you so anxious to do that woman's chores?"

Tom Robinson hesitated, searching for an answer. "Looked like she didn't have nobody to help her, like I says —"

"With Mr. Ewell and seven children on the place, boy?"

"Well, I says it looked like they never help her none—"

"You did all this chopping and work from sheer goodness, boy?" "Tried to help her, I says."

Mr. Gilmer smiled grimly at the jury. "You're a mighty good fellow, it seems— did all this for not one penny?"

"Yes, suh. I felt right sorry for her, she seemed to try more'n the rest of 'em—"

"You felt sorry for *her*, you felt *sorry* for *he*?" Mr. Gilmer seemed ready to rise to the ceiling.

The witness realized his mistake and shifted uncomfortably in the chair. But the damage was done. Below us, nobody liked Tom Robinson's answer. Mr. Gilmer paused a long time to let it sink in.

"Now you went by the house as usual, last November twenty-first," he said, "and she asked you to come in and bust up a chiffarobe?"

"No suh."

"Do you deny that you went by the house?"

"No suh—she said she had somethin' for me to do

wouldn't have anything to do with her because she lived among pigs; Negroes wouldn't have anything to do with her because she was white. She couldn't live like Mr. Dolphus Raymond, who preferred the company of Negroes, because she didn't own a riverbank and she wasn't from a fine old family. Nobody said, "That's just their way," about the Ewells. Maycomb gave them Christmas baskets, welfare money, and the back of its hand. Tom Robinson was probably the only person who was ever decent to her. But she said he took advantage of her, and when she stood up she looked at him as if he were dirt beneath her feet.

"Did you ever," Atticus interrupted my meditations, "at any time, go on the Ewell property—did you ever set foot on the Ewell property without an express invitation from one of them?"

"No suh, Mr. Finch, I never did. I wouldn't do that, suh."

Atticus sometimes said that one way to tell whether a witness was lying or telling the truth was to listen rather than watch: I applied his test—Tom denied it three times in one breath, but quietly, with no hint of whining in his voice, and I found myself believing him in spite of his protesting too much. He seemed to be a respectable Negro, and a respectable Negro would never go up into somebody's yard of his own volition.

"Tom, what happened to you on the evening of November twenty-first of last year?"

Below us, the spectators drew a collective breath and leaned forward. Behind us, the Negroes did the same.

Tom was a black-velvet Negro, not shiny, but soft black velvet. The whites of his eyes shone in his face, and when he

spoke we saw flashes of his teeth. If he had been whole, he would have been a fine specimen of a man.

“Mr. Finch,” he said, “I was goin’ home as usual that evenin’, an’ when I passed the Ewell place Miss Mayella were on the porch, like she said she were. It seemed real quiet like, an’ I didn’t quite know why. I was studyin’ why, just passin’ by, when she says for me to come there and help her a minute. Well, I went inside the fence an’ looked around for some kindlin’ to work on, but I didn’t see none, and she says, ‘Naw, I got somethin’ for you to do in the house. Th’ old door’s off its hinges an’ fall’s comin’ on pretty fast.’ I said you got a screwdriver, Miss Mayella? She said she sho’ had. Well, I went up the steps an’ she motioned me to come inside, and I went in the front room an’ looked at the door. I said Miss Mayella, this door look all right. I pulled it back’n forth and those hinges was all right. Then she shet the door in my face. Mr. Finch, I was wonderin’ why it was so quiet like, an’ it come to me that there weren’t a chile on the place, not a one of ’em, and I said Miss Mayella, where the chillun?”

Tom’s black velvet skin had begun to shine, and he ran his hand over his face.

“I say where the chillun?” he continued, “an’ she says—she was laughin’, sort of—she says they all gone to town to get ice creams. She says, ‘took me a slap year to save seb’m nickels, but I done it. They all gone to town.’”

Tom’s discomfort was not from the humidity.

“What did you say then, Tom?” asked Atticus.

“I said somethin’ like, why Miss Mayella, that’s right smart o’you to treat ’em. An’ she said, ‘You think so?’ I don’t think she understood what I was thinkin’—I meant it was smart of her to save like that, an’ nice of her to treat em.”

“Yes, but you were convicted, weren’t you?”

Atticus raised his head. “It was a misdemeanor and it’s in the record, Judge.” I thought he sounded tired.

“Witness’ll answer, though,” said Judge Taylor, just as wearily. “Yes suh, I got thirty days.”

I knew that Mr. Gilmer would sincerely tell the jury that anyone who was convicted of disorderly conduct could easily have had it in his heart to take advantage of Mayella Ewell, that was the only reason he cared. Reasons like that helped.

“Robinson, you’re pretty good at busting up chiffarobes and kindling with one hand, aren’t you?”

“Yes, suh, I reckon so.”

“Strong enough to choke the breath out of a woman and sling her to the floor?”

“I never done that, suh.”

“But you are strong enough to?”

“I reckon so, suh.”

“Had your eye on her a long time, hadn’t you, boy?”

“No suh, I never looked at her.”

“Then you were mighty polite to do all that chopping and hauling for her, weren’t you, boy?”

“I was just tryin’ to help her out, suh.”

“That was mighty generous of you, you had chores at home after your regular work, didn’t you?”

“Yes suh.”

“Why didn’t you do them instead of Miss Ewell’s?”

"I just want the whole lot of you to know one thing right now. That boy's worked for me eight years an' I ain't had a speck o'trouble outa him. Not a speck."

"*Shut your mouth, sir!*" Judge Taylor was wide awake and roaring. He was also pink in the face. His speech was miraculously unimpaired by his cigar. "Link Deas," he yelled, "if you have anything you want to say you can say it under oath and at the proper time, but until then you get out of this room, you hear me? Get out of this room, sir, you hear me? I'll be damned if I'll listen to this case again!"

Judge Taylor looked daggers at Atticus, as if daring him to speak, but Atticus had ducked his head and was laughing into his lap. I remembered something he had said about Judge Taylor's ex cathedra remarks sometimes exceeding his duty, but that few lawyers ever did anything about them. I looked at Jem, but Jem shook his head. "It ain't like one of the jurymen got up and started talking," he said. "I think it'd be different then. Mr. Link was just disturbin' the peace or something."

Judge Taylor told the reporter to expunge anything he happened to have written down after Mr. Finch if you were a nigger like me you'd be scared too, and told the jury to disregard the interruption. He looked suspiciously down the middle aisle and waited, I suppose, for Mr. Link Deas to effect total departure. Then he said, "Go ahead, Mr. Gilmer."

"You were given thirty days once for disorderly conduct, Robinson?" asked Mr. Gilmer.

"Yes suh."

"What'd the nigger look like when you got through with him?"

"He beat me, Mr. Gilmer."

"I understand you, Tom. Go on," said Atticus.

"Well, I said I best be goin', I couldn't do nothin' for her, an' she says oh yes I could, an' I ask her what, and she says to just step on that chair yonder an' git that box down from on top of the chiffarobe."

"Not the same chiffarobe you busted up?" asked Atticus.

The witness smiled. "Naw suh, another one. Most as tall as the room. So I done what she told me, an' I was just reachin' when the next thing I knows she—she'd grabbed me round the legs, grabbed me round th' legs, Mr. Finch. She scared me so bad I hopped down an' turned the chair over—that was the only thing, only furniture, 'sturbed in that room, Mr. Finch, when I left it. I swear 'fore God."

"What happened after you turned the chair over?"

Tom Robinson had come to a dead stop. He glanced at Atticus, then at the jury, then at Mr. Underwood sitting across the room.

"Tom, you're sworn to tell the whole truth. Will you tell it?" Tom ran his hand nervously over his mouth.

"What happened after that?"

"Answer the question," said Judge Taylor. One-third of his cigar had vanished.

"Mr. Finch, I got down offa that chair an' turned around an' she sorta jumped on me."

"Jumped on you? Violently?"

"No suh, she—she hugged me. She hugged me round the waist."

This time Judge Taylor's gavel came down with a bang, and as it did the overhead lights went on in the courtroom. Darkness had not come, but the afternoon sun had left the windows. Judge Taylor quickly restored order.

"Then what did she do?"

The witness swallowed hard. "She reached up an' kissed me 'side of th' face. She says she never kissed a grown man before an' she might as well kiss a nigger. She says what her papa do to her don't count. She says, 'Kiss me back, nigger.' I say Miss Mayella lemme outa here an' tried to run but she got her back to the door an' I'da had to push her. I didn't wanta harm her, Mr. Finch, an' I say lemme pass, but just when I say it Mr. Ewell yonder hollered through th' window."

"What did he say?"

Tom Robinson swallowed again, and his eyes widened. "Somethin' not fittin' to say—not fittin' for these folks'n chillun to hear—"

"What did he say, Tom? You *must* tell the jury what he said."

Tom Robinson shut his eyes tight. "He says you goddamn whore, I'll kill ya."

"Then what happened?"

"Mr. Finch, I was runnin' so fast I didn't know what happened."

"Tom, did you rape Mayella Ewell?"

"I did not, suh."

"Did you harm her in any way?"

"I did not, suh."

"Did you resist her advances?"

"Mr. Finch, I tried. I tried to 'thout bein' ugly to her. I didn't wanta be ugly, I didn't wanta push her or nothin'."

It occurred to me that in their own way, Tom Robinson's manners were as good as Atticus's. Until my father explained it to me later, I did not understand the subtlety of Tom's predicament: he would not have dared strike a white woman under any circumstances and expect to live long, so he took the first opportunity to run—a sure sign of guilt.

"Tom, go back once more to Mr. Ewell," said Atticus. "Did he say anything to you?"

"Not anything, suh. He mighta said somethin', but I weren't there—"

"That'll do," Atticus cut in sharply. "What you did hear, who was he talking to?" "Mr. Finch, he were talkin' and lookin' at Miss Mayella."

"Then you ran?"

"I sho' did, suh."

"Why did you run?"

"I was scared, suh."

"Why were you scared?"

"Mr. Finch, if you was a nigger like me, you'd be scared, too."

Atticus sat down. Mr. Gilmer was making his way to the witness stand, but before he got there Mr. Link Deas rose from the audience and announced: