

dangled limply between his knees. He was looking at the floor. He had moved with the same slowness that night in front of the jail, when I thought it took him forever to fold his newspaper and toss it in his chair.

Mr. Tate clumped softly around the porch. "It ain't your decision, Mr. Finch, it's all mine. It's my decision and my responsibility. For once, if you don't see it my way, there's not much you can do about it. If you wanta try, I'll call you a liar to your face. Your boy never stabbed Bob Ewell," he said slowly, "didn't come near a mile of it and now you know it. All he wanted to do was get him and his sister safely home."

Mr. Tate stopped pacing. He stopped in front of Atticus, and his back was to us. "I'm not a very good man, sir, but I am sheriff of Maycomb County. Lived in this town all my life an' I'm goin' on forty-three years old. Know everything that's happened here since before I was born. There's a black boy dead for no reason, and the man responsible for it's dead. Let the dead bury the dead this time, Mr. Finch. Let the dead bury the dead."

Mr. Tate went to the swing and picked up his hat. It was lying beside Atticus. Mr. Tate pushed back his hair and put his hat on.

"I never heard tell that it's against the law for a citizen to do his utmost to prevent a crime from being committed, which is exactly what he did, but maybe you'll say it's my duty to tell the town all about it and not hush it up. Know what'd happen then? All the ladies in Maycomb includin' my wife'd be knocking on his door bringing angel food cakes. To my way of thinkin', Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight—to me, that's a sin. It's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man, it'd be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch."

Mr. Tate was trying to dig a hole in the floor with the toe of his

"Atticus, is Jem dead?"

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

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

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

"Aunty, is Jem dead?"

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

"I don't know."

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

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

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

He came in the door and said, "Good Lord." He walked toward me, said, "You're still standing," and changed his course. He knew every room in the house. He also knew that if I was in bad

shape, so was Jem.

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

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

"Then he's not dead?"

"No-o!" Dr. Reynolds got to his feet. "We can't do much tonight," he said, "except try to make him as comfortable as we can. We'll have to X-ray his arm— looks like he'll be wearing his arm 'way out by his side for a while. Don't worry, though, he'll be as good as new. Boys his age bounce."

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

Dr. Reynolds's small joke made me smile. "Then you don't think he's dead, then?"

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

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

"Yes sir, I'm goin' in to see Jem. Atticus'n'them's in there."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Tate.

Aunt Alexandra had shaded Jem's reading light with a towel,

to know exactly what happened. It was mighty dark out there, black as ink. 'd take somebody mighty used to the dark to make a competent witness..."

"I won't have it," Atticus said softly.

"God damn it, I'm not thinking of Jem!"

Mr. Tate's boot hit the floorboards so hard the lights in Miss Maudie's bedroom went on. Miss Stephanie Crawford's lights went on. Atticus and Mr. Tate looked across the street, then at each other. They waited.

When Mr. Tate spoke again his voice was barely audible. "Mr. Finch, I hate to fight you when you're like this. You've been under a strain tonight no man should ever have to go through. Why you ain't in the bed from it I don't know, but I do know that for once you haven't been able to put two and two together, and we've got to settle this tonight because tomorrow'll be too late. Bob Ewell's got a kitchen knife in his craw."

Mr. Tate added that Atticus wasn't going to stand there and maintain that any boy Jem's size with a busted arm had fight enough left in him to tackle and kill a grown man in the pitch dark.

"Heck," said Atticus abruptly, "that was a switchblade you were waving. Where'd you get it?"

"Took it off a drunk man," Mr. Tate answered coolly.

I was trying to remember. Mr. Ewell was on me... then he went down... Jem must have gotten up. At least I thought...

"Heck?"

"I said I took it off a drunk man downtown tonight. Ewell probably found that kitchen knife in the dump somewhere. Honed it down and bided his time... just bided his time."

Atticus made his way to the swing and sat down. His hands

Atticus wheeled around. His hands dug into his pockets. "Heck, can't you even try to see it my way? You've got children of your own, but I'm older than you. When mine are grown I'll be an old man if I'm still around, but right now I'm—if they don't trust me they won't trust anybody. Jem and Scout know what happened. If they hear of me saying downtown something different happened—Heck, I won't have them any more. I can't live one way in town and another way in my home."

Mr. Tate rocked on his heels and said patiently, "He'd flung Jem down, he stumbled over a root under that tree and—look, I can show you."

Mr. Tate reached in his side pocket and withdrew a long switchblade knife. As he did so, Dr. Reynolds came to the door. "The son—deceased's under that tree, doctor, just inside the schoolyard. Got a flashlight? Better have this one."

"I can ease around and turn my car lights on," said Dr. Reynolds, but he took Mr. Tate's flashlight. "Jem's all right. He won't wake up tonight, I hope, so don't worry. That the knife that killed him, Heck?"

"No sir, still in him. Looked like a kitchen knife from the handle. Ken oughta be there with the hearse by now, doctor, 'night."

Mr. Tate flicked open the knife. "It was like this," he said. He held the knife and pretended to stumble; as he leaned forward his left arm went down in front of him. "See there? Stabbed himself through that soft stuff between his ribs. His whole weight drove it in."

Mr. Tate closed the knife and jammed it back in his pocket. "Scout is eight years old," he said. "She was too scared to know exactly what went on."

"You'd be surprised," Atticus said grimly.

"I'm not sayin' she made it up, I'm sayin' she was too scared

and his room was dim. Jem was lying on his back. There was an ugly mark along one side of his face. His left arm lay out from his body; his elbow was bent slightly, but in the wrong direction. Jem was frowning.

"Jem...?"

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

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

Atticus was standing by Jem's bed.

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

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

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

"Sit down, Mr. Finch," he said pleasantly.

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

Mr. Tate sat in Jem's desk chair. He waited until Atticus returned and settled himself. I wondered why Atticus had not brought a chair for the man in the corner, but Atticus knew the ways of

country people far better than I. Some of his rural clients would park their long-eared steeds under the chinaberry trees in the back yard, and Atticus would often keep appointments on the back steps. This one was probably more comfortable where he was.

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

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

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

“That’s m’costume, Mr. Tate.”

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

“What is it, Heck?” said Atticus.

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

pockets and faced Mr. Tate.

“Heck, you haven’t said it, but I know what you’re thinking. Thank you for it. Jean Louise—” he turned to me. “You said Jem yanked Mr. Ewell off you?”

“Yes sir, that’s what I thought... I—”

“See there, Heck? Thank you from the bottom of my heart, but I don’t want my boy starting out with something like this over his head. Best way to clear the air is to have it all out in the open. Let the county come and bring sandwiches. I don’t want him growing up with a whisper about him, I don’t want anybody saying, ‘Jem Finch... his daddy paid a mint to get him out of that.’ Sooner we get this over with the better.”

“Mr. Finch,” Mr. Tate said stolidly, “Bob Ewell fell on his knife. He killed himself.”

Atticus walked to the corner of the porch. He looked at the wisteria vine. In his own way, I thought, each was as stubborn as the other. I wondered who would give in first. Atticus’s stubbornness was quiet and rarely evident, but in some ways he was as set as the Cunninghams. Mr. Tate’s was unschooled and blunt, but it was equal to my father’s.

“Heck,” Atticus’s back was turned. “If this thing’s hushed up it’ll be a simple denial to Jem of the way I’ve tried to raise him. Sometimes I think I’m a total failure as a parent, but I’m all they’ve got. Before Jem looks at anyone else he looks at me, and I’ve tried to live so I can look squarely back at him... if I connived at something like this, frankly I couldn’t meet his eye, and the day I can’t do that I’ll know I’ve lost him. I don’t want to lose him and Scout, because they’re all I’ve got.”

“Mr. Finch.” Mr. Tate was still planted to the floorboards. “Bob Ewell fell on his knife. I can prove it.”

Anyway, it'll come before county court—"

"What will, Mr. Finch?" Mr. Tate uncrossed his legs and leaned forward.

"Of course it was clear-cut self defense, but I'll have to go to the office and hunt up—"

"Mr. Finch, do you think Jem killed Bob Ewell? Do you think that?"

"You heard what Scout said, there's no doubt about it. She said Jem got up and yanked him off her—he probably got hold of Ewell's knife somehow in the dark... we'll find out tomorrow."

"Mis-ter Finch, hold on," said Mr. Tate. "Jem never stabbed Bob Ewell."

Atticus was silent for a moment. He looked at Mr. Tate as if he appreciated what he said. But Atticus shook his head.

"Heck, it's mighty kind of you and I know you're doing it from that good heart of yours, but don't start anything like that."

Mr. Tate got up and went to the edge of the porch. He spat into the shrubbery, then thrust his hands into his hip pockets and faced Atticus. "Like what?" he said.

"I'm sorry if I spoke sharply, Heck," Atticus said simply, "but nobody's hushing this up. I don't live that way."

"Nobody's gonna hush anything up, Mr. Finch."

Mr. Tate's voice was quiet, but his boots were planted so solidly on the porch floorboards it seemed that they grew there. A curious contest, the nature of which eluded me, was developing between my father and the sheriff.

It was Atticus's turn to get up and go to the edge of the porch. He said, "H'm," and spat dryly into the yard. He put his hands in his

Chapter 29

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

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

"Are you sure?" Atticus said bleakly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Cecil?"

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

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

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

"You yelled, what?"

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

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

Atticus said he didn't. He had the radio on. Aunt Alexandra

front porch. There are plenty of chairs out there, and it's still warm enough."

I wondered why Atticus was inviting us to the front porch instead of the livingroom, then I understood. The livingroom lights were awfully strong.

We filed out, first Mr. Tate—Atticus was waiting at the door for him to go ahead of him. Then he changed his mind and followed Mr. Tate.

People have a habit of doing everyday things even under the oddest conditions. I was no exception: "Come along, Mr. Arthur," I heard myself saying, "you don't know the house real well. I'll just take you to the porch, sir."

He looked down at me and nodded.

I led him through the hall and past the livingroom.

"Won't you have a seat, Mr. Arthur? This rocking-chair's nice and comfortable."

My small fantasy about him was alive again: he would be sitting on the porch... right pretty spell we're having, isn't it, Mr. Arthur?

Yes, a right pretty spell. Feeling slightly unreal, I led him to the chair farthest from Atticus and Mr. Tate. It was in deep shadow. Boo would feel more comfortable in the dark.

Atticus was sitting in the swing, and Mr. Tate was in a chair next to him. The light from the livingroom windows was strong on them. I sat beside Boo.

"Well, Heck," Atticus was saying, "I guess the thing to do—good Lord, I'm losing my memory..." Atticus pushed up his glasses and pressed his fingers to his eyes. "Jem's not quite thirteen... no, he's already thirteen—I can't remember.

Chapter 30

“Mr. Arthur, honey,” said Atticus, gently correcting me. “Jean Louise, this is Mr. Arthur Radley. I believe he already knows you.”

If Atticus could blandly introduce me to Boo Radley at a time like this, well—that was Atticus.

Boo saw me run instinctively to the bed where Jem was sleeping, for the same shy smile crept across his face. Hot with embarrassment, I tried to cover up by covering Jem up.

“Ah-ah, don’t touch him,” Atticus said.

Mr. Heck Tate sat looking intently at Boo through his horn-rimmed glasses. He was about to speak when Dr. Reynolds came down the hall.

“Everybody out,” he said, as he came in the door. “Evenin’, Arthur, didn’t notice you the first time I was here.”

Dr. Reynolds’s voice was as breezy as his step, as though he had said it every evening of his life, an announcement that astounded me even more than being in the same room with Boo Radley. Of course... even Boo Radley got sick sometimes, I thought. But on the other hand I wasn’t sure.

Dr. Reynolds was carrying a big package wrapped in newspaper. He put it down on Jem’s desk and took off his coat. “You’re quite satisfied he’s alive, now? Tell you how I knew. When I tried to examine him he kicked me. Had to put him out good and proper to touch him. So scat,” he said to me.

“Er—” said Atticus, glancing at Boo. “Heck, let’s go out on the

had hers going in her bedroom. He remembered because she told him to turn his down a bit so she could hear hers. Atticus smiled. “I always play a radio too loud.”

“I wonder if the neighbors heard anything...” said Mr. Tate.

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

“Go ahead, Scout,” Mr. Tate said.

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

“How’s that?” asked Mr. Tate, startled.

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

Mr. Tate rubbed his chin. “I wondered why he had those marks on him, His sleeves were perforated with little holes. There were one or two little puncture marks on his arms to match the holes. Let me see that thing if you will, sir.”

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

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

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

“Don’t like to contradict you, Mr. Finch—wasn’t crazy, mean as hell. Low-down skunk with enough liquor in him to make him

brave enough to kill children. He'd never have met you face to face."

Atticus shook his head. "I can't conceive of a man who'd—"

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

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

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

"Yes sir. When we got under the tree—"

"How'd you know you were under the tree, you couldn't see thunder out there." "I was barefooted, and Jem says the ground's always cooler under a tree."

"We'll have to make him a deputy, go ahead."

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

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

"And then?" Mr. Tate was looking at me sharply.

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

"Who was it?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Hey, Boo," I said.