

~~but now that I am I'll say this: Atticus Finch is the same in his house as he is on the public streets. How'd you like some fresh poundcake to take home?"~~

~~I liked it very much.~~

Next morning when I awakened I found Jem and Dill in the back yard deep in conversation. When I joined them, as usual they said go away.

"Will not. This yard's as much mine as it is yours, Jem Finch. I got just as much right to play in it as you have."

Dill and Jem emerged from a brief huddle: "If you stay you've got to do what we tell you," Dill warned.

"We-ll," I said, "who's so high and mighty all of a sudden?"

"If you don't say you'll do what we tell you, we ain't gonna tell you anything," Dill continued.

"You act like you grew ten inches in the night! All right, what is it?"

Jem said placidly, "We are going to give a note to Boo Radley."

"Just how?" I was trying to fight down the automatic terror rising in me. It was all right for Miss Maudie to talk—she was old and snug on her porch. It was different for us.

Jem was merely going to put the note on the end of a fishing pole and stick it through the shutters. If anyone came along, Dill would ring the bell.

Dill raised his right hand. In it was my mother's silver dinner-bell.

"I'm goin' around to the side of the house," said Jem. "We looked yesterday from across the street, and there's a shutter loose. Think maybe I can make it stick on the window sill, at least."

"Jem—"

"Now you're in it and you can't get out of it, you'll just stay in it, Miss Priss!"

"Okay, okay, but I don't want a watch. Jem, somebody was—"

"Yes you will, you'll watch the back end of the lot and Dill's gonna watch the front of the house an' up the street, an' if anybody comes he'll ring the bell. That

clear?"

"All right then. What'd you write him?"

Dill said, "We're askin' him real politely to come out sometimes, and tell us what he does in there—we said we wouldn't hurt him and we'd buy him an ice cream."

"You all've gone crazy, he'll kill us!"

Dill said, "It's my idea. I figure if he'd come out and sit a spell with us he might feel better."

"How do you know he don't feel good?"

"Well how'd you feel if you'd been shut up for a hundred years with nothin' but cats to eat? I bet he's got a beard down to here—" "Like your daddy's?"

"He ain't got a beard, he—" Dill stopped, as if trying to remember.

"Uh huh, caughtcha," I said. "You said 'fore you were off the train good your daddy had a black beard—"

"If it's all the same to you he shaved it off last summer! Yeah, an' I've got the letter to prove it—he sent me two dollars, too!"

"Keep on—I reckon he even sent you a mounted police uniform! That'n never showed up, did it? You just keep on tellin' 'em, son—"

Dill Harris could tell the biggest ones I ever heard. Among other things, he had been up in a mail plane seventeen times, he had been to Nova Scotia, he had seen an elephant, and his granddaddy was Brigadier General Joe Wheeler and left him his sword.

"You all hush," said Jem. He scuttled beneath the house and came out with a yellow bamboo pole. "Reckon this is long enough to reach from the sidewalk?"

"Anybody who's brave enough to go up and touch the house hadn't oughta use a fishin' pole," I said. "Why don't you just knock the front door down?"

"This—is—different," said Jem, "how many times do I have to tell you that?"

Dill took a piece of paper from his pocket and gave it to Jem. The three of us walked cautiously toward the old house. Dill remained at the light-pole on the front corner of the lot, and Jem and I edged down the sidewalk parallel to the side of the house. I walked beyond Jem and stood where I could see around the curve.