

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."

"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

"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?"

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.

"I'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.