

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.”

“Then you just pretend you’re half—? I beg your pardon, sir,” I caught myself. “I didn’t mean to be—”

Mr. Raymond chuckled, not at all offended, and I tried to frame a discreet question: “Why do you do like you do?”

“Wh—oh yes, you mean why do I pretend? Well, it’s very simple,” he said. “Some folks don’t—like the way I live. Now I could say the hell with ‘em, I don’t care if they don’t like it. I do say I don’t care if they don’t like it, right enough— but I don’t say the hell with ‘em, see?”

Dill and I said, “No sir.”

“I try to give ‘em a reason, you see. It helps folks if they can latch onto a reason. When I come to town, which is seldom, if I weave a little and drink out of this sack, folks can say Dolphus Raymond’s in the clutches of whiskey—that’s why he won’t change his ways. He can’t help himself, that’s why he lives the way he does.”

“That ain’t honest, Mr. Raymond, making yourself out badder’n you are already —”

“It ain’t honest but it’s mighty helpful to folks. Secretly, Miss Finch, I’m not much of a drinker, but you see they could never, never understand that I live like I do because that’s the way I want to live.”

I had a feeling that I shouldn’t be here listening to this sinful man who had mixed children and didn’t care who knew it, but he was fascinating. I had never encountered a being who deliberately perpetrated fraud against himself. But why had he entrusted us with his deepest secret? I asked him why.

“Because you’re children and you can understand it,” he said, “and because I heard that one—”

He jerked his head at Dill: “Things haven’t caught up with that one’s instinct yet. Let him get a little older and he won’t get sick and cry. Maybe things’ll strike him as being—not quite right, say, but he won’t cry, not when he gets a few years on him.”

“Cry about what, Mr. Raymond?” Dill’s maleness was beginning to assert itself.

“Cry about the simple hell people give other people—without even thinking. Cry about the hell white people give colored folks, without even stopping to think that they’re people, too.”

“Atticus says cheatin’ a colored man is ten times worse than cheatin’ a white man,” I muttered. “Says it’s the worst thing you can do.”

Mr. Raymond said, “I don’t reckon it’s—Miss Jean Louise, you don’t know your pa’s not a run-of-the-mill man, it’ll take a few years for that to sink in—you haven’t seen enough of the world yet. You haven’t even seen this town, but all you gotta do is step back inside the courthouse.”

Which reminded me that we were missing nearly all of Mr. Gilmer’s cross-examination. I looked at the sun, and it was dropping fast behind the store-tops on the west side of the square. Between two fires, I could not decide which I wanted to jump into: Mr. Raymond or the 5th Judicial Circuit Court. “C’mon, Dill,” I said. “You all right, now?”

“Yeah. Glad t’ve metcha, Mr. Raymond, and thanks for the drink, it was mighty settlin’.”

We raced back to the courthouse, up the steps, up two flights of stairs, and edged our way along the balcony rail. Reverend Sykes had saved our seats.

The courtroom was still, and again I wondered where

the babies were. Judge Taylor's cigar was a brown speck in the center of his mouth; Mr. Gilmer was writing on one of the yellow pads on his table, trying to outdo the court reporter, whose hand was jerking rapidly. "Shoot," I muttered, "we missed it."

Atticus was halfway through his speech to the jury. He had evidently pulled some papers from his briefcase that rested beside his chair, because they were on his table. Tom Robinson was toying with them.

"...absence of any corroborative evidence, this man was indicted on a capital charge and is now on trial for his life..."

I punched Jem. "How long's he been at it?"

"He's just gone over the evidence," Jem whispered, "and we're gonna win, Scout. I don't see how we can't. He's been at it 'bout five minutes. He made it as plain and easy as—well, as I'da explained it to you. You could've understood it, even."

"Did Mr. Gilmer—?"

"Sh-h. Nothing new, just the usual. Hush now."

We looked down again. Atticus was speaking easily, with the kind of detachment he used when he dictated a letter. He walked slowly up and down in front of the jury, and the jury seemed to be attentive: their heads were up, and they followed Atticus's route with what seemed to be appreciation. I guess it was because Atticus wasn't a thunderer.

Atticus paused, then he did something he didn't ordinarily do. He unhitched his watch and chain and placed them on the table, saying, "With the court's permission—"

Judge Taylor nodded, and then Atticus did something I never saw him do before or since, in public or in private:

he unbuttoned his vest, unbuttoned his collar, loosened his tie, and took off his coat. He never loosened a scrap of his clothing until he undressed at bedtime, and to Jem and me, this was the equivalent of him standing before us stark naked. We exchanged horrified glances.

Atticus put his hands in his pockets, and as he returned to the jury, I saw his gold collar button and the tips of his pen and pencil winking in the light.

“Gentlemen,” he said. Jem and I again looked at each other: Atticus might have said, “Scout.” His voice had lost its aridity, its detachment, and he was talking to the jury as if they were folks on the post office corner.

“Gentlemen,” he was saying, “I shall be brief, but I would like to use my remaining time with you to remind you that this case is not a difficult one, it requires no minute sifting of complicated facts, but it does require you to be sure beyond all reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the defendant. To begin with, this case should never have come to trial. This case is as simple as black and white.

“The state has not produced one iota of medical evidence to the effect that the crime Tom Robinson is charged with ever took place. It has relied instead upon the testimony of two witnesses whose evidence has not only been called into serious question on cross-examination, but has been flatly contradicted by the defendant. The defendant is not guilty, but somebody in this courtroom is.

“I have nothing but pity in my heart for the chief witness for the state, but my pity does not extend so far as to her putting a man’s life at stake, which she has done in an effort to get rid of her own guilt.

“I say guilty, gentlemen, because it was guilt that motivated her. She has committed no crime, she has merely

broken a rigid and time-honored code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with. She is the victim of cruel poverty and ignorance, but I cannot pity her: she is white. She knew full well the enormity of her offense, but because her desires were stronger than the code she was breaking, she persisted in breaking it. She persisted, and her subsequent reaction is something that all of us have known at one time or another. She did something every child has done—she tried to put the evidence of her offense away from her. But in this case she was no child hiding stolen contraband: she struck out at her victim—of necessity she must put him away from her—he must be removed from her presence, from this world. She must destroy the evidence of her offense.

“What was the evidence of her offense? Tom Robinson, a human being. She must put Tom Robinson away from her. Tom Robinson was her daily reminder of what she did. What did she do? She tempted a Negro.

“She was white, and she tempted a Negro. She did something that in our society is unspeakable: she kissed a black man. Not an old Uncle, but a strong young Negro man. No code mattered to her before she broke it, but it came crashing down on her afterwards.

“Her father saw it, and the defendant has testified as to his remarks. What did her father do? We don’t know, but there is circumstantial evidence to indicate that Mayella Ewell was beaten savagely by someone who led almost exclusively with his left. We do know in part what Mr. Ewell did: he did what any God-fearing, persevering, respectable white man would do under the circumstances—he swore out a warrant, no doubt signing it with his left hand, and Tom Robinson now sits before

you, having taken the oath with the only good hand he possesses—his right hand.

“And so a quiet, respectable, humble Negro who had the unmitigated temerity to ‘feel sorry’ for a white woman has had to put his word against two white people’s. I need not remind you of their appearance and conduct on the stand— you saw them for yourselves. The witnesses for the state, with the exception of the sheriff of Maycomb County, have presented themselves to you gentlemen, to this court, in the cynical confidence that their testimony would not be doubted, confident that you gentlemen would go along with them on the assumption—the evil assumption—that *all* Negroes lie, that *all* Negroes are basically immoral beings, that *all* Negro men are not to be trusted around our women, an assumption one associates with minds of their caliber.

“Which, gentlemen, we know is in itself a lie as black as Tom Robinson’s skin, a lie I do not have to point out to you. You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women—black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire.”

Atticus paused and took out his handkerchief. Then he took off his glasses and wiped them, and we saw another “first”: we had never seen him sweat—he was one of those men whose faces never perspired, but now it was shining tan.

“One more thing, gentlemen, before I quit. Thomas Jefferson once said that all men are created equal, a

phrase that the Yankees and the distaff side of the Executive branch in Washington are fond of hurling at us. There is a tendency in this year of grace, 1935, for certain people to use this phrase out of context, to satisfy all conditions. The most ridiculous example I can think of is that the people who run public education promote the stupid and idle along with the industrious—because all men are created equal, educators will gravely tell you, the children left behind suffer terrible feelings of inferiority. We know all men are not created equal in the sense some people would have us believe—some people are smarter than others, some people have more opportunity because they're born with it, some men make more money than others, some ladies make better cakes than others—some people are born gifted beyond the normal scope of most men.

“But there is one way in this country in which all men are created equal—there is one human institution that makes a pauper the equal of a Rockefeller, the stupid man the equal of an Einstein, and the ignorant man the equal of any college president. That institution, gentlemen, is a court. It can be the Supreme Court of the United States or the humblest J.P. court in the land, or this honorable court which you serve. Our courts have their faults, as does any human institution, but in this country our courts are the great levelers, and in our courts all men are created equal.

“I'm no idealist to believe firmly in the integrity of our courts and in the jury system—that is no ideal to me, it is a living, working reality. Gentlemen, a court is no better than each man of you sitting before me on this jury. A court is only as sound as its jury, and a jury is only as sound as the men who make it up. I am

confident that you gentlemen will review without passion the evidence you have heard, come to a decision, and restore this defendant to his family. In the name of God, do your duty.”

Atticus’s voice had dropped, and as he turned away from the jury he said something I did not catch. He said it more to himself than to the court. I punched Jem. “What’d he say?”

“‘In the name of God, believe him,’ I think that’s what he said.”

Dill suddenly reached over me and tugged at Jem. “Looka yonder!”

We followed his finger with sinking hearts. Calpurnia was making her way up the middle aisle, walking straight toward Atticus.