Opening extract from

The Kill a Mockingbird

Written by

Harper Lee

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I

WHEN HE WAS nearly thirteen my brother Jem got his arm badly broken at the elbow. When it healed, and Jem's fears of never being able to play football were assuaged, he was seldom self-conscious about his injury. His left arm was somewhat shorter than his right; when he stood or walked, the back of his hand was at right-angles to his body, his thumb parallel to his thigh. He couldn't have cared less, so long as he could pass and punt.

When enough years had gone by to enable us to look back on them, we sometimes discussed the events leading to his accident. I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that. He said it began the summer Dill came to us, when Dill first gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.

I said if he wanted to take a broad view of the thing, it really began with Andrew Jackson. If General Jackson hadn't run the Creeks up the creek, Simon Finch would never have paddled up the Alabama, and where would we be if he hadn't? We were far too old to settle an argument with a fist-fight, so we consulted Atticus. Our father said we were both right.

Being Southerners, it was a source of shame to some members of the family that we had no recorded ancestors on either side of the Battle of Hastings. All we had was Simon Finch, a fur-trapping apothecary from Cornwall whose piety was exceeded only by his stinginess. In England, Simon was irritated by the persecution of those who called themselves Methodists at the hands of their more liberal brethren, and as Simon called himself a Methodist, he worked his way across

the Atlantic to Philadelphia, thence to Jamaica, thence to Mobile, and up the Saint Stephens. Mindful of John Wesley's strictures on the use of many words in buying and selling, Simon made a pile practising medicine, but in this pursuit he was unhappy lest he be tempted into doing what he knew was not for the glory of God, as the putting on of gold and costly apparel. So Simon, having forgotten his teacher's dictum on the possession of human chattels, bought three slaves and with their aid established a homestead on the banks of the Alabama River some forty miles above Saint Stephens. He returned to Saint Stephens only once, to find a wife, and with her established a line that ran high to daughters. Simon lived to an impressive age and died rich.

It was customary for the men in the family to remain on Simon's homestead, Finch's Landing, and make their living from cotton. The place was self-sufficient: modest in comparison with the empires around it, the Landing nevertheless produced everything required to sustain life except ice, wheat flour, and articles of clothing, supplied by river-boats from Mobile.

Simon would have regarded with impotent fury the disturbance between the North and the South, as it left his descendants stripped of everything but their land, yet the tradition of living on the land remained unbroken until well into the twentieth century, when my father, Atticus Finch, went to Montgomery to read law, and his younger brother went to Boston to study medicine. Their sister Alexandra was the Finch who remained at the Landing: she married a taciturn man who spent most of his time lying in a hammock by the river wondering if his trot-lines were full.

When my father was admitted to the bar, he returned to Maycomb and began his practice. Maycomb, some twenty miles east of Finch's Landing, was the county seat of Maycomb County. Atticus's office in the court-house contained little more than a hat rack, a spittoon, a checker-board and an unsullied Code of Alabama. His first two clients were the last two persons hanged in the Maycomb County jail. Atticus had urged them to accept the state's generosity in allowing them to plead Guilty to second-degree murder and

escape with their lives, but they were Haverfords, in Maycomb County a name synonymous with jackass. The Haverfords had dispatched Maycomb's leading blacksmith in a misunderstanding arising from the alleged wrongful detention of a mare, were imprudent enough to do it in the presence of three witnesses, and insisted that the son-of-a-bitch-had-it-coming-to-him was a good enough defence for anybody. They persisted in pleading Not Guilty to first-degree murder, so there was nothing much Atticus could do for his clients except be present at their departure, an occasion that was probably the beginning of my father's profound distaste for the practice of criminal law.

During his first five years in Maycomb, Atticus practised economy more than anything; for several years thereafter he invested his earnings in his brother's education. John Hale Finch was ten years younger than my father, and chose to study medicine at a time when cotton was not worth growing; but after getting Uncle Jack started, Atticus derived a reasonable income from the law. He liked Maycomb, he was Maycomb County born and bred; he knew his people, they knew him, and because of Simon Finch's industry, Atticus was related by blood or marriage to nearly every family in the town.

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the court-house sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then; a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three o'clock naps, and by nightfall were like soft tea-cakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to

see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people; Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.

We lived on the main residential street in town – Atticus, Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook. Jem and I found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment.

Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was near-sighted; she squinted; her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking me why I couldn't behave as well as Jem when she knew he was older, and calling me home when I wasn't ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always won, mainly because Atticus always took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.

Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery; Atticus met her when he was first elected to the state legislature. He was middle-aged then, she was fifteen years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack. They said it ran in her family. I did not miss her, but I think Jem did. He remembered her clearly, and sometimes in the middle of a game he would sigh at length, then go off and play by himself behind the car-house. When he was like that, I knew better than to bother him.

When I was almost six and Jem was nearly ten, our summertime boundaries (within calling distance of Calpurnia) were Mrs Henry Lafayette Dubose's house two doors to the north of us, and the Radley Place three doors to the south. We were never tempted to break them. The Radley Place was inhabited by an unknown entity the mere description of whom was enough to make us behave for days on end; Mrs Dubose was plain hell.

That was the summer Dill came to us.

Early one morning as we were beginning our day's play in the back yard, Jem and I heard something next door in Miss

Rachel Haverford's collard patch. We went to the wire fence to see if there was a puppy – Miss Rachel's rat terrier was expecting – instead we found someone sitting looking at us. Sitting down, he wasn't much higher than the collards. We stared at him until he spoke:

'Hey.'

'Hey yourself,' said Jem pleasantly.

'I'm Charles Baker Harris,' he said. 'I can read.'

'So what?' I said.

'I just thought you'd like to know I can read. You got anything needs readin' I can do it . . . '

'How old are you,' asked Jem, 'four-and-a-half?'

'Goin' on seven.'

'Shoot no wonder, then,' said Jem, jerking his thumb at me. 'Scout yonder's been readin' ever since she was born, and she ain't even started to school yet. You look right puny for goin' on seven.'

'I'm little but I'm old,' he said.

Jem brushed his hair back to get a better look. 'Why don't you come over, Charles Baker Harris?' he said. 'Lord, what a name.'

''s not any funnier'n yours. Aunt Rachel says your name's Jeremy Atticus Finch.'

Jem scowled. 'I'm big enough to fit mine,' he said. 'Your names longer'n you are. Bet it's a foot longer.'

'Folks call me Dill,' said Dill, struggling under the fence.

'Do better if you go over it instead of under it,' I said. 'Where'd you come from?'

Dill was from Meridian, Mississippi, was spending the summer with his aunt, Miss Rachel, and would be spending every summer in Maycomb from now on. His family was from Maycomb County originally, his mother worked for a photographer in Meridian, had entered his picture in a Beautiful Child contest and won five dollars. She gave the money to Dill, who went to the picture show twenty times on it.

'Don't have any picture shows here, except Jesus ones in the court-house sometimes,' said Jem. 'Ever see anything good?'

Dill had seen *Dracula*, a revelation that moved Jem to eye him with the beginning of respect. 'Tell it to us,' he said.

Dill was a curiosity. He wore blue linen shorts that buttoned to his shirt, his hair was snow white and stuck to his head like duck-fluff; he was a year my senior but I towered over him. As he told us the old tale his blue eyes would lighten and darken; his laugh was sudden and happy; he habitually pulled at a cowlick in the centre of his forehead.

When Dill reduced Dracula to dust, and Jem said the show sounded better than the book, I asked Dill where his father was: 'You ain't said anything about him.'

'I haven't got one.'

'Is he dead?'

'No . . .'

'Then if he's not dead you've got one, haven't you?'

Dill blushed and Jem told me to hush, a sure sign that Dill had been studied and found acceptable. Thereafter the summer passed in routine contentment. Routine contentment was: improving our treehouse that rested between giant twin chinaberry trees in the back yard, fussing, running through our list of dramas based on the works of Oliver Optic, Victor Appleton and Edgar Rice Burroughs. In this matter we were lucky to have Dill. He played the character parts formerly thrust upon me – the ape in *Tarzan*, Mr Crabtree in *The Rover Boys*, Mr Damon in *Tom Swift*. Thus we came to know Dill as a pocket Merlin, whose head teemed with eccentric plans, strange longings, and quaint fancies.

But by the end of August our repertoire was vapid from countless reproductions, and it was then that Dill gave us the idea of making Boo Radley come out.

The Radley Place fascinated Dill. In spite of our warnings and explanations it drew him as the moon draws water, but drew him no nearer than the light-pole on the corner, a safe distance from the Radley gate. There he would stand, his arm around the fat pole, staring and wondering.

The Radley Place jutted into a sharp curve beyond our house. Walking south, one faced its porch; the sidewalk turned and ran beside the lot. The house was low, was once white with a deep front porch and green shutters, but had

long ago darkened to the colour of the slate-grey yard around it. Rain-rotten shingles drooped over the eaves of the veranda; oak trees kept the sun away. The remains of a picket drunkenly guarded the front yard – a 'swept' yard that was never swept – where johnson grass and rabbit-tobacco grew in abundance.

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was high, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events: people's chickens and household pets were found mutilated; although the culprit was Crazy Addie, who eventually drowned himself in Barker's Eddy, people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions. A Negro would not pass the Radley Place at night, he would cut across to the sidewalk opposite and whistle as he walked. The Maycomb school grounds adjoined the back of the Radley lot; from the Radley chicken-yard tall pecan trees shook their fruit into the school yard, but the nuts lay untouched by the children: Radley pecans would kill you. A baseball hit into the Radley yard was a lost ball and no questions asked.

The misery of that house began many years before Jem and I were born. The Radleys, welcome anywhere in town, kept to themselves, a predilection unforgivable in Maycomb. They did not go to church, Maycomb's principal recreation, but worshipped at home; Mrs Radley seldom if ever crossed the street for a mid-morning coffee break with her neighbours and certainly never joined a missionary circle. Mr Radley walked to town at eleven-thirty every morning and came back promptly at twelve, sometimes carrying a brown paper bag that the neighbourhood assumed contained the family groceries. I never knew how old Mr Radley made his living – Jem said he 'bought cotton', a polite term for doing nothing – but Mr Radley and his wife had lived there with their two sons as long as anybody could remember.

The shutters and doors of the Radley house were closed on

Sundays, another thing alien to Maycomb's ways: closed doors meant illness and cold weather only. Of all days Sunday was the day for formal afternoon visiting: ladies wore corsets, men wore coats, children wore shoes. But to climb the Radley front steps and call, 'He-y', of a Sunday afternoon was something their neighbours never did. The Radley house had no screen doors. I once asked Atticus if it ever had any; Atticus said yes, but before I was born.

According to neighbourhood legend, when the younger Radley boy was in his teens he became acquainted with some of the Cunninghams from Old Sarum, an enormous and confusing tribe domiciled in the northern part of the country, and they formed the nearest thing to a gang ever seen in Maycomb. They did little, but enough to be discussed by the town and publicly warned from three pulpits: they hung around the barber-shop; they rode the bus to Abbotsville on Sundays and went to the picture show; they attended dances at the county's riverside gambling hell, the Dew-Drop Inn and Fishing Camp; they experimented with stumphole whisky. Nobody in Maycomb had nerve enough to tell Mr Radley that his boy was in with the wrong crowd.

One night in an excessive spurt of high spirits, the boys backed around the square in a borrowed flivver, resisted arrest by Maycomb's ancient beadle, Mr Conner, and locked him in the court-house outhouse. The town decided something had to be done; Mr Conner said he knew who each and every one of them was, and he was bound and determined they wouldn't get away with it, so the boys came before the probate judge on charges of disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, assault and battery, and using abusive and profane language in the presence and hearing of a female. The judge asked Mr Conner why he included the last charge; Mr Conner said they cussed so loud he was sure every lady in Maycomb heard them. The judge decided to send the boys to the state industrial school, where boys were sometimes sent for no other reason than to provide them with food and decent shelter: it was no prison and it was no disgrace. Mr Radley thought it was. If the judge released Arthur, Mr Radley would see to it that Arthur gave no further trouble.

Knowing that Mr Radley's word was his bond, the judge was glad to do so.

The other boys attended the industrial school and received the best secondary education to be had in the state; one of them eventually worked his way through engineering school at Auburn. The doors of the Radley house were closed on weekdays as well as Sundays, and Mr Radley's boy was not seen again for fifteen years.

But there came a day, barely within Jem's memory, when Boo Radley was heard from and was seen by several people, but not by Jem. He said Atticus never talked much about the Radleys: when Jem would question him Atticus's only answer was for him to mind his own business and let the Radleys mind theirs, they had a right to; but when it happened Jem said Atticus shook his head and said, 'Mm, mm, mm.'

So Jem received most of his information from Miss Stephanie Crawford, a neighbourhood scold, who said she knew the whole thing. According to Miss Stephanie, Boo was sitting in the living-room cutting some items from the *Maycomb Tribune* to paste in his scrapbook. His father entered the room. As Mr Radley passed by, Boo drove the scissors into his parent's leg, pulled them out, wiped them on his pants, and resumed his activities.

Mrs Radley ran screaming into the street that Arthur was killing them all, but when the sheriff arrived he found Boo still sitting in the living room, cutting up the *Tribune*. He was thirty-three years old then.

Miss Stephanie said old Mr Radley said no Radley was going to any asylum, when it was suggested that a season in Tuscaloosa might be helpful to Boo. Boo wasn't crazy, he was high-strung at times. It was all right to shut him up, Mr Radley conceded, but insisted that Boo not be charged with anything: he was not a criminal. The sheriff hadn't the heart to put him in jail alongside Negroes, so Boo was locked in the court-house basement.

Boo's transition from the basement to back home was nebulous in Jem's memory. Miss Stephanie Crawford said some of the town council told Mr Radley that if he didn't take Boo back, Boo would die of mould from the damp.

Besides, Boo could not live for ever on the bounty of the country.

Nobody knew what form of intimidation Mr Radley employed to keep Boo out of sight, but Jem figured that Mr Radley kept him chained to the bed most of the time. Atticus said no, it wasn't that sort of thing, that there were other ways of making people into ghosts.

My memory came alive to see Mrs Radley occasionally open the front door, walk to the edge of the porch, and pour water on her cannas. But every day Jem and I would see Mr Radley walking to and from town. He was a thin leathery man with colourless eyes, so colourless they did not reflect light. His cheekbones were sharp and his mouth wide, with a thin upper lip and a full lower lip. Miss Stephanie Crawford said he was so upright he took the word of God as his only law, and we believed her, because Mr Radley's posture was ramrod straight.

He never spoke to us. When he passed we would look at the ground and say, 'Good morning, sir,' and he would cough in reply. Mr Radley's elder son lived in Pensacola; he came home at Christmas, and he was one of the few persons we ever saw enter or leave the place. From the day Mr Radley took Arthur home, people said the house died.

But there came a day when Atticus told us he'd wear us out if we made any noise in the yard and commissioned Calpurnia to serve in his absence if she heard a sound out of us. Mr Radley was dying.

He took his time about it. Wooden sawhorses blocked the road at each end of the Radley lot, straw was put down on the sidewalk, traffic was diverted to the back street. Dr Reynolds parked his car in front of our house and walked to the Radleys' every time he called. Jem and I crept around the yard for days. At last the sawhorses were taken away, and we stood watching from the front porch when Mr Radley made his final journey past our house.

'There goes the meanest man ever God blew breath into,' murmured Calpurnia, and she spat meditatively into the yard. We looked at her in surprise, for Calpurnia rarely commented on the ways of white people.

The neighbourhood thought when Mr Radley went under Boo would come out, but it had another think coming: Boo's elder brother returned from Pensacola and took Mr Radley's place. The only difference between him and his father was their ages. Jem said Mr Nathan Radley 'bought cotton', too. Mr Nathan would speak to us, however, when we said good morning, and sometimes we saw him coming from town with a magazine in his hand.

The more we told Dill about the Radleys, the more he wanted to know, the longer he would stand hugging the light-pole on the corner, the more he would wonder.

'Wonder what he does in there,' he would murmur. 'Looks like he'd just stick his head out the door.'

Jem said, 'He goes out, all right, when it's pitch dark. Miss Stephanie Crawford said she woke up in the middle of the night one time and saw him looking straight through the window at her . . . said his head was like a skull lookin' at her. Ain't you ever waked up at night and heard him, Dill? He walks like this –' Jem slid his feet through the gravel. 'Why do you think Miss Rachel locks up so tight at night? I've seen his tracks in our back yard many a mornin', and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen, but he was gone time Atticus got there.'

'Wonder what he looks like?' said Dill.

Jem gave a reasonable description of Boo: Boo was about six-and-a-half feet tall, judging from his tracks; he dined on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch, that's why his hands were blood-stained – if you ate an animal raw, you could never wash the blood off. There was a long jagged scar that ran across his face; what teeth he had were yellow and rotten; his eyes popped, and he drooled most of the time.

'Let's try to make him come out,' said Dill. 'I'd like to see what he looks like.'

Jem said if Dill wanted to get himself killed, all he had to do was go up and knock on the front door.

Our first raid came to pass only because Dill bet Jem *The Grey Ghost* against two Tom Swifts that Jem wouldn't get any farther than the Radley gate. In all his life, Jem had never declined a dare.

Jem thought about it for three days. I suppose he loved honour more than his head, for Dill wore him down easily: 'You're scared,' Dill said, the first day. 'Ain't scared, just respectful,' Jem said. The next day Dill said, 'You're too scared even to put your big toe in the front yard,' Jem said he reckoned he wasn't, he'd passed the Radley Place every school day of his life.

'Always runnin',' I said.

But Dill got him the third day, when he told Jem that folks in Meridian certainly weren't as afraid as the folks in Maycomb, that he'd never seen such scary folks as the ones in Maycomb.

This was enough to make Jem march to the corner, where he stopped and leaned against the light-pole, watching the gate hanging crazily on its home-made hinge.

'I hope you've got it through your head that he'll kill us each and every one, Dill Harris,' said Jem, when we joined him. 'Don't blame me when he gouges your eyes out. You started it remember.'

'You're still scared,' murmured Dill patiently.

Jem wanted Dill to know once and for all that he wasn't scared of anything: 'It's just that I can't think of a way to make him come out without him gettin' us.' Besides, Jem had his little sister to think of.

When he said that, I knew he was afraid. Jem had his little sister to think of the time I dared him to jump off the top of the house: 'If I got killed, what'd become of you?' he asked. Then he jumped, landed unhurt, and his sense of responsibility left him until confronted by the Radley Place.

'You gonna run out on a dare?' asked Dill. 'If you are, then –'

'Dill, you have to think about these things,' Jem said. 'Lemme think a minute . . . it's sort of like making a turtle come out . . .'

'How's that?' asked Dill.

'Strike a match under him.'

I told Jem if he set fire to the Radley house I was going to tell Atticus on him.

Dill said striking a match under a turtle was hateful.

'Ain't hateful, just persuades him – 's not like you'd chunk him in the fire,' Jem growled.

'How do you know a match don't hurt him?'

'Turtles can't feel, stupid,' said Jem.

'Were you ever a turtle, huh?'

'My stars, Dill! Now lemme think . . . reckon we can rock him . . .'

Jem stood in thought so long that Dill made a mild concession: 'I won't say you ran out on a dare an' I'll swap you *The Grey Ghost* if you just go up and touch the house.'

Jem brightened. 'Touch the house, that all?'

Dill nodded.

'Sure that's all, now? I don't want you hollerin' something different the minute I get back.'

'Yeah, that's all,' said Dill. 'He'll probably come out after you when he sees you in the yard, then Scout'n' me'll jump on him and hold him down till we can tell him we ain't gonna hurt him.'

We left the corner, crossed the side street that ran in front of the Radley house, and stopped at the gate.

'Well go on,' said Dill, 'Scout and me's right behind you.'

'I'm going,' said Jem, 'don't hurry me.'

He walked to the corner of the lot, then back again, studying the simple terrain as if deciding how best to effect an entry, frowning and scratching his head.

Then I sneered at him.

Jem threw open the gate and sped to the side of the house, slapped it with his palm and ran back past us, not waiting to see if his foray was successful. Dill and I followed on his heels. Safely on our porch, panting and out of breath, we looked back.

The old house was the same, droopy and sick, but as we stared down the street we thought we saw an inside shutter move. Flick. A tiny, almost invisible movement, and the house was still.

2

DILL LEFT US early in September, to return to Meridian. We saw him off on the five o'clock bus, and I was miserable without him until it occurred to me that I would be starting to school in a week. I never looked forward more to anything in my life. Hours of wintertime had found me in the tree-house looking over at the school yard, spying on multitudes of children through a two-power telescope Jem had given me, learning their games, following Jem's red jacket through wriggling circles of blind man's buff, secretly sharing their misfortunes and minor victories. I longed to join them.

Jem condescended to take me to school the first day, a job usually done by one's parents, but Atticus had said Jem would be delighted to show me where my room was. I think some money changed hands in this transaction, for as we trotted around the corner past the Radley Place I heard an unfamiliar jingle in Jem's pockets. When we slowed to a walk at the edge of the school yard, Jem was careful to explain that during school hours I was not to bother him, I was not to approach him with requests to enact a chapter of *Tarzan and the Ant Men*, to embarrass him with references to his private life, or tag along behind him at recess and noon. I was to stick with the first grade and he would stick with the fifth. In short, I was to leave him alone.

'You mean we can't play any more?' I asked.

'We'll do like we always do at home,' he said, 'but you'll see – school's different.'

It certainly was. Before the first morning was over, Miss Caroline Fisher, our teacher, hauled me up to the front of the

room and patted the palm of my hand with a ruler, then made me stand in the corner until noon.

Miss Caroline was no more than twenty-one. She had bright auburn hair, pink cheeks, and wore crimson fingernail polish. She also wore high-heeled pumps and a red-and-white striped dress. She looked and smelled like a peppermint drop. She boarded across the street one door down from us in Miss Maudie Atkinson's upstairs front room, and when Miss Maudie introduced us to her, Jem was in a haze for days.

Miss Caroline printed her name on the blackboard and said, 'This says I am Miss Caroline Fisher. I am from North Alabama, from Winston County.' The class murmured apprehensively, should she prove to harbour her share of the peculiarities indigenous to that region. (When Alabama seceded from the Union on 11 January, 1861, Winston County seceded from Alabama, and every child in Maycomb County knew it.) North Alabama was full of Liquor Interests, Big Mules, steel companies, Republicans, professors, and other persons of no background.

Miss Caroline began the day by reading us a story about cats. The cats had long conversations with one another, they wore cunning little clothes and lived in a warm house beneath a kitchen stove. By the time Mrs Cat called the drugstore for an order of chocolate malted mice the class was wriggling like a bucketful of catawba worms. Miss Caroline seemed unaware that the ragged, denim-shirted and floursack-skirted first grade, most of whom had chopped cotton and fed hogs from the time they were able to walk, were immune to imaginative literature. Miss Caroline came to the end of the story and said, '*Oh*, my, wasn't that nice?'

Then she went to the blackboard and printed the alphabet in enormous square capitals, turned to the class and asked, 'Does anybody know what these are?'

Everybody did; most of the first grade had failed it last year.

I suppose she chose me because she knew my name; as I read the alphabet a faint line appeared between her eyebrows, and after making me read most of *My First Reader* and the stock-market quotations from *The Mobile Register* aloud, she

discovered that I was literate and looked at me with more than faint distaste. Miss Caroline told me to tell my father not to teach me any more, it would interfere with my reading.

'Teach me?' I said in surprise. 'He hasn't taught me anything, Miss Caroline. Atticus ain't got time to teach me anything,' I added, when Miss Caroline smiled and shook her head. 'Why, he's so tired at night he just sits in the living-room and reads.'

'If he didn't teach you, who did?' Miss Caroline asked good-naturedly. 'Somebody did. You weren't born reading *The Mobile Register*.'

'Jem says I was. He read in a book where I was a Bullfinch instead of a Finch. Jem says my name's really Jean Louise Bullfinch, that I got swapped when I was born and I'm really a –'

Miss Caroline apparently thought I was lying. 'Let's not let our imaginations run away with us dear,' she said. 'Now you tell your father not to teach you any more. It's best to begin reading with a fresh mind. You tell him I'll take over from here and try to undo the damage –'

'Ma'am?'

'Your father does not know how to teach. You can have a seat now.'

I mumbled that I was sorry and retired meditating upon my crime. I never deliberately learned to read, but somehow I had been wallowing illicitly in the daily papers. In the long hours of church – was it then I learned? I could not remember not being able to read hymns. Now that I was compelled to think about it, reading was something that just came to me, as learning to fasten the seat of my union suit without looking around, or achieving two bows from a snarl of shoelaces. I could not remember when the lines above Atticus's moving finger separated into words, but I had stared at them all the evenings in my memory, listening to the news of the day, Bills To Be Enacted into Laws, the diaries of Lorenzo Dow – anything Atticus happened to be reading when I crawled into his lap every night. Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing.

I knew I had annoyed Miss Caroline, so I let well enough

alone and stared out of the window until recess when Jem cut me from the covey of first-graders in the school yard. He asked how I was getting along. I told him.

'If I didn't have to stay I'd leave, Jem, that damn lady says Atticus's been teaching me to read and for him to stop it –'

'Don't worry, Scout,' Jem comforted me. 'Our teacher says Miss Caroline's introducing a new way of teaching. She learned about it in college. It'll be in all the grades soon. You don't have to learn much out of books that way – it's like if you wanta learn about cows, you go milk one, see?'

'Yeah Jem, but I won't wanta study cows, I –'

'Sure you do. You hafta know about cows, they're a big part of life in Maycomb County.'

I contented myself with asking Jem if he'd lost his mind.

'I'm just trying to tell you the new way they're teachin' the first grade, stubborn. It's the Dewey Decimal System.'

Having never questioned Jem's pronouncements, I saw no reason to begin now. The Dewey Decimal System consisted, in part, of Miss Caroline waving cards at us on which were printed 'the', 'cat', 'rat', 'man', and 'you'. No comment seemed to be expected of us, and the class received these impressionistic revelations in silence. I was bored, so I began a letter to Dill. Miss Caroline caught me writing and told me to tell my father to stop teaching me. 'Besides,' she said. 'We don't write in the first grade, we print. You won't learn to write until you're in the third grade.'

Calpurnia was to blame for this. It kept me from driving her crazy on rainy days, I guess. She would set me a writing task by scrawling the alphabet firmly across the top of a tablet, then copying out a chapter of the Bible beneath. If I reproduced her penmanship satisfactorily, she rewarded me with an open-faced sandwich of bread and butter and sugar. In Calpurnia's teaching, there was no sentimentality: I seldom pleased her and she seldom rewarded me.

'Everybody who goes home to lunch hold up your hands,' said Miss Caroline, breaking into my new grudge against Calpurnia.

The town children did so, and she looked us over.

'Everybody who brings his lunch put it on top of his desk.'

Molasses buckets appeared from nowhere, and the ceiling danced with metallic light. Miss Caroline walked up and down the rows peering and poking into lunch containers, nodding if the contents pleased her, frowning a little at others. She stopped at Walter Cunningham's desk. 'Where's yours?' she asked.

Walter Cunningham's face told everybody in the first grade he had hookworms. His absence of shoes told us how he got them. People caught hookworms going barefoot in barnyards and hog wallows. If Walter had owned any shoes he would have worn them the first day of school and then discarded them until mid-winter. He did have on a clean shirt and neatly mended overalls.

'Did you forget your lunch this morning?' asked Miss Caroline.

Walter looked straight ahead. I saw a muscle jump in his skinny jaw.

'Did you forget it this morning?' asked Miss Caroline. Walter's jaw twitched again.

'Yeb'm,' he finally mumbled.

Miss Caroline went to her desk and opened her purse. 'Here's a quarter,' she said to Walter. 'Go and eat downtown today. You can pay me back tomorrow.'

Walter shook his head. 'Nome thank you ma'am,' he drawled softly.

Impatience crept into Miss Caroline's voice: 'Here Walter, come get it.'

Walter shook his head again.

When Walter shook his head a third time someone whispered, 'Go on and tell her, Scout.'

I turned around and saw most of the town people and the entire bus delegation looking at me. Miss Caroline and I had conferred twice already, and they were looking at me in the innocent assurance that familiarity breeds understanding.

I rose graciously on Walter's behalf: 'Ah – Miss Caroline.'

'What is it, Jean Louise?'

'Miss Caroline, he's a Cunningham.'

I sat back down.

'What, Jean Louise?'

I thought I had made things sufficiently clear. It was clear enough to the rest of us: Walter Cunningham was sitting there lying his head off. He didn't forget his lunch, he didn't have any. He had none today nor would he have any tomorrow or the next day. He had probably never seen three quarters together at the same time in his life.

I tried again: 'Walter's one of the Cunninghams, Miss Caroline.'

'I beg your pardon, Jean Louise?'

'That's okay, ma'am, you'll get to know all the county folks after a while. The Cunninghams never took anything they can't pay back – no church baskets and no scrip stamps. They never took anything off of anybody, they get along on what they have. They don't have much, but they get along on it.'

My special knowledge of the Cunningham tribe – one branch, that is – was gained from events of last winter. Walter's father was one of Atticus's clients. After a dreary conversation in our living-room one night about his entailment, before Mr Cunningham left he said, 'Mr Finch, I don't know when I'll ever be able to pay you.'

'Let that be the least of your worries, Walter,' Atticus said.

When I asked Jem what entailment was, and Jem described it as a condition of having your tail in a crack, I asked Atticus if Mr Cunningham would ever pay us.

'Not in money,' Atticus said, 'but before the year's out I'll have been paid. You watch.'

We watched. One morning Jem and I found a load of stovewood in the back yard. Later, a sack of hickory nuts appeared on the back steps. With Christmas came a crate of smilax and holly. That spring when we found a croker-sack full of turnip greens, Atticus said Mr Cunningham had more than paid him.

'Why does he pay you like that?' I asked.

'Because that's the only way he can pay me. He has no money.'

'Are we poor, Atticus?'

Atticus nodded. 'We are indeed.'

Jem's nose wrinkled. 'Are we as poor as the Cunninghams?'

'Not exactly. The Cunninghams are country folks, farmers, and the crash hit them hardest.'

Atticus said professional people were poor because the farmers were poor. As Maycomb County was farm country, nickels and dimes were hard to come by for doctors and dentists and lawyers. Entailment was only part of Mr Cunningham's vexations. The acres not entailed were mortgaged to the hilt, and the little cash he made went to interest. If he held his mouth right, Mr Cunningham could get a WPA job, but his land would go to ruin if he left it, and he was willing to go hungry to keep his land and vote as he pleased. Mr Cunningham, said Atticus, came from a set breed of men.

As the Cunninghams had no money to pay a lawyer, they simply paid us with what they had. 'Did you know', said Atticus, 'that Dr Reynolds works the same way? He charges some folk a bushel of potatoes for delivery of a baby. Miss Scout, if you give me your attention I'll tell you what entailment is. Jem's definitions are very nearly accurate sometimes.'

If I could have explained these things to Miss Caroline, I would have saved myself some inconvenience and Miss Caroline subsequent mortification, but it was beyond my ability to explain things as well as Atticus, so I said. 'You're shamin' him, Miss Caroline. Walter hasn't got a quarter at home to bring you, and you can't use any stovewood.'

Miss Caroline stood stock still, then grabbed me by the collar and hauled me back to her desk. 'Jean Louise, I've had about enough of you this morning,' she said. 'You're starting off on the wrong foot in every way, my dear. Hold out your hand.'

I thought she was going to spit in it, which was the only reason anybody in Maycomb held out his hand: it was a time-honoured method of sealing oral contracts. Wondering what bargain we had made, I turned to the class for an answer, but the class looked back at me in puzzlement. Miss Caroline picked up her ruler, gave me half a dozen quick little pats, then told me to stand in the corner. A storm of laughter broke

loose when it finally occurred to the class that Miss Caroline had whipped me.

When Miss Caroline threatened it with a similar fate the first grade exploded again, becoming cold sober only when the shadow of Miss Blount fell over them. Miss Blount, a native Maycombian as yet uninitiated in the mysteries of the Decimal System, appeared at the door hands on hips and announced: 'If I hear another sound from this room I'll burn up everybody in it. Miss Caroline, the sixth grade cannot concentrate on the pyramids for all this racket.'

My sojourn in the corner was a short one. Saved by the bell, Miss Caroline watched the class file out for lunch. As I was the last to leave, I saw her sink down into her chair and bury her head in her arms. Had her conduct been more friendly towards me, I would have felt sorry for her. She was a pretty little thing.