

To Kill a Mockingbird Chapter 10

Scout's promise to Atticus about fighting was tested constantly at school because of the case he had taken on, but she bit the bullet and kept her fists down. She and Jem began to notice that their father was older than most of their classmates' fathers. Scout viewed him as feeble and was disappointed that he couldn't do the things most fathers did like playing football in the Methodist versus Baptist fundraiser game. He didn't hunt or fish or play poker. All he really did was sit in their living room and read. And he didn't have an admirable job like a dump truck driver or a farmer or even a mechanic. He just sat in an office. And to top it all off, he wore glasses. He didn't even teach Jem and Scout to shoot when they got their air rifles, but he did ask that they shoot at tin cans or bluejays but not mockingbirds because it was a sin to kill mockingbirds. Scout had never heard her daddy say that something was a sin, so she was naturally curious as to why mockingbirds were so special. She went to Miss Maudie for answers, and Miss Maudie explained that, "Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't eat up people's gardens, don't nest in corncribs, they don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us. That's why it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." Chapter 10, Pg. 94

Then Scout went on to discuss her disappointment that Atticus was older than most dads were and he couldn't do anything really impressive. Miss Maudie tried to ease Scout's disillusionment, but in her mind, Atticus was just an old man.

One Saturday not long after that, Scout and Jem were playing outside when Jem noticed that old Tim Johnson, the liver-colored dog who belonged to a man from the Southern edge of town, was acting strangely. They ran inside to tell Cal, and when she saw him, she raised the alarm that a rabid dog was heading for their street. All the neighbors closed up their doors when the operator called them with the news, but the Radleys didn't have a phone. Cal ran to their house and banged on the door warning them, but there was no response. She and the children locked themselves in and watched at the windows for the dog to come down their street. Atticus came home with Heck Tate, the Maycomb sheriff, and they waited for the dog to come around the bend in the road. The dog stopped in front of the Radley house, and Heck was afraid that if he shot and missed, the bullet would go into the house and the dog would attack. It was a one-shot kind of job, so he insisted that Atticus do it. Scout and Jem were shocked to see the father they considered feeble walk into the street with the mad dog, drop his glasses, and shoot the gun like an expert. Tim Johnson was dropped with one shot, and Jem and Scout learned that day that their father was an expert marksman.

Miss Maudie explained that Atticus didn't hunt because he realized that God had given him an unfair advantage over most creatures, and he decided that he wouldn't shoot anymore until it was necessary. He had never mentioned it before because Atticus was too much of a gentleman to brag about his marksmanship.