

To Kill a Mockingbird Chapter 15

It came about that Dill's parents were convinced to let him stay in Maycomb County, and summer seemed perfect for about a week. Then the nightmare descended. One night while they were in the living room after dinner a group of men came to the Finch house to speak with Atticus. Although they'd only come to talk with Atticus about the danger of moving Tom Robinson to the Maycomb County jail, Jem thought it was a mob after Atticus. His father explained that those people were their friends and neighbors and that there were no mobs in Maycomb, so Jem need not worry. That night Jem told Scout that he was worried something would happen to Atticus, but he wouldn't be specific about his concerns, so Scout was left in the dark.

At church the next day, Scout saw Heck Tate and Mr. Underwood, *The Maycomb Tribune* editor, talking to Atticus although they were not churchgoing men. Atticus told her that they'd shown up to tell him that Tom had been moved back to the Maycomb County jail. The rest of that Sunday passed in the same dull routine until that evening when Atticus came in the living room with a long extension cord with a light bulb on the end. He told them that he was going out and wouldn't be back until quite late so he was saying goodnight then. He drove away in the car, which he usually only used for business trips, and Jem's curiosity and concern were peaked. That night at bedtime he and Scout sneaked out of the house, gathered Dill, and headed to town to find Atticus. He wasn't in his office in the bank building, so they headed up the street to see if Atticus was at the newspaper with Mr. Underwood. As they walked they noticed a light in front of the jailhouse, which was unusual because the jail didn't have an outside light. As they got closer they discovered that Atticus was sitting under the extension cord with its light bulb hanging over his head. He was in a chair by the jail entrance reading a newspaper. They turned to take a shortcut home, satisfied that he was okay, but as they walked across the square, they saw four cars stop in front of the jail.

Scout, Jem, and Dill hid themselves near enough to watch what happened as men got out of the cars. The men demanded Tom Robinson, but Atticus wouldn't budge. Scout, misunderstanding the seriousness of what was happening, ran through the crowd to her father. Dill and Jem followed her because they couldn't stop her. Atticus looked afraid then. Scout was embarrassed when she looked around and realized that she didn't know any of these men. They weren't the same group of neighbors who had gathered in their yard the night before. These people were strangers and they were all looking at her. Atticus insisted several times that Jem

take Dill and Scout home, but Jem wouldn't budge. While Atticus pleaded with Jem, Scout looked around again and recognized Mr. Cunningham, young Walter's father. She started talking to Mr. Cunningham about Walter and the case Atticus had helped him with. She kept trying to make desperate attempts at conversation and Mr. Cunningham didn't respond. Scout began to feel more embarrassed than ever so she kept rambling on. She realized she was sinking and looked around her again. Atticus stood with his mouth hanging open a little in amazement and Scout asked what was the matter. Mr. Cunningham surprisingly told her that he would tell Walter that she said hello as she'd asked him to do. Then the group of men got in their cars and drove away.

When Scout turned to her father to ask if they could go home, he was sagging against the jail in relief. A voice from a window overhead asked if the men had gone and Atticus assured Tom that the men wouldn't bother him anymore. Then Mr. Underwood furthered that assurance from his window above the *Tribune* office as he leaned out with his shotgun and told Atticus that he'd had him covered the whole time. On the way home Jem and Atticus walked ahead of Scout and Dill, and although she expected Atticus to be angry with Jem for his disobedience, when they passed under a streetlight, Atticus was ruffling Jem's hair, the only sign of affection he ever exhibited.