

To Kill a Mockingbird Chapter 19

Atticus called the defendant Tom Robinson to the stand to testify. When Tom tried to take the oath, his withered left hand slipped from the Bible, further proof that it was useless to him. When he took the stand, Tom admitted that he'd been in trouble with the law one other time because he'd gotten in a fight with a man who tried to cut him. He'd spent thirty days in jail because he couldn't pay the fine, and although the other man in the fight had been convicted of the misdemeanor as well, he hadn't served jail time because he paid the fine. With his record exposed, Atticus moved the questioning toward the case at hand.

Tom explained that he passed Mayella Ewell's home every day on his way to work for Mr. Link Deas. Tom said that he would always tip his hat to Mayella, and one day she asked him to come inside the fence and chop up a chiffarobe for her. The discrepancy was that this was one day in the spring, not in November as she had testified. After he did the chopping, she said she guessed she'd have to pay him for it, but he refused the money. From that point on, she'd often asked him to come in and do small chores, and he had done them because it looked like she didn't get any help from her father, Bob Ewell, or her siblings.

As Tom testified, Scout decided that Mayella Ewell must have been the loneliest person in the world. She didn't have any friends, and her family wasn't respected enough for people to chalk up their peculiarities to just being their way as the townspeople would do if they were talking about some of the wealthier citizens with unusual habits. "Maycomb gave [the Ewells] Christmas baskets, welfare money, and the back of its hand." Chapter 19, Pg. 194

Tom explained that on November twenty-first he had been on his way home from work for Mr. Deas and he noticed that the Ewell place was unusually quiet. Mayella came out and hollered that she had some work for him to do inside the house. She told him that the door had come off its hinges and she needed him to fix it before it got cold out. So he went in the house, but the door wasn't broken. She shut the door behind him, and he realized that all the children who normally swarmed around the place were gone. He asked her where the children were, and she laughed when she told him that they'd gone into town to buy ice cream. She'd been saving for a year and finally had seven nickels so they could all go buy themselves an ice cream. Tom was wary and said he'd better be going, but Mayella insisted that he climb up on a chair and get a box down from the top of a chiffarobe that was almost as tall as the room. While he was on the chair, she grabbed him around the legs, and it scared him. He hopped down and the chair fell over, but he swore to the courtroom that that was the only furniture in the room that was knocked over when he was there. Tom explained that Mayella sort of jumped on him, not violently, but hugged him around the waist. He said that Mayella kissed him on the side of his face claiming that she'd never kissed a man so she might as well kiss him. She told him that what her father does to her doesn't count. Tom told Mayella to let him go, but he couldn't get past her

because she was in front of the door, and he would have had to push her to get past her and he didn't want to hurt her. Just as he was telling her to let him go, her father started yelling from the window. Mr. Ewell called Mayella a whore and threatened to kill her, but Tom didn't hear more because he ran away. His situation was a delicate one. As a black man, he didn't dare mishandle or strike a white woman because he would be strung up for it, so his only other choice was to run, which looked like a sign of guilt.

Tom insisted that he did not rape Mayella Ewell and that he ran because he was scared, because if anyone there had been a black man in the same situation, he would have been scared. Atticus turned the witness over to cross-examination, but before Mr. Gilmer began his questioning, Mr. Deas stood up in the courtroom and announced that Tom had worked for him for eight years and never caused any kind of trouble. Judge Taylor threw Deas out of the courtroom and had his outburst stricken from the record. Mr. Gilmer began to cross-examine, calling Tom "boy" and suggesting that any man strong enough to bust up a chiffarobe with one hand could certainly sling a woman down and choke the breath out of her. Mr. Gilmer kept questioning why Tom would go out of his way to do so much for Mayella for free if he hadn't had his eye on her for a while. Tom tried to explain that he had wanted to help her because no one else would and he said that he felt sorry for her because she had no help. Mr. Gilmer pounced on that statement and presented it to the jury as an incredulous admission that this black man had the audacity to feel pity for a white person.

As the interrogation continued, Mr. Gilmer made it seem as if just because Tom's testimony contradicted Mayella's, he was calling her a liar. Tom insisted that she wasn't lying, she just remembered it wrong. Mr. Gilmer kept working him, jabbing at him, trying to rile him up or rattle him by suggesting that if he had been innocent he wouldn't have run. But Tom insisted again that any black man in that situation would have run out of fear that he'd end up in court for something he didn't do. Then Mr. Gilmer suggested that Tom was getting an attitude with him, and before the rest unfolded, Jem sent Scout outside with Dill because Dill was sobbing.

She and Dill sat out under a live oak tree and Dill explained that he was crying because Mr. Gilmer was being so awful to Tom. Scout tried to explain that that was his job and he treated everyone that way, but Dill insisted that Atticus didn't treat people that way. He thought that Mr. Gilmer was just being terrible to Tom and it didn't matter that he was just a Negro because Mr. Gilmer shouldn't treat anyone that way -- no one should.

A voice from the other side of the huge tree trunk agreed with him, and Scout recognized the man as Mr. Dolphus Raymond.