

To Kill a Mockingbird Chapter 9

A kid at school began giving Scout trouble because her father was defending a black man. Scout wasn't sure what he meant by that or why that was such a bad thing, so before she cleaned his clock, she consulted Atticus to learn more about the matter. Atticus explained to her that he was defending Tom Robinson, a black man, in a trial. He said that he had to do it although he knew he wasn't going to win because if he didn't take on this fight, he couldn't expect Jem or Scout to ever mind him again, and he couldn't represent their town in the state legislature. Scout really didn't understand what he was talking about, but he asked her not to fight whenever someone made comments about him or this case. He wanted her to remember that although it might get ugly, these people were still their friends and Maycomb County was still their home. So Scout did the unthinkable and walked away from a fight because she didn't want to let Atticus down, and she made good on that bargain until Christmas.

Uncle Jack, younger brother to Atticus, came to spend his annual Christmas week in Maycomb County, and he stayed with Atticus and the kids as usual. Shortly after his arrival, he was introduced to Scout's new speech -- she was cursing left and right as part of her campaign to get out of school. She thought that if Atticus figured she had learned such words at school, he'd stop sending her. He, however, just ignored it and advised his brother to do so as well, but when Scout requested at dinner that Jack "pass the damn ham, please" Chapter 9, Pg. 83, Jack could take no more of Scout's vulgarity. He gave her a talking-to after dinner, instructing her that words like "damn" and "hell" were only to be used in instances of extreme provocation and that was that.

The next morning was Christmas and after receiving the air rifles they begged for, it was time to go to Finch's Landing to visit their Aunt Alexandra. Scout and Jem disliked the trips to the Landing because their cousin, Francis was a sniveling brat and they were forced to play with him while they were there. On the other hand, the food was wonderful, so they were almost willing to suffer through a day with Francis. Alexandra constantly harped on the fact that Scout wore pants. Although Scout insisted that she couldn't do anything in a dress, Alexandra was certain that she need not be doing anything that required her to wear pants. She told Scout that she needed to behave herself and be a ray of sunshine in her father's sad life. Scout observed: *"that one could be a ray of sunshine in pants just as well, but Aunty said that... I was born good but had grown progressively worse every year . . . but when I asked Atticus about it, he said there were already enough sunbeams in the family and to go on about my business, he didn't mind me much the way I was."* Chapter 9, Pg. 86

In the course of conversation with Francis, Scout mentioned Dill, and Francis began to make fun of her. He said that Alexandra had said that Dill didn't really have a home in Meridian, but was passed from relative to relative. Then he said that it wasn't Scout's fault she was too dumb to know that because Alexandra said it was Atticus who let her and Jem run around with stray dogs. Alexandra also said that if Atticus was a "'nigger-lover'" Chapter 9, Pg. 87, that's his own business, too, but it's ruining the rest of the family. Francis kept taunting her until she couldn't take anymore and she pounced on him and walloped him until Jack pinned her. Francis insisted that Scout called him a "'whore-lady'" Chapter 9, Pg. 89 and then hit him, and Scout owned up to it. Jack, without hearing her side of things, whipped her for her transgressions and she pouted long after they arrived at home.

When Jack came in to talk to her she explained that he didn't understand children at all because he hadn't even listened to her side of the story before he whipped her. She told him what Francis had been saying about Atticus. She hadn't really understood what the words he said meant, but she knew by the way he was saying it that it was bad and she couldn't let anyone talk bad about Atticus. Although Jack wanted to tear Francis up for the things he said, Scout made him promise not to say anything because she didn't want Atticus to know she'd let him down by fighting over someone saying bad things about him. Then she asked Jack what a whore-lady was, and he avoided her question and left it at that.

Later that night Scout tiptoed downstairs for a drink and she overheard Atticus and Jack talking. She listened in because they were discussing her behavior and she was waiting to see if Uncle Jack would break his promise to her and tell Atticus why she had fought Francis. He didn't say a word. Atticus explained to Jack that he knew Scout tried to do the right thing, and although she didn't even come close to it most of the time, she knew that Atticus knew she tried and that's all that mattered. He explained that times were going to be difficult for their family because of the upcoming trial, but he hoped that Scout and Jem would come to him for answers to the questions that this trial was going to raise instead of listening to the townspeople. He didn't want his children to be infected with the same paranoia and hatred that most Maycomb County people were afflicted by whenever a situation with a colored person arose. As Scout listened in, Atticus called out to her and told her to go to bed. Scout says, "I never figured out how Atticus knew I was listening, and it was not until many years later that I realized he wanted me to hear every word he said." Chapter 9, Pg. 93