

Jem and I slid across the street. Miss Maudie was staring at the smoking black hole in her yard, and Atticus shook his head to tell us she did not want to talk. He led us home, holding onto our shoulders to cross the icy street. He said Miss Maudie would stay with Miss Stephanie for the time being.

"Anybody want some hot chocolate?" he asked. I shuddered when Atticus started a fire in the kitchen stove.

As we drank our cocoa I noticed Atticus looking at me, first with curiosity, then with sternness. "I thought I told you and Jem to stay put," he said.

"Why, we did. We stayed—"

"Then whose blanket is that?"

"Blanket?"

"Yes ma'am, blanket. It isn't ours."

I looked down and found myself clutching a brown woolen blanket I was wearing around my shoulders, squaw-fashion. "Atticus, I don't know, sir... I—"

I turned to Jem for an answer, but Jem was even more bewildered than I. He said he didn't know how it got there, we did exactly as Atticus had told us, we stood down by the Radley gate away from everybody, we didn't move an inch—Jem stopped.

"Mr. Nathan was at the fire," he babbled, "I saw him, I saw him, he was tuggin' that mattress—Atticus, I swear..." "

"That's all right, son." Atticus grinned slowly. "Looks like all of Maycomb was out tonight, in one way or another. Jem, there's some wrapping paper in the pantry, I think. Go get it and we'll—"

"Atticus, no sir!"

Jem seemed to have lost his mind. He began pouring out our secrets right and left in total disregard for my safety if not for his own, omitting nothing, knot-hole, pants and all.

"...Mr. Nathan put cement in that tree, Atticus, an' he did it to stop us findin' things—he's crazy, I reckon, like they say, but Atticus, I swear to God he ain't ever harmed us, he ain't ever hurt us, he coulda cut my throat from ear to ear that night but he tried to mend my pants instead... he ain't ever hurt us, Atticus—"

Atticus said, "Whoa, son," so gently that I was greatly heartened. It was obvious that he had not followed a word Jem said, for all Atticus said was, "You're right. We'd better keep this and the blanket to ourselves. Someday, maybe, Scout can thank him for covering her up." "Thank who?" I asked.

“Boo Radley. You were so busy looking at the fire you didn’t know it when he put the blanket around you.”

My stomach turned to water and I nearly threw up when Jem held out the blanket and crept toward me.

“He sneaked out of the house—turn ‘round—sneaked up, an’ went like this!”

Atticus said dryly, “Do not let this inspire you to further glory, Jeremy.”

Jem scowled, “I ain’t gonna do anything to him,” but I watched the spark of fresh adventure leave his eyes. “Just think, Scout,” he said, “if you’d just turned around, you’d da seen him.