

"Did you call a doctor, Sheriff? Did anybody call a doctor?" asked Atticus.

"No, sir," said Mr. Tate.

"Why not?" There was an edge to Atticus's voice.

"Well I can tell you why I didn't. It wasn't necessary, Mr. Finch. She was mighty banged up. Something sho' happened, it was obvious."

"But you didn't call a doctor? While you were there did anyone send for one, fetch one, carry her to one?"

"No sir—"

Judge Taylor told Atticus that he had already answered the questions and to move on. Atticus wanted to make sure.

"Sheriff," Atticus was saying, "you say she was mighty banged up. In what way?"

"Well—"

"Just describe the injuries, Heck."

"Well, she was beaten around the head. There was already bruises comin' on her arms, and it happened about thirty minutes before—"

"How do you know?"

Mr. Tate grinned. "Sorry, that's what they said. Anyway, she was pretty bruised up when I got there, and she had a black eye comin'."

"Which eye?"

"Let's see," he said softly, then he looked at Atticus as if he considered the question childish. "Can't you remember?" Atticus asked.

Mr. Tate pointed to an invisible person five inches in front of him and said, "Her left."

"Wait a minute, Sheriff," said Atticus. "Was it her left facing you or her left looking the same way you were?"

Mr. Tate said, "Oh yes, that'd make it her right. It was her right eye, Mr. Finch. I remember now, she was bunged up on that side of her face..."

Mr. Tate blinked as if something had suddenly been made clear to him. He turned and looked at Tom Robinson and Tom raised his head also.

Something became clear to Atticus as well and he asked the sheriff to repeat what he just said.

"It was her right eye, I said."

Atticus looked up at Mr. Tate. Which side again, Heck?"

"The right side, Mr. Finch, but she had more bruises – you wanta hear about 'em?"

"Yes, what were her other injuries?"

"... her arms were bruised, and she showed me her neck. There were definite finger marks on her gullet—"

"All around her throat? At the back of her neck?"

"I'd say they were all around Mr. Finch."

"You would?"

"Yes sir, she had a small throat, anybody could'a reached around it with—"

"Just answer the question yes or no please, Sheriff," said Atticus dryly, and Mr. Tate fell silent.

They were all finished with Mr. Tate as a witness and he stepped down from the witness stand.

Everyone shuffled around a bit, whispering to each other. Dill asked Reverend Sykes what that was all about, but he didn't know. So far things were utterly dull. There were no arguments from opposing counsel and there was no drama. All were relaxed except Jem.

"Robert E. Lee Ewell!"

In answer to the clerk's booming voice, a man rose and strutted to the stand, the back of his neck reddening at the sound of his name. When he turned around to take the stand we say that he had wispy hair that stood up from his forehead, a nose that was thin and pointed, and no chin to speak of.

Every town had families like the Ewells. They lived off of welfare, no truant officer could get the children in school, and no health official could free them from diseases that came from their filthy surroundings.

The Ewells lived behind the town garbage dump in what was once a Negro cabin. It's a square shaped cabin with four small rooms. Its windows were just open spaces in the walls that were covered with greasy cheesecloth in the summer to keep out the varmints. Their yard was dirty and contained the remains of a Model-T Ford, a discarded dentist's chair, an ancient icebox, plus lesser items: old shoes, worn-out table radios, picture frames, and fruit jars.

One corner of the yard, though, bewildered Maycomb. Against the fence, in a line, were six chipped-enamel slop jars holding brilliant red geraniums, cared for as tenderly as if they belonged to Miss Maudie Atkinson. People said they were Mayella Ewell's.

Nobody was quite sure how many children were on the place. Some people thought there were six, others said nine. There were always several dirty faced ones at the windows when anyone passed.

"Mr. Robert Ewell?" asked Mr. Gilmer.

"That's m' name, Cap'n," said the witness.

Mr. Gilmer's back stiffened. "Are you the father of Mayelle Ewell?" was the next question.

"Well, if I ain't I can't do nothing about it now, her ma's dead," was the answer.

Judge Taylor spoke up in a way that made all the laughter in the courtroom die down, "Are you the Father of Mayella Ewell?"

"Yes sir," Mr. Ewell said meekly.

Judge Taylor spoke again and informed Mr. Ewell that he will no longer take any obscene speculations on any subject from anybody in this courtroom.

Mr. Gilmer continued, "Thank you, sir. Mr. Ewell, would you tell us in your own words what happened on the evening of November 21st, please?"

"Well, the night of November twenty-one I was comin' in from the woods with a load o' kindlin' and just as I got to the fence I heard Mayella screamin' like a stuck hog inside the house—"

"What time was it, Mr. Ewell?"

"Just 'fore sundown. Well, I was sayin' Mayella was screamin' fit to beat Jesus—"

another glance from the bench silenced Mr. Ewell.

"Yes? She was screaming?" said Mr. Gilmer.

"Well, Mayella was raisin' this holy racket so I dropped m' load and run as fast as I could but I run into th' fence, but when I got distangled I run up to th' window and I seen—" Mr. Ewell's face grew scarlet. He stood up and pointed his finger at Tom Robinson. "I seen that black n****r yonder ruttin' on my Mayella!"

Judge Taylor used his gavel for five full minutes before the courtroom came to order. Reverend Sykes leaned across Dill and told Jem that he ought to take me home.

Jem turned his head. "Scout, go home. Dill, you'n Scout go home."

"You gotta make me first," I said, remembering Atticus's promise.

"I think it's okay, Reverend, she doesn't understand it."

I was offended. "I most certainly do, I c'n understand anything you can."

Reverend Sykes got nervous. "Mr. Finch know you all are here? This ain't fit for Miss Jean Louise or you boys either."

Jem shook his head. "He can't see us this far away. It's alright, Reverend."

Jem won. He got us to stay.

Judge Taylor finally got the courtroom back under control and Bob Ewell looked mighty pleased at what he had caused. Judge Taylor threatened to clear all the spectators out of the courtroom if there were more outbursts.

"Proceed Mr. Gilmer." Judge Taylor stated.

"Mr. Ewell, did you see the defendant having sexual intercourse with your daughter?"

"Yes, I did."

"You say you were at the window?" asked Mr. Gilmer.

"Yes, sir."

"How far is it from the ground?"

"Bout three foot."

"Did you have a clear view?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did the room look?"

"Well, it was all slung about, like there was a fight."

"What did you do when you saw the defendant?"

"Well, I run around the house to get in, but he ran out the front door just ahead of me. I sawed who he was, all right. I was too distracted about Mayella to run after 'im. I run in the house and she was lyin' on the floor squallin'—"

"Then what did you do?"

"Why I run for Tate quick as I could. I knowed who it was, all right, lived down yonder in that nigger-nest, passed the house every day. Jedge, I've asked this county for fifteen years to clean out that nest down yonder, they're dangerous to live around 'sides devaluin' my property—"

“Thank you, Mr. Ewell,” said Mr. Gilmer hurriedly.

Bob Ewell made a hasty retreat from the witness stand, but Atticus had also risen to ask a few questions. Mr. Ewell backed up to the witness stand and the crowd laughed at him.

“Mr. Ewell,” Atticus began, “folks were doing a lot of running that night. Let’s see, you say you ran to the house, you ran to the window, you ran inside, you ran to Mayella, you ran for Mr. Tate. Did you, during all this running, run for a doctor?”

“Wadn’t no need to. I seen what happened.”

“But there’s one thing I don’t understand,” said Atticus. “Weren’t you concerned with Mayella’s condition?”

“I most positively was,” said Mr. Ewell. “I seen who done it.”

“No, I mean her physical condition. Did you not think the nature of her injuries warranted immediate medical attention?”

“What?”

“Didn’t you think she should have had a doctor, immediately?”

Mr. Ewell in all of his life would never have thought to call on a doctor. It would have cost him five dollars.

Atticus asked him if he heard Mr. Heck Tate’s testimony and he said that he did.

Atticus asked, “Do you agree with his description of Mayella’s injuries?”

“How’s that?”

“Mr. Tate testified that her right eye was blackened, that she was beaten around the —“

“Oh yeah,” said the witness. “I hold with everything Tate said.”

“You do? I just want to make sure... ‘Which eye her left? Oh yes that’d make it her right, it was her right eye...’ ”

“I holds with Tate. Her eye was blacked and she was mighty beat up.” Mr. Ewell answered.

“Mr. Ewell, can you read and write?”

“I most positively can.”

“Will you write your name and show us?”

“I most positively will. How do you think I sign my relief checks?”

Mr. Ewell wrote his name.

“What’s so interestin’?” he asked.

“You’re left-handed, Mr. Ewell,” said Judge Taylor. Mr. Ewell got angry and didn’t see what being left-handed had to do with it.

Mr. Gilmer asked him one more question. “About your writing with your left hand... are you ambidextrous, Mr. Ewell?”

“I most positively am not, I can use one hand good as the other. One hand good as the other,” he added, glaring at the defense table.

Jem got excited, “We’ve got him.”

I didn’t think so. I knew Atticus was trying to show that since Mayella was mostly beaten on her right side, it had to be a left-handed person who did it. But Tom Robinson could easily be left-handed too.