**From Chapter 12**

I wanted to stay and explore, but Calpurnia propelled me up the aisle ahead of her. At the church door, while she paused to talk with Zeebo and his family, Jem and I chatted with Reverend Sykes. I was bursting with questions, but decided I would wait and let Calpurnia answer them.

“We were ‘specially glad to have you all here,” said Reverend Sykes. “This church has no better friend than your daddy.”

My curiosity burst: “Why were you all takin‘ up collection for Tom Robinson’s wife?”

“Didn’t you hear why?” asked Reverend Sykes. “Helen’s got three little’uns and she can’t go out to work—” “Why can’t she take ‘em with her, Reverend?” I asked. It was customary for field Negroes with tiny children

to deposit them in whatever shade there was while their parents worked—usually the babies sat in the shade between two rows of cotton. Those unable to sit were strapped papoose-style on their mothers’ backs, or resided in extra cotton bags.

Reverend Sykes hesitated. “To tell you the truth, Miss Jean Louise, Helen’s finding it hard to get work these days… when it’s picking time, I think Mr. Link Deas’ll take her.”

“Why not, Reverend?”

Before he could answer, I felt Calpurnia’s hand on my shoulder. At its pressure I said, “We thank you for

lettin‘ us come.” Jem echoed me, and we made our way homeward.

“Cal, I know Tom Robinson’s in jail an‘ he’s done somethin’ awful, but why won’t folks hire Helen?” I asked. Calpurnia, in her navy voile dress and tub of a hat, walked between Jem and me. “It’s because of what folks say Tom’s done,” she said. “Folks aren’t anxious to—to have anything to do with any of his family.”

“Just what did he do, Cal?”

Calpurnia sighed. “Old Mr. Bob Ewell accused him of rapin‘ his girl an’ had him arrested an‘ put in jail—”

“Mr. Ewell?” My memory stirred. “Does he have anything to do with those Ewells that come every first day of school an‘ then go home? Why, Atticus said they were absolute trash—I never heard Atticus talk about folks the way he talked about the Ewells. He said-”

“Yeah, those are the ones.”

“Well, if everybody in Maycomb knows what kind of folks the Ewells are they’d be glad to hire Helen… what’s rape, Cal?”

“It’s somethin‘ you’ll have to ask Mr. Finch about,” she said. “He can explain it better than I can. You all hungry? The Reverend took a long time unwindin’ this morning, he’s not usually so tedious.”

“He’s just like our preacher,” said Jem, “but why do you all sing hymns that way?” “Linin‘?” she asked.

“Is that what it is?”

“Yeah, it’s called linin‘. They’ve done it that way as long as I can remember.”

Jem said it looked like they could save the collection money for a year and get some hymn-books. Calpurnia laughed. “Wouldn’t do any good,” she said. “They can’t read.”

“Can’t read?” I asked. “All those folks?”

“That’s right,” Calpurnia nodded. “Can’t but about four folks in First Purchase read… I’m one of ‘em.” “Where’d you go to school, Cal?” asked Jem.

“Nowhere. Let’s see now, who taught me my letters? It was Miss Maudie Atkinson’s aunt, old Miss Buford—” “I’m older than Mr. Finch, even.” Calpurnia grinned. “Not sure how much, though. We started rememberin‘

one time, trying to figure out how old I was—I can remember back just a few years more’n he can, so I’m not much older, when you take off the fact that men can’t remember as well as women.”

“What’s your birthday, Cal?”

“I just have it on Christmas, it’s easier to remember that way—I don’t have a real birthday.”

“But Cal,” Jem protested, “you don’t look even near as old as Atticus.” “Colored folks don’t show their ages so fast,” she said.

“Maybe because they can’t read. Cal, did you teach Zeebo?”

“Yeah, Mister Jem. There wasn’t a school even when he was a boy. I made him learn, though.”

Zeebo was Calpurnia’s eldest son. If I had ever thought about it, I would have known that Calpurnia was of mature years—Zeebo had half-grown children—but then I had never thought about it.

“Did you teach him out of a primer, like us?” I asked.

“No, I made him get a page of the Bible every day, and there was a book Miss Buford taught me out of— bet you don’t know where I got it,” she said.

We didn’t know.

Calpurnia said, “Your Granddaddy Finch gave it to me.”

“Were you from the Landing?” Jem asked. “You never told us that.”

“I certainly am, Mister Jem. Grew up down there between the Buford Place and the Landin‘. I’ve spent all my days workin’ for the Finches or the Bufords, an‘ I moved to Maycomb when your daddy and your mamma married.”

“What was the book, Cal?” I asked.

“Blackstone’s Commentaries.”

Jem was thunderstruck. “You mean you taught Zeebo outa that?”

“Why yes sir, Mister Jem.” Calpurnia timidly put her fingers to her mouth. “They were the only books I had.

Your grandaddy said Mr. Blackstone wrote fine English—” “That’s why you don’t talk like the rest of ‘em,” said Jem. “The rest of who?”

“Rest of the colored folks. Cal, but you talked like they did in church…”

That Calpurnia led a modest double life never dawned on me. The idea that she had a separate existence outside our household was a novel one, to say nothing of her having command of two languages. “Cal,” I asked, “why do you talk nigger-talk to the—to your folks when you know it’s not right?”

“Well, in the first place I’m black—”

“That doesn’t mean you hafta talk that way when you know better,” said Jem.

Calpurnia tilted her hat and scratched her head, then pressed her hat down carefully over her ears. “It’s right hard to say,” she said. “Suppose you and Scout talked coloredfolks’ talk at home it’d be out of place, wouldn’t it? Now what if I talked white-folks’ talk at church, and with my neighbors? They’d think I was puttin‘ on airs to beat Moses.”

“But Cal, you know better,” I said.

“It’s not necessary to tell all you know. It’s not ladylike—in the second place, folks don’t like to have somebody around knowin‘ more than they do. It aggravates ’em. You’re not gonna change any of them by talkin‘ right, they’ve got to want to learn themselves, and when they don’t want to learn there’s nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language.”

“Cal, can I come to see you sometimes?”

She looked down at me. “See me, honey? You see me every day.”

“Out to your house,” I said. “Sometimes after work? Atticus can get me.” “Any time you want to,” she said. “We’d be glad to have you.”