**Miss Maudie Atkins**

from ***To Kill a Mockingbird*** - Chapter 8

Miss Maudie's sunhat was suspended in a thin layer of ice, like a fly in amber, and we had to dig under the dirt for her hedge-clippers. We found her in her back yard, gazing at her frozen charred azaleas.

"We're bringing back your things, Miss Maudie," said Jem. "We're awful sorry." Miss Maudie looked around, and the shadow of her old grin crossed her face.

"Always wanted a smaller house, Jem Finch. Gives me more yard. Just think, I'll have more room for my azaleas now!"

"You ain't grievin', Miss Maudie?" I asked, surprised. Atticus said her house was nearly all

she had.

"Grieving, child? Why, I hated that old cow barn. Thought of settin' fire to it a hundred

times myself, except they'd lock me up."

"But -"

"Don't you worry about me, Jean Louise Finch. There are ways of doin’ things you don't know about. Why, I'll build me a little house and take me a couple of roomers and-gracious, I'll have the finest yard in Alabama. Those Bellingraths'll look plain puny when I get started!"

Jem, and I looked at each other.

"How'd it catch, Miss Maudie?" he asked. "I don't know, Jem. Probably the flue in the kitchen. I kept a fire in there last night for my potted plants. Hear you had some unexpected company last night, Miss Jean Louise."

"How'd you know?"

"Atticus told me on his way to town this morning. Tell you the truth, I'd like to've been with you. And I'd've had sense enough to turn around, too."

Miss Maudie puzzled me. With most of her possessions gone and her beloved yard a shambles, she still took a lively and cordial interest in Jem's and my affairs.

She must have seen my perplexity. She said, "Only thing I worried about last night was all the danger and commotion it caused. This whole neighborhood could have gone up. Mr. Avery'll be in bed for a week-he's right stove up. He's too old to do things like that and I told him so. Soon as I can get my hands clean and when Stephanie Crawford's not looking, I'll make him a Lane cake. That Stephanie's been after my recipe for thirty years, and if she thinks I'll give it to her just because I'm staying with her she's got another think coming."

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"You've ruined [your hands in the yard]," said Jem. "Why don't you get a colored man?" There was no note of sacrifice in his voice when he added, "Or Scout'n'me, we can help you."

Miss Maudie said, "Thank you sir, but you've got a job of your own over there." She pointed

to our yard.

"You mean the Morphodite?" I asked. "Shoot, we can rake him up in a jiffy."

Miss Maudie stared down at me, her lips moving silently. Suddenly she put her hands to

her head and whooped. When we left her, she was still chuckling.

Jem said he didn't know what was the matter with her - that was just Miss Maudie.

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