Chapter 10:

Atticus was much older than the parents of our school friends, and there was nothing Jem or I could say about him when our classmates said, “My father – “

Besides that, he wore glasses. He was nearly blind in his left eye. Whenever he wanted to see something well, he turned his head and looked from his right eye.

He did not do the things our schoolmates’ fathers did: he never went hunting, he did not play poker or fish or drink or smoke. He sat in the living room and read.

He would not remain as inconspicuous as we wished him to: that year the school buzzed with talk about him defending Tom Robinson, none of which was complimentary.

When he gave us our air-rifles Atticus wouldn’t teach us to shoot so Uncle Jack did. Atticus said to Jem one day, “I’d rather you shot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you’ll go after birds. Shoot all the blue jays you want, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird.”

That was the only time I ever heard Atticus say it was a sin to do something, and I asked Miss Maudie about it.

“Your father’s right,” she said. “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. That’s why it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird. You and Jem are lucky to have the benefit of your father’s age.”

**Jem and Scout learn about their father.**

“But Atticus can’t do anything….”

You’d be surprised. He’s the best checker-player in town and he can play a harmonica.

These modest accomplishments made me even more ashamed of him.

One Saturday, Jem and I decided to go exploring with our air-rifles to see if we could find a rabbit or a squirrel. Just past the Radley Place, I noticed Jem squinting at something down the street.

“Whatcha looking at?”

“That old dog down yonder,” he said.

“That’s old Tim Johnson, ain’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“What’s he doing?”

“I don’t know, Scout. We better go home.”

We got Calpurnia and she followed us beyond the Radley Place and looked where Jem pointed. Tim Johnson was walking erratically, as if his right legs were shorter than his left legs.

Calpurnia stared, than grabbed us by the shoulders and ran us home. She called Atticus at his office.

“Mr. Finch!” she shouted. “This is Cal. There’s a mad dog down the street and he’s comin’ this way.”

Calpurnia told all the neighbors to stay inside. Mr. Heck Tate, the sheriff, and Atticus came to the house. The street was deserted. Then Tim Johnson came into sight. The sheriff said, “He’s got it all right.”

“He’s lookin’ for a place to die,” said Jem.

Mr. Tate turned around, “He’s far from dead, Jem, he hasn’t got started yet.”

“Take him, Mr. Finch.” Mr. Tate handed the rifle to Atticus; Jem and I nearly fainted.

“Mr. Finch, this is a one-shot job.”

Atticus shook his head vehemently: “Don’t just stand there, Heck! He won’t wait all day for you –“

“For God’s sake, Mr. Finch, look where he is! Miss and you’ll go straight into the Radley house! I can’t shoot that well and you know it!”

“I haven’t shot a gun in thirty years – “

Jem and I watched our father take the gun and walk out into the middle of the street. Atticus pushed his glasses to his forehead.

Tim Johnson stopped in front of the Radley gate and raised his head. We saw his body go rigid.

With movements so swift they seemed simultaneous, Atticus lifted the gun and shot.

Tim Johnson flopped over and crumpled on the sidewalk in a brown-and-white heap. He didn’t know what hit him.

**Jem and Scout learn about their father.**

Slowly the neighbors began coming out. Jem said “ ’d you see him, Scout? It looked like that gun was a part of him… an’ he did it so quick.”

Miss Maudie grinned, “Well now Scout, still think your father can’t do anything? Still ashamed of him?

“No” I said meekly.

“Forgot to tell you the other day that Atticus Finch was the deadest shot in Maycomb County.”

**Jem and Scout learn about their father.**