

The Wait

By Kathryn Tuns

While the action of Chapter 21 of the novel To Kill a Mockingbird takes place in the Maycomb courthouse, the following work of fanfiction imagines the chapter from Aunt Alexandra's perspective while she anxiously awaits the jury's verdict and the trial's closing.

I watched the children scamper down the road towards the courthouse, giddy to witness the trial play out its grand finale. Word had reached us that the jury had returned. I sighed and felt a prick on the back of my neck that I could not scratch. This trial was going to kill someone, and I do not just mean Tom Robinson. I watched Stephanie Crawford slip out of her house in a new dress with a coke in hand. I did not want to be noticed, but, sure enough, as soon as she saw me she waved and rushed over. I faked a thin smile as she started her chatter, telling me of the events in grueling detail.

“When the jury headed out everyone was so still, but I had to slip out for some thin' to eat, it was so stuffy in there. Hope I don't lose my seat. The courthouse was jammed pack. Jem and Scout were sittin' in the balcony with the...”

“Stephanie, if I wanted to know what happened I would have gone to the court, myself,” I interrupted. A few creases appeared on her forehead.

“Well, fine then,” she said, before she turned on her heels and marched towards the courthouse.

I reentered the house and went to the kitchen. Calpernia was by the sink washing the dishes, looking dazed. She acknowledged me with a small nod. I made my way to the counter and started some coffee. Though the stuff was foul, I did have it on the occasion, and now seemed like a fitting time. I poured myself a cup, hesitated, then poured one for Calpernia. We waited.

The evening drew on. I was struck with a tired feeling, even after several cups of coffee; not so much due to lack of sleep, but to worry. I worried for Atticus and for the children. Maycomb is a town good people with pride in their heritage. But it is also a town full of people who would sentence that man just for the enjoyment of watching him squirm. If what they say is true, then what that boy did is reprehensible. Raping and beating a poor young girl *should* get him killed. But his sentence will affect Atticus, and I would rather see Tom Robinson go free than watch my brother endure more pressure.

I decided to set to work on my needlework. Pinpoint allows me the chance to think. My mind turns to that busybody, Stephanie Crawford. It sickens me to think that so many people went to the courthouse today, especially under the circumstances. All the

women and children in attendance-- it is scornful. The courtroom is no fit place for them, and they know it. Curiosity must have gotten the better of them, and we all know that curiosity killed the cat. Then again, satisfaction brought it back.

Calpernia has set up a cot on the back porch for herself, as I have taken her usual room as my own. Atticus insists she stay the night and let things die down a bit after the sentencing. Atticus will accompany her home in the morning. She entered the living room where I was working on my needlepoint and cleared her throat. I looked up at her. For the first time, I noticed the lines on her weary face and the grey hair near her temples. Even with these signs of time, her figure was powerful.

“Do you need anything, Miss?” She asked.

“No.”

“Are you sure, Miss Alexandra? More coffee? I could bake some of those tarts you like?”

“I’m fine,” I hesitated a moment trying to think of how to word what I was about to ask: “Calpernia, do you think we, Atticus that is, has a chance? I mean that jury is taking an awfully long time.”

Calpernia rang out the side of her apron, carefully choosing her words.

“I don’t reckon so, Miss Alexandra. Atticus probably made them think, maybe even dispute, but to them a black man is still a black man. The crime is serious; the chances of him going free are very slim.”

She stopped and looked at me. Something in her face told me she was worried. About what, I didn’t know. She turned to head back to the kitchen, but I didn’t want to be alone. I either had to keep talking, or let her leave.

“I wish Scout would wear a dress!” I blurted out, unexpectedly. “She needs to become a lady. I want her to have a good childhood, and it won’t last forever.” Calpernia stopped walking and turned back to look at me.

“I know, and in time she just might,” Cal paused. “But we can’t force her to grow up, and though you may not see it, she *has* become a young lady.” She snorted, “though we might need to do something about those breaches soon. She is growing so fast that her legs are springing out of them.”

I gave a little laugh, and Calpernia left the room. Alone again, I put down my needlework. Scout and Jem needed her, I suddenly realized, overcome with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for this woman. Other than their mother, no other woman could have raised those children. That’s when it hit me: I referred to Jean Louise by her nickname. That deprived, monosyllabic nickname: Scout. I smiled at the thought of becoming a part of their lives. They will always need Calpernia, but they could learn to love me, too.

Those children are braver than half of the townspeople of Maycomb. I do hope that they amount to something. Background matters, but who knows? The Finches may be a well-respected family, but that does not mean that all individuality should be lost. Pride in the family name is important, but one must find their own course in life.

Atticus did, and he is is a better person than I could ever be.

I heard voices coming up the path. It was Jem, and he was crying.