Passage from Chapter 1:

Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the

streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it

was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summerday; bony mules hitched to Hovver carts flicked flies in

the sweltering shade of the live oaks in the square. Men’s stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning.

Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o’clock napes, and by nightfall were like soft teacakes with

frostings of sweat and sweet talcum.

People moved slowly then. They ambled across the square, shuffled in and out of the stores around it, ]

took their time about everything. A day was twenty-four hours long but seemed longer. There was no

hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside

the boundaries of Maycomb County. But it was a time of vague optimism for some of the people:

Maycomb County had recently been told that it had nothing to fear but fear itself.

We lived on the main residential street in town—Atticus Jem and I, plus Calpurnia our cook. Jem and I

found our father satisfactory: he played with us, read to us, and treated us with courteous detachment.

Calpurnia was something else again. She was all angles and bones; she was nearsighted; she squinted;

her hand was wide as a bed slat and twice as hard. She was always ordering me out of the kitchen, asking

me why I couldn’t believe as well as Jem when she knew as well as Jem when she knew he was older,

and calling me home when I wasn’t ready to come. Our battles were epic and one-sided. Calpurnia always

won, mainly because Atticus took her side. She had been with us ever since Jem was born, and I had felt

her tyrannical presence as long as I could remember.

Our mother died when I was two, so I never felt her absence. She was a Graham from Montgomery;

Atticus met her when he was first elected to the stae legislature. He was idle-aged then, she was fifteen

years his junior. Jem was the product of their first year of marriage; four years later I was born, and two

years later our mother died from a sudden heart attack. They said it ran in her family. I did not miss her,

but I think Jem did. He remembered her clearly, and sometimes in the middle of a game he would sign at

length, then go off and play by himself behind the car-house. When he was like that, I knew better than to

bother him.

When I was almost six and Jem was nearly ten, our summertime boundaries (within calling distance of

Calpurnia) were Mrs. Henry Lafayette Dubose’s house two doors to the north of us, and the Radley Place

three doors to the south. We were never tempted to break them. The Radley Place was inhabited by an

unknown entity of the mere description of whom was enough to make us behave for days on end; Mrs.

Dubose was plain hell.