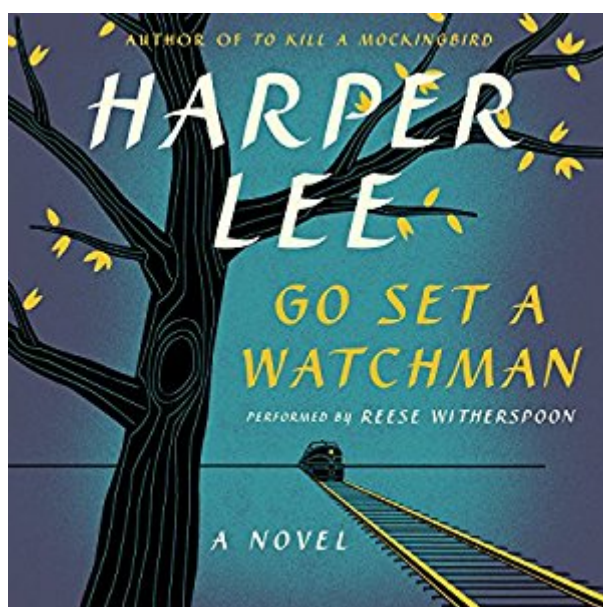


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Go Set A Watchman: A Novel



Synopsis

An historic literary event: the publication of a newly discovered novel, the earliest known work from Harper Lee, the beloved, best-selling author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Originally written in the mid-1950s, *Go Set a Watchman* was the novel Harper Lee first submitted to her publishers before *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Assumed to have been lost, the manuscript was discovered in late 2014. *Go Set a Watchman* features many of the characters from *To Kill a Mockingbird* some 20 years later. Returning home to Maycomb to visit her father, Jean Louise Finch - Scout - struggles with issues both personal and political, involving Atticus, society, and the small Alabama town that shaped her. Exploring how the characters from *To Kill a Mockingbird* are adjusting to the turbulent events transforming mid-1950s America, *Go Set a Watchman* casts a fascinating new light on Harper Lee's enduring classic. Moving, funny, and compelling, it stands as a magnificent novel in its own right.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If "*Go Set a Watchman*" had been published before "*To Kill a Mockingbird*," it would have been meaningless. Tom Robinson's trial would be just a vague incident in the Jean Louise's memory instead of a culturally iconic scene. Atticus Finch would be his daughter's fallen hero, but not ours. If "*Watchman*" had been first, we would only know Atticus as a segregationist and we wouldn't care: he wouldn't have been an ethical role model and a hero. There would be references to Atticus's past and why Jean Louise's world is shaken when she finds out he is a segregationist, but we would not share them. Now, though, Jean Louise's (who I keep referring to as "Scout" out of habit) feelings of

betrayal are our own, as we can see by the collective Internet outrage. That's why "Watchman" works; that's why I have to give it four stars. "Watchman" is about fallen idols and disillusionment. Jean Louise tries to reconcile how moral paragon Atticus Finch could be racist, and that's what the readers have been trying to reconcile, as well. The press release for "Watchman" said, "[Jean Louise Finch] is forced to grapple with issues both personal and political as she tries to understand her father's attitude toward society, and her own feelings about the place where she was born and spent her childhood," which gave us a hint that the Atticus we knew--the infallible anti-racist crusader--would not be that way in "Watchman." The talk about "Watchman" tarnishing Lee's legacy contributed to that idea. Still, I dismissed this possibility until it was confirmed, and even then, I was in denial.

I came in skeptical, but I loved this novel for exactly what it is: a brilliantly written, beautiful southern novel about a young woman who discovers her father is not a god. And I'm angry that some pompous, patriarchal publisher squashed it and convinced her to write a brilliantly written, beautiful southern novel about a young woman who discovers her father is a god. WATCHMAN is about growing up, "killing the Buddha" and laying claim to one's own world view. I can certainly believe that this is Harper Lee's first novel. I totally understand why the editor buried it and encouraged her to bend her considerable talent to the concept of MOCKINGBIRD, latching onto a fairly insignificant anecdote and reframing it as the main plot thrust -- which also neatly swapped hero and heroine, making the star of the book a man instead of a young woman. Setting aside the suspicious circumstances of the magical appearance of WATCHMAN (and the buckets of money involved for the publisher and agent), I also totally get why Harper Lee might want us to have this novel now, at this point in her life. She is now where old Atticus is in WATCHMAN: an elderly person who is sick and tired of carrying the burden of our hero worship. So there. Take that. Eat your disillusionment and throw up behind the ice cream parlor that was once your childhood home. It hurts, and it infuriates, and it strips away your security blanket. Get over it. As an editor, I want to go back in time, embrace this young author, force her to firmly look in my eyes, and tell her: "This is a wonderful book. And you must write another one and another and another, and every one of them should say exactly what you want to say."

There's been a lot of controversy surrounding the publication of GO SET A WATCHMAN, which has been universally recognized as the first draft of what would eventually become Harper Lee's magnificent TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD. WATCHMAN, written several years before

MOCKINGBIRD, tells the story of 26-year-old Jean Louise Finch who returns to her childhood home of Maycomb, Alabama to visit her 72-year-old father, Atticus Finch. At first, the visit is bathed in the patina of memories and nostalgia - Jean Louise remembers the smells, the sounds, and the people she grew up with, and she resents the changes that have taken place (Atticus has left the house where Jean Louise was born and built himself a new place that doesn't quite feel the same). The first third of the novel is slow-paced and wistful, with Jean Louise flirting with childhood friend and maybe-fiancé, Hank Clinton, now her father's law partner. She spars with her Aunt Alexandra (who berates her for wearing "slacks" in town) and her Uncle Jack (whose conversation is steeped in metaphor and allusion). It isn't until she learns that Atticus and Hank are both part of the Maycomb County Citizen's Council, an organization bent on preventing racial integration, that the plot really begins. The Atticus we see here - a man determined to preserve the identity of a South torn asunder, first by emancipation and then by Supreme Court decisions - is not the Atticus Jean Louise remembers from her childhood. She thought of him as a God, and we who so loved both the book and movie versions of MOCKINGBIRD did, too. But WATCHMAN has a message that's far more complex than its more famous counterpart. Because Atticus is not a God. He's also not evil, even in his need to protect his world from the kind of change that cannot come easily.

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