

A jury of her peers by susan glaspell

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This short story entitled “ A Jury of Her Peers” by Susan Glaspell is about a farmer’s murder in Dickinson County. This farmer named John Wright was murdered during his sleep. The suspect of the said crime was his wife, Minnie Wright, for the crime happened in their residence, in John’s own bed. Mr. Wright was strangled by a rope during his sleep which caused his death. The story revolved around the investigation conducted after the crime. Five people went to the Wright’s residence - Mr. Henderson, who was the county attorney; Mr. Peters who was the sheriff together with his wife; and, Mr. Hale, who was a neighbor of the Wrights. Mrs. Martha Hale was also there since Mrs. Peters wanted to have female company with her as they went to the scene of the crime.

When they got to the Wrights’ house, the sheriff and the county attorney asked Mr. Hale to tell about what happened when he went to the house to see John Wright. Mr. Hale said that Mrs. Wright was just in seated on a chair and as he asked to see John, Minnie said he cannot for John is dead. He asked where he was and Minnie simply pointed upstairs. Further, he asked how he died and she said that a rope wrung his neck. So Mr. Hale went upstairs together with his eldest son, Harry. Mr. Hale thought of removing the rope thinking that John might still be alive, but his son stopped him, saying that it was evidence that should be preserved. Harry ascertained that Mr. Wright was indeed dead.

During the investigation, they failed to scrutinize for clues in the kitchen and focused on the crime scene itself. As the three men investigated upstairs, the two women were left in the kitchen, where they did investigations by themselves. Ironically, the two women discovered things which served as

pieces of the puzzle. Mrs. Hale knew that there were unfinished tasks in the kitchen, which the men did not notice. She knew this, as she herself had unfinished works in the kitchen as his husband demanded that she join him to the Wrights' house. Another clue was a bird cage with hinges that were broken, in what they thought, a rough manner.

Then, there was a quilt, with stitching that they scrutinized and noticed that was almost perfect and neatly done. At the edge of the quilt, however, the stitches became uneven, as if Minnie was unstable as she did it. As the women continued to look at Minnie's sewing materials for the quilt, Mrs. Hale, saw a beautiful box. When she opened it, she saw something wrapped in silk. To her surprise it was the dead canary bird. Its neck was wrung. It was killed in almost the same way as Mr. Wright was murdered.

These pieces of evidence were kept among themselves. Though the men found out about the broken cage, the women said that perhaps a cat killed the bird, and the men took the idea. Aside from this, Mrs. Hale has repaired that imperfect stitching from the quilt which Mrs. Wright was making. The women, who seem to relate to the sentiments and position of Minnie, silently agreed to keep the motive for the killing of John Wright. As Enotes puts it: "In silent collusion, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters cover up the clues that reveal Minnie's motive, quietly acquitting Minnie from wrongdoing without their husbands' knowledge" (par. 2)

This story, as indicated in the Introduction of as study guide in Enotes, was "based on an actual court case [that Susan Glaspell] covered as a reporter for the Des Moines Daily" (par. 1). The crime happened in Indianola, Iowa on

December 2, 1900 where a farmer named John Hossack was murdered in bed. His head was hit hard by an axe and the suspect was none other than his wife, Margaret. She was released as there was insufficient evidence for her to be convicted.

Apparently, during the period when Susan Glaspell wrote this short story, women were good as voiceless. No woman was a member of jury. Glaspell, through her writing, has depicted how the women can be ironically stronger and smarter than the men. It was the women who have found the evidence and in their own way became the jurors for this crime. In addition, women were regarded by men as inferior. As stated, women were left in the kitchen and it was the men who did the investigation. Also, there were a number of instances in the story where the men laughed at the women's ways and conversations. The women were timid and they do not speak when they were with the men.

Moreover, one can deduce the fact that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters can empathize with Mrs. Wright. They knew that there has been maltreatment from Mr. Wright and that he "killed" the source of little joys for her wife. It was mentioned that before they married, Minnie sang on choirs and stopped singing after marrying Mr. Wright. Moreover, Mrs. Hale supposed that canary birds are singing birds and are good companions against loneliness. From this, Mrs. Hale concludes (as implied in the story) that Mr. Wright must have killed the canary bird.

The story was written in a cohesive manner and can be easily grasped. On initial glance it appears to be a simple detective story. However, as any

other literature, one ought to understand it within its historical context.

Reading and understanding the conversations between the women seem to represent the powerlessness and overall disadvantaged status of women in society. During the 1900s, women did not enjoy the same freedom as women do nowadays. "A Jury of Her Peers" effectively showed how unjust the women were treated in a male-dominated society.

Enotes say that critics see the story as "more of a commentary about female oppression, justice, the confining nature of rigid stereotypes, and the differences in perspective between men and women" (par. 3). Basing from this fact, one can appreciate how powerful such piece of writing was, up to this date. Furthermore, Enotes adds that "critics have hailed 'A Jury of Her Peers' as a feminist classic, noting the story's significance-laden details and its insight into motivations of men and women" (par. 4). This work of Glaspell is a good material for the study offeminism.

Works Cited

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