
Review of Susan Glaspell's Story, a Jury of Her Peers

A Jury of Her Peers

In her short story, A Jury of Her Peers, author Susan Glaspell writes about the investigation of a murder that occurred at a farmhouse in the country. The story takes place in the early 1900s before women could sit on juries. Therefore, whenever a woman was on trial, a jury of her peers really was not judging her. As the story begins, Martha Hale and her husband are being taken by Sheriff Peters with his wife, and the county attorney, to the isolated home of the Wrights. Mr. Hale tells the Sheriff and the county attorney that on the previous morning he found Mr. Wright strangled to death. He also tells them that Mrs. Wright claimed that she did not know who had killed him. As a result, Mrs. Wright was arrested and was waiting to be charged.

As they entered the house they came upon the kitchen, which would become the central location of the story. As the men searched around for any clues, they continuously made jokes about the things that the women were concerned about. In addition, they put the women down at every opportunity. What they didn't realize was that the kitchen held many clues as to the life of abuse and violence that Mrs. Wright had been forced to endure. However, the signs that the men had ignored were clearly seen and understood by the women. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters were to gather clothing and to see if they could find any clues while the men turned to their more serious work of trying to find a motive. Although the men were making jokes as to whether the women would know a clue if they saw one. What they didn't realize was that the women would not only find a clue, but they would find the clues that would be the make or break of the case. In a basket of patches that appeared to be for a quilt, the women found a strangled canary. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters piece together the difficult life of the third woman, Mrs. Wright, and decide to conceal the evidence that could incriminate her. Thus, A Jury of Her Peers was indeed judging Mrs. Wright.

It was very obvious that the men were interpreting a number of the clues completely different than the women were seeing them. For instance, when the men found incomplete tasks all around the kitchen they made jokes about it and called them signs of an incompetent housekeeper. However, to the women these were clear signs of an unstable conscience. The incomplete tasks in Mrs. Wright's kitchen told the women that she acted very soon after Mr. Wright's strangling of the bird. The most important clue that the women found was the bird. The bird, as far as they could see it, acted as a substitute for the child that Mrs. Wright never had. In addition, it helped to replace the silence of her cold, demanding husband. The bird also helped them to see that when Mr. Wright killed the canary, he seemed to also kill her spirit. The

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different meanings of the word knot seems to fit the storyline quite well, however, it also appears to leave one with an image of Mr. Wright with a rope around his neck. Although, to the two women, it represents that they will not tell anyone about their secret.

It was obvious to both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters just what had happened. However, without even discussing it they knew that if they let the men find the bird that they would have the motive they were so anxiously searching for around the house. They both understood what Mrs. Wright had been going through and obviously felt that she had already served a sentence equal to the crime. Thus, the reason for the title, A Jury of Her Peers, was being seen in the way Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters decided to try and cover up the evidence that would most likely have led to a guilty verdict for Mrs. Wright. Thus, Mrs. Hale put the dead bird in her pocket where it would never be found, and hoping that Mrs. Wright would be found not guilty, because of a lack of a motive.

A Jury of Her Peers opens with Mrs. Hale leaving her house her bread all ready for mixing, half the flour sifted and half unsifted (1; numbers in parentheses indicate paragraph). Mrs. Hale hadn't planned to go to the Wright house by Mrs. Peters, the sheriff's wife wished Mrs. Hale would come too... The sheriff guessed she was getting scary and wanted another woman along. The Machiavellism of the gentlemen is oppressive. The county attorney, Mr. Henderson, when asking Mrs. Peters to look for clues made Mr. Hale wonder aloud Would the women know a clue if they did come upon it? The women, however, were able to identify clues and determine the motivation and the justification of the crime. In A Jury of Her Peers, the jury, Mrs.

Peters and Mrs. Hale, exonerate Mrs. Wright. The exoneration was based on evidence of Mrs. Wright having been a good housewife, her acceptance of her circumstance and the final cruelty of Mr. Wright.

Mrs. Wright was a good housewife. They were too myopic to see anything other than the superficial. Dirty dishes, groceries not put away and when Mr. Henderson found the towels in the towel rack dirty he commented Not much of a housekeeper... Martha Hale knew those towels get dirty quick. The condescending attitude of Mr. Henderson shone when he laughed Ah, true to your sex, I see. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters felt the unease which was deeper than the fact a murder had been committed in the house. Several times The two women had drawn nearer.

The county attorney looked around the kitchen. Mr. Peters gave a little laugh for the insignificance of kitchen things. The cupboards were substandard and unsightly. Mr. Henderson opened one As if its queerness attracted him. Inside were the burst remains of Mrs. Wright's preserves. Mrs. Peters remembered that that She worried about that when it turned so cold last night. A poor housekeeper who had just murdered her husband wouldn't have been overly

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concerned with her jarred fruit.

There were groceries out, half put away. Mrs. Hale was scandalized by leaving her kitchen in such disarray. It was no ordinary thing that called her away... Mrs. Hale had noticed ..a bucket of sugar on a low shelf. The cover was off the wooden bucket, and beside it was a paper bag - half full. Mrs. Wright was a good housekeeper. No ordinary thing could have forced Mrs. Wright to leave her kitchen in such a way. Mrs. Peters had come to the Wright house to gather a few of Mrs. Wrights personal belongings. Her belongings were somewhat shabby and worn. A rather peculiar item was requested. Mrs. Wright wanted her apron. Mrs. Peters determined she had wanted it just to make her feel more natural. If youre used to wearing an apron.... An inadequate housewife wouldnt feel natural in an apron. Mrs. Wright had also

asked for her shawl. Mrs. Peters knew exactly where to find the shawl per Mrs. Wrights instruction. A woman who doesnt keep a tidy house doesnt know where things are precisely.

Mr. and Mrs. Wright had been married for twenty years. Mr. and Mrs. Hale were the Wrights neighbors. Mr. Wright had gone to ask Mr. Wright about installing telephone service when he discovered what had transpired. Mr. Hale thought perhaps if he could explain how the womenfolk liked the telephones. However, Mr. Hale think as

what his wife wanted made much difference to John-. John was not a caring individual. Mrs. Hale described him as a man who didnt drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his debts. But he was a hard man. Like a raw wind

that gets to the bone. Twenty years Mrs. Wright lived with a man who chilled ones bones and never complained.

Mrs. Hale hadnt seen much of Mrs. Wright over the years as the Wright house never seemed a very cheerful place. Minnie Foster, as Mrs. Hale remembered her, was a bright, girl who sang in the choir and wore pretty clothes. Mrs. Peters had only met Mrs. Wright the evening before, when the sheriff had brought her in under arrest. Mrs. Hale remembered Minnie as kind of like a bird herself. Real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and - fluttery. How - she- did- change. She had had nice things, when she was young. There was no evidence of any niceties in the Wright house. Minnie Foster wore threadbare clothes, sat in an old broken down rocking chair and had to cook on a broken stove. The gloom was depressing yet Mrs. Wright kept to herself and didnt complain.

Mrs. Peters found a broken bird cage, one hinge has been pulled apart.. In the darkness of her world, Mrs. Wright found some beauty. Mrs. Peters also found the birds mutilated body. The birds body was found in a pretty box, Ill warrant that was something she had a long time ago -

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when she was a girl. The last vestige of Minnie Foster's happiness was going to be used as a coffin. For her to use one of the only pretty things found in her life to bury her pet shows the deep affection Mrs. Wright must have felt for it. Mrs. Peters argued, "Of course we don't know who killed the bird." To which Mrs. Hale simply replied, "I knew John Wright."

Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters didn't speak of their feelings. Mrs. Hale saw the truth of the situation before Mrs. Peters. The two women's eyes met in an unspoken communication through their investigation. There was nothing peaceful in the Wright house, for years. Then for a time Minnie had the sweet sound of a canary. Even Mrs. Peters couldn't deny it. Mr. Wright had been strangled in his bed. It was an odd way to kill a man, Mr. Henderson needed motivation. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters found justification. The two of them removed the bird without speaking a word. They understood.

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