

Trifles (one act play)

- by Susan Keating Glaspell

Characters:

Minnie Wright- suspected for murder

John Wright- murdered

George Henderson- County Attorney

Henry Peters- Local Sheriff

Mrs. Peters- Wife of the Sheriff

Mr& Mrs. Hale- neighbour of Mr &Mrs. Wright

The play opens on the scene of an abandoned farmhouse. The house is in disarray, with various activities interrupted, such as dishes left unwashed and bread prepared but not yet baked. Five people arrive at the house to investigate the scene of a crime, including the county attorney, George Henderson, the local sheriff, Henry Peters, and the neighbor, Lewis Hale, who discovered a murdered man, John Wright, strangled with a rope in his bed. The men are accompanied by two of their wives, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale. Mr. Hale describes for the county attorney the experience of finding John Wright's dead body the previous day. He stopped by his neighbors' house to ask if they'd want to install a party line telephone. He encountered Minnie Wright sitting in her rocking chair, and she calmly announced that her husband was dead. Mr. Hale went upstairs to find the body, and left everything in place for the inspection of the attorney and the sheriff. Minnie claimed that she didn't wake up when her husband was strangled in their bed.

Mrs. Wright (Minnie) has been arrested for the crime and is being held until her trial. The men do not look closely around the kitchen for evidence of a motive, but discover Minnie's frozen and broken canning jars of fruits. Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale know that Minnie was worried her canning jars would explode in the cold weather, and the sheriff jokes that a

woman would worry about such things while held for murder. The men criticize Minnie's poor housekeeping, as evidenced by the mess in the kitchen and a dirty towel.

The men go upstairs to inspect the bedroom and Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale collect items from the kitchen that Minnie requested be brought to her at the jail, including clothes and an apron. The women comment on the strangeness of strangling a man to death when the men had pointed out that there was a gun in the house. The women admire a quilt that Minnie was working on, and are wondering if she was going to finish it by "quilting" or "knotting" when the men reenter and, overhearing the women talking, joke about the women's trivial concerns at a time like this. Once again left alone by the men, the women notice that some of the stitching of the quilt is very poor, as if Minnie were nervous or upset.

The women then find a birdcage without any bird in it. Mrs. Hale expresses strong regrets having not come to visit Minnie more often, acknowledging that John Wright was a hard man and that it must have been very difficult for Minnie to be alone at her house. She recalls Minnie before she married and how cheerfully she sang in the choir. The women then uncover a beautiful red box, and in it, the dead bird that was missing from the birdcage, its neck broken.

When the men return, Mrs. Hale hides the box with the body of the bird. Once the men leave again, Mrs. Peters remembers a boy who killed her childhood pet kitten, and her certainty that she would have hurt him in return if she could have. And yet, Mrs. Peters says, "the law has got to punish crime." Mrs. Hale berates herself for what she sees as her own crime of not visiting her neighbor Minnie, crying out, "who's going to punish that crime?"

The men return, and the sheriff asks if the county attorney wants to take a look at the items Mrs. Peters is bringing to Minnie at the jail. He says that Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising and assumes the things she's taking aren't harmful. The women hide the box with the body of the bird. The county attorney jokes that at least they discovered the fate of Minnie's quilt project, and Mrs. Hale reminds him that she was planning to finish the quilt by knotting it.
