

Trifles



Odin Webster

Adapted from the play by Susan Glaspell

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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Trifles

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Trifles was first performed by the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, MA, August 8, 1916.

MRS. HALE: Susan Glaspell

MR. HALE: George Cram Cook

MRS. PETERS: Alice Hall

HENRY PETERS: Robert Conville

GEORGE HENDERSON: Michael Hulkan

Trifles

CLASSIC/MYSTERY. Adapted from the play by Susan Glaspell. In this captivating mystery, the murderer and victim are never seen. Instead, their lives unfold through clues left behind in a farmhouse kitchen. John Wright has been murdered, and his wife, Minnie, has been taken into custody. While the Sheriff and County Attorney search the Wright's property for evidence, a neighbor woman and the Sheriff's wife discover important clues in the kitchen that the Sheriff and County Attorney have disregarded as "trifles." The women must decide whether to hide the evidence or reveal the truth about John Wright's death.

Performance time: Approximately 30 minutes.



Susan Glaspell (1876-1948)

About the Story

A best-selling author of plays, novels, and short stories, Susan Glaspell (1876-1948) won a Pulitzer Prize for her 1931 play, *Alison's House*, but is best known today for her one-act play "Trifles." As a reporter for the Des Moines Daily News, Glaspell covered the murder of John Hossack in which his wife, Margaret, was charged with his murder. This case inspired Glaspell to write "Trifles" and set the play in a kitchen similar to Margaret Hossack's kitchen. "Trifles" was first performed in 1916 by the Provincetown Players in Provincetown, MA, in which Glaspell played the role of Mrs. Hale and her husband, George Cram Cook, played Mr. Hale.

Characters

(3 M, 2 F)

SHERIFF: Henry Peters, the local sheriff; wears a sheriff's uniform and a winter coat; male.

MRS. PETERS: The Sheriff's wife; a thin, wiry, nervous-looking woman; wears a winter coat and fur stole; female.

MR. HALE: Farmer who is a neighbor of the murder victim; wears a winter coat; male.

MRS. HALE: Farmer's wife who is a neighbor of the murder victim; wears an overcoat with a large pocket; female.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: George Henderson, an arrogant, condescending attorney; wears winter clothing; male.

Setting

1900s, farmhouse kitchen.

Set

Wrights' farmhouse kitchen. The kitchen is gloomy and disheveled. There is a small chair in the corner. At SL, three steps lead to a stair door. A small table sits in the SL rear corner of the room. At the center of the room is a big kitchen table. Half of the table is clean while the other half is messy. The kitchen contains a rocking chair, a stove, a sink, a towel rack, and a hook on the back wall. There is a breadbox on a low shelf with a loaf of bread outside the breadbox. There are unwashed pans under the sink, a dishtowel on the table, and other signs of incomplete work. At the rear, there is an outer door that opens. There is a door SR that leads to the unseen front room.

Props

Notebook	Petticoat
Pen	Cloth
Water pail and dipper	Shawl
Water basin	Apron
Dishtowel	Needle and thread
Assorted pans	Large sewing basket
Towel covering a bread pan	Brightly colored quilt pieces
Loaf of bread	Birdcage with broken door
Breadbox	Small fancy box
Jar of cherry preserves	Piece of silk
Shabby, worn dress	Petticoat
Shabby, worn skirt	Bag
Worn pair of women's shoes	Small stuffed songbird, opt.

Sound Effects

Footsteps descending stairs
Footsteps ascending stairs
Footsteps from above
Sound of a doorknob turning

**“Well, women are used to
worrYing over trifles.”**

—Mr. HALE

Trifles

(AT RISE: Disheveled farmhouse kitchen of Minnie and John Wright, 1900s. There are unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the breadbox, a dishtowel on the table, and other signs of incomplete work. At the rear, the outer door opens and the Sheriff enters followed by the County Attorney and Mr. Hale. The Sheriff, Mr. Hale, and the County Attorney are bundled up in winter attire and go at once to the stove. Mrs. Peters, the Sheriff's wife, and Mrs. Hale enter slowly and stand close together near the door. Mrs. Hale looks fearfully about as she enters.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: (*Rubbing his hands.*) This feels good.
Come up to the fire, ladies.

(*Mrs. Peters takes a step forward.*)

MRS. PETERS: I'm not...cold.

(*Sheriff unbuttons his overcoat and steps away from the stove.*)

SHERIFF: Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: By the way, has anything been moved?
Are things just as you left them yesterday?

SHERIFF: (*Looking about.*) It's the same. When it dropped below zero last night, I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on—but I told him not to touch anything except the stove...and you know Frank.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

SHERIFF: Oh, yesterday...I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy. I want you to know I

had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today, and as long as I went over everything here myself—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Well, Mr. Hale, tell me just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

MR. HALE: Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place, and as I got here I said, "I'm going to see if I can't get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone." I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway and all he wanted was peace and quiet. I guess you know about how much he talked himself. But I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it in front of his wife—though I said to Harry that I didn't know if what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

COUNTY ATTORNEY: Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell me now just what happened when you got to the house.

MR. HALE: I didn't hear or see anything. I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up...it was past eight o'clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, "Come in." I wasn't sure. I'm not sure yet, but I opened the door...this door... *(Indicating the door where Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale are standing.)* ...and there in that rocker... *(Points to rocking chair.)* ...sat Mrs. Wright.

(They all look at the rocking chair.)

COUNTY ATTORNEY: What...was she doing?

MR. HALE: She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of...pleating it.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: And how did she look?

MR. HALE: Well, she looked odd.

COUNTY ATTORNEY: How do you mean...odd?

MR. HALE: Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

[END OF FREEVIEW]