

Trifling with Trifles



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Inspired by the play *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell

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Trifling with Trifles

SPOOF/FARCE. Audiences will love this over-the-top spoof of Susan Glaspell's play *Trifles*. The Sheriff and District Attorney arrive at the Wright homestead after a neighbor finds John Hale dead with a noose around his neck. Calmly rocking in her chair, Minnie Hale, confesses to the murder of her husband. But why did Minnie do it? It isn't until a couple of womenfolk inspect Minnie's kitchen that they find clues including an "apron," a jar marked "poison," an ugly quilt, a crushed birdcage, and a dead canary.

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, 3 F)

MINNIE WRIGHT: Accused of killing her husband; wears a housedress; female.

LEWIS HALE: Minnie's neighbor, a farmer; wears a worn pair of bib overalls; male.

MARTHA HALE: Lewis Hale's wife; wears a housedress; female.

GEORGE HENDERSON: County attorney; wears an ill-fitting suit with an untied bowtie and carries a battered briefcase; male.

GERALDINE HENDERSON: George Henderson's wife; wears a dress; female.

SHERIFF: Small town sheriff who chews on an unlit candy cigar; wears an oversized cowboy hat, cowboy boots, a sheriff's badge pinned to his chest, a holstered toy pistol, and a belt with several handcuffs dangling from it; male.

Setting

An isolated farm.

Set

Interior of a neglected kitchen in an isolated farmhouse.

There is a wooden table with chairs and an old rocking chair. The sink area is piled high with dirty plates and pans. The exterior entrance is SL and a door to the bedroom is SR. There is the exterior of an old icebox, opt.

Props

Cigar, for Sheriff to chew on (can be a candy cigar)	Thick rope with a noose (5 feet long)
Battered briefcase	Jar with "poison" written on the label large enough for audience to see
Handcuffs	M & Ms
Assorted "dirty" dishes, pots, and pans	Sledgehammer
Hand towel	Birdcage bashed in on one side
Assorted cleaning items (dishrag, broom, mop, bucket, etc.)	Stuffed yellow bird the size of a chicken (neck isn't stuffed so it can easily flop back and forth)
Threaded hand sewing needle	Identical clothing for Hale that is caked with mud
"Apron" for Martha to get caught in	Toy pistol
Quilt (ugly with mismatched pieces falling off it, haphazard pattern, etc.)	

Sound Effect

Sound of howling, growling, and/or barking dogs

**“Jist look at
how it flippity-flops
when yew
wiggle-waggle it.”**

—Mr. Hale.

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(AT RISE: *The interior of a neglected kitchen in an isolated farmhouse. Note: Whenever the front door is opened, howling/growling/barking dogs are heard until it is closed. Lewis Hale enters SL followed by his wife Martha.*)

HALE: (*Looking over his shoulder, calls.*) This here's the place, Mr. Henderson.

(*George Henderson enters, pauses, and looks around. His wife, Geraldine Henderson enters. Sheriff enters, chewing on an unlit cigar. When the front door is closed, the dog sounds fade out.*)

HENDERSON: (*Looking around.*) By gosh and belly wash, don't nobody never clean up this here place? (*Tries to wave away the smell with his hand.*) It smells...moldy-oldie. (*Sizes up the room.*) Who could live in a place like this? It's filthy an' dirty an'...an'...it's a plumb stinky pot!

SHERIFF: Yep. That there's the reason I'm a-carryin' a ceegar in mah mouth. To kill the skunk whut made the stink.

HENDERSON: Well, I wisht you'd a smoked up this here room afore invitin' us [ee-un]. [*"in"*]

SHERIFF: Smoked up? I don't smoke, Mr. Henderson. An' I take oh-ffense at yer accusation.

HENDERSON: But yew jist said—

SHERIFF: I said I *carry* ceegars. I didn't say I *smoke* ceegars.

HENDERSON: That don't make no [see-unse]. [*"sense"*]

SHERIFF: Sir, Mr. Henderson, yer a lawyer an' probly don't have much see-unse yerself, but even yew should know that smokin' is bad fer yer...ummm...yer in-di-gestion.

HENDERSON: In-di-gestion?!

HALE: Can yew fellers quit yer squawkin' an' let's git own with this? Martha an' me need to git back to our place real soon. It's time fer milkin'.

MARTHA: It's past time fer milkin', Lewis!

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GERALDINE: Mrs. Hale, do yew do the milkin' or does yer husband do the milkin'?

MARTHA: Well, Mrs. Henderson, look at him an' take a wild guess.

(Geraldine looks at Hale and then back at Martha.)

GERALDINE: Yew do the milkin'.

MARTHA: Well, I do some o' the milkin, an' the calves do the rest.

HENDERSON: All right, all right, ya'll.

HALE: *(Angrily.)* Well, let me know when y'all er finished with yer yakkin' so's I can tell yew whut happened.

HENDERSON: O'course, Mr. Hale. Or may I call yew Lewis? *(Hale starts to respond but is interrupted.)* Is this here, this room, the way yew found thangs when yew stopped by yesterdee?

HALE: Purty much.

HENDERSON: Yer shur?

HALE: *(Sheepishly.)* Well, I guess I mighta...*borrowed*...a beer.

HENDERSON: Yew *borrowed* a beer?

HALE: Well, maybe two. All the dust flyin' a-round made me kinda thirsty.

SHERIFF: Makes perfect sense, Mr. Henderson. *(To Hale as he goes to the icebox.)* Is there any more in the icebox?

HALE: Nope. I guess I drunk um all.

SHERIFF: Oh, shucks an' fiddle-dee-doo! An' I'm plenty thirsty, too.

HENDERSON: Well, I hope yew had somebody guardin' the place. This here is a crime scene, an' somebody should be guardin' a crime scene at all times.

SHERIFF: Well, I sent Frank out here.

HENDERSON: Well, that's good.

SHERIFF: But he didn't come.

HENDERSON: *(Angrily.)* Why not?

SHERIFF: His mama needed him to git rid of a hornet's nest.

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HENDERSON: An' did he git rid o' the hornet's nest?

SHERIFF: Nope. The hornets got rid o' him. He spent the night in the 'mergency room.

HENDERSON: Sheriff, yew got more'n one deputy. Why didn't yew send Sleepy, er Roger, er Dopey out here?

SHERIFF: I didn't wanna break up no poker game.

HENDERSON: Why not?

SHERIFF: 'Cause I was a-winnin'.

MARTHA: Geraldine...is it okay if'n I call yew by yer first name? *(Doesn't wait for a response.)* Geraldine, I thank we better sit ourselves down fer this, don't chu?

GERALDINE: Sit? Why, Martha? If I may call yew by yer first name.

MARTHA: 'Cause when my husband begins to tell a story, it goes own, an' own, an' own.

(Slight pause.)

GERALDINE: Let's sit.

(Martha and Geraldine sit simultaneously.)

MARTHA: An' he don't never git to the end of it.

HENDERSON: Awright, Mr. Hale. Start from the beginnin' now.

HALE: The beginnin'?

SHERIFF: *(To Hale.)* Our [ee-llustr-us] County Attorney, here, wants to hear the whole story. [*"illustrious"*]

HALE: Okay. Well... *(Clears his throat once, twice, and on the third time, coughs loudly.)*

MARTHA: *(To Geraldine.)* See whut ah mean?

GERALDINE: I do, Martha. I surely do.

HENDERSON: *(Impatient.)* Mr. Hale!

HALE: Oh, yea-us. I was jist clearin' my throat.

HENDERSON: *(Angrily.)* Is it clear now? Huh? Is it clear now?

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HALE: Yep. All clear.

(Hale clears his throat again. Henderson pauses for the throat clearing to pass.)

HENDERSON: Then please pro-ceed.

HALE: Well, I was a-drivin' my old truck, whut's 'bout to fall apart, to town fer some eggs.

HENDERSON: Eggs?

HALE: Well, yeah. Need um fer cookin'...eggs, ya see. Cain't cook eggs 'less yew got eggs to cook. Ain't that right, Martha?

MARTHA: Well, that's about the cor-rect-est thang you ever said.

[END OF FREEVIEW]