

In "A Jury of Her Peer," by Susan Glaspell, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters realize from the clues they find that Mrs. Wright (Minnie Foster) has killed her husband but that she was justified in doing so. They conceal the evidence to prevent Mrs. Wright's possible conviction. Why do they not turn over the evidence and let the justice system take over? Perhaps they know that the men will not use the evidence to uncover the truth but instead will use it to crucify Mrs. Wright for, not necessarily killing a human being, but for killing "one of their own". Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters learned that Minnie Foster was battered, and therefore sympathized, but a term had not yet been invented to describe Mrs. Wright's situation and state of mind at the time of the murder. Now we know that she was suffering from "Battered Wife Syndrome". "Women in the context of 'Trifles' and 'A Jury of Her Peers' are trapped by a social system that may lead them to crime and then punish them when they are forced to commit it" (Alkalay-Gut 72). It is this situation of the double-edged sword which the women of the play identify. "We all go through the same things--it's all just a different kind of the same thing. If it weren't--why do you and I understand? Why do we know?--what we know this minute?" (Glaspell 293).

Mrs. Wright was a lonely childless woman who has been isolated from society by her husband, John Wright. Mrs. Hale and Minnie Wright were neighbors and have known each other for over twenty years but Mrs. Hale has not seen much of Minnie over the last several years. Mrs. Wright's clothing was torn and tattered but not because she could not afford anything better. She could have probably sewn a new dress if she was allowed. Most likely, her husband would not permit it because he wanted to keep her down. Mr. Wright has isolated Minnie in this way by making her feel unworthy of leaving the house and taking part in social activities. "I think maybe

that's why she kept to herself. I s'pose she felt she couldn't do her part; and then, you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby" (Glaspell 287). Furthermore, he refuses to buy telephone, and in doing so, he has denied his wife access to even the minimal contacts that town life might afford women at that time. "When the women collect some of Minnie's clothes to take to her in prison, the sight of the 'shabby black skirt' painfully reminds Mrs. Hale by contrast of the 'pretty clothes' that Minnie wore as a young girl before her marriage" (Ben-Zvi 60). "She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively--when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls, singing in the choir. But that--oh was twenty years ago"(Glaspell 287). This isolation and insensitivity John Wright has towards his wife's needs is a very clear sign of domestic abuse. When Glaspell opens the story, she emphasizes this isolation by describing the emptiness of the terrain through which the characters travel on their way to the Wright home. The house is isolated "down in a hollow and you don't see the road" (Glaspell 281). Mrs. Hale notes several times through out the story that the Wright home looked very "lonesome" (Glaspell 281). This isolation can be very disturbing to the victim of such abuse. "It can cause Psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and general suspiciousness" (Kinser 1).

She lived with this loneliness and abuse for over twenty years, with no one to turn to for comfort except for a canary she bought from a traveling peddler. Like her, the canary had been caged and unlike her, when it sang someone listened. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters found a bird a cage with one of the door hinges ripped off and this bird strangled in a box under some quilt patches. This is perhaps the most obvious evidence of John Wright's domestic abuse towards his wife. Minnie finally realized that just as he had quickly taken the life of her bird, that he was slowly and gradually doing the same thing to her. At this moment she figured out that it had to end. It was no coincidence that John Wright had been strangled, as they say in the Bible, and eye

for an eye, "rather than use an ax, this abused wife strangles her husband: a punishment to fit the crime" (Ben-Zvi 35).

"Battered women become so demoralized and degraded by the fact that they cannot predict or control the violence that they sink into a state of psychological paralysis and become unable to take any action at all to improve or alter the situation short of killing the abuser" (upstream 22). Mrs. Wright simply felt there was no other way out. Domestic violence is best described as a lot of factors that when combined a batterer forces an intimate partner to live with a constant sense of danger and expectation of violence. Mrs. Hale did not suffer the same abuse as Mrs. Wright but being a woman in that day, she could completely sympathize. After she saw how bad Mrs. Wright actually had it, she felt responsible saying that maybe if she would have visited more often, this would not have happened. The most common examples of abuse are physical acts and threats of violence against a spouse. Other examples may include acts of power and control by one spouse over the other, which have emotional and psychological effects on the battered spouse. Although we never hear of Mr. Wright verbally or physically abusing his wife but we can clearly see that it had to happen. Abuse was rarely reported in these days, and if it was, it was often overlooked because the officials were men, who did not care because they did the same things to their wives. Not only did the women in this story cover for Minnie, they took a small step towards independence, silent voices that said "we're not going to take it anymore."