

SO THE JURY WAS HUNG

A Farce in One Act

By Jack Steele

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Story of the Play

Mr. Litel Quirt has difficulties from the start trying to maintain the gavel as the appointed foreman of the jury, composed of 11 others, all women. Each word spoken reminds the ladies of some personal incident that must be told. Tempers rapidly develop into a good old knock-down fight with Mr. Quirt at the bottom of the heap. When the door is opened by the court attendant and twelve dinners are brought in, his fears reach a climax. They are going to be kept there all night!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

Court Attendant: who opens the door for the jury.

Three Giggles: whose only conversation is a shower of giggles.

Mrs. Schneezer: whose explosive sneeze punctuates the giggles.

Mrs. Umbrage: a large female with a heavy scowl.

Miss Abigail Meek: all the name implies.

Miss Tattler: a scrawny woman, with a swivel tongue.

Mrs. Lament: who floats in her own gloom.

Mrs. Jolly: who looks on the bright side.

The Bride: starry-eyed worrier about her husband.

Miss Spinster: with a man-hunting glance.

Mr. Litel Quirt: foreman of the jury, a little man.

Maids: who bring in trays.

SETTING

Jury room: Can be played in curtains with practical door, R. Except for the large jury table center stage with its twelve chairs placed about it, and a water cooler in the corner next to the door, the room is entirely bare. Arranged before each chair, a pencil and pad has been placed on the table, with a gavel beside the pad at the head of the table, where will sit Mr. Litel Quirt, foreman of the jury. The table should be placed at an angle; so that only four of the jurors actually sit with their backs to the audience: the Three Giggles and Mrs. Schneezer.

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Stage is empty. A murmur of VOICES can be heard offstage, then the bang of a gavel and the JUDGE'S voice: "The JURY will now retire for a verdict!" Door R. is opened by COURT ATTENDANT; and the Jury, ELEVEN WOMEN and the Foreman, MR. LITEL QUIRT, file in, single file. As Mr. Litel Quirt makes his entrance, at the end of the line, the Court Attendant glances significantly from him to the ladies, then back to Mr. Quirt. He wags his head from side to side, clucks sympathetically. When finally he closes the door, he is still wagging his head. Then the key is heard to click decisively in the lock; and Mr. Quirt, after trying the door and finding it locked, really begins to worry.)

THREE GIGGLES: *(Have some trouble finding their chairs.)*

He-he-he! He-he ...

MRS. SCHNEEZER: *(Right behind THEM.)* Achoo-oo!

MRS. UMBRAGE: *(Right behind HER.)* For heaven's sake, woman, stop sneezing!

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Cand. *(Sniffles into handkerchief.)* I'b geddig a code.

MRS. LAMENT: A woman on our street, three houses down, had a cold just like yours, Mrs. Schneezer, big strapping woman she was, too. *(Sighs.)* It was a lovely funeral.

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Ah-h ... *(Stops in middle of sneeze.)* funeral! Oh, my goodness! You don't suppose I ...

MRS. JOLLY: Nonsense, dear. *(Pats HER on shoulder, glares at MRS. LAMENT.)* When you get home tonight, soak your feet in a hot mustard bath and drink three glasses of hot lemonade at the same time. Then, when you get into bed ...

MISS TATTLER: That hot lemonade treatment with mustard trimmings went out with the bustle, Mrs. Jolly. Now I remember when a certain friend of mine almost got pneumonia *(Goes off into gossip.)*

So The Jury Was Hung

-5-

MISS TATTLER: *(Continued.)* ... and no wonder, poor dear, she almost got pneumonia, when all she did was worry about where her husband was every night. Not that she'd listen to me, but I told her, I said, "Now. Nancy," I said, "you might as well face it," I said. "That Widow Smith's taking him away from you," I said. "Though heaven knows what you see in him," I said ...

ABIGAIL MEEK: I use hot water bottles

THE BRIDE: Johnnie, that's my husband ... *(Self-conscious titter.)* ... we've only been married a month ... Johnnie caught cold only three days after we were married, and the doctor told him he'd better stop working so hard and go on a diet. The doctor said it was better to starve a cold and --

MRS. UMBRAGE: And feed the undertaker! *(Sits in chair at head of table.)*

THREE GIGGLES: He, he, he; he, he, he.

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Ahchoo-oo!

MR. LITEL QUIRT: *(Taps MRS. UMBRAGE timidly on shoulder.)* I ... uh ... beg your pardon, Mrs. Umbrage

MRS. UMBRAGE: Why? *(Aggressive.)* You done something?

MR. LITEL QUIRT: You're sitting in my chair.

MRS. UMBRAGE: Who says it's your chair?

MISS SPINSTER: *(Slips into chair next to HIS.)* Mr. Litel Quirt is foreman of this jury, Mrs. Umbrage; and as foreman of the jury, he is entitled to sit at the head of the table.

(MR. LITEL QUIRT nods vigorously at this and sticks out his thin chest. MISS SPINSTER pats his hand on the edge of the table. Mr. Litel Quirt gives her a double take. He swallows hard, his chest deflates, he moves his hand away.)

So The Jury Was Hung

-6-

MRS. UMBRAGE: (*Gets up out of chair with bad grace.*)
The little squirt!

MR. LITEL QUIRT: (*Sits in chair and glowers at MRS. UMBRAGE'S broad back as she takes a seat at the other end of the table.*) The name, Mrs. Umbrage, is Litel Quirt!

MRS. UMBRAGE: That's what I said.

THREE GIGGLES: He, he, he! He, he, he

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Ahchoo-o!

MRS. UMBRAGE: Why don't you put a peg on your nose?

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Why don't you keeb your bouth shud?
You bussle-bound elephant!

MRS. UMBRAGE: (*Rises to the occasion and rolls sleeves.*)
Muscle-bound elephant! (*To MRS. JOLLY in chair next to HER.*) Did you hear what she called me!

MRS. JOLLY: I heard. (*SHE grins broadly at MRS. SCHNEEZER.*)

MRS. UMBRAGE: (*Reaches for MRS. SCHNEEZER.*) I'll
yank her hair out! I'll scratch her eyes out!

MRS. SCHNEEZER: (*Reaches for MRS. UMBRAGE.*) You
add who else? You febale hippopotahus!

MRS. JOLLY: That's telling 'em, Mrs. Schneezer!

MISS TATTLER: Goody! A fight!

THREE GIGGLES: He, he, he! He, he, he ...

MRS. SCHNEEZER: (*Stops reaching for MRS. UMBRAGE to grab for HER handkerchief.*) Ahhh-chooo!

MR. LITEL QUIRT: (*Who has been pounding on the table with gavel.*) Ladies! Ladies, please! Order! Order!

MISS SPINSTER: (*Backs HIM up.*) Order, order!

MR. LITEL QUIRT: (*As MRS. UMBRAGE sits back, glowering.*) Remember, ladies, what we are here for ...

MRS. UMBRAGE: We're not here to have her call me names. You heard what she called me ... a female hippopotamus! How would you like to be called a female hippopotamus? How would you like it?

MRS. SCHNEEZER: Well, you had doe business delling be to pud a peg on by dose. (*Sniffs into HER handkerchief.*)
I apologize for calling you a hippopotabus ...

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