

The Juror

By Karin Carstens

In his opinion, the woman was guilty of murder in the first degree. Walter Greene couldn't take his eyes off the well-groomed, dark haired woman sitting beside the lawyer for the defense.

Walter, a retired court clerk, had seen his share of trials. If not from the view of the jury box, and he counted it an honor to serve, then from the front rows of the spectator's section. He loved to study criminal cases and the shelves in his study were lined with murder mysteries. In the jury box, he had the added privilege of studying the defendant's expressions.

The still young woman, he guessed her age at thirty-five, had selected her outfit with muted browns, though matronly, she looked elegant. Her cream-colored blouse did not hide a small cross, hugged close to her neck. Her shoulders squared she sat stiffly, staring straight ahead, head held high and proud.

So? Walter thought, not finding his heart moved by any perceived remorse on her part. The only evidence of her emotions; her restless fingers on the table kneaded a lace handkerchief. However, to him, she was a classic example of a cold-blooded killer.

"Your honor, Mrs. Wadsworth is innocent. The prosecution has failed to present sufficient evidence to convict my client of any crime. The alleged blunt weapon used in the brutal killing of her husband has not as yet been produced as evidence," Latham Hertig, the portly, balding defense lawyer said in a nasal voice. He had begun to pace back and forth in front of the jury box with short, quick steps, as though he had springs in his shiny patent leather shoes. Walter's eyes now followed the lawyer's steps mesmerized by the shine of his shoes that had caught a beam of light and had flashed into his eyes.

It had been a long trial and Walter had halfway through it decided to give a guilty verdict. Now that it was coming to the end, he couldn't afford the luxury of confusion, and therefore he kept his mind focused first on Mrs. Wadsworth, and now on the little shiny shoes of the dark suited lawyer.

Would they have prosecuted the woman if there hadn't been enough circumstantial evidence of her guilt? She had no alibi for the night of the murder-she said she had taken a walk after the argument with her husband over his refusal to give her a divorce. Walter sighed; He had read that lame excuse in too many mysteries. Unashamedly she had confessed that her husband's infidelity had encouraged her to fall in love with another man.

The lawyer had exhausted himself and now stood squarely facing Walter who looked at him sheepishly. He hadn't heard the final words of the defense but why should he? He knew his vote.

Walter frowned and scratched his ear in an effort to avert his eyes from the darkly intense stare of the lawyer. He couldn't give in now; it was too late to rethink some of the weak spots in the prosecution's case. The other jurors sat stiffly, eyes cast on the lawyer not giving a clue to their convictions.

A shiver ran up his spine at the thought that he could possibly be the only one voting for murder in the first degree. Well, if that was the case, the other jurors would have to do their best to persuade him. He glanced at the immovable, unrepentant woman at the table of the defense lawyer. She was a good-looking woman, the kind who wouldn't give him a second glance. It would be a tragedy, or would it--to think that she could be put to death and deprive her lover of possessing her.

He lifted his torso to his full height in his chair, feeling power surging through him. His eyes now met the lawyer's with defined determination. Mrs. Wadsworth's fate was entirely in Walter's hands.

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