

# ***TRIAL* and ERRORS**

*By David Meyer*

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PUBLISHED BY

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Mrs. Dafney Dill has been accused of murder and is about to go to trial in a small-town courtroom, complete with a snoozing judge, good ol' sheriff, and a jury of bored country folks.

As the prosecution presents its case, it doesn't look good for Dafney. Witnesses and evidence mount, and worst of all, the judge is in a hurry to get home to some glazed rhubarb his missus has fixed.

It's up to the naive and ill-prepared B.V. DeBriefs, Dafney's court-appointed public defender, to save her. He presents his best arguments, including expert witnesses and a re-enactment of the crime. Through the twists and turns of the legal system, justice is finally served ... and just in time for dinner!

This broad farce, with its loose characterizations and free-wheeling story line, is ripe for improvisation. Let the comics in your cast shine. Justice may be blind, but it shor' has a good sense of humor!

## **SYNOPSIS OF ACTS**

**ACT I:** Present

**ACT II:** 15 minutes later

**ACT III:** 15 minutes later

*(See end of script for setting, prop and costume information.)*

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(6 M, 4 W, 8 flexible parts and a flexible jury)*

- Judge Andy Jory:** (or Ann) A large part that can be played as a male or female. The Judge is a country bumpkin of sorts. He is approximately 60 years old, with a simple, easy-going manner. He strives to be fair in an over-regulated, confusing arena. His physical appearance is adjustable.
- Bailiff Judd Klinker:** (or Joy) medium-size part that can be played as a male or female. Age is adjustable. Like the Sheriff, this part is on stage throughout the play.
- Stenographer Horace:** (or Harriet) A medium-to-small part that can be a male or female. He is a bookworm type and more business-like than anyone else in the court. His age and physical appearance is totally adjustable.
- Shamus Barrister:** The prosecuting attorney is an educated country boy. A large part that is easily adjusted to any physical appearance. He is in his thirties.
- Sheriff Gunther Remington:** A big, heavy good ol' boy country sheriff. He is in his fifties and wears a tan uniform and a gun belt. The part is small but on stage most of the play.
- B.V. DeBriefs:** The defense attorney, can be male or female. He is young and somewhat idealistic. He comes monthly to the area to act as public defender. He is an outsider, approximately mid-twenties, better dressed and better educated than most in the court. The part is large.
- \*Nun:** (A small, non-speaking part that can be doubled.) A young, petite nun in a habit.
- Dafney Dill:** A thin, pretty blond in her later twenties. She is attractive but a bit empty-headed. She chews gum, often seems bewildered and at other times assertive. This is a medium-size part.
- \*Al Fredo:** (or Alice) Small part that can be doubled. Owner of the Sawmill, a local cafe, he is middle-aged and overweight. Has a rough appearance. Doubling possible. (On in Act II).
- \*Marlin Fisher:** Middle-aged owner of the bait and tackle shop, which is a meeting place for locals and a source of gossip. The part can be doubled. (On in Act II).
- \*Fred Acchini:** Small part that can be doubled. He is older, heavy set, with graying hair and a mustache. He speaks with an accent.
- \*The Widow Black:** Middle-aged, attractive. This medium part can be doubled. (On in Act II and Act III)

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- \*Matt Benlock:** (or Matilda) A small part that can be doubled. Matt is an expert witness from the crime lab. He wears glasses, is studious in appearance and mannerisms. (On in Act II)
- \*Val Parmesan:** A medium part that can be male or female. A slick gambler type. A friend of the victim. Adjustable appearance. (On in Act III, also plays body in re-enactment.)
- \*Carol Bell:** Small part. Hairdresser friend of Dafney. Plays Dafney in Act III re-enactment. Middle-aged. (On in Act III)
- \*Jack Hammer:** Handyman, (or woman) who discovers victim. Physically adaptable character. Rough appearance, like a hard-working craftsman. (On in Act III)
- \*Dr. Denton Fenders:** Approximately mid-sixties. He is the town doctor and a friend to the victim. He has a professional air about him and country doctor appearance. (On in Act III)
- \*Jock E. Swartz:** A small part with an adaptable physical character. He speaks broken English with heavy French accent with some Spanish thrown in. Age about 45. (On in Act III)
- The Jury:** The jury is totally at the director's discretion. It can be any number (not to exceed 12) and, ideally, should have a minimum of 6. The more varied and outlandish the characters the better; however, the country theme and overall mood of the play should serve as guidance. The dialogue assigned to jurors is by number and easily redistributed.

*\*Indicates doubling possible for part*

## ACT I

*(AT RISE: We join a country trial at its conclusion. The JUDGE is pounding his gavel and calling for order. The BAILIFF is standing aside SL and the court reporter (STENO) is taking it all down at a little table in front of the Judge's bench. Prosecutor SHAMUS BARRISTER is seated next to a big old country SHERIFF. The defense attorney, B. V. DEBRIEFS, is standing next to a petite, nervously polite NUN. The jury box is empty.)*

**JUDGE:** *(Tapping gavel.)* Order! Order in the court! Now, you folks decided to plead your case before this court. You didn't want a jury trial, *(Offhanded.)* of course, finding a jury of your peers would be hard. Now before I give you my finding, I want you all to know I took into consideration Sister Bertrill's calling. *(Softly.)* Now, I'm a good church-going man and I believe in forgiveness. *(Getting firm.)* But the law is the law! I find the defendant guilty as charged!

**BV:** But Your Honor ...

**JUDGE:** Guilty! We don't cotton to folks spitting on our sidewalks ...

**BV:** *(Pleading.)* But Your Honor, a bug flew in her mouth during noon prayers. It was a normal reaction to ...

**JUDGE:** *(Calming with a touch of sarcasm.)* I don't believe this occurred on a Friday. And a tiny bug doesn't constitute meat in this courtroom! Next time, Sister Bertrill, just swallow! *(Gavel.)* That'll be \$60.00 or 60 days.

**BV:** Your Honor, Sister Bertrill has taken a vow of poverty, she doesn't have ...

**JUDGE:** Spitting is a nasty habit, Sister ... but this court is not without compassion. I'll suspend \$10.00 of the fine.

**BV:** But Your Honor, Sister Bertrill hasn't any money at all...

**JUDGE:** Then I'll suspend 10 days of the sentence. Bailiff, take the defendant into custody. *(BAILIFF comes forward and begins to lead the NUN off USL. She goes meekly and respectfully.)* Oh, Sister Bertrill...

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*(JUDGE holds up a paper.)*

**JUDGE:** *(Cont'd.)* it seems when you pay your debt to the county, the federal boys want to talk to you.

**BV:** *(Surprised.)* The FBI wants Sister Bertrill?

**JUDGE:** Not the FBI ... the FAA. It looks like Sister Bertrill's been bothering the flights out of Sally Field again ... you know our little country airport still comes under FAA regulations.

**BV:** *(Calling, as BAILIFF leads NUN off USL.)* Don't worry, Sister ... I'll straighten this out with the FAA.

*(BAILIFF exits USL with the humble NUN.)*

**JUDGE:** *(Gavel.)* Next case!

**SHAMUS:** *(Rising from behind prosecutor's desk, looking over papers.)* Our next case is going to be a rather lengthy one, Your Honor. That is why I saved it for last.

**JUDGE:** I don't have "lengthy" cases in my courtroom. I only sit once a month and that's plenty for the law-abiding people in these parts.

**SHAMUS:** Still, Your Honor, this is going to be a jury trial.

**JUDGE:** Jury trial! Well now, we ain't had one of those in years. *(Looks about.)* I suppose we need a jury. What kind of trial is it? Horse thief? Cattle rustler? Moonshiner?

**SHAMUS:** It's a murder case, Judge.

**JUDGE:** Murder! Right here in our neck of the woods? Murder, you say?

**SHAMUS:** It's a change of venue case, Your Honor. Events took place in the next county.

**JUDGE:** I'm not a bit surprised. They're godless heathens over there in Nottingham County! *(Pause.)* Well now ... a murder trial. I don't believe I've ever found anyone guilty of murder... this will be a first.

**BV:** I've been assigned as public defender for this case. I'll need some time to prepare a defense and consult with my client.

**JUDGE:** How much time?

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