

# **WHO'S ACCUSED?**

*By J. Michael Shirley*

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### **SYNOPSIS**

Here's a one-act comedy about good-ol-boy law and (dis)order in the deep South! As various denizens of Redwine County testify, we find out an entire murder trial is based on the "facts" that the local undertaker needs some business and the sheriff's cleaning lady thinks the accused sorta looks like that criminal on TV the other night.

The fact that there is no body doesn't stop these folks from turning an out-of-town speeder into a murderer. Luckily the defense council, a woman attorney from the North, is not part of the good ol' boys' network and is not about to let her new client swing from the hangin' tree! A young newspaper reporter covering this most unusual and hilarious trial, serves as narrator.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(4 M, 4 W 2 flexible parts, extras )*

**Willene Cross:** Newspaper reporter on the rural beat; acts as the narrator, speaks directly to the audience.

**\*Bailiff:** Swears in witnesses.

**Judge Turnipseed:** A good ol' boy.

**District Attorney Waites:** Another good ol' boy.

**Public Defender Davis:** A Northern woman, thorough, ready to prove herself.

**\*Deputy Trimble:** Arrested the suspect.

**Della Caruthers:** Cleaning lady, sees a mass murderer everywhere.

**Lizzie Beth Watkins:** TV-addicted wife of missing farmer.

**Felton Dibbs:** Observant town "drunk."

**Rufus Jackson:** Local undertaker.

**Extras:** Play Thomas Hargrove (the defendant) and members of the jury, all non-speaking roles.

*\*Flexible parts, may be played by men or women.*

### **SETTING**

County courtroom. Some members of the cast might be placed in the audience prior to performance so that they can make their entrances from the house. At the beginning, the jury is seated in the jury box, the District Attorney and Counsel for the Defense are seated in traditional locations.

**TIME:** The present.

**PLAYING TIME:** 30 minutes.

**PROPS:** Gavel for Judge; Bible for swearing in; notebook for Miss Cross; papers for both attorneys; handkerchief for Lizzie Beth Watkins.

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### SCENE 1

*(AT RISE: Early morning in the courtroom. WILLENE CROSS moves to CS.)*

MISS CROSS: Hello, my name is Willene Cross and I'm a reporter for the *Capital Herald*, the largest newspaper in our state. Since I graduated from college last year I've been working for the paper as a "rural reporter," you know, going out into the more sparsely populated areas and doing human interest stories and the like. Every now and then, I am called upon to cover court cases. Sometimes they have some pretty interesting cases in courtrooms like these ... most of the time, though, they're just run-of-the-mill. This case, however, was somewhat more interesting! You see, the defendant ... he's not in here yet ... Mr. Thomas Allen Hargrove, well, he was driving through Redwine County on his way back to his home. He'd been to a lawn and garden convention ... he works for a hardware store. Well, Mr. Hargrove got stopped by a deputy who was intent on writing him a speeding ticket ... nothing more ... just a speeding ticket. What happened after that, made this the most interesting case I'd ever covered.

*(SHE'S interrupted by the sound of PEOPLE entering the courtroom. BAILIFF enters, followed by JUDGE, SHERIFF, and DEFENDANT.)*

BAILIFF: All rise. *(BAILIFF makes sure the audience rises too!)* Superior Court of Redwine County is now in session, Judge Homer L. Turnipseed presiding.

JUDGE: *(Takes HIS seat.)* You may be seated. I need not remind you that we are gathered here under the all-seeing eyes of sweet justice herself so I don't want to see any smokin' or chewin' going on in this courtroom amongst any of you fellas ....

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JUDGE: *(Continued.)* You ladies who feel the need for a dip of snuff might please wait until we are in recess as well.

Mr. District Attorney, are you ready to call the first case?

WAITES: Yes, Your Honor, I am.

JUDGE: Then, let's get on with it.

WAITES: Case number 4127 dash 24. The County of Redwine versus Thomas Allen Hargrove. The charge in this case is ... SUSPICION OF MURDER IN THE FIRST DEGREE.

JUDGE: Ms. Public Defender, are you ready to proceed?

DAVIS: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Mr. Waites, call your first witness.

DAVIS: Your Honor, if I might just point out one thing --

JUDGE: Ms. Davis, I know what you're gonna say and we've been through all this in chambers. I think the best thing is to go ahead and view the evidence and see what comes out in this case. Another thing, I took the liberty of summoning the jury from last week to come back and serve on this one ... the last case only took twenty-five minutes and I think the county ought to get their money's worth outta that panel. Now, let's get on with the case.

WAITES: The state calls Deputy Carl Trimble. *(HE moves to take the stand; is sworn in by BAILIFF.)* Deputy Trimble would you state your name and tell us where you work.

TRIMBLE: My name is Carl Trimble and I am a deputy sheriff for Redwine County Sheriff's Department.

WAITES: Would you tell us what happened the day before yesterday?

TRIMBLE: Yes, sir. I was sittin' in my patrol car ... car number two ... out on Highway 77 near Ralph Henderson's store. I'd just got me a cold "co-cola" and a pack of crackers and I was just sittin' there watching traffic go by.

WAITES: Deputy, did you notice anything unusual while you were at that location?

TRIMBLE: Yes, sir, I did. I seen this blue, four-door car come barreling down the highway.

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TRIMBLE: *(Continued.)* He must'a been doin' 57 or 58 miles-an-hour ... well, that was a 55 zone, so I figured I'd better see just what the hurry was.

WAITES: What happened then?

TRIMBLE: Well, I stopped him ... that fella there ... and asked to see his drivin' license. I took the license back to the patrol car and radioed in to Della ... she was workin' at the office that day, cleanin' up and all, and she told me she'd watched that TV show, "Most Wanted Criminals," the night before and that name sounded awful familiar. So, I thought I'd better take him ... that fella there ... down to the office.

WAITES: When you got to the office, what did you find out?

TRIMBLE: Della was on the phone to her sister, Louise, asking her if she'd seen the TV show and if she remembered what the man's name was. They was both mighty sure that it was the same as his ... that fella there. After she hung up, the phone rang and it was Lizzie Beth Watkins ... she was all up in the air 'cause Ellis, her husband, had gone to check on the cows that morning and didn't ever come home. That's when I decided to hold him... that fella there ... for further investigation.

WAITES: Your witness. *(Sits down.)*

DAVIS: *(Stands, moves over to witness.)* Officer Trimble ... what did you end up charging this good man, Mr. Hargrove, with?

TRIMBLE: Suspicion of murder. What with Ellis Watkins turnin' up missin' and Della seein' that show on TV ...

DAVIS: Have you seen the body of Ellis Watkins?

TRIMBLE: Well, I seen him last week when he came into town.

DAVIS: No, no ... I mean, do you know for a fact that Ellis Watkins is dead?

TRIMBLE: Well, no ... I ... well, it don't make no sense. If Ellis went to check on the cows and he ain't come back yet ... he must be dead ... or somethin'.

DAVIS: So you base your suspicion on the fact that Ellis hasn't come home.

TRIMBLE: And on that TV show. Della seed it herself!

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